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Running on the spot? A review of twenty years of research on the management of human resources in comparative and international perspective

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Abstract Research using a comparative and international perspective on the management of human resources is examined, drawing on articles published in leading human resource management, management/organizational behaviour and related social science journals between 1977 and 1997. In total a little under 2 per cent of the articles under review focused on the management of human resources in a comparative and international perspective. The largest group of these articles was comparative in nature (44 per cent), followed by those with an international perspective (35 per cent). A smaller number adopted a combined approach (17 per cent) and a few were separately classified as foreign national studies (4 per cent). Over time, there has been some progress made in terms of the number of articles published and the scope of topics covered. However, many of the articles displayed similar shortcomings to those noted in earlier reviews of cross-national management/organization studies: in particular, an over-reliance on a small number of primarily Anglo-Saxon countries, a lack of a longitudinal perspective, a loose specification of culture, an ethnocentric bias and a frequent failure to explain observed differences and similarities.

Keywords Literature review; comparative; international; human resource management.

The intensification of competition in national and international markets, the advent of supranational organizations such as the European Union and corporate restructuring on an unprecedented scale are some of the factors that are transforming the nature of academic scholarship in management and organization studies. Scholars across many disciplines have increasingly shifted their focus from concerns with purely domestic issues to studies about people, organizations and business systems in different nations. Some of these efforts have been driven by theoretical aspirations to understand economic and social systems across countries; others have been driven by pragmatic desires to enable organizational practitioners to manage more effectively across national and cultural boundaries.

The core questions to which scholars and practitioners have sought answers are as follows: (1) what are the main similarities and differences between national systems? (2) what are the determinants and consequences of these similarities and differences? (3) are similarities and differences becoming greater or smaller? (4) how can multicultural organizations be managed? (5) how should organizations of one culture adapt to the different environments of another culture and how can a host culture best

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accommodate the organizational practices of an outside organization? and (6) what organizational practices are beneficially transferable from one culture to another?¹ Behind these questions lie two core theoretical issues as to what is general and universal in the management of organizations and what is peculiar or specific to one nation or culture. In other words, a central issue concerns what is constant and what varies across nations. In seeking answers to these questions, many scholars have applied existing management models and theories to cultures other than the ones in which they originated; others have sought to develop new frameworks, models and theories to explain the behaviour of organizations in different national settings. Yet detailed reviews of the cross-cultural management/organization literature have consistently highlighted major methodological, epistemological and theoretical deficiencies (Roberts, 1970; Neghandi, 1974, 1986; Child, 1981; Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982; Adler, 1983a, 1983b; Sekaran, 1983; Roberts and Boyacigiller, 1984a, 1984b; Adler *et al.*, 1986; Redding, 1994). On the basis of a review of the reviews, Redding (1994: 331) concluded that 'thirty years of work has made little impression on the immensely complex problem of cultures and organization behaviour. However, there is strong agreement on the essence of the difficulty and the nature of the failure.'

Specifically, these reviews highlight a number of major problems. First, there is often a lack of integration of studies of individuals, groups and organizations. This was originally noted in a landmark review of the literature by Roberts (1970: 328) where she described the area as a 'morass'. Citing Bass's (1965) comment on US organizational research to the effect that there was one group of researchers interested in people without organizations and another group interested in organizations without people, she argued that progress was dependent upon studying interactions between individuals and organizations. In practice, she claimed, this was little evident. Subsequent work by Neghandi (1974, 1986), and more recently Lachman *et al.* (1994) and Earley and Singh (1995), which has sought to develop a more integrated framework, suggests that this problem continues. Second, culture is problematic as a determinant of variations in organizational functioning and structuring (for reviews, see Child, 1981; Smith, 1992; Tayeb, 1994; Chapman, 1996). At a conceptual level, the most fundamental problem has been the lack of any agreement as to how to define culture. The literature contains a plethora of definitions. The distinction between 'culture' and 'nation' is a further problem. 'Nation' is a much broader concept, encompassing social, political, and economic institutions. Yet 'nation' is invariably used as a synonym for 'culture'. Since single nations are frequently composed of a number of distinctive cultures, it is clear that cultural boundaries do not necessarily overlap with national boundaries; although they are usually assumed to do so. Consequently, cross-national differences are frequently interpreted as cross-cultural differences. At an operational level, culture is rarely specified and more often than not is treated as 'a residual factor which is presumed to account for national variations that have neither been postulated before the research nor explained after its completion' (Child, 1981: 306). In addition, although a great number of studies claim to have examined the impact of culture on organizational structuring and functioning, the cultural context is rarely investigated beforehand. More usually it is introduced only after the results have been presented. Hence, cultural variables are commonly introduced *ex post* as explanatory variables without an *a priori* explanation of their content and origins. A third problem identified by these reviews is the frequent existence of an ethnocentric bias. Many studies are replications of work already conducted by researchers in their home nation. A significant methodological goal of this type of research is standardization. As far as is possible all aspects of the research design are kept identical across national research

settings, so that identical instrumentation (except for language) is administered with the same instructions, and analysed using the same methods. Hence, in such ethnocentric studies everything is compared in terms of common reference points and is viewed through a particular lens which tends to filter out the diversity of understandings which may exist in different countries. Finally, these reviews have often demonstrated methodological inadequacies which question their conclusions. Functional equivalence is not always established. Instrument design and data collection are rarely sensitive to linguistic and perceptual differences between nations. The samples of organizations, individuals and nations are usually loosely matched and selected on the basis of convenience rather than on the basis of representing important features of national distinctiveness.²

After reviewing the state of research in this area in the late 1970s, Lammers and Hickson (1979) concluded that many of these problems had arisen because the field of cross-cultural management/organization was still in its infancy. Somewhat later, in a review of the literature from twenty-four journals over a ten-year period up to 1980, Adler (1983a) concluded that the number of cross-cultural management/organization articles was surprisingly limited and still included many of the problems outlined above. Almost a decade later, Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) noted that the 1980s had produced no increase in the proportion of cross-cultural management/organization articles, citing reviews by Godkin *et al.* (1989) and Peng *et al.* (1991). This is further confirmed by a more recent review of articles published between 1985 and 1990 in seventy-three academic, professional and academic/professional journals by Adler and Bartholomew (1992, 1997).

