

What do we know about cross-country comparative studies in HRM? A critical review of literature in the period of 2000-2014

Abstract

Significant progress has been made in the research on variations in human resource management (HRM) across national boundaries, in both the quantity of studies and theoretical advancements since the mid-1980s. The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic review of existing literature on cross-country comparative studies of HRM as an important strand of the international HRM field in order to shed new light on dominant key concerns and themes, and emerging syntheses. More specifically, we conducted a systematic review of cross-country comparative HRM studies published in academic journals in the English language in the 15-year period of 2000-2014. Our paper charted the development of cross-country comparative studies of HRM as a sub-field of HRM research. Our analysis of 125 articles from 30 business and management journals shows the countries/regions that have been studied, topics, and research methods used. We also highlight a number of research avenues for further study in this field. Although there are a number of distinct strands to the literature, our study concludes that there is an emerging common ground in underlying concerns and theoretical assumptions both within the field, and with other areas of management inquiry.

Key words: cross-country comparative study, comparative HRM, organizational behaviour, cultural approaches, institutional approaches

Introduction

In spite of the caution in the use of the term globalization by authors, it is generally recognized that a growing proportion of organizations are directly or indirectly engaged in global networks. This can range from outright ownership by a multinational corporation (MNC) to occupying some or other position in a global value chain. On the one hand, many firms in the developed world have faced existential levels of competition from overseas competitors who, at least in part, found their competitiveness on very low labour standards. On the other hand, it has proven very difficult for emerging market competitors to emulate successful business models found elsewhere. To a large part, this advantage depends on cooperative models of human resource management (HRM), that promote mutual commitment and the nurturing and sharing of knowledge. Hence, comparing how firms manage their people in different national settings, both within and beyond the confines of a single organization has assumed increasing importance since the 1980s, evidenced by the growth in the volume and quality of work published in this Journal, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (IJHRM).

The early literature in international HRM was primarily concerned with the challenges of international staffing within the MNC context (Brewster and Harris 1999). More recently, HR research with a trans-national dimension has expanded to encompass a more comparative dimension that focus on the societal differences as well as similarities across nations. Studies have also emerged that examined individuals without an organizational context (e.g. expatriates and self-expatriates) or cast at a general context without focusing on specific countries or companies (e.g. global talent management). While studies of expatriates, either within or outside the MNC contexts, were the main stake in the early years of international HRM research, the focus has been primarily on corporate expatriates (e.g. Tungli and Peiperl 2009). Since the early 2000s, this research interest has been extended to self-initiated

expatriates (e.g. Al Ariss and Özbilgin 2010), as globalization continues and global labour mobility becomes more common. Global talent management has emerged as a relatively new stream of research since the mid-2000s, as interests in talent management grew (c.f. Collings and Mellahi 2009).

As the field of HRM in the international context developed, confusions have appeared as to what constitutes the body of research in international HRM and what researchers mean when using different terms but with overlapping territories (c.f. Björkman and Welch 2015; Brewster, Mayrhofer and Smale 2016 for reviews). For example, some researchers adopt a narrow definition and use the term ‘international HRM’ to refer to MNCs studies. Some scholars treat cross-country comparative studies (e.g. comparative study of performance management in India and China) as an independent body of research in its own right. Some scholars use the term ‘comparative HRM’ to refer to studies that compare HR policies and practices of MNCs across a number of countries. Others use the term cross-cultural studies that may straddle MNC studies as well as cross-country comparative studies. For clarity, we classify the growing body and increasing broad range of studies of HRM in the international context into four main strands of literature under the overarching umbrella of ‘international HRM’ (to differentiate from domestic HRM). We do so in order to define the (logistical) boundary for this review paper to avoid confusion¹:

1. Studies of HRM in MNCs in one or more countries (*classic international HRM*);
2. Cross-country theoretical and empirical comparative studies of HRM systems, policies and practices in the countries compared at the macro and/or micro levels, including cross-cultural studies and cross-country institutional analysis (*comparative HRM*);

¹ We had initially planned to conduct a comprehensive review of research on international HRM as a whole, including all four categories. But we found that the body of literature is too large and diverse to provide a coherent and focused analysis in a single paper. Hence we decided to focus on Category 2 for this paper. We will continue to review and write papers on the other three categories.

