Applying HRM Policies and Principles in the Subsidiary: A Comparison between Anglo-American and Chinese Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

The effective deployment and management of human resources is a key contributor to the sustainable success of the modern day global organisation. One of the most important decisions the global HR manager has to make is to what extent should headquarters HR policy be applied elsewhere. The challenge involves thorough investigations into the deep-routed values of the home national culture, and the culture of the subsidiary location. This paper investigates the inherent challenges of applying Anglo-American HR management concepts and policies in the Chinese subsidiary organisation. The research reveals that the main cross-cultural factors for consideration by HR managers are related to the concepts of power-distance, individualism vs. collectivism, long- vs. short-termtime orientation and high- vs. low context communication. The effects on organisations of Confucianism, guan-xi, social harmony and face are also discussed. The research provides a discussion which includes recommendations and implications for the global HR manager in order enhance Anglo-American operations in the Chinese cultural environment.

Keywords: Human resource management; cross-cultural dimensions; Anglo-American culture; Chinese culture; values; cultural contexts; international management skills

1. Introduction

Modern multinational corporations (MNC's) are operating in a global marketplace that is becoming increasingly competitive and complex. The main challenge for global human resource managers is to fully understand how cross-cultural issues can have an impact on the strategic direction and long-term success of the business. The rivalry among global firms is being continuously intensified by technological advancements, better connectivity, improved infrastructures, and higher customer expectations in global and local markets (Chen, Mujtaba, and Heron, 2011; Cheretis and Mujtaba, 2014). As a result, the modern multinational company must compete as efficiently and effectively as possible, both from global and local perspectives.To accomplish this, the modern multinational company must have in place the all the necessary resources. These resources should ultimately include all the financial assets, physical assets and plant, human resources, and the knowledge needed to perform business effectively and gain a high degree of competitive advantage. As a result, there are inherent challenges and implications for the global and local human resource management (HRM) practices (Gilani, Cavico and Mujtaba, 2014).

In the contemporary workplace, while both national and international work colleagues have become more culturally diverse (Mujtaba, 2010), the effective diversification of human resource management practices and policies is still an issue for the modern multinational firm (Stone & Stone-Romero, 2008). According to Mead and Andrews (2009), there are two major themes on which the global human resource manager should emphasize focus; to what extent do local factors affect the implementation of general HR principles, and the growing need to adapt these principles and policies when they are being implemented in another cultural context.

This paper firstly discusses a diverse range of cultural dimensions from various research sources. The objective is to give initial orientation to the reader regarding the different dimension contexts which are to be considered across various cultures. In particular, the main aspects of Chinese national culture and the Chinese system of values are compared cross-dimensionally to those of the Anglo-American.

Next, the paper highlights HRM challenges that multinational corporations may face when they enter and operate in the Chinese market. The constructs of national and organisational cultures are discussed in addition to the extent to which global or Anglo HR policies may be applied in the Chinese organisational environment.

The evolution of Western human resource management, including strategic human resource management (SHRM) is discussed in relation to how it has evolved over time and the differences that may exist in the less developed economies.

The paper then discusses recommendations for global HR managers who may wish to operate cross-culturally between the Anglo and Chinese national and organisational contexts. The emphasis for recommendations is based Confucianism, power relationships, guan-xi, social harmony, and face. In addition, Chinese labour relationships and association contexts are discussed.