A major purpose of the article is to identify and evaluate the main empirical areas of research, the methodologies which have been used and the conceptual and theoretical approaches which have been adopted in comparative and international human resource management. On the basis of this, the aim is to make some tentative suggestions about gaps in the literature and possible ways forward for future research. A second purpose of the article is to examine whether such criticisms, levelled at the cross-national management/organization literature in general, also apply to studies which have focused on comparative and international perspectives on the management of human resources in particular. Throughout, the analysis is based more on procedural questions of approach than on substantive matters related to the specific findings of articles.

The paper therefore follows the approach adopted by the previous reviews of management/organization literature mentioned above. Thus, the discussion is based on a review of articles published in leading academic journals. In the present study, the review focuses on articles in twenty-nine human resource management, management and related social science journals published between 1977 and 1997. In this way, both the area of focus is distinctive and the twenty-year time period is longer than in previous reviews. The focus is on journal articles, since these are the primary means by which scholars seek to disseminate their results. However, research monographs and books are referred to where appropriate.

The article is organized as follows. The next section outlines the methods of selection of the journals and articles included in the current review. Definitions and the methods used for journal analysis are then discussed. This is followed by the outline of the results which focuses on the types of studies, the level of investigation, countries covered, time period of study, research methods, analytical frameworks and types of explanation. In the following section, problems, gaps and potentials are discussed. In

the final section, some broad conclusions are drawn for ways forward for future research.

Methods

The journals were selected for review on the basis of two considerations. First, we sought to concentrate on 'major' journals in those discipline areas in which the management of human resources is either a primary focus (human resource management, industrial relations) or a subsidiary focus (management, organizational behaviour). We also included some major journals from related core disciplines (psychology, sociology and economics). The journals were identified from studies which have sought to determine the relative influence of different publications, either by using citation analysis or by seeking the opinions of leading academics via questionnaire surveys (Blackburn and Mitchell, 1981; Coe and Weinstock, 1984; Liebowitz and Palmer, 1984; Sharplin and Mabry, 1985; Extejt and Smith, 1990; Gordon and Purvis, 1991; Everett, 1994; Doyle and Arthurs, 1995). Second, we chose leading English-language journals.³ The journals included in the study are listed in Appendix 1. We would concede that these two selection criteria impart their own biases in that the research reported in these journals is very likely to be based on the experiences of firms and workers in relatively unregulated, innovative (i.e., mainly Anglo-Saxon, advanced countries) environments. At some stage in the future, it would be informative to carry out a similar survey of non-English-language journals.

In order to be included in the study an article had to pass two further tests. First, the content of an article had to be concerned with some aspect of the management of human resources. Given that the precise nature of human resource management is contested, we adopted a broad definition using Gospel's (1992) typology, where human resource management is taken to cover the three broad areas of work relations, employment relations and industrial relations. Work relations covers the way work is organized, the division of labour and the deployment of workers around technologies and production processes. Employment relations deals with the arrangements governing such aspects of employment as recruitment, training, promotion, job tenure and the reward of employees. Industrial relations is here defined to cover the representational aspirations of employees and the voice systems which may exist, such as joint consultation, employee involvement practices, works councils and collective bargaining. These three broad areas are obviously rather arbitrary distinctions of convenience and, in practice, there is considerable overlap between them.⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, however, the distinction is used to provide a framework for distinguishing and analysing key areas of research.

The second test was that the article had to be classifiable as 'comparative', 'international', 'foreign national' or 'combined'. Here we drew on the definitions originally developed by Adler (1983b) and subsequently used by Adler and Bartholomew (1992, 1997) and Peng *et al.* (1991). Comparative articles focus on some aspect of the management of human resources in two or more nations, such as a comparison of human resource management strategies between Britain and Holland (Heijltjes *et al.*, 1996) or Germany and America (Wever, 1995). Other studies within this category compared the industrial relations systems between France and Germany (Maurice and Sellier, 1979) or Britain and Sweden (Fulcher, 1988), or provided a comparison of a broad range of human resource management policies in ten European countries (Brewster and Holt Larsen, 1992) or considered specific policies such as training between Britain, France and Germany (Noble, 1997). International articles examine the

management of human resources within multinational firms and are therefore concerned with issues such as the co-ordination of human resources within such enterprises (Tung, 1983; Jain, 1990), the management of expatriates (Ondrack, 1985; Scullion, 1992; Black and Gregersen, 1992; Marginson *et al.*, 1995; Gregersen, 1997), or the transfer of policies from home-country facilities to operations in host countries (Petersen and Schwind, 1977; Negandhi *et al.*, 1985; Pavett and Morris, 1995; Ferner, 1997). Foreign national articles are those which are essentially single-country studies, usually written by non-indigenous researchers, but which seek to draw conclusions which go beyond the country studied. A study of the management of industrial relations in Italy, by an American academic, explicitly seeking to draw out implications for the US, is one example of this type of study (Locke, 1992). Other examples include examinations of the nature of human resource management in specific countries (Nelson and Reeder, 1985; Kamoche, 1992; Child, 1991; Camuffo and Costa, 1993; Warner, 1993). Combined articles adopt a combination of the approaches detailed above (Northrup and Rowan, 1977; Tung, 1982; Kopp, 1994; Huault, 1996; Turner, 1997).

In total, the twenty-nine journals surveyed had published 20,287 articles over the period covered, and we identified 338 (1.7 per cent) as falling within our ambit. Each of these articles was then surveyed by a member of the research team and the content classified using a common coding frame. This is reproduced in Appendix 2. In order to ensure consistency, at the outset five journals, accounting for 52.9 per cent of identified articles, were reviewed by all three members of the research team. This enabled us to clarify the definitions used and also to ensure that common understandings were applied by individual team members. The discussion in the next section is based upon an analysis of the data compiled via the coding frame.