3. Studies of expatriates, including self-expatriates, across different countries conducted at the individual level **without examining the MNCs in which they work for** (e.g. Selmer, Ling, Shiu and de Leon 2003; Selmer 2007);² and
4. Global talent management **without anchoring on specific national or organizational contexts** (e.g. Farndale, Scullion and Sparrow 2010).³

Despite research efforts from different parts of the world, we do not have an overview in terms of, for example, what elements of HRM in the international context have been studied, where have these studies been conducted, what methods have been used, what theoretical advancements have been made, and what might be the research gaps. The aim of this paper is to provide a systematic review of existing literature on cross-country comparative studies of HRM, i.e. Category 2 to fill part of the research gap. We choose cross-country comparative studies for analysis here because it is an important component of international HRM studies and an important means of advancing HRM research ‘by examining phenomena across **settings** that have powerful institutional and cultural differences’, as Rousseau and Fried argued in the context of organizational behaviour research (2001: 11, original emphasis). In this paper, we adopt a broad definition of HRM to include studies of various aspects HRM, including aspects of organizational behaviour (OB) that have implications for HRM.

This review paper contains four main sections in addition to this Introduction. Section 1 provides a working definition and overview of the development of the field of comparative HRM research. Section 2 outlines methods of data collection and analysis. The third section provides an extensive analysis of the 125 papers published in 30 business and management

² Studies that examined expatriates within the multinational context are included in Category 1. We created Category 3 which is a relatively small but growing body of literature because they have a different focus than expatriate studies within the multinational context, the latter tend to focus on organizational policies and practices associated with the management of expatriation and repatriation.

³ Similarly, studies that examined talent management within the multinational context are included in Category 1. Studies of talent management across countries (e.g. Cooke, Saini and Wang’s study that compared talent management in China and India) are included in Category 2.

(broadly defined) journals in the English language in the period of 2000 and 2014. Section 4 then highlights research gaps and indicative avenues for future research.

The development of comparative HRM

A major advance of the field of international HRM was its broadening scope to include comparative HRM, that is, comparing the management of people in different national contexts, without the employees in question necessarily being linked to the same organization or even in the same global value chain. What comparative HRM seeks rather to draw out are differences in dominant national HRM paradigms or recipes, and, in some instances, how these may differ on sectoral or regional lines within nations (Goergen, Brewster and Wood 2013; Walker, Brewster and Wood 2014). In order to compare HRM between countries, one requires, firstly, some or other national taxonomy (e.g. variety of capitalism or dominant type of national culture) and a set of defining practices – the latter may be comprehensive or simply focusing on a particular area. Early literature on comparative HRM can be divided into two broad categories.

The first category concerns developments and extensions of the literature on comparative industrial relations (e.g. Helper 1990; Locke, Kochan and Piore 1995; Brookes, Brewster and Wood 2005). This approach focused on the relationship between regulatory institutions, the relative strength of key societal actors, such as employer associations and unions, and the employment relationship. The latter encompassed the volume and nature of working time, the nature of the contract (individual or collective, secure or insecure), and the proportion of value generated returning to workers. Union decline from the 1980s onwards – and also growing interest in the reasons behind the rise of Japanese and German manufacturing – led to an expansion of this literature to encompass mechanisms for collective representation and voice that supplemented traditional collective bargaining (e.g.

Brookes et al. 2005; Meardi 2007). The rise of the literature on comparative institutional analysis – with its assumptions as to the links between dominant modes of inter-organizational regulation and relationships, and intra organizational practices – led to the development of this literature, encompassing comparisons of different capitalism archetypes against a very much wider range of HRM practices (Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990).

Secondly, influenced by Hofstede's (Hofstede and Hofstede 2001) cultural taxonomies, and other efforts to categorize national cultures, a body of work sought to compare the consequences of national culture for the practice of people management. At a theoretical level, cultural approaches differ more in terms of the taxonomies derived than theoretical foundations; the latter are very eclectic, and draw on insights from psychology, sociology, political studies and anthropology. However, they can be considered to be broadly structuralist – of a particularly rigid variety – in that they consider different types of culture to be both clearly defined, and relatively static or very strongly path dependent. This makes the delineation of different strands of the literature more challenging than in the case of comparative institutional analysis.

A major limitation of such approaches is that the focus on cultural ideal types, with confident claims being made as to their scientific status and long-term effects of behaviour, is mistaken, given the absence of a rigorous body of evidence to back them up (McSweeney 2002; Vaiman and Brewster 2015). Some of the other structural limitations in this argument – assumptions of path dependence and the lack of clear links between cultures and HRM paradigms – led to a focus on how certain cultural features might mitigate the effects of structural adversity. For example, a body of literature on HRM in Africa suggested that, whilst firms in Africa have to contend with both domestic political instability and developmental challenges, and intense international competition, the adoption of paradigms

closely aligned with communitarian features of African cultures (*Ubuntu*) might both reenergize the firm and enhance working life (Khan and Ackers 2004).

