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## Article

# Current issues in International HRM: Alternative forms of assignments, careers and talent management in a global context

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**Current issues in International HRM:  
Alternative forms of assignments, careers and  
talent management in a global context**

International Human Resource Management (IHRM) has become an important field of research. The first textbook on International Human Resource Management is approaching its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday (Dowling & Schuler, 1990; Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2013) and the first journal dedicated to the investigation of human resource management topics in an international context established in 1989, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, is also close to its 25<sup>th</sup> Volume. Another specialized journal dedicated to international staff mobility, the *Journal of Global Mobility*, has been established by a group of prominent IHRM researchers this year. A regular conference dedicated to IHRM was established in the late 1980s and for more than 20 years this conference has convened biennially. It still enjoys strong support and the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference will be organized in Cracow, Poland in 2014.

Initially, IHRM was mainly concerned with expatriate management and its associated challenges for international managers and MNEs, but the field of International HRM can today be characterized by three broad approaches (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2013; Budhwar, Schuler, & Sparrow, 2009). The first emphasizes cross-cultural management: examining human behavior within organisations from an international, or more specifically, the intercultural perspective. A second approach developed from the comparative industrial relations and HRM literature and seeks to describe, compare, and analyze HRM systems in various countries. A prominent example for this is the Cranfield Project on IHRM, which started in 1989 to meet the need for ready access to information on best practice and comparative performance within Europe, and now globally ([www.cranet.org](http://www.cranet.org)). A third approach seeks to focus on aspects of HRM in multinational firms. This includes the issue of expatriate management as well as the challenges of global standardisation and local adaptation of HRM in the multinational

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enterprise. However, while these three core approaches can be clearly distinguished on an analytical level, it cannot be denied that there are important relationships between the knowledge generated in the three of them. To cope with the global challenges of HRM, often knowledge generated in the context of all three fields is necessary to advance our understanding of specific IHRM topics.

Not surprisingly there is no consensus on the definition of International HRM as it has moved from the infancy stage of development to a more mature and established field, however in tracking the evolution of definitions, Scullion (2005) suggests that definitions have broadly concentrated on examining the HR issues, problems strategies, policies, and practices that firms pursue in relation to the internationalisation of their business. It was also suggested that IHRM needs to understand how multinational enterprises manage their geographical dispersed workforce in order to leverage their HR resources for both local and global competitive advantage (Scullion, 2005), thus, reflecting the third approach to the study of IHRM mentioned above.

### **Contents and objective of this special issue**

This special issue is dedicated to examining some current issues in international HRM; it contributes mainly to the field of HRM in the multinational enterprise. However, it clearly also draws on knowledge from cross-cultural IHRM. The guest editors have identified three topics that have gained tremendous importance due to the increasing globalisation of the world economy and the war for internationally qualified talent. This not only applies to multinational enterprises, but also to small and medium-sized enterprises, as senior managers are challenged to attract, retain, and motivate global talent: global assignments, global careers and global talent management. While all fields are not new and have partly been subject to prominent publications (e.g., Scullion & Collings, 2011; Cascio, 2013) new and highly relevant research questions continue to emerge and there is still a lack of empirical research in these areas.

In current research, phenomena related to global assignments, global careers, and global talent management are discussed from individual as well as from organisational perspectives. The first includes challenges of various types of assignments and their management. Global careers address, for example, the success of international assignments, female careers in international management, or cross-cultural learning processes of expatriates. The organisational perspective comprises various functional areas in IHRM, including the most important practice, which is global talent management. However, topics such as expatriate management and global performance management are also related to global assignments, global careers, and talent management.

The objective of this special issue is to draw together scholars who are working at the forefront of this research domain. This includes strong theoretical, conceptual, and/or empirical papers using quantitative or qualitative approaches in order to advance our knowledge of international HRM - especially with regard to global assignments, global careers, and global talent management. The first three papers mainly look at various types of international assignments as part of global careers, while the two other papers focus on various issues of global talent management. We will first outline current issues in these subfields of IHRM, and then present a short summary of the papers that have been selected for publication in this special issue.