Finally, the paper will highlight some further implications surrounding effective global HR management in the Chinese cultural context which includes managing aspects of collectivism, salary structures, time orientation, and the cost of expatriate failures. The research closes with a summary of the findings and recommendations.
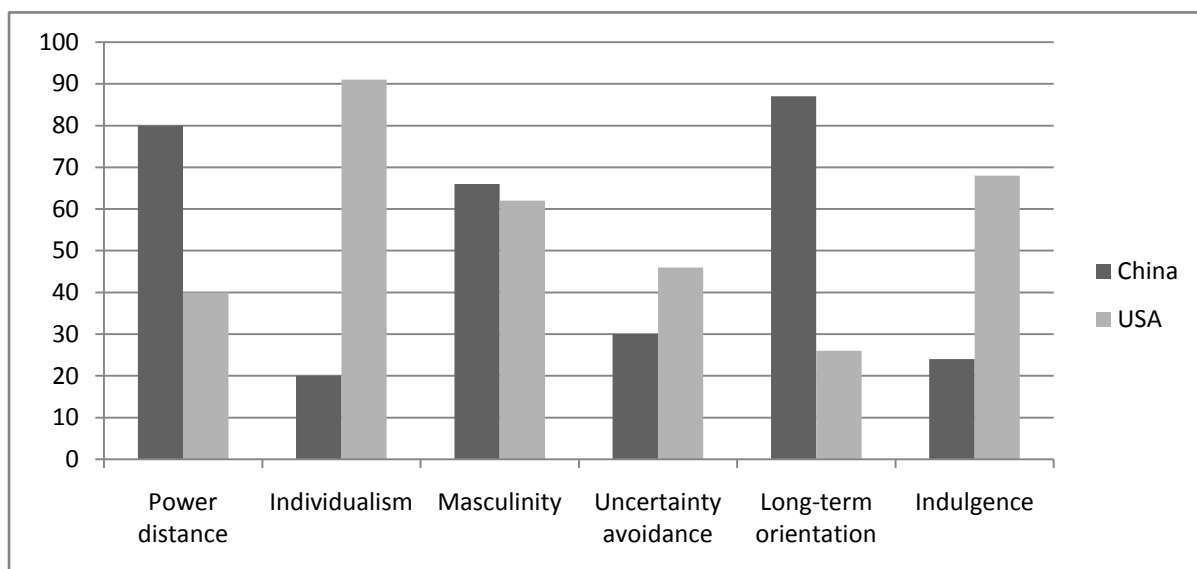

2. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS: ANGLO-AMERICAN vs. CHINESE

According to Hofstede (1980);"Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one human group from another"(p.25).Following extensive research, Hofstede (1980& 1991) developed and published initially a four-dimensional model of suggested cultural dimensions and later added a fifth dimension all of which still provide a

useful tool for researchers and managers who are making cross-cultural comparisons. Hofstede continued to develop the model which now consists of a total of six dimensions of culture. The six dimensions are:

1. Power Distance (PDI)
2. Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)
3. Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)
4. Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)
5. Long- vs. short-term orientation (LTO)
6. Indulgence vs. Restraint (IND)

Using the above dimensions is particularly useful when comparing one culture directly with another. Chart 1 below illustrates a comparison between the Chinese and American cultures across all six cultural dimensions supposed by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010).

Chart 1: China vs.USA across Hofstede's six cultural dimensions:

Source: Chart data based on geert-hofstede.com/china.html. (Retrieved March 30, 2017).

According to Hostede (1980 & 1991) and Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010), Chart 1 illustrates the following 6 major comparisons:

1) The power distance dimension highlights the inequalities in the distribution of power in a given culture or society. The Chinese, with a score of 80, place a much higher value on power distance than do the Americans who scored 40. The results suggest that the Chinese will show greater deference to their superiors. In addition, those in power will be less approachable and less amenable to criticism than their American counterparts. Control will likely be more centralised in a Chinese organisation and employee empowerment will be less widespread in the Chinese work environment (Mujtaba, 2010).

2) The individualist vs. Collectivist dimension shows the degree to which members of a culture are likely to be interdependent on one another. The concept of this dimension is very much based around "I" vs. "we" values. The Chinese, with a low individualism score of 20, value collectivism, that is, to be part of a group. Hence, the Chinese will strive for the common good of the group. Members of the "in-group" as it may be known will display a

high level of loyaltyfor each other (Ping, Mujtaba, and Xue, 2014; Ping, Mujtaba, and Jieqiong, 2012). In contrast, the Americans, with a high individualism score of 91, will striveforindependence and self-improvement. The focus for the American is on how each individual member of the organisation or society can become better and improve their own life through their own personal decision-making, motivation and self-empowerment. For an American, being part of an in-group has much less value.

3)The masculinity vs. femininity dimension sees the Chinese and American cultures score more closely. With a score of 66 in this dimension, compared to the American score of 62,the Chinese are generally more masculine oriented and will strive for success even if this means sacrificing family time and working long hours to achieve it (Ping, Mujtaba, and Jieqiong, 2012). Of course, the increasing trend toward becoming workaholics is a global phenomenon impacting many professionals due to industry competitiveness and undue pressures imposed on managers.