Again, it has been argued that the operation of extended networks of support (e.g. *guanxi*) might impart a flexibility to otherwise quite rigid models (Xing, Liu, Tarba and Cooper 2016). Critics have argued that extended networks of support might primarily serve the function of enriching insiders at the expense of other stakeholders, or subject the organization to a greater range of competing pressures than it can cope with (c.f. Webster et al. 2005). Other accounts have argued that whilst the operation of such networks might mitigate the effects of embedded authoritarian managerial practices through creating mutual notions of obligation and responsibility, they ultimately provide ad hoc compromises or solutions (e.g. informal cash loans to staff to mitigate the effects of low wages, ad hoc leave arrangements in response to family crises, the recruitment of relatives of existing staff) that do nothing to promote genuine co-determination (Webster and Wood 2005).

Within the first tradition, from the 2000s onwards, there has been growing interest in the comparison of institutional effects with HRM. This encompasses both the aforementioned literature on comparative capitalism and other strands of comparative institutional analysis. Whilst, as noted above, the roots of the former stretch back to the 1990s, and, in particular, the interest in how different types of mature capitalism could combine manufacturing success with cooperative forms of work organization (Wood, Dibben and Ogden 2014), interest in the issue increased exponentially with the publication of the influential 2001 Hall and Soskice collection (Hall and Soskice 2001). Although the basic argument mirrored that of a number of earlier writers (Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990; Whitley 1999), the collection provided a much wider range of studies to explore the structural differences between Liberal Market Economies (LMEs) on the one hand, and Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs) on the other hand. The former encompassed the developed

Anglo-Saxon economies (including the US and the UK) and the latter the Rhineland economies, Scandinavia and Japan (Hall and Soskice 2001). In LMEs, shareholder rights were stronger, unions weaker, and linkages between firms more tenuous and arms' length. This made for greater job insecurity, lesser collective bargaining coverage, and a reliance on the external labour market for skills (Hall and Soskice 2001). In CMEs, inter-firm ties and unions were much stronger, job security greater, and legally embedded co-determinative workplace structures more widespread. In other words, there was a close relationship between institutional setting and the practice of HRM. Again, within the developed world, it was felt that the most advanced economies broadly fitted into the LME or CME category; other economies would, as institutional arrangements matured, evolve into either one of these two models.

A limitation of the early work on comparative capitalism was that its empirical base rested on stylized ideal types supplemented by macro-economic data and limited illustrative case study evidence (Wood et al. 2014). This led to the emergence of a body of comparative HRM work, including significant numbers of articles published in *IJHRM*. In a 2007 study, Brewster, Croucher, Wood and Brookes (2007) found that CMEs were indeed associated with a much higher incidence of collective and representative voice mechanisms; rather more surprisingly, they also found that individual and direct voice mechanisms were stronger in such economies. In other words, even individual and direct voice mechanisms were less common in LMEs than CMEs. What this would suggest is that, if unions are weaker, firms will be less likely to face pressures to improvise solutions to take account of employee concerns and suggestions; again, as in many CME firms, the two broad different types of voice might coexist, without individual and direct voice undermining collective and representative voice mechanisms (Brewster, Wood, Croucher and Brookes 2007). Again, in looking at contingent reward systems and a range of other calculative (i.e. control-oriented)

HRM policies, Poutsma, Ligthart and Veersma (2006) found that these were more common in LMEs.

At a theoretical level, there was a growing realization that many national economies did not fit easily in either the LME or the CME category, nor appeared likely to evolve into them. This led to the growing interest in multi-variety models. An early account by Whitley (1999) highlighted distinctions *inter alia*, between Western LMEs and CMEs, and developed Asian economies; it also held that the northern Italian industrial districts model represented a capitalist archetype in its own right. Other accounts argued that Mixed Market Economies /Mediterranean Economies (MMEs) and (Central and Eastern European) Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) represented further distinct capitalist archetypes (Hancke, Rhodes and Thatcher 2007), as did Scandinavia (Social Democratic Capitalism) (Amable 2003). Again, empirical work revealed a broad correspondence between capitalist archetypes and HRM practice (Goergen, Brewster and Wood 2013). In other words, the addition of capitalist archetypes revealed a more nuanced view of bounded diversity in the practice of HRM. More specifically, a series of studies by Goergen and others (Goergen, Brewster, Wood, and Wilkinson 2012; Goergen, Brewster and Wood 2013; Goergen, Chahine, Brewster, and Wood 2013) highlighted the relationship between five broad types of capitalism (LME, Rhineland/Continental European CME, Social Democratic Capitalism, MME and EME, and a number of areas of HR practice, including communicative and consultative mechanisms, training and investment in people, and union representation. A counter-intuitive finding was that in LMEs, spending on training was relatively high; however, a closer examination revealed that this reflected a large amount of attention being devoted to relatively short basic induction training as a means of compensating for high staff turnover rates (Goergen, Brewster and Wood et al. 2013).