Results

Taking the nine human resource management-type journals identified in Table 1, 3.5 per cent of their total number of articles were concerned with the management of human resources from a comparative, international, foreign national, or combined perspective. In our other two sub-categories, management/organizational behaviour and related social science, 0.6 per cent and 0.2 per cent of articles respectively fell within our ambit. Our overall figure of 1.7 per cent is lower than that reported in other cross-national management/organizational reviews such as the 3.6 per cent reported by Adler (1983a) during the 1970s, the 2.3 per cent by Adler and Bartholomew (1992) in the early 1980s, and the 6.0 per cent reported by Peng *et al.* (1991) in the late 1980s. This results mainly from the narrower focus of the present study on a subset of articles which deal more specifically with the management of human resources.

Table 1 shows that the number of publications increased significantly in the late 1980s, reflecting the entry of a number of new journals which were specifically concerned with this area of study. Indeed, six human resource management journals accounted for over half of identified articles. Moreover, three of these journals (*European Journal of Industrial Relations*, *Human Resource Management Journal* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management*) have been founded since 1990. The predominance of the *European Journal of Industrial Relations* and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* in this review is due to the fact that both journals have established an editorial approach and scope which overcomes some of the barriers that have trapped organization studies into geographical and cultural parochialism (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991: 279). These include the explicit encourage-

Table 1 *Articles published in twenty-nine journals grouped by main disciplinary area, 1977–97*

<i>Journal</i>	<i>1977–82</i>	<i>1983–7</i>	<i>1988–92</i>	<i>1993–7</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
<i>Human resource management</i>					
1 IJHRM	NP	NP	26	77	103 (31)
2 HRMJ	NP	NP	12	13	25 (7.4)
3 BJIR	10	6	5	3	24 (7.7)
4 EJIR	NP	NP	NP	15	15 (4.4)
5 ILR	5	2	1	5	13 (3.8)
6 IR	2	2	1	5	10 (3.0)
7 ILRR	0	2	1	4	7 (2.1)
8 HR	0	0	0	3	3 (0.9)
9 HRM	0	0	0	2	2 (0.6)
<i>Management/organizational behaviour</i>					
10 JMS	6	6	3	11	26 (7.7)
11 JIBS	2	6	3	8	19 (5.6)
12 AMJ	4	4	1	4	13 (4.3)
13 AMR	3	3	5	1	12 (3.6)
14 CMR	1	4	1	4	10 (3.0)
15 HBR	3	1	2	2	8 (2.4)
16 OS	3	0	2	2	7 (2.1)
17 JOB	0	1	2	3	6 (1.8)
18 ASQ	3	0	0	1	4 (1.2)
19 BJM	NP	NP	1	3	4 (1.2)
20 SMR	2	1	0	1	4 (1.2)
21 O	NP	NP	NP	0	0
22 RiOB	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Related social science</i>					
23 WES	0	3	4	2	9 (2.7)
24 PP	0	2	1	3	6 (1.8)
25 JOOP	0	1	0	2	3 (0.9)
26 W+O	0	0	1	3	4 (1.2)
27 JAP	0	0	1	0	1 (0.3)
28 EJ	0	0	0	0	0
29 AER	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	44	44	73	177	338 (100)

Note

NP = not published

ment of articles that take comparative and international perspectives, the encouragement of contributions which have taken a wider perspective than has prevailed in the past by recognizing the importance of different national intellectual traditions and priorities, and the development of a community of scholars that is both interdisciplinary and international (Poole, 1990: 10–11; Hyman, 1995: 13–16). The importance of these two journals as outlets for research examining the management of human resources from comparative and international perspectives is indicated by the fact that were they to be excluded from the review only 220 (1.1 per cent) of the 20,287 articles examined would have fallen within our ambit.

Two further points in connection with Table 1 might be noted. First, in the past, industrial relations journals had few articles on the management of human resources and even fewer on comparative and international aspects. Such journals tended to concentrate mainly on trade unions and collective bargaining. Through the 1980s, this changed, with a growing number of articles focusing more on the management of human resources. Second, within the related social science category, sociologists have done more research on comparative and international human resource-type topics than either social psychologists or economists. Within the major economics journals selected, the lack of interest by economists was notable, given their more general interest in areas such as international trade theory, the growth of the multinational firm and national competitiveness. Within the major social psychology journals selected, the lack of any major interest by psychologists in comparative and international research in this area was also notable, given the major impact which psychologists have had on the study of individual and group attitudes and behaviour at work.

Types of study, level of investigation, countries covered and time period of study

In terms of the type of approach adopted, Table 2 shows that the largest number of studies were comparative in nature (44 per cent), followed by those with an international perspective (35 per cent). A smaller number adopted a combined approach (17 per cent) and a few were classified as foreign national studies (4 per cent).

Regardless of the type of study, the main focus was the organization. However, the next most frequent level of focus varied between types of article. In the case of comparative studies, it was the individual, with a significant number of studies seeking to ascertain the nature of individual values in different nations (Hofstede, 1980a). For international and international/comparative studies, the focus was mixed in that studies mainly dealt with the relationship between the individual and the organization (e.g. the link between expatriate managers and organizational structure). Not surprisingly, for foreign national studies, the focus was usually the nation, though some were more concerned with regions within a country.