4) On the dimension of uncertainty avoidance the Chinese score 30 and the Americans score 46. This dimension reflects the level of acceptance demonstrated towards an ambiguous or unknown situation or outcome. It also reflects on the likelihood of measures or policies the culture may put in place to avoid issues where there may be future uncertainty. China's low score reflects that the Chinese are quite accepting of ambiguity. This cultural trait is reflected in their organisational decision making, and is often reflected in the Chinese flexibility on adherence to rules and regulations which may be "amended" on a case-by-case basis (Ping, Mujtaba, and Xue, 2014).

5) Long-term vs. short-term orientation. On this dimension there is a vast difference between the Chinese who score 87, and the Americans who score 26. The results indicate that Chinese culture is more long-term oriented. Cultures with a long-term orientation value persistence and perseverance. They also believe in long-term savings and investments in the future. Chinese Confucianism and its inherent values are also intrinsically linked to the Chinese culture and are reflected in the Chinese score in this dimension. In contrast, the American orientation is more short-term. Americans are more past and present focussed with a greater value on traditions and fulfilling social obligations. There is also a bias towards immediate gratification rather than long-term benefits.

6) The final dimension for comparison between the Chinese and American cultures is indulgence vs. restraint. This dimension measures the degree to which members of culture seek to control their desires and impulses. It also reflects how children are "socialised" in this dimension when being raised in the culture. While the Chinese score 24 in this dimension, the Americans score 68. The statistics imply that the Chinese are less indulgent than the Americans. Indulgent societies place more emphasis on gratification of desires, enjoying life, adventurism and having fun. In other words, some individuals in indulgent societies tend to feel a sense of entitlement to receive unearned privileges that are not always afforded to everyone fairly (Mujtaba and Sims, 2011).The Chinese are more likely to behave in a curbed manner, regulated by stricter adhesion to social conformity and behavioural norms (Ping, Mujtaba, and Xue, 2014; Ping, Mujtaba, and Jieqiong, 2012). Compared to the Americans, the Chinese are also less likely to exhibit positive emotions even though they are still felt within the individual. Happiness, leisure and freedom are similarly not given the level of significance that is overtly apparent in the American culture.

It is important to note, however, when using cultural model, or any other model, that no particular culture can be exactly fixed or classified in terms of position along any of the dimensional spectrums because each culture being researched will show some degree of diversity when analysed. In addition, not every individual in a particular national culture should be expected to fit into a stereotype or mould (Mujtaba, 2007). Some members of a culture will display behaviours that are completely alien to their national culture and others

will not. Nevertheless, Hofstede's cultural dimensions do form a good basis for research purposes, and have been continuously cited and utilised by researchers during their cultural investigations. Cultural dimensions also assist researchers to apply some predictability to cultures. According to Mujtaba (2007);"one must acknowledge that cultures tend to regularize human behaviour which can make predictability of behaviour a bit easier for researchers and global employees" (p.24).

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) dimensions are not the only conceptual tools available for global human resource managers or researchers to utilize in their work strategies and related studies. For example, Edward Hall (1976) differentiated other dimensions of culture, namely, high and low context cultures, and further expressed how these cultures operate with different methodology for both communication and decision making. In this regard, China is classified as a high-context culture and America is classified as a low context culture.

