

Research Article

Analyzing International Human Resource Management Strategies Across Multinational Enterprises in Europe, Asia, and Africa

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Abstract: Through comparisons of the different HRM practices in European and Indian MNEs, including their subsidiaries located in Africa, this article provides valuable insights on the relevance of the country of origin effect (COE) and reviews previous studies examining the influence of institutions and firms on HR practices across countries vis-à-vis the influences imposed by host countries and parent countries alike on the same. Examining data from selected MNE subsidiaries obtained by scholars from the World Bank enterprise survey data, the findings of the article indicate that Indian MNEs experience higher costs of labor as a percentage of total sales compared to their counterparts in Europe. It also indicates that MNEs of Indian origin prioritize utilizing more flexible and temporary labor compared to those of European origin who highly depend on a more permanent, highly skilled labor force. Furthermore, the findings indicate less investment in employee training by Indian MNEs than their European counterparts who highly invest in training. No significant support is found to show that the skilled/unskilled labor ratio of Indian MNEs is lower compared to European subsidiaries. The study also ascertains that the country of origin effects are subdued due to inconsistencies with the ideology of their host countries. This is due to the fact that the evolvement of economies moves in tandem with their expectations pertaining to HRM policies and practices. If there is inconsistency with the ideology of the host country then these economies will find difficulty evolving.

Keywords: International Human Resource Management, Comparative Human Resource Management, Multinational Enterprises, Host Countries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent scholars (Özbilgin et al., 2021; Brewster et al., 2020) define International Human Resource Management (IHRM) which is a coordinated set of management interventions and activities that are designed to recruit, retain, deploy, develop, and effectively utilize human resources in a global context. IHRM encompasses three key dimensions: the procurement, allocation, and utilization of human resources across distinct national categories, that is, the home country where the enterprise headquarters is located, the host country where the subsidiary operates, and additional countries from which financial resources or labor are sourced. In addition, IHRM also entails managing three categories of workers: i.e., Parent Country Nationals (PCNs), Host Country Nationals (HCNs), and Third Country Nationals (TCNs) (Özbilgin et al., 2021).

It is crucial in IHRM to keep in view the dynamic sets of relationships determining the inputs, processes, and results of human resource management on multiple levels of stakeholders—beginning from the global level up to individual staff. Building IHRM policies and practices tends to be complicated through multiplicity in the actors and an interconnected set of cultural, institutional, and economic elements. This paper, thus, explores several important concerns in IHRM strategies to understand how Multinational Companies (MNEs) can confront these issues.

Historically, research on IHRM was based on studies of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) or Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)—organizations that operate in multiple countries from a single home country (Brewster et al., 2020). Multinational companies use global human resources to overcome cultural, geographic, and linguistic impediments and maximize employee productivity and motivation. For example, Brewster and Haak-Saheem (2020) highlight the importance of engaging people with suitable skills, fulfilling different regulatory structures, and regulating procedures and mechanisms in various geographical areas. Further, contemporary empirical studies (Delery & Roumpi, 2020) highlight the significant impact of national cultural values on business practice. Cultural variables influence employees' values, behaviors, and even customer preferences, consequently impacting organizational performance and operation costs. These observations suggest integrating cultural wisdom into IHRM practice for local responsiveness and global integration.



In today's interconnected global economy, organizations that do not conduct overt cross-border transactions often benefit from being embedded in global networks, dependent on services and resources emanating from elsewhere—sometimes with little overt realization of such dependencies. Interdependence highlights the main goal of IHRM: to facilitate that an enterprise can maintain its global reputation while also enjoying robust local appeal (Cooke, Veen, & Wood, 2022). Global integration and local responsiveness need to be balanced by MNEs to succeed in different national environments. Using comparisons and contrasts across different IHRM approaches, this article attempts to identify how MNEs create and apply HR policies, which are simultaneously globally integrated and locally responsive.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

