

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED COMPANIES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

The current stage of our society's development is characterized by the escalating effects of globalization worldwide. It is also significantly reflected in personnel work in the companies. Working in an international environment is demanding and requires collaboration among people of different cultures. Local policies used and accepted in domestic enterprises is gradually changing - it is internationalized. There are also changes in the approaches of multinational companies to human resources management. The purpose of the paper is to present the views of experts on international human resources management, assessed by several authors, and to adopt evaluation opinions. We assume that the differentiated approaches of the multinational (parent) company to the subsidiaries influence the degree of convergence and divergence in management. The theoretical knowledge will be supported by the results of the survey conducted in 2018 in 271 companies in Slovakia selected on the basis of their international scope and long-term performance. The expected result is to verify the dependence between the chosen approach to human resources management and the competence of subsidiaries in designing and implementation of standards, norms and directives using the Pearson chi-square test.

KEY WORDS: multinational companies, human resources management, convergence, divergence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing pace of globalization and the greater movement of capital to exploit labour costs and skills have placed increasing pressures on systems with a high resource investment level (Lucio et al. 2014). Aim of this pressure is to ensure the required level of human resources in the company. Slovakia is a country dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (99.9%) owned by legal and natural persons (Slovak Business Agency, 2017). Micro-enterprises with up to 9 employees predominate (97.1% of the number of enterprises), 2.3% are small enterprises and 0.5% are medium-sized enterprises. The number of large enterprises reached 0.1% of the number of enterprises. Excluding self-employed entrepreneurs, 2.1% of entrepreneurial subjects are actively involved in international business, the majority of enterprises are small and medium sized. The main reason for the development of business on an international scale is to achieve higher efficiency and compete globally (Zhang, Edwards, 2007). One of the advantages and disadvantages at the same time is the acquisition of joint capital with another entity abroad. In the case of an agreement with a foreign partner, the advantage is to obtain not only financial resources but also the experience of international business, participation in international activities, the disadvantage could be the parent company's access to the management of local companies (subsidiaries), decision-making on the share of the achieved business results, convergence or divergence in management. International business changes the policy and workplace management system that are used in domestic enterprises because managers and employees of a multinational companies must think and act globally. Human resources management is becoming international, respecting the different legal systems and different values of national cultures, but also commonly accepted standards and adopted rules.

The paper deals with the clarification of international human resources management according to several authors, whose opinions are evaluated and compared with the results of the survey conducted in 2018 in 271 companies in Slovakia.

We believe that the differentiated approaches of multinational companies in the management of subsidiaries influence the degree of convergence and divergence. We evaluate the views of human resources managers working in human resources management companies and, using Pearson's chi-square test, we verify the dependence between the chosen approach to HRM and the competences of subsidiaries in developing and implementing standards, norms and directives.

2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Since 1997, at the Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, we systematically examine the management of human resources in domestic enterprises in Slovakia and in multinational companies (Vetráková et al., 2007). The VEGA Research Project, "Formation of organizational culture and management system of enterprises with international presence in intercultural environment", solved in 2014-2016, have confirmed the initial assumptions about a deepening competitive global environment that leads companies to change organizational culture and management. Global, geocentric-oriented companies are gradually moving from ethnocentric and polycentric management to borderless management. We are currently solving another VEGA Research Project "Convergence and Divergence in International Human Resources Management", whose scientific goal is to examine the views of managers of selected companies in Slovakia on the advantages and disadvantages of working in a multinational company and to propose a flexible system of international human resources management, taking into account the convergence and divergence.

The strategic priority of managerial work in multinational companies is the development and stability of enterprises in a global competitive environment. The increasing variability of the conditions in which enterprises operate implies greater flexibility in human resources management and preparedness for change. The study of human resources in international space is addressed by many authors (Balakrishnan, Srividhya, 2007; Kramar, 2014; Bierema, Callahan, 2014; Armstrong, Taylor, 2014; Ehnert et al., 2016). They associate the objective of international human resources management with the ability of managers of multinational companies to find, recruit, employ and stabilize people with competencies to work in an intercultural environment who can contribute to the creation of values and performance of the company.

Among the criteria for selecting employees who are interested in working in a multinational company, Deresky (2014) particularly highlights the prerequisites for working with people of different cultures, previous experience of living and working abroad, understanding the culture of a foreign country, and controlling the foreign language. There are employees of various groups working in multinational companies. This includes host country nationals, expatriates and third country nationals. By comparing human resources management processes in domestic enterprises and multinational companies, the international human resources management is more extensive and also addresses activities related to administrative services and care for expatriates and their family members, international taxation, international and local labour laws, and values, translation services, training for work in the international environment (Dvořáková et al., 2012, Sojka, 2016). A more heterogeneous structure of employees of a multinational company encourages the competitiveness and performance of the company. The consequence is the employment of talented and competent employees, better career development opportunities and their higher stabilization than in domestic enterprises. Cross-cultural training helps to develop a more cosmopolitan outlook and gives managers a deeper understanding and appreciation of value and norms as well as appropriate and acceptable behaviours in the company (Pinnington, Debrah, Rees, 2014).