Whilst the correspondence between national institutional frameworks and HRM practice may seem fairly straightforward, a number of caveats are in order. Firstly, it appears that, even if certain ways of managing people predominate in national contexts, there is almost as much diversity within national contexts as between them (Walker et al. 2014). This would include important variations on region, sector, and firm size, reflecting variations in institutional coverage, the operations of complementarities, and the uneven nature of systemic change (Lane and Wood 2009).

Secondly, and, given the ongoing process of institutional change in any setting, key actors are likely to impact on the system. Roe (2003) argues that right wing governments are likely to result in enhanced shareholder power and a commensurate weakening of worker rights. However, Goergen, Brewster and Wood (2013) found that the only area of HRM practices where right wing governments has a significant impact was in terms of redundancies; firms were more likely to shed staff, especially via compulsory redundancies, when such governments were in power. As MNCs are only partially rooted in any institutional setting, it could be argued that they may act as norm entrepreneurs, undermining established firm level mechanisms for managing people (Dore 2008). Indeed, Gooderham, Nordhaug and Ringdal (2006) found that MNCs originating in North America were significantly more likely to adopt hardline instrumentalist HRM policies than those from other parts of the world. However, Brewster, Wood and Brookes (2016) found that MNCs tended, in general, to be more cautious in departing from national norms than their local counterparts, and tended to be followers rather than leaders in terms of innovating new HRM practices. This would reflect the fact that MNCs enter particular markets because of the advantages they confer (Morgan and Kristensen 2006); hence, they would be less interested in challenging the status quo. Interestingly, those firms most aggressively driving change were those industries facing crises of competitiveness (Brewster et al. 2016); this would

suggest that innovating in HRM might often represent a response to crisis rather than positive strategic choices to make successful firms even more so.

Thirdly, it is not just firms that cross national boundaries, but also investors and value chains. An emerging body of work on private equity suggests that such investors are more likely to aggressively drive redundancies and other more hardline HRM policies when they originate from LMEs (Clark 2007; Appelbaum, Batt and Clark 2013; Goergen and Wood 2014). Again, the emergence of ultra-low cost manufacturers in Asia has undermined established regional production networks; more extended and opaque Global Value Chains may lead to job losses and drive down wages (and, weaken the countervailing power of labour) amongst established players and regions (Donaghey, Reinecke, Niforou and Lawson 2014). There is also the issue of the mobility of labour. There are two sub-dimensions. The first is of semi- and un-skilled labour. Contrary to the claims of neo-liberals, labour is not like any other commodity in that there are restrictions on its movements across national boundaries (Varsanyi and Nevans 2007; Popke 2011). By the same measure, many economies – the US and the UK being particular cases in point – where tough restrictions on immigration coexist with the wide-scale usage of illegal labour in low-end jobs, especially in the agricultural and food industries; migration law is used as a mechanism of labour discipline, and, at its worst, modern slavery (Popke 2011; Sporton 2013; Fudge and Strauss 2014). The second is the movement of highly skilled labour; the growing literature on talent management explores this. However, the parameters of the field are still being mapped out, the evidence base as to the desirability of specific approaches to talent management remains uneven (Collings and Mellahi 2009).

The above critical account of the development of the international and comparative HRM field, both as theoretical underpinning and as empirical contexts, provides an informative backdrop for the evaluation of cross-country comparative HRM studies as an

important segment of the international HRM literature. While our focus in this paper is on cross-country comparison, developments triggered by the continuing globalization and the influence of MNCs and global value chains as international institutional actors may partially account for the developments of HRM systems and practices in nation states.

Methods of data collection and analysis

Data collection

For the purpose of this study, two methods were used to search for the articles as data for analysis. First, a list of 38 major academic journals in the business and management field (broadly defined to include work and organization, and industrial/employment relations) published in English (see Table 1) were screened one by one using the combined key words ‘cross-country’ and ‘human resource management’; ‘cross-country’ and ‘training’; ‘cross-country’ and ‘reward’; ‘cross-country’ and ‘performance management’; ‘cross-country’ and ‘gender’; ‘cross-country’ and ‘talent management’; and ‘international HRM’. While this list of key words is not exhaustive, we believe that they would capture most of the relevant articles. The fact that the papers downloaded included more HR themes than the functional key words (e.g. training and performance) used here suggests that these functional HR key words have not prevented other relevant papers that do not feature these key words to be found.