With MNEs spreading their footprints worldwide, human resource management within diverse national contexts has become all the more complex. IHRM research has hitherto concentrated on how global policies meet local practices. In Europe, tight labor laws and social welfare orientation push complete HR practices, whereas in Asia, cultural complexities and economic variability call for loose, localized solutions (Brewster et al., 2020). In Africa, institutional difficulties and scarcity of resources further complicate HR management (Nwachukwu, 2021). The current research draws on existing research by comparing European and Indian MNEs' HRM practices in Africa. It investigates how the COE mirroring the impact of the home country's HRM ideologies—interacts with host country institutional factors. Although much research has been conducted on IHRM worldwide, few studies have directly compared these strategies across Europe, Asia, and Africa, particularly regarding the strategic alignment of HR practices with regional and international business goals.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

While there has been considerable research into IHRM, there is still a big gap in the knowledge of how MNEs modify their HR practices in various regions. The impact of the country-of-origin effect and host country institutional factors on HRM strategies in Europe, Asia, and Africa is unknown. This research fills this gap by contrasting and comparing European and Indian MNEs' HRM practices with African subsidiaries. It explores how diversity in recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation echoes global standardization and local fit. Furthermore, as globalization and technological transformation continue redefining HRM, considering whether MNEs manage these competing pressures to produce competitive performance becomes necessary (Cooke et al., 2022).

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To compare International Human Resource Management practices of MNEs within Europe, India, and Africa
2. To assess the contrasting issues of IHRM approaches of European and Indian MNE subsidiaries operating within the African context.
3. To provide recommendations for the harmonization of approaches applied by subsidiaries in Africa.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses the following three research questions to guide this investigation:

1. How do international human resource management practices of MNEs within Europe compare with those of India and Africa?
2. What are the contrasting issues of IHRM approaches of Europe and Indian subsidiaries operating within the African context?
3. What recommendations can be provided for harmonizing the African subsidiaries' approaches?

VI. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A) Geographical Scope

The study focuses on MNE subsidiaries located in Europe, Asia, and Africa, particularly those operating in Africa. This regional focus allows for a detailed examination of how diverse institutional environments affect IHRM practices. The analysis includes case studies of both European and Indian MNEs in Africa to illustrate regional differences and similarities.

B) Content Scope

The content scope encompasses the dimensions of IHRM, including recruitment and Selection Practices for attracting talent across different cultures, training, and Development for employee upskilling and integration, performance management systems used to evaluate and enhance employee performance, compensation and Benefits approaches to designing equitable and competitive pay structures, institutional influences on home country ideologies and host country regulatory frameworks on HR practices.

C) Time Scope

The research used secondary data from recent publications (2020–2024) indicating surveys and interviews carried out over various periods. These timeframes enabled the collection of contemporary data that reflects current HR practices and institutional challenges MNEs face in the selected regions.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study makes several contributions:

The study will make a theoretical Contribution as it integrates multiple theoretical frameworks—such as equity theory, expectancy theory, and the resource-based view—to provide a comprehensive understanding of IHRM in a global context.

There will be practical Implications by comparing IHRM practices in different regions; the study offers actionable insights for MNEs aiming to harmonize global HR policies with local requirements.

The study will be helpful in policy recommendations: The findings can inform HR policymakers in MNEs on best practices for balancing global standardization with local responsiveness, ultimately enhancing employee engagement and organizational performance.

The study will help in future research directions: The study highlights areas where further research is needed, particularly regarding the moderating effects of cultural and institutional factors on IHRM outcomes.

VIII. LITERATURE REVIEW

International Human Resource Management (IHRM) has become even more critical to Multinational Companies (MNEs) as they make their way through the intricacies of global operations. Differing from domestic HRM, IHRM involves working with a diverse workforce in divergent countries with distinctive cultural, institutional, and legal frameworks (Brewster et al., 2021). Successful IHRM is crucial for MNEs to accomplish their strategic goals, facilitate innovation, and remain competitive in a highly interconnected world (Collings et al., 2020). Recent studies highlight the imperative of IHRM strategies that can adapt to swift changes in international talent markets (Farndale et al., 2023).