The heterogeneity of employees requires the adoption of certain common rules that respect equal opportunities and diversity management. Similarly to Cooke (2014), we are of the opinion that while maintaining the productivity and competitiveness, this goal must be achieved with employment ethics and corporate social responsibility in mind. From the point of view of the creation and subsequent maintenance of competitive teams, working in an intercultural environment, the adaptation and development of employees is important. It helps to facilitate the new employee's orientation in a new social environment and to familiarize him/her with the organizational culture and procedures. The content of training for work in a multinational company are not only cultural differences, but also the legislative, social and political system of the foreign country, the economic and business environment. It is also important to accept the hierarchical division of power in company and avoiding uncertainty from the employees' side. Employees as members of different cultures may have different approaches to performing specific tasks.

The necessity to deal with selected employees or groups of employees whose knowledge, experience and prerequisites for future development are a guarantee of future successful progress and a competitive advantage comes to the foreground. Managers who make decisions about human resources often ignore the latest trends in human resources development and evaluation (Fitz-Enz, 2010). Human resources are evaluated only in terms of costs and are looking for ways to reduce these costs, which is unlikely to be labelled as strategic business behaviour. The prerequisite for a successful human resources management is the sensitivity to national differences and habits, competence, adaptability and flexibility of managers and employees working in an intercultural environment (Robbins, Coulter, 2004). Caligiuri (2006) identified

the key management tasks of management in a multinational company: working with employees of different cultures (1), interacting with external and domestic customers from different countries (2), controlling and managing communication at a workplace in a foreign language (3), management of work of employees of different nationalities (4), development of a strategic business plan on a global scale in connection with individual organizational components (5), monitoring and management of the budget in a multinational company (6), negotiation and communication with people working in various organizational parts of the company (7), management of foreign business partners (8) and risk management in a multinational company and its parts (9).

The functionality of a multinational company is influenced by the internal communication link of all organizational components (Thomas, Lazarova, 2014). The role of the parent company is to inform employees abroad of trends, changes, innovations, new work practices, be interested in performance, achieved results, problems in the operation, but also satisfaction/dissatisfaction of employees and customers. On the other hand, it is essential for the parent company to allow subsidiaries' managers to communicate with the head office in case of any issues that may affect the present and the future of the company. At the same time, it is necessary to create informal communication structures that will strengthen relations between the management of the headquarters and the subsidiaries.

Consequence of globalization processes, in terms of cooperation to achieve global strategic goals, is the pressure on multinationals to form global associations rather than national units, (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014) in terms of cooperation to achieve global strategic goals. This supports the convergence of human resources policies and practices and weakens their divergence. International human resources management is influenced by various types of competitive strategies of multinational companies (Barlett, Ghoshal, 1998). Multinational companies' approaches to international human resources management influence the degree of convergence (strategic standardization) or divergence (strategic localization) in the attitudes and policies of the parent company to subsidiaries. The natural interest of the parent company is the convergence associated with the creation and application of uniform rules and practices in human resources management (ethnocentric approach). Divergence is the opposite of convergence, and its nature is in the application of human resources management practices that correspond to local conditions and national culture with a polycentric approach. Complete convergence or divergence is virtually absent in practice. The ethnocentric or polycentric approach was characteristic of human resources management at the start of the formation of multinational companies. Successively, due to the economic development of different locations (regions), legislation, labour market specificities, certain human resources management activities in the same multinational company have converged and others have diverged. With the development of globalization and the mutual recognition of cultural and institutional differences, the implementation of a regiocentric or geocentric (global) policy of international human resources management is applied (Isidor et al., 2011).

In international human resources management, taking into account the economic, political, social and legislative situation of a country, convergence based on standardization of procedures and/or divergence associated with acceptance of management differences is preferred. Managers of multinational companies are becoming more sensitive to the state administration, the local labour market, public opinion and regulations. Management approaches applied in the parent company are adapted to the conditions of foreign affiliates, as unified procedures and standards can not be implemented in all countries (Harzing, Pinnington, 2015). The emergence of mutual co-operation is the formation of a commonly accepted organizational culture, the search for common values and goals (Guirdham, 2011).

