
Editorial

Philip G. Benson

College of Business, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces,
NM, USA

E-mail: pbenson@nmsu.edu

Ruth Alas

Estonian Business School, Lauteri 3, Tallinn 10114, Estonia

E-mail: ruth.alas@ebs.ee

Biographical notes: Philip G. Benson is Professor of Management at New Mexico State University, where he also serves as the Director of the Management Doctoral Programme. His PhD is in Industrial and Organisational Psychology and was earned from Colorado State University in 1982. Recent research has focused on the international aspects of human resource management and he has served on the faculties of several US universities, as well as having taught at universities in Estonia, Lithuania and Morocco.

Ruth Alas is the Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs and Head of the Management Department in the Estonian Business School. She has written 21 management textbooks and more than 100 articles. Her research focus is on employee attitudes, learning abilities, organisational culture, leadership, crisis management, business ethics and corporate social responsibility. She has given lectures about change management in Estonia, China and the Republic of South Africa. She has organised several international conferences in Estonia and is Chair of the EIASM workshop series on 'Organisational development and change'. She is on the editorial boards of nine journals.

The world, by all accounts, is undergoing rapid and significant change. While this simple truism has been obvious for decades and its coming heralded by such writers as Alvin Toffler (1970), the basic fact still rises above being a trite comment on the world. Rather, what is paramount is to recognise how global changes have and will continue to impact the world in which we all live and work and the organisations that must function in this rapidly changing world.

Modern organisational research faces the challenge of understanding this new, emerging and exciting set of world issues and trends. As Tsui (2007) has noted, research can take various 'types'; most of the papers in this issue are of the form she calls "context-specific studies", those studies that focus on a region outside the USA. Our initial focus here is on the emerging economies of Eastern Europe but we hope to find implications that are far wider in their meaning. Indeed, it is necessary for all HR activities, in all countries, to take on a 'global mind-set', one which goes beyond mere regional boundaries and sees how HRM can be implemented in widely varying cultural contexts (Begley and Boyd, 2003). We hope to approach such broad goals in this special issue and, thus, it is worth noting the source of these papers and the reason for the topical focus of this issue.

In June of 2007, the 9th International Human Resource Management Conference was held in Tallinn, Estonia. The theme for the conference (changes in society, changes in organisations and the changing role of HRM: managing international human resources in a complex world) generated several hundred submissions and many of those papers were presented at the conference. Several of those papers, in revised form, are included in this volume, as are several papers that were submitted to the special issue but which were not part of the 9th IHRM Conference.

The resulting seven papers, while clearly diverse, still allow us to see the direction of the rich field of IHRM as we move into the 21st century. Papers represent macro and micro approaches, varied countries and the breadth of topics found in modern IHRM. Authors are clearly globally based. In short, the wide scope of IHRM and the organisational context in which we function is well represented.

We present these papers from a micro-level to a macro-level, with the latter papers also addressing the issues of cross-level phenomena. Given the theme of this special issue, looking at the organisational context of international human resource management (IHRM), most of the papers take a broader view of the role of IHRM in practice, research and theory. Also, we note that, in keeping with the “global mind-set” (Begley and Boyd, 2003), the papers are not uniquely limited to the European context but all have implications for EU countries and those who work with EU countries.

1 The papers: what have we found?

Kupka and Everett have pointed out that cultural affinity is a promising variable in international HRM. However, the complexity of this variable is closely grounded in the nature of the cultures involved; pre-perestroika Moscow and New York city are quite different but subtleties apply in many other comparisons. Indeed, as the authors point out, modern Europe, including Eastern European countries that were formerly part of the USSR, show much wider cultural diversity than is first perceived. The patchwork that is modern Europe is a culturally complex entity.

The authors suggest that intercultural affinity is an underused construct that may explain some of the adjustment process as people transcend cultural boundaries. One notable aspect of this construct is that it requires appreciation of both the home and the host countries and this issue, while not new (Benson, 1978), has been much ignored in the culture shock literature. The measure proposed by Kupka and Everett, while still in early developmental stages, is one approach to this problem.

Measuring the trans-cultural work environment is also addressed by Sohmen, Parker and Downie in the second paper of this issue. Project work has long held importance in the IHRM field and international projects have been seen as the source of numerous inter-cultural conflicts. Even novels and movies have noted the role of the “ugly American” in international business (Lederer and Burdick, 1958). The modern international project, however, is likely to take on a very different character, with the growth of virtual teams and high technology endeavours and Sohmen et al. address the more complex kinds of project found in the 21st century, proposing to extend the concept of transformational leadership into this context.

Mirowska discusses labour/management relations in a context much broader than the European context and makes recommendations that are intended to be more universal in

application and relevance. The five actions model can be used to structure the way we manage complex organisations, building trust and cooperation that will enhance the productivity of the organisation. This paper is also a good lead-in to the following paper, as management relationships with unions (and employees generally) are increasingly clouded by real or potential threats of offshoring.

Foulkes, Vachani and Zaslow discuss the rapidly changing nature of offshoring in the modern world. European and American companies alike are increasingly engaging in this form of business activity and the nature of offshore work is much different today from how it was a few decades ago. The kinds of job, the ways in which we work at distance and the countries where offshoring can occur have all taken on significance for IHRM. This paper begins to extend the topics of IHRM (e.g. global staffing) into a much broader (i.e. macro) perspective, with many lessons and implications for issues such as the role of IHRM in organisational change.