With regard to the main countries studied, the UK, US, Japan, France and Germany were the most frequently studied countries, accounting for 48 per cent of all cases. Of course, the overall weight of the UK and US obviously reflects the composition of journals chosen for analysis and the predominance within the human resource management literature of Anglo-Saxon perspectives. This has implications to which we return below. Seven other countries formed a second tier – China, Australia, Sweden, Canada, The Netherlands, Spain and Singapore. These countries accounted for 15 per cent of the nations studied. The data also indicate that, where two or more nations were studied, the most frequent comparisons were made between the US and UK, UK and

Table 2 *Type of study*

<i>Type of study</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Comparative	148	44
International	118	35
International/comparative	58	17
Foreign	14	4
TOTAL	338	100

Table 3 Time period of study

<i>Time frame of study</i>	<i>Comparative (%)</i>	<i>International (%)</i>	<i>Com./int. (%)</i>	<i>Foreign (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Cross-sectional	89.7	99.0	95.1	100	5.7
Longitudinal	10.3	1.0	4.9	0	94.3
TOTAL	100 (N= 116)	100 (N= 97)	100 (N= 41)	100 (N= 6)	100 (N= 263)

France, UK and Germany, and US and Japan. With regard to international studies, the most frequently studied countries were the UK, US, Japan and a number of rapidly industrializing countries (Malaysia, Singapore, Mexico and China). This latter list reflects the host countries of many American, European and Japanese multinationals. Six countries (China, France, Germany, Italy, UK, and Kenya) were the primary focus of foreign national studies as we have defined them.

Irrespective of the approach adopted, the great majority of studies (94.3 per cent) were cross-sectional (see Table 3). However, a number of researchers have argued that longitudinal studies have advantages over cross-sectional studies when the variables investigated change over time and when the causal relationship between variables needs to be determined (Sashkin and Garland, 1979; Scott, 1987). Nevertheless, the findings from the present study are supported by the results of a number of reviews of the cross-national management/organization literature. Thus, Roberts (1970) found few examples of longitudinal analysis and Peng *et al.* (1991) report that only 10 per cent of the studies in their review were longitudinal. We return below to this lack of a longitudinal perspective.

Research methods

Table 4 summarizes the methods of research. This shows that questionnaires (42 per cent), case studies (29.6 per cent) and literature reviews (11.2 per cent) were the most commonly used methods of data collection for each type of study. A few articles were based on large data sets (3.9 per cent). A very small number of studies used

Table 4 Methods of research

<i>Means of data collection</i>	<i>Comparative (%)</i>	<i>International (%)</i>	<i>Com./int. (%)</i>	<i>Foreign (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Questionnaire	48.3	41.0	35.8	7.6	42.0
Case study	24.1	27.3	46.4	38.5	29.6
Literature review	10.3	12.8	5.4	30.8	11.2
Large data set	5.5	3.4	1.8	—	3.9
Interview	1.4	1.0	1.8	7.7	1.5
Mix ¹	0.7	2.5	1.8	—	1.5
Other ^s	9.7	12.0	7.0	15.4	10.3
TOTAL	100 (N= 145)	100 (N= 117)	100 (N= 56)	100 (N= 13)	100 (N= 331)

Notes

¹ questionnaire survey plus interviews/case study

² archival, laboratory or field experiment

questionnaires in combination with in-depth interviews and case studies (1.5 per cent). Some used an experimental/psychological approach (10.3 per cent). The most common type of study in this area is therefore a questionnaire survey. Several factors could explain this. For individual researchers, or researchers based in one country, the high cost and time associated with in-depth interviews may be prohibitive. For international teams, the variation in the type and quality of data collected through interviews in separate countries may also make comparison difficult. These findings are consistent with those reported by Podsakoff and Dalton (1987) and Peng *et al.* (1991) for broader cross-national and international management/organization studies.

Analytical frameworks

Table 5 is based upon a classification originally developed by Adler (1983b, 1984). Ethnocentric work refers to research studies designed and conducted in one culture by researchers from that culture which are then replicated in a second culture. Underpinning ethnocentric studies is a universalist approach, in that instruments and measures developed in one culture are believed to be equally appropriate and applicable in other cultures. Therefore, as mentioned previously, the main methodological aim is standardization. Polycentric research eschews the imposition of universal concepts and focuses on describing, explaining and interpreting the patterns of management and organization utilizing more locally derived frameworks. In effect, these are usually individual domestic studies conducted in different countries. In contrast to the previous two approaches, comparative studies are designed to identify both those factors of management and organizational structuring and functioning which are universal and/or culturally specific between cultures. Unlike ethnocentric studies which seek to impose one culture's theories and models on other cultures, or polycentric studies which deny universality and therefore make comparison difficult, comparative studies attempt to develop a universal construct that seeks a cross-cultural relevance along with locally derived ways of measuring that relevance. Emergent similarity is then labelled as universality and emergent differences as cultural specificity.

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that cross-cultural and international studies of the management of human resources are subject to a substantial ethnocentric bias (58.7 per cent). According to Adler 'in ethnocentric studies, one culture's "universal" theories are imposed on another culture' (1984: 42). Ethnocentric studies therefore tend to assume that the home country (very often the US or UK) is more important than or superior to other countries. This would be unimportant if either organizational theories were based on universal values or national values did not have an impact on organizational life. Neither supposition is tenable, given the research indicating the diversity of cultural values (Hofstede, 1980a; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Trompenaars,

Table 5 *Analytical framework*

<i>Methodological approach</i>	<i>Comparative (%)</i>	<i>International (%)</i>	<i>Com.int. (%)</i>	<i>Foreign (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Ethnocentric	45.7	75.7	60.4	71.4	58.7
Polycentric	37.1	15.0	26.4	28.6	27.4
Comparative	18.2	10.3	13.2	—	13.9
TOTAL	101 (N= 143)	101 (N= 107)	100 (N= 53)	100 (N= 14)	100 (N= 317)

1993) and the impact of such diversity on organizational behaviour (Cray and Mallory, 1998; Hickson and Pugh, 1995; Schneider and Barsoux, 1997). Yet the results of the current review suggest that few researchers have explicitly addressed the influence of Anglo-American values on research on organizations. Rather, most assume universality for the concepts they are investigating. Although it is difficult to recognize culture's profound influence on the development of theories, it is nevertheless critical. A number of writers have questioned the application of management models and theories developed in one country to other countries (see Azumi, 1974; Clark, 1996; Hofstede, 1980b, 1983, 1993; Lammers and Hickson, 1979; Laurent, 1983, 1986). The implication of this body of literature is that, since management models and theories reflect the cultural conditions in which they were initially developed, they cannot simply be transferred from one culture to another. Hofstede puts it most strongly when he maintains that 'management scientists, theorists, and writers are human too: they grew up in a particular society, in a particular period, and their ideas cannot but reflect the constraints of their environment' (1993: 82).