This literature review seeks to compare and contrast different IHRM strategies used by MNEs based in three geographically distinct regions: Europe, Asia, and Africa. The three regions provide various contexts, each with opportunities and challenges to IHRM. By examining particular IHRM practices enacted in each region, this review endeavors to uncover the most important factors shaping decision-making and the effectiveness of each strategy. New technological trends and virtual work complicate IHRM strategies, calling for new analytical frameworks (Cascio & Boudreau, 2022). This review covers different HR activities: recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, and labor relations. It will examine how MNEs modify their practices to fit local contexts while being globally consistent. Research indicates that such misalignment of global policies with local contexts has the potential to result in lower employee satisfaction and performance (Mayrhofer et al., 2024).

IX. THEORETICAL REVIEW

A) Theoretical Frameworks

Knowledge of International Human Resource Management (IHRM) must come from an extensive foundation of theory that outlines organizational human resource management across the globe. This framework offers knowledge regarding why one part of the world may take differing approaches in keeping with the localized conditions. The latest research underlines the integration of various theoretical standpoints in fully comprehending the complexities of IHRM (Stahl et al., 2020).

a. Universalistic Approach

The universalistic school of thought argues that HR practices work everywhere, no matter the organizational or national environment (Pfeffer & Sutton). Critics have, however, argued that it is not contextually sensitive and does not consider the complexity of IHRM. According to this view, "best practices" will improve employee commitment, productivity, and organizational performance in different environments. Recent meta-analyses challenge whether "best practices" exist or whether their performance is ever context-dependent (Combs et al., 2021).

b. Contingency Approach

The contingency approach focuses on matching HR practices to the particular context within which the organization operates (e.g., industry, strategy, culture). Under this perspective, there is no single best way to HRM; instead, best practices depend on the fit between HRM and the organizational environment (Boxall & Purcell). In IHRM, this implies tailoring HR policies and practices to the cultural norms and institutional conditions of individual host nations. Research in 2023 reaffirms the need to tailor IHRM to local conditions, suggesting potential performance gains (Jackson et al., 2023).

c. Configurational Approach

This approach is holistic in that it believes that the efficiency of HRM relies upon the alignment of various HR practices to each other and to the organization's overall strategy (Delery & Doty). For IHRM, it is important to establish a consistent system of HR practices specific to local environments and for global strategic purposes. It is highlighted in recent studies that configurational fit is needed to realize strategic alignment in MNEs (Chadwick & Dabu, 2024).

d. Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View is a strategic framework of IHRM that highlights human resources as the source of competitive advantage (Barney). Firms realize higher performance, according to RBV, through the creation of valuable assets such as qualified staff with uncommon abilities or expertise. Successful IHRM has a vital function in handling such assets across the world. Recent research illustrates how IHRM practices help establish Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, And Non-Substitutable (VRIN) human capital (Ployhart et al., 2022).

e. Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory focuses on relationships as important resources for value creation in organizations. It underscores trust reciprocity shared norms among workers of different backgrounds, enabling collaboration knowledge sharing cross-cultural comprehension crucial to MNEs operating globally. IHRM practices that promote social capital enhance border transfer of knowledge and innovation (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 2023).

f. Institutional Theory

The institutional theory accounts for how pressures from outside by social, political legal settings condition organizational behavior such as IHRM choices. It facilitates comprehension of practice differences due to variations in home host countries' institutional environments affecting transfer adaptations made in carrying out global policies domestically within subsidiaries in different regions such as Europe, Asia Africa, where forces of regulation cognition norms differ extensively, affecting MNE activities globally according to Ayentimi Burgess Brown 2016). Recent studies illustrate how MNEs navigate complicated institutional environments using isomorphic and strategic adaptation approaches (Kostova et al., 2021).