This results in broad differences during communication. For example, the Chinese are able to communicate fully with much less explicitly stated information in the spoken message. In the Chinese context, spoken words will be fewer, and more meaning is to be gained from what is not said. Facial expressions, body language, and to some extent non-verbal utterances serve to convey a complex message which is only fully understood by members of the same culture. Americans and members of other low context cultures may become frustrated by the lack of spoken words and apparent lack of clarity in the message. It is important to note, however, that most of the time all that needs to be communicated actually has been communicated in the Chinese context.
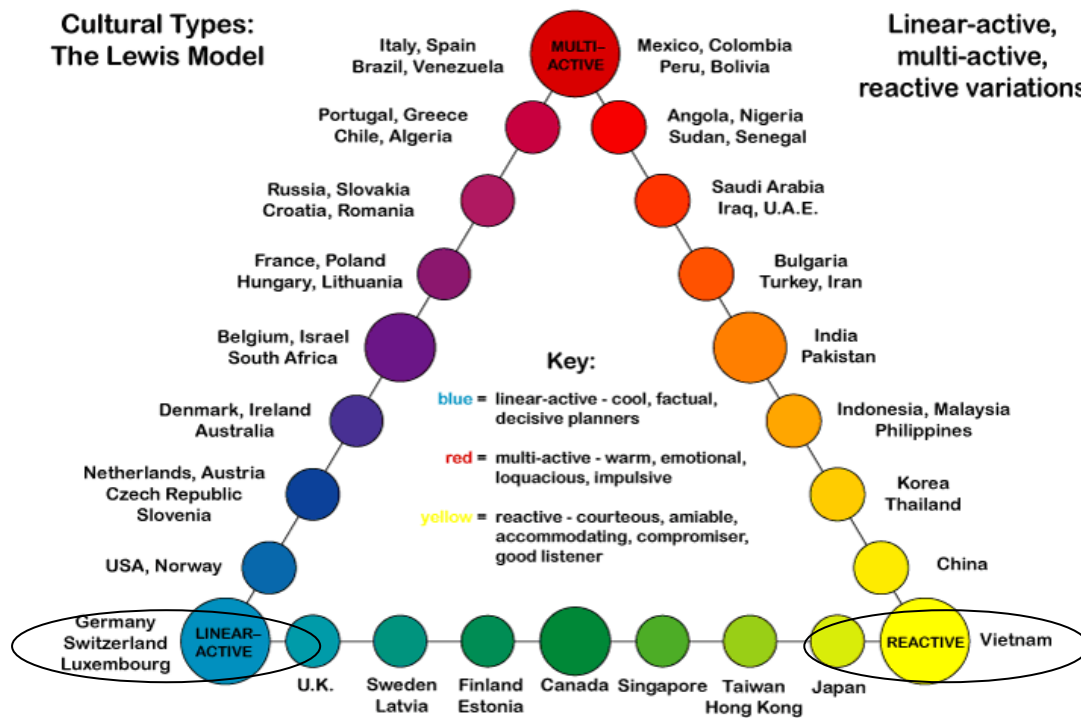
In addition, Hall and Hall (1990) also discussed the concepts of monochronic and polychronic cultures. They noted that individuals of a monochronic culture are more inclined to do things task by task while polychronic oriented individuals are more adept at executing multiple tasks at the same time (Mujtaba, 2014). In this aspect, the Chinese tend to be more polychronic in their behaviour while the Americans tend to be more monochronic. The Americans view time as linear, therefore, schedules and appointments are strictly adhered to and concentration is thus focussed on completing one mission or task before taking on the next. The Chinese, in contrast, will focus on several duties, missions and tasks consecutively. Relationships and working together in harmony are given more value than fixation on the time schedules (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Research by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) also examined culture on several different dimensions. One of the key concepts of this research is universalism vs. particularism. In universalistic cultures, emphasis is placed on what is right and lawful, and laws are applied and enforced more vigorously than they are in particularistic cultures. The American culture favours universalism. The Chinese culture sits on the particularist end of this spectrum where more value is placed on initially analysing the situation, working out any personal obligations or personal relationships, and analysing the parties involved before deciding on the degree to which rules and morals "may" be applied.

In one of the later and more contemporary models to gain global recognition, Lewis (1996) discusses that the human condition can be split into three dimensions: The linear active, the multi-active, and the reactive.

The model that Lewis(1996) developed aims to categorise how individuals will react or interact with each other or their manager cross-culturally, and predicts what are the more dominant behaviours displayed by a member of a national culture in a given set of circumstances. According to Lewis, China is the second-most "reactive" culture in the framework of 68 nations which were analysed by Lewis (1996).

Figure 1: Lewis (1996) Model of Cross-Cultural Communication

Source: Lewis. R. D. (1996). *When Cultures Collide*

It was concluded by Lewis (1996) that "reactive" nations foster cultures that place a high value on the following: Listening more than talking; not interrupting; being more reactive than proactive; looking less into detailed planning and more into general principles; concealing feelings; being polite and indirect; being non-confrontational and more accommodating; being adept at saving and preserving face of self and others; exhibiting great patience; upholding statements and promises; being diplomatic rather than exposing certain truths; using subtle body language; using personal connections and mixing the social with the professional environment.