Second, Ebsco, Emerald and Monash Library database were searched from the university library electronic journal database with the same key words. We used both methods of search to maximize the chance of finding relevant articles. The search period was set for January 2000-December 2014. One research assistant was employed to do the search. All articles deemed relevant for the purpose of this review paper were downloaded and the first two authors screened through each of these articles. A total of 177 articles were

downloaded initially that are related to Category 2. These were further assessed for appropriateness and 125 articles were selected for analysis, 109 of which are empirical studies and 16 review articles. These articles were published in 30 business and management journals (see Table 2).

It is important to acknowledge that our search may not have exhausted all the articles published on the topic in the period of our study due to unavailability in the database or human error (oversight) during the search. However, we are confident that this set of data has captured the majority of the articles in good journals in our search period. Therefore, it enables us to map out what has been researched, where, how and what gaps might exist.

Insert Table 1 about here

Data processing and analysis

Each downloaded article was initially screened and coded by a research assistant. Each article was entered into the data coding file. Each article was coded by author(s), year of publication, journal in which it appeared, types of article (empirical vs. review), research methods used, countries studied, industries studied, and HRM aspects studied. The coding categorization was created in order to address the following research questions for the analytical purpose of this paper.

1. What has been researched (aspects of HRM)? What has been less researched? Why?
What are the consequences/implications for knowledge gaps?
2. What methods have been used (e.g. case study, survey, interviews), are these adequate, what are the gaps?
3. What industries have existing studies focused on?
4. What countries have been the most studied?

5. Are these studies reflecting the changing trends of HR environment and practices in the global politico-economic landscape?
6. What are some of the areas future studies should focus on (e.g. methods, types of firms, aspects of HRM, industrial sectors)?

For the purpose of this study, empirical articles refer to those that involved first-hand empirical data collection, whereas review papers do not contain first-hand empirical data but may be informed by empirical data drawn from secondary sources. Due to the lack of consistent information, we omitted industries studied in our analysis.

The second author then went through the initial coding by the research assistant. Discrepancies were discussed with the lead author, who also conducted random check on a quarter of the articles in the data entries. The final data set was recorded in an excel database for analysis. The data was broken down into three time periods based on the year of publication: 2000-2004 (31 articles); 2005-2009 (43 articles); and 2010-2014 (51 articles), in order to assess the developments in the literature over the entire period as well as over 5 year time spans. Tables were generated through the use of filters to summarize some of the data, such as frequency count and proportional percentage. Pivot tables were generated to identify trends across the countries that were studied and regional patterns.

Main findings

Where articles were published

As indicated in Table 2, over a quarter of all articles included in our review were published in *IJHRM*. Some 67 per cent of all the articles in the review were published by six journals: *IJHRM*; *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources (APJHR)*; *Employee Relations (ER)*; *Cross Cultural Management (CCM)*; *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management (IJCCM)*; and *Personnel Review (PR)*. This is perhaps not surprising given that all these

journals have an HRM focused, with some having an additional international/regional focus. Nevertheless, the pattern of where the articles have been published indicates that cross-country comparative HRM studies have not made their way to the top management journals at large, measured, for example, by the British and Australian journal ranking list and by Impact Factors. It is also revealing that *Gender, Work and Organization (GWO)*, a journal that is not specialized in HRM actually did very well in terms of publishing cross-country comparative HRM studies and has made a substantial contribution to advancing our knowledge of gender and diversity issues. In addition, journals with a regional focus, such as *Asia Pacific Business Review (APBR)*, *APJHR*, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)*, *Journal for East European Management Studies (JEEMS)*, and *Journal of European Industrial Training (JEIT)*, represented 18 per cent of the publications.

Insert Table 2 about here

What methods were used

Research methods utilised across the 125 studies were analysed in order to identify patterns and preferences in relation to methodological approaches. A first distinction that was made was whether papers were considered review or empirical studies on the basis of the orientation of the study. A total of 109 papers were categorized as empirical studies and 16 as review articles, as noted earlier. In this section, we focus on the empirical studies to identify what methods have been deployed in cross-country comparative research.

As shown in Table 3, quantitative methods, predominantly survey studies, has been the main method adopted for cross-country comparative HRM research. Given the logistic complexities and resource implications for sampling data across different geographical locations, the choice for a survey instrument is arguably advantageous from practical

considerations, whilst further from a nomothetic perspective it can be preferable to rely on quantitative data (Easterby-Smith and Malina 1999). In terms of the quantitative studies, it was found that while the majority derived data from organizations, institutions, or HR practitioners, there was also a group of eight studies that relied on student surveys (e.g. Beekun, Stedham, Yamamura and Barghuti 2003; Ramamoorthy, Gupta, Sardesai and Flood 2005; Kono, Ehrhart, Ehrhart and Schultze 2012).