Types of explanation

Table 6 shows that, where explanations for differences or similarities are provided, they are primarily of a cultural (21.8 per cent) or institutional nature (19 per cent), or a combination of the two (10.4 per cent). However, even when used, the precise nature of the cultural or institutional factors is often left unexplored or unexplained. All too often they are used as residual variables rather than as independent or explanatory variables which are closely defined and extensively analysed in themselves. Consequently, Roberts's (1970: 330) statement of nearly thirty years ago appears to remain relevant today: for most researchers the societal setting 'is still a reality to be explained and as such cannot yet explain other realities'. Where culture is specified, increasingly Hofstede's (1980a) work is the most common interpretative schema employed, with its emphasis on such cultural dimensions as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity. When it is used, the major shortcomings of Hofstede's original study of IBM employees conducted around 1968 and 1972 are often ignored (see Sondegaard, 1994; Smith, 1996; Tayeb, 1998). Furthermore, rarely do studies specify *a priori* those dimensions that are relevant to the phenomena under investigation. Rather they are treated as *ex post* explanatory variables. Consequently, as was noted earlier, culture, and Hofstede's framework in particular, is rarely an integral part of the initial research design.

Table 6 *Type of explanation*

<i>Type of explanation</i>	<i>Comparative (%)</i>	<i>International (%)</i>	<i>Com.int. (%)</i>	<i>Foreign (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Cultural	24.3	17.3	30.4		21.8
Institutional	32.4	8.2	12.5		19.0
Cultural/Institutional	12.5	4.5	12.5	28.6	10.5
MNC type		1.8			0.6
Other	4.4	9.1	5.4	14.3	6.6
No explanation	26.5	59.1	39.3	57.1	41.5
TOTAL	100 (N= 136)	100 (N= 110)	100 (N= 56)	100 (N= 14)	100 (N= 316)

In terms of institutional explanations, there is less of a preponderance. Here some studies stress endogenous factors such as the strategy and structure of management, drawing on Chandlerian-type notions (Chandler, 1962, 1977, 1990) or employee representational bodies within the firm, drawing on the industrial relations traditions (Dunlop, 1958). Others stress more exogenous factors such as the role of national vocational and educational arrangements, drawing on the work of the Aix group (Maurice *et al.*, 1979, 1982), or the role of 'national business systems', drawing on the work of Whitley (1991, 1992).

Three sets of approaches were underdeveloped. First, reflecting the point made earlier, few took a broad economic perspective or used tools drawn from economics. Second, though many provided some potted history, few used historical narrative and asked the sorts of questions which historians might pose about timing, conjunctures and counterfactuals. Third, surprisingly few were concerned with process, perhaps reflecting the lack of in-depth interviews and participant-observation-type research. These gaps are returned to below.

A striking finding from Table 6 is the extent to which these studies have failed to offer an integrated explanation for their results. We classified two articles in five as being primarily concerned with description and offering at best a rather *ad hoc* set of explanations. This is critical since the basic purpose of examining human resources from a comparative and international perspective is to contribute to an understanding of the extent to which there are differences and similarities between nations and between organizations and their members located in different nations. If the findings are left largely unexplained, we cannot determine which set of factors accounts for the variation, and this in turn means that we cannot make real comparisons. As a consequence also we cannot understand the process by which different aspects of the management of human resources become infused with national distinctiveness. The field, therefore, has mainly been concerned with identifying the extent to which the management of human resource varies between nations and organizations. It has been less concerned with explaining the noted differences and similarities.

Areas covered

Comparative As defined above, comparative human resources management covers the management of work, employment or industrial relations in two or more companies. Of our sample, 148 articles or 44 per cent fell clearly into this category and a further 58 or 17 per cent were categorized as both comparative and international in that they dealt with two or more countries and also dealt with human resource management in multinational companies.

The majority of the comparative articles concentrated on the organizational level (34.5 per cent). Within this, some were studies of whole firms and some of plants, though there were few of divisions or other sub-units within firms. Over a quarter of these organization-level studies concerned the efficiency and performance of different firms. Overall, however, it is notable how few studies are concerned with economic outcomes. A significant group (19.3 per cent) focused on individuals. These tended to be studies of motivation, commitment and job satisfaction. It is perhaps surprising that only 8.3 per cent of the comparative articles were industry-level studies.

The main focus of comparative research was on aspects of employment relations (41.2 per cent). Within this area, the main emphasis was on training (19.7 per cent), wages (13.1 per cent) and staffing (11.5 per cent). A significant proportion of these were studies of the selection, development and remuneration of managers. There was also a

concern here with organizational culture as a dependent variable, with 11.5 per cent of the total number of comparative articles dealing with organizational culture, cultural types and cultural change. We found, however, few studies of management style (4.1 per cent) or of leadership (2.7 per cent). The main focus, therefore, on aspects of employment relations concerned 'harder' matters such as training and wages rather than 'softer' matters such as culture, style and leadership.

Of the comparative articles, 33.8 per cent concerned industrial relations. Overall, here there was a preponderance of articles which dealt with the management of trade unions and collective bargaining rather than with the management of other kinds of representational arrangements and participative systems. There were also a number of articles which dealt with employers' organizations, and again these focused on collective bargaining rather than on the role which such associations may perform in terms of training or consultancy activities. There would seem to be a need therefore for more studies of the management of non-union-based forms of employee representation, such as comparisons of the management of works councils between countries.