### ***Global assignments and careers***

Global or expatriate assignments address a period of time during which an employee lives and works for his/her employer temporarily abroad. During the past years, various types of global assignments have emerged, including short-term, extended, longer-term, and non-standard arrangements: commuter, rotator, contractual, virtual, and self-initiated assignments (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2013). In addition, the specific situation of frequent travelers, or so-called 'flexpatriates,' has been discussed in this context. In this special issue, we look at alternative examples of international assignments, namely, foreign executives in local organisations (FELOs), as well as international business travelers, and the determinants of working abroad and creating a global career.

The article by *Frithjof Arp* is concerned with different types of global assignments. His paper entitled, "*Typologies: What types of foreign executives are appointed by local organisations and what types of organisations appoint them?*" describes a specific form of expatriation within the self-initiated expatriate research stream, namely *foreign executives in local organisations* (FELOs). The growth in importance of self-initiated expatriation is highlighted in a recent book edited by Vaiman and Haslberger (2013). Based on an empirical study conducted in Malaysia encompassing 71 interviews with FELOs from culturally distant organisations, the author derives four different types of FELOs - the global executive nomad FELO, the innate identity FELO, the entrepreneurial innovator FELO, and the localized FELO. These types vary according to underlying dimensions such as tenure, income, or the level of host-country integration. Even though some descriptions of traditional, company-backed expatriates can be related to FELO typologies, these are not entirely relevant to this particular phenomenon and this study therefore adds to the literature on FELOs. In addition to the FELO typology, the article suggests three types of organisations hiring FELOs: Nationalistic, nepotistic/ethnocentric organisations; pragmatic organisations; and global mindset/local action organisations. Factors determining the type of organisation are, for instance, the degree of internationalisation, the phase of organisational development, or the hiring strategy. One could assume that all types of local organisations appoint FELOs by using a geocentric hiring approach – i.e., recruiting the best managers regardless of their nationality. However, the study clarifies that a geocentric HRM approach is not necessarily applied when employing foreign executives for headquarter positions. The typologies assist in predicting which organisations are likely to be successful or to fail when employing FELOs. This article adds to the current literature in International Human Resource Management by focusing on global careers outside of traditional, company-backed expatriate assignments, and it responds to the phenomenon of foreign executives being appointed by local organisations in recent years.

"*Work life balance up in the air – Does gender make a difference between female and male international business travelers?*" by *Iris Kollinger-Santer and Iris C. Fischlmayr*, contributes to the under-researched area of international business travelers. International business travelers evolved as a form of alternate assignment (along with short-term assignments and commuter assignments) as a response to changes in expatriate and business environments. Managing work life balance (WLB) has generally become a concern for employees and HR departments alike, but balancing work and private life is especially

challenging for international business travelers. The study analyses factors influencing the WLB of female and male international business travelers, as well as the coping strategies for stressors apparent in their situations. Based on 94 interviews, the authors found that there is a clear gender-specific difference in the perception of factors influencing WLB. Stressors related to travelling are experienced or perceived at different intensities by women and men. Women experience a lack of time, or missing time for social contacts or leisure activities, more strongly than men. Reasons for this gender difference include traditional role distributions, coupled with a lack of male support in the household and with childcare. Having children or not makes a crucial difference in the perception of WLB for women. Women and men apply different coping strategies to the different kinds of stressors they face. Dual-career couples, and, in particular, dual-career families, find keeping a healthy WLB to be a challenge. To sum up, the family situation is a decisive factor for WLB of international business travelers.

The study by *Stefan Rembof, Marjaana Gunkel, and Christopher Schlägel, "Working in the 'global village': The influence of cultural intelligence on the intention to work abroad"*, deals with the growing importance of international mobility in the context of increasingly global activities of companies. Because careers are becoming international and boundaryless, motivational processes leading to the development of intentions to strive for such careers need to be better understood, as companies seek to identify the best talent. Using the lens of social cognitive theory and the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), this study aims to shed light on these processes by examining the influence of language skills, international experience and networks abroad on the intention to work abroad. The authors also study the moderating role of cultural distance in their sample of 518 German business students. They find that cultural intelligence acts as a mediator for the relationships between language skills and the intention to work abroad, as does international experience and the intention to work abroad. Cultural distance mediates two of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence, namely, metacognitive CQ and cognitive CQ. Individuals with higher levels of metacognitive CQ develop both the intention to work in a culturally distant, as well as in a culturally less-distant country, whereas higher levels of cognitive CQ result in a stronger intention to work abroad in a more-distant culture. Further, networks abroad have a direct influence on the intention to work abroad, but all four facets of CQ have a positive influence on this dependent variable. The results of this study may be of particular relevance to recruitment and selection processes, as well as to the mentoring processes of expatriate staff.