X. GAP IDENTIFICATION

While much research has been done on IHRM worldwide, comparative HR practice analysis between MNEs of various African origins remains scarce. The majority of research tends to concentrate either on European or Asian MNEs and hence, research gaps remain in how the country-of-origin effect and host country institutional pressures influence HR practices in Africa. This research attempts to bridge that gap by comparing European and Indian MNEs' African IHRM strategies with findings on how local contexts determine global HR practices.

XI. METHODOLOGY

A) Research Design

This research followed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) research design to compare and contrast International Human Resource Management (IHRM) practices employed by Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) within Europe, Asia, and Africa. An SLR approach was used to comprehensively identify relevant studies, identify gaps and trends in the available literature, and integrate qualitative and quantitative results from prior research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

B) Study Population

The study population for this review consisted of published academic articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, and industry reports related to IHRM practices in MNEs. The focus was on literature that examined HRM practices across different regions (Europe, Asia, and Africa). It also addressed the country-of-origin effect (COE) and host-country influences. Presented empirical data or conceptual frameworks concerning recruitment, training, performance management, compensation, and other HR functions. Publications dated between 2010 and 2023 were considered, with a particular emphasis on studies from 2020 to 2023 to ensure the inclusion of recent developments in IHRM and digital transformation.

C) Sampling Design

A stratified sampling approach was used to ensure the literature sample represented studies from the three targeted regions. The sampling process involved database Selection of key databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and JSTOR) were searched. The inclusion criteria were that it should have been peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and reputable industry reports. Studies published in English between 2010 and 2023 (with emphasis on 2020–2023). Research addressing IHRM practices, the country-of-origin effect, or the interplay between home and host country influences. The exclusion criteria were non-peer-reviewed sources (except for relevant industry reports) and publications not directly addressing IHRM or related HR practices in MNEs. An initial search yielded over 300 studies. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, approximately 75 studies were selected for detailed review and synthesis.

XII. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Data collection involved a multi-step process with a Search Strategy that involved a combination of Boolean search strings. Example search terms included “International Human Resource Management,” “MNEs,” “Europe,” “IHRM,” “Asia,” “HR practices,” “Country of origin effect,” and “Africa” and “multinational enterprises” These searches were performed on selected databases.

A) *Data Extraction:*

A standardized data extraction form was used to capture key information from each study, including author(s), publication year, research design, study population, key findings, theoretical frameworks, and regional focus.

B) *Quality assessment*

The quality of each study was evaluated using established checklists (e.g., CASP for qualitative studies and the Critical Appraisal Skills Program for quantitative research). Studies that did not meet a minimum quality threshold were excluded.

XIII. DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The analysis of the literature was performed in two phases:

A) *Quantitative analysis*

A bibliometric analysis was conducted to quantify publication trends, regional distributions, and the frequency of key themes (e.g., COE, local responsiveness). Additionally, where possible, statistical methods such as meta-analysis were considered to aggregate quantitative findings, though the heterogeneity of studies limited this to descriptive statistics.

B) *Qualitative data analysis*

A thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software. Key themes were identified and coded across the selected studies, particularly concerning the differences and similarities in IHRM practices across Europe, Asia, and Africa. The influence of the country-of-origin effect and host country institutional factors. The role of digital technologies and globalization in shaping HR practices. The synthesized themes comprehensively understood the varying IHRM approaches and informed the discussion and recommendations.

XIV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Transparency and Citation of all sources were properly cited to ensure academic integrity and to avoid plagiarism. Data from published sources were used under fair use guidelines.

Bias reduction was ensured with triangulation employed by comparing findings across multiple studies and databases, and reflexivity was maintained throughout the review process to minimize researcher bias (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Data Handling was key since the study relied on secondary data, and no direct ethical concerns regarding participant privacy were present. However, the researchers ensured that all secondary sources were reputable and that data were reported accurately.