A small 19.6 per cent of the comparative articles dealt with work relations. This may reflect difficulty of gaining access to areas which may be more sensitive from a competitive point of view since they may concern matters of production and cost schedules. In the 1980s, there were a number of articles on topics such as quality control circles and total quality management which were then areas of growing research interest. In the 1990s, there have been a number of articles which have focused on aspects of flexible working and lean production. However, few of these provided information on relative performance.

International As with the comparative articles, the majority of the international articles concentrated on the organizational level (44.8 per cent). Within this, again, most were studies of whole firms rather than plants or divisions within firms. It might be useful, therefore, to have more studies of multinationals which focus on the constituent parts of firms. A significant minority (18.1 per cent) focused on individuals and these tended to be studies of the management of expatriates and the effects of managerial practices on motivation between countries. There was also a growing number which dealt with the boundaries between firms. Thus, there was an increasing number of articles on joint ventures, especially between Western and Japanese companies and also between Western companies and enterprises in Russia and Eastern Europe. By contrast, there was little on the management of supply chains and multinational alliances. Again, these would seem to be fruitful areas for further research.

The main focus of the research on multinationals was on aspects of employment relations (52.5 per cent), and, within this area, the main emphasis was on staffing (27.4 per cent) and training (17.7 per cent). The primary focus in these studies was on the management of managers rather than of ordinary blue- or white-collar workers or specialist staff such as R&D workers. Under the heading of employment relations, there was also a focus on culture with 14.4 per cent of the total dealing with organizational culture, cultural types and cultural change. We found several studies of management style (6.7 per cent), but very few studies of leadership in international human resource management (0.8 per cent). Few studies focused on either work relations or industrial relations as we have defined them above. The former constituted 13.5 per cent and the latter 12.7 per cent. Where we broke this down further, most articles on the management of work relations dealt with the transfer of technology and working practices. Most international industrial relations articles dealt with the management of

collective bargaining and rather fewer with the management of joint participation and consultation within multinationals.

The relative lack of articles on international work relations and industrial relations requires some further comment. In terms of the study of work organization, there would seem to be a major gap at the level of the firm. In fact, there have been fewer studies of how work is organized within the same firm across countries and rather more studies of how work is organized between different firms across countries. Therefore, the intra-company study of work relations within multinational firms would seem to be a possible area for further research. In terms of industrial relations, there is both an older literature (Northrup and Rowan, 1977) and a newer literature (Marginson, 1992) which has dealt with the management of trade unions and collective bargaining in multinational companies. Though there were a large number of studies of works councils, especially within the European context, these we mainly excluded because they dealt with works councils from the perspective of employees and unions and did not focus on the management of works councils. In the industrial relations area, the management of relations with trade unions still tends to predominate over other kinds of representative and participative arrangements. Not surprisingly, the highest proportion of studies of transplants and transfer were to be found in the international category (29 per cent). Here, over the years, there have been a number of interesting studies. In particular, in recent years, there have been a growing number of studies of the transfer of human resource practices by Japanese multinationals, many suggesting that Japanese firms are more likely to transfer production systems than employment or industrial relations arrangements.

Finally, and anticipating the later gaps in the literature, there were two surprises in terms of under-researched areas of international human resource management. First, given that a distinctive feature of human resource management is often said to be the link between corporate and human resource strategy, it is notable that we classified only 9.3 per cent as dealing with strategy. Again, this might reflect the difficulty of gaining access to strategic decision making at the level of the firm. Second, it is notable how few studies have focused on the European Union or the North American Free Trade Agreement and the opportunities and problems such supranational organizations create for the management of human resources in multinational companies.

Articles which we categorized as comparative/international tended to focus on the role of multinationals in two or more countries and to stress the country of origin and host country effects as much as the activities of the multinational *per se*. Articles which we classified as foreign nationals focused mainly on one country but sought to draw conclusions for human resource management in other countries. Under this heading, for example, we included recent articles on China by Nelson and Reeder (1985), Child (1991), Tung (1991) and Warner (1993). One strength of some of these articles is that they tend to present a less stereotyped picture of a country and highlight the differences within a country. In this respect, recent work such as that by Locke (1992) is interesting in that it stresses how different political and institutional configurations between regions within a country can affect the nature of human resource management and the climate of industrial relations within the firm.

Discussion

The most common type of study concerned with the management of human resources from a comparative and/or international perspective has the following characteristics: (1) it is focused on the organization; (2) it is mainly concerned with aspects of

employment relations followed by industrial relations and work relations; (3) it relies primarily on questionnaires and secondarily on case studies; (4) it is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal; (5) it is located in the UK or US and then Japan, France and Germany; (6) it tends to be ethnocentric in orientation; and (7) it often fails to explain observed differences or similarities, and, if it does, often falls back on a vague and unspecified notion of culture. In this section we discuss a certain parochialism in the area and then consider some gaps in the current literature.

Parochialism

There are two kinds of parochialism which one sees in the literature on comparative and international human resource management. First, it seems to be largely insulated from earlier work on and critiques of the cross-national and international management/organization literature, as reviewed by Roberts (1970), Peng *et al.* (1991), and Adler and Bartholomew (1992, 1997). As a consequence, the findings from the present study would suggest that only small progress has been made and that most studies examining the management of human resources from a comparative and/or international perspective have failed to draw on a number of highly relevant debates and developments in related areas. For example, debates concerning the definition of culture and cross-cultural methodology in anthropology (e.g. Chapman, 1996; Kroeber and Kluckhorn, 1952); psychology (e.g. Bhagat and McQuaid, 1982, Peng *et al.*, 1991; Triandis *et al.*, 1972) and organizational behaviour (e.g., Child, 1981; Lammers and Hickson, 1979; Tayeb, 1994).