Insert Table 3 about here

Despite clearly being the preferred research method (if preference is evidenced by article acceptances), there are challenges in relation to the use of quantitative methods, such as appropriately adjusting survey instruments to different cultural contexts and properly administering them (Teagarden et al. 1995). This includes issues of translation. However, a more daunting problem lies in securing decent survey response rates, in an age of survey fatigue. Traditional conventional wisdom held that in many fields a 50% response rate was considered ‘good’; however, other work suggests that much lower response rates may in practice generate accurate results (Mellahi and Harris 2016). Here it is worth noting that commercial marketing firms typically operate with very much lower response rates. We would argue that response rates cannot be considered in isolation from the nature of the study, and the sampling method deployed; we would be cautious of any assumptions of a fixed percentage threshold. In dealing with survey fatigue, increasing numbers of scholars make use of commercial firms and/or paying respondents to complete surveys. In the case of the former, actual survey methods may be quite opaque and/or clearly non-probability based; we would think it is much better for scholars to conduct their own surveys – even if response

rates are lower – as they can directly monitor quality of the survey process, than a higher one via some other commercial third party.

A further issue is on the accuracy of managerially reported performance data, a crucial issue if the organizational consequences of particular HR issues are to be considered (of course, it is possible to match listed firms with company data, but this would be at the cost of respondent anonymity. Singh, Darwish and Potočnik (2016) found that on the basis of evidence from four countries, managerially reported data seemed to be generally an accurate representation of how firms were doing. With survey data, there is also the perpetual bugbear of possible common method variance bias; we would argue that testing for this is a better path to simply rejecting work that carries a whiff of it; however, this view is not shared by a significant proportion of reviewers.

Finally, a recent *Strategic Management Journal* has highlighted the absurdity of rejecting work that disproves sets of hypotheses (Bettis, Ethiraj, Gambardella, Helfat and Mitchell 2016). Rather, by proving something is not the case, knowledge is clearly advanced (Popper 2005), whilst one cannot dismiss the value of replicating past work where the principle finding is that earlier findings are disproved. Indeed, it could be argued, that there is a great need for much more work in this area, and reluctance to embark on it reveals a wilful misunderstanding of the basic principles of statistics (Bettis et al. 2016). As an alternative to firm based survey data, it is possible to make use of company data. However, not only does this confine any study to listed firms, but also the range of metrics is greatly constrained. Nonetheless, it is possible to extract data on the effects of a change in ownership or ownership composition on employment, productivity and performance; this can be done against a matched control group of firms (Goergen and Wood 2014). In practice, company data remains a much under-utilized resource by the community of HRM scholars.

Our analysis found that the adopted research methods shaped the average number of countries from which data was collected. The average number of countries across the quantitative studies is around 5.6 countries per study, with a variation of 4.6 for the surveys and 8.8 for the secondary data analysis. Qualitative projects, on the other hand, on average compared data from 2.7 countries. Moreover, mixed-method studies have an average of 2.2 countries. Thus, quantitative studies compared data collected from a greater number of locations than the qualitative or mixed-method approaches.

With respect to the quantitative secondary data studies, it was observed that several cross-country datasets were used for comparative HRM research, including the World Bank's Enterprise survey (Sahadev and Demirbag 2010), the European Working Conditions Survey (Sanséau and Smith 2012), the purpose-built Cranet survey (Nikandrou, Apospori and Papalexandris 2005; Özçelik and Aydınli 2006; Tregaskis and Brewster 2006; Apospori, Nikandrou, Brewster and Papalexandris 2008; Karoliny, Farkas and Poor 2009), and the GLOBE study (e.g. Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010). Studies also relied on available (local) datasets (e.g. Hawley and Paek 2005), which pose challenges in terms of comparability.

The qualitative studies in our analysis had a strong reliance on in-depth interviews as a data collection method, used by 84 per cent of the study. Several studies had an exploratory purpose (Chow 2004; Donnelly 2008), which is in line with the qualitative paradigm and approach. Few studies have a strong 'theory building' objective, although most of the studies have argued to have made theoretical contributions to the field. Furthermore, a few qualitative studies had a strong institutional focus (Mabey 2008; Collins, Sitalaksmi and Lansbury 2013), while others assessed particular (organizational) policies (Schröder, Muller-Camen and Flynn 2014). Researchers used this method to engage in sense-making activities, for instance, identifying patterns across HR practitioners, managers, or employee perspectives (Selmer et al. 2003; Bingham, Clarke, Michielsen and Van de Meer 2013).

This pattern suggests that there is considerable scope for research in the field of cross-country comparative HRM to conduct in-depth qualitative analysis in order to develop a more nuanced understanding on the topic under investigation. This supplements the rich tradition of participant observation within the body of labour process research. There is a little doubt as to the value of such approaches. However, if there is uncertainty on what constitutes an adequate sample size or survey response rate for quantitative work, then even more controversial is what an acceptable body of fieldwork is for an international standard journal. In the end, there are no hard and fast rules; however, the field is cluttered with small scale studies that do little to advance understanding in other than a very limited domain. There is little doubt that there is a pressing need for researchers to forge coalitions in working together to secure adequate bodies of qualitative evidence.