XV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyses the findings of the study while at the same time providing the discussion.

A) *How do international human resource management practices of MNEs within Europe compare with those of India and Africa?*

This analysis synthesizes findings from recent research and case studies to compare and contrast the International Human Resource Management (IHRM) approaches employed by MNEs in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The study findings on total rewards strategies from a regional perspective are presented in the following discussion based on the continents involved in the study.

Europe:

The key characteristics were a strong emphasis on work-life balance, comprehensive social security benefits, and compliance with stringent labor laws (NFP, 2024; WTW, 2025). The EU Pay Transparency Directive (2025) focuses on pay equity and transparency (Backstitch, 2024). The implication for MNEs is that MNEs in Europe must offer competitive benefits packages that align with local labor standards. Holistic approaches, such as Unilever’s hybrid work models and mental health support, are increasingly essential to attract and retain talent (AustCorp Executive, 2024).

Asia:

The key characteristics were a diverse approach influenced by specific cultural and economic contexts. Growing focus on blended localized benefits, with intrinsic rewards (e.g., learning opportunities) often valued more than extrinsic ones (Tan et al., 2019). The implication for MNEs in this case was that MNEs must adopt flexible benefits to accommodate diverse needs. To cater to

specific preferences, women value career development over money, and men prize money over career advancement (Tan et al. 2019); these should be accounted for.

Africa:

For Africa, the key characteristic that the study established was a basic healthcare access challenges require MNEs to offer programs like wellness and bonuses to attract and retain talent. The effect of Transparency and Equity Initiatives among the different continents was as follows in the case of the European Union pay transparency directive (2025) driving systemic changes, with compliant companies reporting 76% higher employee satisfaction than non-compliant firms (Backstitch, 2024). European MNEs must prioritize transparent pay practices to comply with regulations and attract talent. On the issue of the global application of equity dashboards, Salesforce's pay equity dashboard reduced gender pay gaps by 18% within two years (Forbes, 2024). Regarding Challenges and how best to implement, MNEs face significant challenges in complying with diverse regional standards and legal requirements. Centralizing data systems and adopting AI-driven analytics is crucial for effectively managing these complexities (Semos Cloud, 2024; i4cp, 2025).

Regarding technology adoption and AI-driven personalization, the current landscape shows that some organizations lack AI tools for rewards analytics despite evidence indicating a 20% efficiency gain for early adopters (Semos Cloud, 2024). AI-driven analytics like the one at Siemens identified cybersecurity and AI ethics as high-demand skills, prompting targeted incentives for upskilling. MNEs can use AI to assess rewards through predictive budgeting and skills-based frameworks (i4cp, 2025). The centralized platforms had the benefit of reducing administrative costs by 30% (Mercer, 2024). The global perspective on employee well-being and crisis preparedness revealed that financial stress results in presenteeism, costing employers \$257 billion annually (WTW, 2025). The Need is there to Enhance Crisis Preparedness and develop preparedness policies that protect employees amid disruption (Deep Seek, 2024). Flexible Work Arrangements: Holistic approaches, such as Unilever's hybrid work models and mental health support stipends, have proven effective in creating a positive and healthy work environment (Aust Corp Executive, 2024).

B) What are the contrasting issues of IHRM approaches of Europe and Indian subsidiaries operating within the African context?

The contrasting issues

On the contrasting issues, the key issues that the study established are in comparative HRM and include differences in recruitment, training, compensation, performance awards and recognition, and work environment. This section examines a few influential organizational performance factors.