A second kind of parochialism relates to the Anglo-Saxon nature of much of the research. If we are to make progress, we need to move away from a parochialism inherent within Anglo-American research towards a more plural perspective which is based on openness to other perspectives (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Redding, 1994; Clark, 1996). To take one example. Anglo-Saxon scholars might be more open to French traditions in related areas, in particular to the work of the Aix 'societal effects' school with its emphasis on the importance of educational and training systems (Maurice *et al.*, 1979, 1982) and to the work of the 'regulation' school with its emphasis on broad economic and production regimes (Boyer, 1986).

We are not suggesting that Anglo-American scholars necessarily view their theories and models as superior to other theories and models. Rather, the results from this study suggest that Anglo-American scholars have tended to develop theories and models without being sufficiently aware of non-Anglo-American perspectives. The main reason for this is the dominance of scholars from the USA and Britain in the most influential journals. Consequently, they control the key conduits through which information is disseminated to the wider academic community. Whoever controls these channels of communication defines the nature of the subject/discipline area (see Cole and Cole, 1972; Doreian, 1985). In the case of management/organizational behaviour, a study of the national origins of journal authors in fifteen leading journals between 1981 and 1992 indicated that 91.1 per cent of authors were from the UK and America, with 86.4 per cent being from America (Engwall, 1996). In a follow-up to Engwall's (1996) study, Danell (1998) suggests that, while European-based journals are becoming increasingly international in terms of their authorship, American journals have moved little towards becoming more international. In a comparison of *Administrative Science Quarterly* (*ASQ*) and *Organization Studies* (*OS*) between 1981 and 1992, Danell *et al.* (1997) report that 86.6 per cent of authors in *ASQ* were American, whereas 29.7 per cent of authors in *OS* were American. The editors of *OS*, as have several other journals

included in the present study, as noted earlier, have actively sought to increase the representation of authors from non-English-speaking countries by actively encouraging submissions and reviewing in the local language. Until more journals take actions such as these, this type of parochialism will continue.

Some gaps and future areas of research

Reference has already been made to some gaps in the literature. In particular, in terms of approach, we have referred to the limited contribution of economists and psychologists who would seem to have contributions to make in terms of issues, theory and methodology. Reference has also been made to the under-emphasis on process and the absence in most studies of a serious longitudinal perspective. In terms of comparative research, we noted that aspects of work relations were relatively under-researched, as are industrial relations in non-union settings. In terms of research on international human resource management, we noted a lack of work on the link between strategy and human resource policies, the organization of work relations and the management of non-union industrial relations. Here we comment further on a number of other gaps.

A growing body of research, in particular in the area of international human resource management, has been concerned with the management of managers. This is important. However, by contrast, and perhaps surprisingly, the management of ordinary production or white-collar workers within multinational companies has been neglected. This may reflect a belief (surely mistaken?) that such workers are not a 'problem' and their successful management is no longer an important strategic issue for the multinational enterprise. Similarly, there is little on the management of some specific groups such as engineers, scientists and R&D workers. Notable exceptions here are the work by Lam (1994) on the management of engineers and by Kuemmerle (1997) on the development of foreign R&D capabilities by multinationals. In addition, under this same heading, though there is much on the management of diversity, this tends to focus on the management of multi-cultural groups, and there is little on the management of gender, minority groups and the disabled, again despite some notable exceptions (Erdener, 1996) and some eloquent pleas for work in this area (Rubery, 1995).

Another gap is to be found in the failure in many articles to link employment relations, work relations and industrial relations. Of course, there is an argument for taking a narrow focus and for exploring one area in depth. However, much is to be obtained from exploring the interconnections and complementarities between these three areas of human resource management. Some of the best examples of a more integrated approach are to be found in a European tradition of political economy which draws on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. Here we might cite again the work of the Aix school of Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre on the influence of broad societal effects on such human resource activities as training and pay systems (1979, 1982, 1986). Of a similar nature is the work by Maurice, Sorge and Warner on societal differences in organizing manufacturing units (1980). Other research which integrates work, employment and industrial relations and which also seeks to relate these to broad corporate strategy and structure is to be found in the broad strategy and structure perspective of Muller and Purcell (1992) and the equally broad and more historical perspective of McKinlay and Starkey (1992).

In the articles which we surveyed, there is relatively little on economic outcomes and performance. In part this may be because of the difficulty of gaining access to sensitive commercial data. Exceptions are perhaps some work on QC circles and benchmarking.

To date, however, little comparative or international work has been done on the effects of different 'bundles' of human resource practices on the lines of recent national studies (Arthurs, 1994). One important and suggestive exception, however, is the recent work by MacDuffie (1995a, 1995b, 1997) which links human resource policies, flexible production systems and training arrangements to economic performance outcomes.

There is little on corporate governance as this has developed as a research area in recent years. Corporate governance is defined as the mechanisms by which companies are directed and controlled. It relates also to the ownership and financing of enterprises and to the control and representational systems within which they operate. In recent years, there has been some interesting work on financial systems and corporate governance (Mayer, 1990). This suggests certain hypotheses: for example, that 'outsider', market-based systems such as exist in Anglo-Saxon countries may create pressures for short-term, market-orientated approaches to personnel management; by contrast, 'insider', firm-based systems of governance which exist in Germany and Japan may encourage greater commitment on the part of employees and may lead to longer-term approaches to the management of human resources. To date, such ideas have not had much impact on the comparative and international human resource management literature.⁵ There would, therefore, seem to be a need for work of a political economy nature which would combine financial markets, corporate governance systems and human resource decisions.

Finally, there is surprisingly little on the role of the state. This relates both to the role of government (national and local) as an employer of labour and to how public-sector human resource management practices may vary between countries. It also relates to how government action can constrain human resource management practice. This is in contrast to the older industrial relations tradition which gave the state considerable weight. By contrast, the newer human resource management approach has tended to view the firm as an often atomistic entity operating without political contests. In fact, most recent work in this area has concerned the role of the EU as a growing supranational state rather than national states. One exception which might be cited here is the work by Ferner (1987) on links between government and management and how this affects the management of human resources.