Huczynski and Buchanan (2010) point out that convergence and divergence, despite some common features, can not be confused with centralization and decentralization in human resources management. Centralization is the concentration of authority and responsibility in the hands of top management executives, and decentralization means the dispersion of authority and responsibility for decision-making in human resources management for lower-level managers in the company's organizational hierarchy.

All activities that are part of international human resources management lead to one main goal. Managing human resources in an intercultural environment, in order to ensure the development of the company, must act effectively and rationally in matters affecting employees, exploiting their abilities and potential in the interests of both individuals and company (Szarková et al., 2010, Dessler, 2012, Mura et al., 2017). Taking into account the specificities of the intercultural environment enables a more efficient and better use of human potential and a more efficient work in a multinational company, thus contributing to the provision of better services and the growth of competitiveness on the international market. Multinational companies have also successfully established themselves in Slovakia, and have contributed in terms of labour productivity, modernization, application of new top technologies, organizational culture and management system in terms of interculturality, growing production and economic growth in the country, whose pace of year-on-year growth has been in the top five countries of the European Union in recent years (Kosir, 2016).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The subject of the study is the development of international human resources management, a joint culture including the position of internationally active human resources departments and the specificities of work management, with emphasis on advantages and disadvantages of convergence/divergence, centralization/decentralization of multinational companies.

The object of the survey are the human resources management processes of selected enterprises of multinational companies in Slovakia with many years of work experience belonging to the group of successful enterprises.

For testing if the presence of centralization/decentralization is somehow dependent on used approach to human resources management in multinational companies the chi-square test of independence was used. This type of statistical testing is applied when the independent variable and dependent variable are both categorical. The null hypothesis (H_0) in chi-square tests is that there is no relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The alternative hypothesis (H_1), on the other hand, predicts that there is a relationship (Härdle, Simar, 2012). The result are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The dependence of approach to HTM and centralization/decentralization

Crosstab					
			Cent./Decent.		Total
			Centralization	Decentralization	
Approach	Ethnocentric	Count	115	26	141
		Expected Count	108.2	32.8	141
	Polycentric	Count	38	12	50
		Expected Count	38.4	11.6	50
	Transnational	Count	55	25	80
		Expected Count	61.4	18.6	80
Total	Count	208	63	271	
	Expected Count	208	63	271	

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.714a	2	0.095
Likelihood Ratio	4.621	2	0.099
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.680	1	0.031
N of Valid Cases	271		

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11,62.

Source: Own processing

We verified the hypotheses at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. The obtained p-value must exceed this value in order for the null hypothesis to be accepted. As can be seen in table 1. Our obtained p-value is 0.095, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis that leads us to the conclusion that the approach to human resources management in multinational companies and the presence of centralization/decentralization are not statistically dependent.

Similarly, we used chi-square test of independence for testing if the presence of convergence/divergence is somehow dependent on used approach to human resources management in multinational companies that was used. We verified the hypotheses at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. The p-obtained value must exceed this value in order for the null hypothesis to be accepted. The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2. The dependence of approach to HTM and convergence/divergence

Crosstab						
			Convergence/Divergence			Total
			Convergence	Divergence	Combination	
Approach	Ethnocentric	Count	69	14	58	141
		Expected Count	55.7	17.7	67.6	141
	Polycentric	Count	19	6	25	50
		Expected Count	19.7	6.3	24	50
	Transnational	Count	19	14	47	80
		Expected Count	31.6	10	38.4	80
Total		Count	107	34	130	271
		Expected Count	107	34	130	271

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13,935a	4	0.008
Likelihood Ratio	14,376	4	0.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	10,816	1	0.001
N of Valid Cases	271		

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6,27.

Source: Own processing

As can be seen in table 2, our obtained p-value is 0.008, which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that leads us to the conclusion that the approach to human resources management in multinational companies and the presence of convergence/divergence in such companies are statistically dependent.

The chi-square test showed us that there is a statistically significant relationship between two variables, but it is quite weak. For judging such strength, we used Cramers' V. Cramer's V equals 0 when there is no relationship between the two variables, and generally has maximum value of 1, regardless of the dimension of the table or the sample size. This makes it possible to use Cramer's V to compare the strength of association between any two cross classification tables. Tables which have a larger value for Cramer's V can be considered to have a strong relationship between the variables, with a smaller value for V indicating a weaker relationship. The results of Cramer's V test are in table 3.