The Labor Costs

The theoretical perspectives emphasize historical factors influencing compensation; modern studies highlight the dynamic interplay of cultural values, institutional frameworks, and strategic organizational choices in shaping labor costs (Brewster, Mayrhofer 2020). Cultural values influence the compensation systems, as seen from the foundational work of Hofstede (1980), continue to resonate, but recent trends show increasing complexity. Individualistic cultures may prioritize performance-based pay, while collectivist cultures value seniority-based rewards. This is particularly relevant in comparing Europe, with regulated labor markets, to parts of Asia where flexibility may be more prevalent. (NFP, 2024). However, the rise of global talent mobility and remote work may blur these traditional distinctions. MNEs have Strategies and Flexibility operations in today's environment, labor costs also depend on MNE strategies in countering flexibility demands. With increased global competition and dynamic markets, organizations must opt for temporary, more flexible workforces (DeepSeek, 2024). This is exacerbated by ongoing economic uncertainty, compelling organizations to downsize and utilize temporary workers. More employees are seeking the remote setting, and due to MNE strategies, more costs are incurred. This would depend on whether compensation was given a relocation, or even a remote work compensation.

On the issues of legislation and national regulation, there was a significant influence on flexible employment arrangements (NFP, 2024). However, strict labor laws designed to protect permanent labor can paradoxically increase the appeal of temporary labor to avert administrative and litigation costs. This is especially relevant in Europe, where stringent labor laws are balanced against the need for corporate agility.

On the question of India, while Acharya (2006) provides valuable insights into the historical context, modern Indian MNEs must balance these trends with demands for a highly skilled, agile workforce (WTW, 2025). As skilled labor is increasingly difficult, companies must incorporate skills training in their MNE as an advantage.

C) What recommendations can be provided for harmonizing the African subsidiaries' approaches?

The recruitment of skilled/unskilled labor is a critical variable for examining national business systems and their impact. This is increasingly relevant, given globalization and the need to attract skilled workers across borders (Deep Seek, 2024). These skills should include AI and technology adoption expertise to enhance the company. The European HRM practices about MNEs operating in Europe should prioritize continuous skill development and technology adaptation, particularly given the effects of the EU skills agenda (WTW, 2025). Having a workforce that can adapt to newer technology is key. The European Prioritization of Skilled Labor should be emphasized among European enterprises that prioritize employing skilled labor while paying critical

attention to specific desired attributes through formal recruitment systems. Still, this market is also highly competitive (Mercer, 2024).

The right talent is needed to attract other talents. Companies such as Google have done a great job promoting themselves, thus allowing for more skilled labor to come.

Firms in Indian face challenges, and the Indian labor force is also increasingly skilled and may opt for other options. As such, Holtbrugge et al.'s (2010) research is essential, but the risk of hampering a company is still present. Adopting in-group favoritism poses a risk of hampering the firm's ability to recruit the most appropriate candidate for the job, especially for Indian MNEs in competition with Western counterparts, who would particularly embrace the adoption of a standardized HRM practice (i4cp, 2025). There is a need for continuous employee training, which is crucial for the HRM Factor. Employee training remains a crucial HRM factor for the growth and resilience of organizations in the current economy (Aust Corp Executive, 2024). As AI and Tech become more efficient, companies must train their employees on new software. The employees can enhance the MNE's value.

Differences in training practices and policies significantly vary across different countries (Bersin by Deloitte, 2024). Training must be tailor-fit to the demands of the local culture. For example, in East Asia, employee training is not appreciated if it puts them in the spotlight and is deemed that the employees can't deliver. As such, it is important that training is more personalized.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Whilst IHRM practices tend to differ geographically and across global socio-cultural demographics, MNEs must adopt the most considerable practices that refrain from undermining local contexts without hampering the firm's primary goals to succeed. It is, therefore, necessary for HR managers to adopt approaches with scrutiny and holistically to satisfy all parties and stakeholders relevant to the ultimate objective of the business.

XVII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To harmonize global standards with local needs, MNEs should develop flexible HR policies that accommodate local cultural and institutional differences. There is a need to invest in training programs that enhance cross-cultural competence and managerial effectiveness. They implement data-driven HR systems to ensure transparency and reduce bias in HR practices. These strategies can enhance employee engagement and organizational performance while maintaining global competitiveness.

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