Our analysis also revealed that mixed-method studies distinguished themselves from the other two categories of methods used by their strong workplace and operational level focus. These studies concerned themselves with employee-related matters such as employee experiences (Stewart, Danford, Richardson and Pulignano 2010), equal employment promotion opportunities (McGauran 2001), and learning opportunities (Kira 2007). Moreover, there was also a focus on career mobility (Donnelly 2009), work-life balance, and working time arrangements (Donnelly 2011). Only one study had a more aggregated perspective, focusing on the convergence of management practices in relation to strategy, finance, and HRM (Carr and Pudelko 2006).

It appears that, despite the calls for more longitudinal studies by a number of authors (e.g. Rowley, Benson and Warner 2004; Tregaskis and Brewster 2006; Aydınli 2010), few studies have taken on the challenge. The value of such exercises is already demonstrated by the longitudinal quantitative (Nikandrou et al. 2005; Tregaskis and Brewster 2006; Bae, Chen and Rowley 2011; Gillon, Braganza, Williams and McCauley-Smith 2014;) and qualitative

(Som 2012) contributions that have been made. Therefore, there remain considerable opportunities for longitudinal research in the cross-country HRM field.

Which countries were studied

Tables 4 and 5 summarize the relative proportion of work by countries and regions. Deriving regional categories brings some complexities. Latin and Central America, in several instances countries had been compiled into a single category (Bowen, Galang and Pillai 2002; Huo, Huang and Napier 2002). Where possible individual countries – that were part of a combined measure – were included as separate entries into our analysis, with a primary focus on economic and cultural distinctions (Thomas, Shenkar and Clarke 1994).

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

Our analysis revealed that 56 studies had a comparative focus within one particular region, whereas 66 studies compared data from more than one region. Of the latter category, 44 studies compared countries from two regions, the remainder juxtaposed multiple regions (see Table 6). In particular, qualitative studies more frequently compared data from within a particular region (73 per cent of the studies). In comparison, quantitative studies tended to span regions more (38 per cent of the studies), and were more likely to compare data from multiple regions. The availability of the secondary empirical survey data set, such as the Cranet Survey and the World Bank data, as mentioned earlier, have aided this regional crossing. The average number of countries that were compared was 4.6, and the median two. At the higher end, there were studies that compared 27 (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2010) and 42 (Van Emmerik, Euwema and Wendt 2008) countries. As can be seen, the field is becoming more diversified in terms of geographic areas for data collection.

It should be noted that there are an increasing number of comparisons within the Asia region. It was already suggested that there is a need to better understand HRM practices across countries from this region (Cooke 2009: 17), hence the uptake of regional studies is a positive sign of emerging scholarship in the English literature. The data indicates, however, that there is a decreasing number of cross-country comparative studies in the more established Asian locales such as mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan and that the focus is shifting towards comparing other parts of the region including Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. For the former, it may be that research interest continues to grow but that studies have not made their way into the journals. For the latter, it may also be the case that research capacity in ‘late comer’ countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, has increased.

The pattern of regional focus that has emerged in the studies resembles that of global trade and FDI. Table 6 revealed that for the articles involving multiple regions, the greatest scholarly interest was in the juxtaposition of Asia, Europe and North America. Moreover, the comparison of Middle and South America with North America is in line with expected regional, economical, and cultural closeness of the regions. Also the research interest of contrasting HRM matters in the Asia and Oceania regions fits with these broader global trends (e.g. Kimber, Lipton and O’Neill 2005; Kramar and Parry 2014).

Comparative HRM research of Middle East countries is more limited. Similarly, the African region is also under-utilized as a possible source of comparison. South Africa was the only country from the region that was examined by researchers on more than one occasion. Hence there remain rich opportunities to investigate HRM issues within these regions as well as to compare them. For instance, the increasing trade between Asia and Africa in the form of Chinese and Indian trade and FDI (Broadman 2007; Zafar 2007) warrants further

investigation of how this is impacting HRM philosophies, strategies, policies and practices across both regions (also see Cooke, Wood and Horwitz 2015).

Insert Tables 6 about here

Thematic foci

Seven broad categories of related HRM themes were identified from our analysis (see Table 7). It is clear from our findings that the field has moved beyond a narrow focus of expatriation (De Cieri, Cox and Fenwick 2007) in the earlier studies and versed into a diverse range of other subjects. It is particularly worth noting that gender and diversity issues have emerged as an important research focus in cross-country settings in recent times. We provide a brief summary of the HRM themes studied below. It should be noted here that the classification of these themes is somewhat subjective and intended, in part, to create a structure for discussion.