Table 3. The relationship between the approach to international human resources management and the degree of convergence and divergence in management

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approximate Significance
Pearson Chi-Square	Phi	0.227	0.008
	Cramer's V	0.160	0.008
N of Valid Cases		271	

Source: Own processing

Table 3 shows that Cramer's V value is 0.16, which represents weak, but acceptable association between observed variables. This means that there is some relationship between the approach to international human resources management and the degree of convergence and divergence in management. By examining table 2, the nature of the relationship between the approach and use of convergence, divergence or combination can be determined. There is a strong predominance of convergence in companies that apply the ethnocentric approach, while companies with polycentric or transnational approach are more inclined to combination of convergence and divergence. Pure divergence has the weakest representation among the surveyed companies. As we stated in theoretical part, complete convergence or divergence is virtually absent in practice. That's why we claim, that the combination of both will be the most likely choice of multinational companies' managers in international human resources management in the future.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the review of the secondary sources, we can conclude the following findings. Managers of multinational companies are becoming more sensitive to the state administration, the local labour market, public opinion and regulations than those in domestic enterprises. Management approaches applied in the parent company are tailored to the conditions of foreign affiliates, as unified procedures and standards can not be implemented in all countries. In multinational companies, there is pressure to create global units in order to achieve the objectives. This supports the convergence of human resources policies and practices and weakens their divergence. In international human resources management, taking into account the economic, political, social and legislative situation of different countries, convergence based on standardization of procedures and/or divergence associated with acceptance of management differences is preferred even if complete convergence or divergence is virtually absent in practice. The ethnocentric or polycentric approach was characteristic of human resources management at the start of the formation of multinational companies. Gradually, given the economic development of different locations (regions), legislation, labour market specificities, certain human resources management activities in the same multinational company have converged and others have diverged. With the development of globalization and the mutual recognition of cultural and institutional differences, the implementation of a regiocentric or geocentric (global) policy of international human resources management is applied.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire responses, we claim that the chosen approach to human resources management in the surveyed companies with foreign participation does not affect the level of centralization or decentralization, i.e. concentration of authority and accountability in the hands of top executives of the company versus the dispersion of authority and responsibility for decision making in human resources management the managers of the lower levels of the company's organizational hierarchy depend on other factors. On the other hand, the results show that the chosen approach has some influence on the level of convergence and/divergences in the formation of personnel strategies and policies, or the application of specific standards, guidelines and procedures. This dependence is relatively weak, but not negligible. This means that the approach to managing human resources is one of a number of factors (for example personality of the manager, legislative environment in the country, strength of national culture and others).

Other factors could be the subject of our next investigation. In the future, we would also like to conduct similar research to see if the managers of multinationals really decide to prefer a combination of convergence and divergence in international human resource management. In addition, further research in this area will focus on multinational companies based in Slovakia, which are ranked in the CEE TOP 500 ranking. The subject of the investigation will be to determine the manner of mutual communication and the extent of allocated powers between the parent company and its subsidiaries, which may or may not have an impact on the achieved results of operations. We will compare our findings with practices in domestic enterprises that do not achieve as good economic results as the above mentioned MNCs placed in the CEE TOP 500. The result should be a proposal for better management of human resources in domestic enterprises with the aim of increasing their competitiveness.

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KONVERGENCIJA I DIVERGENCIJA U UPRAVLJANJU LJUDŠKIM POTENCIJALIMA U ODABRANIM PODUZEĆIMA U SLOVAČKOJ REPUBLICI

SAŽETAK

Trenutačna faza razvoja našeg društva je okarakterizirana brzorastućim efektima globalizacije širom svijeta. Također, to se značajno reflektira i u radu osoblja u poduzećima. Raditi u internacionalnom ozračju je zahtjevno i zahtijeva suradnju između ljudi različitih kultura. Lokalne politike koje se koriste i koje su prihvaćene u domaćim poduzećima se postepeno mijenjaju – internacionaliziraju se. Jednako tako, postoje promjene u pristupima upravljanju ljudskih potencijala od strane multinacionalnih poduzeća. Svrha ovog članka je prezentirati mišljenja stručnjaka o međunarodnom upravljanju ljudskim potencijalima, ocijenjenom od strane nekolicine autora, i usvojiti evaluacijska mišljenja. Pretpostavka je da različiti pristupi multinacionalne tvrtke majke prema svojim podružnicama odnosno tvrtkama kćeri utječu na stupanj konvergencije i divergencije u upravljanju. Teorijsko znanje će biti poduprto rezultatima istraživanja provedenog u 2018. godini među 271 poduzeća u Slovačkoj odabranih na osnovi opsega njihova međunarodna poslovanja i dugoročnog učinka. Očekivani je rezultat da će se potvrditi, koristeći Pearsonov Hi-kvadrat test, međuovisnost odabranog pristupa upravljanju ljudskim potencijalima i kompetencije podružnice u kreiranju i implementaciji standarda, normi i direktiva.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: multinacionalna poduzeća, upravljanje ljudskim potencijalima, konvergencija i divergencija.