Conclusions

This review has shown a growing interest in recent years in human resource and related management journals in the study of human resource management in comparative and international perspective. However, this has been restricted to a relatively small number of journals some of which have recently been established to focus specifically on this area of study. By contrast, it is perhaps disappointing that this area has been neglected by related social scientists, though undoubtedly their perspectives and methodologies could add to our understanding.

The results indicate a lack of studies with either a broad historical or detailed ethnographic orientation. Some of the issues covered have a long pedigree, going back to the beginning of our period, such as the study of the management of industrial relations and collective bargaining. Some are newer areas, such as a focus on the management of managers. Others areas, such as the study of strategy and performance, are only now beginning to be explored. However, major constraints here would seem to be the need for access at high levels in the organization and the disclosure of commercially sensitive material. At the same time, major opportunities offer themselves in areas such as the management of more diverse groups within the organization,

questions of corporate governance and human resources, and links between corporate and human resource strategy, and the three interrelated areas of employment, work and industrial relations.

Broadly speaking we do not find a subject area that has generally recognized and sought to tackle some of the problems which similarly bedevilled the development of research from international and cross-cultural perspectives in other disciplines. Rather they appear to have been swept under the carpet. Indeed, an examination of the references contained in the articles included in the research shows little cross-fertilization of relevant debates from anthropology, organization behaviour, psychology, political studies and so forth. Thus, we find the field dominated by questionnaire-based, cross-sectional studies of a small number of Anglo-Saxon countries, which are ethnocentric in orientation. Such an emphasis reflects, and in turn reinforces, the degree of importance that researchers attach to culture and other societal factors, and the extent to which they recognize the problematic nature of research from a comparative and international perspective. By not moving beyond descriptions of the extent to which the management of human resources varies between nations and organizations, scholars may actually be avoiding some of the problems inherent in conducting this type of research. Any half-hearted attempts and short-cuts to solve them, perhaps driven by expediency, will only damage the discipline and undermine its integrity.

One possible way forward is for journal editors to encourage authors to be more open about and critically reflective of the methodologies they employ. Although not mentioned in the main part of the article, given that we focused on high-impact journals, when conducting the survey we were surprised as to how difficult it was to determine the methodology employed in some studies. Occasionally it was described in just one or two sentences. Another suggestion for a way forward is to give greater consideration to polycentric and comparative methodological approaches. While these approaches can be more time-consuming and expensive, at their heart they are more culturally sensitive and encourage us as researchers to understand the link between the phenomena being investigated and the societal fabric within which they are situated. This in turn may move us away from the parochialism which currently permeates the literature on the management of human resources in comparative and international perspective.

Appendix 1: journals covered by study

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
Academy of Management Journal	AMJ
American Economic Review	AER
Academy of Management Review	AMR
Administrative Science Quarterly	ASQ
British Journal of Industrial Relations	BJIR
British Journal of Management	BJM
California Management Review	CMR
Economic Journal	EJ
European Journal of Industrial Relations	EJIR
Harvard Business Review	HBR
Human Relations	HR
Human Resource Management	HRM
Human Resource Management Journal	HRMJ
International Journal of Human Resource Management	IJHRM

International Labour Review	ILR
Industrial and Labor Relations Review	ILRR
Industrial Relations	IR
Journal of Applied Psychology	JAP
Journal of International Business Studies	JIBS
Journal of Management Studies	JMS
Journal of Organization Behaviour	JOB
Journal of Organizational and Occupational Psychology	JOOP
Organization	O
Organization Studies	OS
Personnel Psychology	PP
Research in Organizational Behavior	RiOB
Sloan Management Review	SMR
Work and Occupations	W+ O
Work, Employment and Society	WES

Appendix 2: data coding frame

International HRM journal survey

Journal: _____

Volume: _____ Date: _____

Author: _____

Title: _____

Section 1: view point/perspective taken

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| (1) Type of study | International
Comparative
Foreign national study
Combined |
| (2) Methodology | Questionnaire survey
Large data set
Case study
Interview
Review
Other |
| (3) Time period | Cross-sectional
Longitudinal |
| (4) Type of article | Conceptual/theoretical
Empirical
Review |

Countries _____
 investigated

Section 2: work activity investigated

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| (1) Work relations | Job design
Division of labour
Teamwork
Other |
| (2) Employment relations | Job tenure/security
Staffing
Wages and benefits
Training
Other |
| (3) Industrial relations | Trades unions & collective bargaining
Works councils
Employee involvement (non-union)
Other |
| (4) International organizations | Multinationals
EU
Other |
| (5) Culture | Organization culture
Culture type
OD & change
Other |
| (6) Individual | Motivation & values
Leadership
Communication
Other |
| (7) Organizations | Management style
Conflict/cooperation
Group decision making
Efficiency/performance
Other |
| (8) Organization interactions | EU
Other |
| (9) Nature of borders | Transfer
Convergence/diversity |

Section 3: approach to comparative work

(1) Nancy Adler	Ethnocentric Polycentric Comparative
(2) Level of investigation	Individual Group Plant Division Industry Organization National Super-national e.g. EU

Section 4: explanatory frameworks/models

(1) Type of explanation	Culture Institutions Both Other
(2) Discipline	Economics Sociology Psychology Law Multi-disciplinary Other
(3) Meta-analysis	Framework Model Theory

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Notes

- 1 The latter set of questions are on the lines as formulated by Redding (1994: 324).
- 2 One exception to some of these points is to be found in the work of Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990). Their work makes considerable effort to minimize intercultural measurement and design problems.
- 3 Most of the earlier reviews referred to are surveys solely of US-based journals.
- 4 Moreover, no distinction is made between articles which focus on broad strategic questions and those which deal with more routine administrative issues.
- 5 An exception to this is a more traditional body of literature on worker directors and works councils in Germany.

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