The implications, therefore, for the global HR manager who will operate in China are as numerous and complex as the research that is available. As previously highlighted, it can easily be speculated by management that members of each global, national or organisational culture, plus any respective subcultures, will have their own ideals and values along multiples of all of the aforementioned spectrums. The Chinese, with their very deep-routed culture, are no exception to the rule. This presents an extremely complex and dynamic challenge for the effective and efficient globalization of HRM polices for the MNC. The most important message that can be drawn is that the multinational who can best understand and gets to grips with the complexities of local Chinese cultural contexts could be the global player who realizes the best competitive advantages inthe People's Republic of China.

3. CROSS-CULTURAL HR MANAGEMENT

When applying HRM policies in the subsidiary, the global HR manager must take two major factors into account. The first factor to take into account is that there will be an organisational culture which is likely to be applied in a subsidiary location. Organisational cultures, according to Chatman and Jehn (1994), may be identified as having seven primary characteristics, innovation, stability (maintaining the status quo versus growth), people orientation, outcome orientation, easygoingness, detail orientation, and team orientation.

Definitions of organisational culture are numerous; however, the definition can at least be framed to include the values, beliefs, expectations, habits and behaviours within a specific firm since each organisation is different (Mead & Andrews, 2009).The second factor to take into account is thatthere will be a local or national culture which is either expected to adapt to headquarter policies,orwill need to be encouraged to adapt to headquarter policies, or even absorbthe organisational culture being implemented in the subsidiary.

This is not an easy task since the national culture is learned at an early age and deeply ingrained in local employees. Finding universally acceptable solutions, therefore, when applying HRM policies in the subsidiary is the key to effective human resource management and will more solidly support a firm's multinational strategy (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003).

Cross-cultural and global HR managers should also be aware that the function of human resource management within global corporations is continuously evolving as companies continue to strive for both local and globally sustainable competitive advantage. Originally, western organisations utilised a fairly simplistic and mechanistic model of personnel management. Simple personnel management, where it is still evident, functions to provide staff on a fairly reactive basis depending on the relatively immediate needs of the business at the least cost. In addition, the personnel management or department deals with and administers the day-to-day relationships between the employees and employer. Personnel management is reasonably successful with the smaller or family business type of organisation where the local market is seen as the major competition. Therefore, the focus of personnel management is rather more short-term oriented, and operates with a generally reactive emphasis. As a result, traditional personnel resource management does not allow a great deal of flexibility of human resource needed in the increasingly complex and dynamic global market environment.

Global HR managers should note that the modern multinational corporation has long since moved away from the concept of the personnel department and now looks at personnel as a resource which should be utilised by the organisation in the most efficient, effective and flexible way. Modern competitive multinational corporations seehuman resource as the human capital that is necessary for the organisation to meet its strategic goals. The term "human capital" implies that the workforce consists of personnel with a specific set of complementary skills, abilities and knowledge which can be efficiently and effectively utilised in the most competitively advantageous way.

Using human resources in this way is known in the modern international organisation as strategic human resource management (SHRM). Wright and McMahan (1992) define SHRM as "the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organisation to achieve its goals" (pp.295-320). Increasingly and crucially, modern day human resource managers must become more actively involved in the strategic planning processes of the organisation and must understand how, when, and where to provide the human resource necessary for the strategic direction of the business (Gerhart, Hollenbeck, Noe, & Wright, 2015).

3.1. Evolution of Anglo-American HRM

Global HR managers should note that all or most modern human resource theories and practices have originated from the Western perspective of doing business,and the Western tertiary education system. As such, Western HRM systems are directly linked to Western values which may often have limited application or relevance elsewhere (Mead & Andrews, 2015).It should be further known that modern human resource management is also a product of the more mature and developed economies and is only in its infancy in some less developed nations (Mead & Andrews, 2015). Hence, it is imperative that the global human

resource manager is fully aware of the practicalities and implications of applying Westernised HRM policies in another cultural context.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGERS

China became a World Trade Organisation member in 2001 and is viewed as a good prospective location for global expansion by MNC's. However, there are some practical implications for any MNC with strong organisational western values and generalised HRM policies. Issues are likely to arise in the Chinese subsidiary that will require the need for HRM policy diversification in order to assist in the smoother running of the organisation. According to Mujtaba (2007): "The subject of diversity requires examining one's own beliefs and values as well as learning the skills of dealing appropriately with those whose beliefs and values may be very different" (p.7).

For the case of China, it is imperative for the global HR manager to have an understanding of the Chinese cultural context. Chinese culture is extremely deep-routed with many traditions which date back over many centuries and a good starting point in regards to the Chinese culture is to consider the influence of Confucianism.