### ***Global talent management***

Global talent management (GTM) is a rapidly growing multi-disciplinary field of research, and despite a decade of debate about the importance of talent management for success in global business there is a lack of consensus on the definition and theoretical development of the field (Scullion & Collings, 2011). Here, we adopt the broad definition of global talent management used by Stahl, Björkman, Farndale, Morris, Paauwe, Stiles, Trevor, and Wright (2007), namely, an organisation's ability to attract, select, develop, and retain key talented employees in a global context. There is still consider-

able debate regarding many issues in this emerging field (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Cascio, Al Ariss, & Paauwe, 2014, in press). Furthermore, much of the theoretical and empirical work on global talent management is still based on North American experiences, while research on the subject in other national contexts, such as Germany, China, and India is rather limited. In this special issue we explicitly acknowledge the diversity of contexts for the study of talent management. While there has been some debate over the continuing significance of talent management given the impact of the global recession, there seems to be a consensus that talent remains a critical issue for top managers in international companies, particularly those operating in the emerging markets (Sparrow, Scullion, & Tarique, 2014, in press). The final two papers in this special issue provide a contribution to these research gaps.

The paper by *Marlene Walk, Heike Schinnenburg, and Femida Handy*, “*What does talent want? Work expectations in India, China, and Germany*”, adds to the increasingly important field of GTM. According to the authors, talent is currently seen as the most consistent and frequent factor affecting business success in a globalizing world, and companies compete for qualified staff across national borders. This study attempts to fill two research gaps. First, the paper attempts to add to the under-researched area of cross-cultural student work expectations, as students are the primary talent group from which organisations recruit their future employees. Second, the authors develop a measure to assess work expectations across diverse cultural backgrounds - a contribution in itself, given the scarcity of reliable and valid measures in diverse cultural settings. Drawing on samples from Chinese, Indian, and German students, the authors found fewer differences in work expectations than their cultural diversity might initially suggest. Nevertheless, because subtle differences can impact GTM, the authors call for more targeted recruitment and retention strategies. For instance, German students differ from Chinese and Indian students in the extent to which they value working for foreign companies. The authors suggest leaving some freedom to adapt talent-management strategies locally, thereby being able to address specific expectations of graduates.

The article by *Denise Ewerlin*, “*The influence of global talent management on employer attractiveness: An experimental study*”, explores the links between employer branding and GTM. This involves combining ideas from HRM and marketing, to show how employer branding may work in practice due to the “war for talent”, companies increasingly try to market themselves as attractive employers, so talent-management programs are often emphasized. Talented individuals are scarce, and they will therefore be able to choose between attractive job offers in the future. Thus the design of talent-management programs could be a decisive factor in their decisions to work for specific employers. However, there is little research about the actual influence of GTM programs on employer attractiveness. This research deficit is the starting point of this study by Ewerlin. Additionally, the author investigates the influence of culture on this relationship, and, in particular, the dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Based on an experimental investigation in a quantitative study with a sample size of 217, the author could not confirm that GTM has a direct effect on employer attractiveness. However, the contents of GTM programs have proven relevance for employer attractiveness. In this study the contents of GTM programs interacted with cul-

tural differences in the needs of talented individuals to affect the relative attractiveness of employers. These results indicate that GTM programs should account for cultural differences, and the author provides specific suggestions for this purpose. The study also addresses a research – practice gap in this field.

The guest editors sincerely hope that readers will find the conceptual and empirical knowledge in this special issue on alternative forms of assignments, careers, and talent management in a global context to be of interest and value both to IHRM scholars and practitioners.

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