The paper by Nikandrou, Apospori and Papalexandris takes a broad view of the role of training and development in European contexts, using the Cranet data as a basis of inquiry. Given the role of the EU in encouraging similar policies and practices, they question the extent to which this has resulted in a degree of convergence in managerial practices vis-à-vis the training function. They find some support for such convergence in Europe.

Studdard and Darby extend the issue of human resources knowledge into the realm of start-up or entrepreneurial firms. The role of the incubator is crucial, possibly impacting firm reputation in ways that enhance performance but, clearly, the role of information cannot be overlooked in understanding the HRM function and effectiveness in modern organisations.

One of the issues to be addressed in this special issue is the nature of organisations across levels of analysis. The final paper, by Kessler, Taylor, Levine, Wiley and Kessler, talks about the relationship between satisfaction and productivity and uses a very new twist to consider a long-standing research question. Previously, researchers have looked at the relationship between job satisfaction and performance as an individual-level construct but, now, this is conceptualised as a macro question, looking at countries as the unit of analysis.

What does this add to knowledge? Indeed, this issue is important, since re-conceptualising the question at this level is only useful if there's an inherently interesting issue that can be raised by doing so. They find that levels of analysis do matter, although understanding these issues at the country level does indeed raise questions about the very phenomena under consideration.

2 Discussion of the papers: what does it all mean?

In the last two or so decades, the field of HRM in general has come to recognise that a strategic orientation is necessary for our future development as an academic enterprise and as an area of organisational practice. This is also true for IHRM and the papers here, while not deliberately strategic in topic or intent, do have implications for how we approach this important aspect of our field. Clearly, we must think of how IHRM functions in a broader context and reconsider the realms and boundary conditions which constrain our understanding of IHRM (e.g. Fenwick, 2005; Schuler, 2001).

Research on the IHRM function has grown increasingly sophisticated and the implications for practice are accordingly that much richer. The issues faced in managing the global workforce have never been as exciting as we enter a new millennium and the future of such research is likely to be even more exciting. The papers here raise several issues of interest in this regard.

For example, while trans-cultural projects are of importance (Sohmen et al.) it is necessary to conceptualise such projects in a dynamic and 'inter'-cultural context, wherein the flow of technology runs in both directions. Attention to issues of 'reverse diffusion' cannot be ignored in modern views of international project work or, for that matter, for the transfer of knowledge and practices in general (Edwards et al., 2005).

As another example of issues raised here, the work of Kessler et al. presents data that could have implications for potential migration patterns. Tung and Lazarova (2006) note that countries that have historically been victims of 'brain drain' may now be able to attract 'ex-host country nationals' (EHCNs) to return to their homelands, thus experiencing the possibility of 'brain gain'. The relationships between satisfaction, productivity and turnover have been much analysed at the micro level but can this paper serve as the basis of a study wherein 'turnover', at the macro level, becomes 'migration'? Clearly, whole research vistas open when we cross levels of analysis.

In general, the field of IHRM is gaining a clear sense of maturity, one that was missing in earlier research and models of the role of global workers. The field has progressed far beyond mere hiring and training standards to questioning the very fabric of the IHRM process. Models and issues both become increasingly complex and the knowledge derived is, subsequently, that much more interesting and relevant.

Acknowledgments

We extend a special thank-you to the reviewers who made it possible to complete this project. It is only through the relatively thankless task of reading and critiquing papers that Academe can progress. Our thanks go out to:

- Terry Adler, New Mexico State University, USA.
- Michael R. Buckley, University of Oklahoma, USA.
- Rita Campos e Cunha, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal.
- Bonnie F. Daily, New Mexico State University, USA.
- Helen DeCieri, Monash University, Australia.
- Steven M. Elias, Auburn University, USA.
- James B. Gilbreath, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, USA.
- Glennis M. Hanley, Monash University, Australia.
- Jeffrey S. Hornsby, Kansas State University, USA.
- Odd Nordhaug, Norwegian School of Economics and Business, Norway.
- Astrid Reichel, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Austria.

- Wesley Scroggins, Missouri State University, USA.
- Eleni Stavrou-Kostea, University of Cyprus, Cyprus.
- Kelly Tian, New Mexico State University, USA.
- Judith Y. Weisinger, New Mexico State University, USA.

In addition, we thank Ashish Mahajan, Doctoral Candidate at New Mexico State University, for his assistance in managing the review process. We also thank Professor Vlad Vaiman, Executive Editor of the *European Journal of International Management*, for working with us on this issue and supporting our efforts.

References

- Begley, T.M. and Boyd, D.P. (2003) 'The need for a corporate global mind-set', *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp.25–32.
- Benson, P.G. (1978) 'Measuring cross-cultural adjustment: the problem of criteria', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp.21–37.
- Edwards, T., Almond, P., Clark, I., Colling, T. and Ferner, A. (2005) 'Reverse diffusion in US multinationals: barriers from the American business system', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6, pp.1261–1286.
- Fenwick, M. (2005) 'Extending strategic international human resource management research and pedagogy to the non-profit multinational', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp.497–512.
- Lederer, W.J. and Burdick, E. (1958) *The Ugly American*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Schuler, R.S. (2001) 'Human resource issues and activities in international joint ventures', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.1–52.
- Toffler, A. (1970) *Future Shock*, New York: Random House.
- Tsui, A.S. (2007) 'From homogenization to pluralism: international management research in the academy and beyond', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 6, pp.1353–1364.
- Tung, R.L. and Lazarova, M. (2006) 'Brain drain versus brain gain: an exploratory study of ex-host country nationals in Central and East Europe', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 17, No. 11, pp.1853–1872.