Confucianism has always influenced, and continues to have effect on the Chinese way of thinking and behavioural patterns. According to Tian (2007), Confucianism influences morals, relationships with family and others, deference for elders and hierarchical seniors, social harmonisation, and protection of self-esteem. Human resource managers will soon discover that respect for the hierarchy and elders, subservience towards those in power, and a predominant power distance will be persistent in the Chinese national context (Li, 1999). Thus an autocratic style of leadership is likely to be characterised in business organisations (Li, 1999). For the MNC global HR manager who wishes to impose or overlay headquarters' or Anglo-style policies in the Chinese subsidiary, decentralising power and delegation of tasks in the Chinese context is likely a primary HRM consideration. This will have to be carefully negotiated, planned and managed if a desirable outcome is to be obtained.

Another major consideration when looking at Chinese cultural context and the workplace environment is the role played by the mechanism of interpersonal relationships in the Chinese organization. Interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture are referred to as "*guan-xi*".

*Guan-xi*is considered to be essential in the Chinese context and it is used "interpersonally" for support and consideration when networking with others. Hence, it is useful in the Chinese cultural business context in the resolving of interpersonal disputes or issues and assists in the creation of harmony (Hutchings & Murray 2002; Hutchings & Murray 2003).However, *guan-xi*has also another, more contemporary connotation in the Chinese culture as the term is also used to describe relationships that create obligations for favours in the workplace (Dunfee& Warren, 2001).Therefore, HR managers should be aware that in some contexts the practice of *guan-xi* might well be considered unethical in the same way that patronage relationships are often viewed as unethical in the Anglo-American context.

HR Managers should also be aware of the concept of harmony in the Chinese culture. The Chinese place a high value on harmony which by Confucian teachings is said to bring about prosperity. In the family context, subordinates are expected to behave in the spirit of the median, and this will extend into their business ideologies (Chen, 2001). Harmony is expected to exist, even though there is a defined hierarchy. This indicates that each member of a society or organisation is aware of his or her place within it, and seeks to adhere to conformity for the collective good. The preservation of social harmony in the Chinese culture is also another important factor towards the maintenance of keeping one's pride, dignity and self-esteem, and contributes to "saving face".

The concept of saving face is deep routed in many Eastern cultural contexts and Chinese culture is no exception. According to Confucian values, people should value face and must neither seek to lose face nor gain face at the expense of another person. As a result, embarrassing situations and social conflict where someone would gain the upper hand are rarely evident in the social arena or organisational arena. However, as with any concept, there are people who view things differently.

For some, it may also be argued that the concept of saving face is deliberately used as a mechanism for controlling people's behaviours (Tian, 2007; Wang, Jaw, & Huang, 2008; Faure & Fang, 2008).

4.1. Chinese Labour Relationships

According to Mead and Andrews (2009), all labour relationships between employees and employers involve a degree of expectancy in that the employer seeks a job well done and the employee expects fair remuneration for the work undertaken.

The global HR manager operating in the Chinese subsidiary must remain aware that any Western headquarters labour policies will be drawn from a Western perspective and will be focused around the context of relationships which are defined by written and explicitly worded contracts, whereas the labour relationship norm within the Chinese culture is more likely to be one of association which is based on mutual trust and obligation (Mead & Andrews, 2009). Interestingly, Bond et al. (1987) noted that "in the Chinese cultures, rule is by the rulers; in Western cultures, rule is by the rules" (p.121).This is an important concept for global HR managers to grasp when they are applying generalised HRM practices in the Chinese subsidiary.

4.2. Chinese Association Contexts

HR Managers should note that in the Chinese culture, trust and mutual obligation are deep-routed in the workplace. Consequently, a degree of interpersonal knowledge of immediate superiors and colleagues is in many cases expected to have at least some impact on HR proceedings within the organisation.

For the local Chinese HR manager, personal knowledge of both current and potential employees serves to offer flexibility over any written agreements or directives. As a result, recruitment, job design, flexibility, training, and performance reviews are all likely to be impacted based on the association between specific persons rather than on criteria such as the ability, aptitude, or genuine competence of an individual to perform his or her role (Mead & Andrews, 2009).

One of the main implications for global strategic HRM is that in the Chinese culture wherethe association context is more predominant there is more likelihood that the necessary skills and knowledge are not optimised to develop a strong competitive advantage.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF CHINESE CULTURE FOR WESTERNISED HRM

For any westernised organisation, it must be understood that the Chinese culture will have an impact on approaches to human resource management. National Chinese cultural context will either work more towards organisational goals, or it works more against them.

In addition to the Anglo-Chinese contrast in power distance, the concepts of individualism vs. collectivism must be considered. The Chinese culture has traditionally tended to favour collectivist approaches to task execution and meeting of organisational goals. The implication for HRM is that job specifications, recruitment and deployment of personnel may need to be centred around finding and assessing individuals who will perform effectively as part of a workgroup or team.

Chinese cultural "in-group" considerations also affect who might be promoted and who might not, and will often steer preferential treatment to group-favoured individuals.

Personal relationships are valued more than task execution and loyalty to the organisation (Hofstede, 1980 & 1991; Hofstede, Hofstede &Minkov, 2010).

Salary structures can also be affected by individualism and collectivism. In Anglo cultures where the emphasis is on individual achievement there is likely to be a broader range of remuneration between the highest and lowest paid employees, whereas in the Chinese context of collectivism and team orientation the remuneration scheme may be, or may need to become flatter in structure (Gerhart, Hollenbeck, Noe, & Wright, 2015).

Another key implication for HRM in the context of Chinese culture is the concept of long-term vs. short-term orientation. The Chinese like to focus on the long-term. This is particularly important when considering planning. Unlike Anglo-American planning, the Chinese emphasis will not be on the immediate quarters and year, but rather it will be on the next decade and beyond.

Finally, the selection, training and compensating of expatriate managers in the Chinese context should be carefully managed. The costs of expatriate manager failures are very high and should not be underestimated (Mujtaba, 2014). For the Chinese, the technical ability of the expatriate is the attribute that most earns the respect of the subordinates in the Chinese operational environment; however, multiple skills will also be necessary to perform effective cross-cultural management (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987; Ping, Mujtaba, and Jieqiong, 2012; Ping, Mujtaba, and Xue, 2014; Gerhart, Hollenbeck, Noe, & Wright, 2015). Success can only be achieved if the expatriate manager is both sensitive towards and aware of the complexities of the Chinese culture. This will certainly require specific cross-cultural training both before and during the assignment. The expatriate manager must be flexible enough to adapt to the local norms where this is appropriate and commensurate to the achievement of organisational goals, and must also demonstrate the continued willpower to overcome the inevitable culture shock.

6. SUMMARY

The key to effective global and cross-cultural HR management lies in the ability of the manager to understand three important types of culture: Their own national culture; the host country's national culture, and the culture of the organisation itself. Managers who operate in a cross-cultural environment must be aware of how far the concepts and dimensions of each culture can be applied to the other; to what extent do certain cross-cultural dimensions work together harmoniously; and to what extent might certain cross-cultural dimensions be in conflict with one another.

There are stark differences between the Chinese and Anglo-American cultures. The predominant differences lie in power relationships, individualism vs. collectivism, time orientation, and high vs. low context communications and behaviours.

Chinese values are further emphasised through their adoption of Confucian philosophies. Hierarchical relationships, *guan-xi*, social harmony and protection of face are given much higher value in the Chinese society, and this is carried into the organisations in which they work.

Flexible labour relationships and the less-rigid application of rules and regulations are meaningful in the Chinese organisational context. The Chinese culture is more oriented towards trust than it is towards control. The successful cross-cultural HR manager will be the one who best understands that Anglo-American HRM concepts are at times alien in China and that Chinese values are at times alien to Western societies.

Understanding cultural diversity, building strong relationships, and flexibility are the keys to cross-cultural and global human resources management success. This is how sustainable competitive advantages can be built and enjoyed in a globally dynamic and diverse workplace.
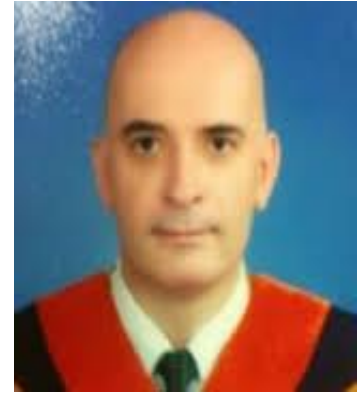
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