Insert Table 7 about here

1. HRM practices The first broad category includes studies of a range of HRM practices. It is perhaps not surprising that HRM practices emerged as the most studied aspect in the cross-country comparative HRM literature. As Schuler, Budhwar and Florkowski (2002) observed, the analysis of HRM policies and practices are the traditional focus of international HRM scholars.

Four sub-categories within this theme could be identified. First, the majority of articles in this category (18 out of 28) explored in different ways whether HRM practices are converging or diverging across countries and/or regions. The majority of these studies point to a duality of development in this field, highlighting the impact of globalization that

accounts for some degrees of convergence on the one hand, and the enduring influence of national institutions and societal culture that explains the persistent divergence on the other (see below for further discussion). The second group of studies compared different types of HRM practices across countries and regions in order to identify patterns in relation to management and HRM practices (Som 2012; Yoon and Chae 2012; Tijdens, De Ruijter and De Ruijter 2013). The third category consists of studies on the transferability of HRM practices from one country or cultural context to another (Thang, Rowley, Quang and Warner 2007), including from western to developing countries (Galang 2004). The discussion of transferability of HRM practices in these studies is generally situated at a macro level, highlighting barriers/differences of national systems. It should be noted that the more detailed and micro level studies of the transfer of HRM practices are most conducted within the MNC contexts which are analysed in a separate study (in progress) conducted by the authors. The fourth sub-category contains a small number of studies that assessed the adaptation of structures that facilitate employee participation and involvement (Wimalasiri and Kouzmin 2000; Markey 2006).

The majority of the studies (19 out of 28) in this category relied on quantitative methods, whereas six studies relied on secondary data. Apospori et al. (2008: 1202) already flagged the need for more qualitative research that focuses on the ‘content and meaning of the different practices applied in organizations’. It further emerged that Asia (17) and Europe (16) were the regions that were studied most frequently, while the inclusion of North America (6), for instance, was substantially smaller. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that intra-region comparison may be considered more appropriate due to perceived institutional, economic and cultural proximity within the same geographic region.

There has been a long standing research interest in the questions as to whether HRM and employment relations systems and practices have been converging or diverging (e.g.

Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, and Myers 1960; McGaughey and De Cieri 1999; Von Glinow, Drost and Teagarden 2002), which has evoked fervent debate whether HRM practices are becoming more universal or whether aspects of particularism remain (Pudelko 2006). In the analysed studies, for instance, one of the lines of investigation was whether the adoption of ‘best practices’, by MNCs, has caused a greater similarity in HRM practices found across the globe, or whether country of origin and domicile effects persist (Brewster et al. 2008; Carr and Pudelko 2006; Gould-Williams and Mohamed 2010; Bae et al. 2011).

The cross-country studies that focused on the degree of similarity and variation of practices had a strong regional focus. Twelve of the 18 articles assessed whether practices across countries from the same region were converging towards each other, while six studies relied on data from different regions. In terms of the cross-regional studies, it was notable that a few articles assessed the extent to which HRM practices from the ‘ideal types’ of market economies (Hall and Soskice 2001) were converging towards each other (Carr and Pudelko 2006; Pudelko 2006). Similarly, it was explored whether, for instance, pay practices across liberal market economies were becoming more identical (Long and Shields 2005). The majority of studies with a regional focus concentrated on the European economic region (8), while the remainder was within Asia (4). The latter explored whether national systems of HRM were moving towards an Asian model (Rowley et al. 2004), and whether differences between countries with similar cultural roots but different economic trajectories pertain and how such differences can be explained (Bae et al. 2011).

The European studies on the other hand focused, for example, on the question as to whether employment and HRM practices in former socialist countries were converging towards each other, and the rest of the Europe (Nikandrou et al. 2005; Karoliny et al. 2009; Sahadev and Demirbag 2010), or whether the southern and northern models of European HRM were converging (Apospori et al. 2008). These studies suggest that intra-regional

similarities can still be identified, even if Turkey is included in this category (Nikandrou et al. 2005; Aydınlı 2010; Sahadev and Demirbag 2010). Tregaskis and Brewster (2006) highlighted in their longitudinal study the complexities in ascertaining whether there is such a thing as a European convergence of employment practices. The patterns that they identified revealed that the situation is complex and that there is no evidence that current pressures are ‘creating “final” convergence in organisational practices’ (Tregaskis and Brewster 2006: 11).

Overall the articles on convergence and divergence highlighted more about regional patterns than increasing similarities of HRM practices globally. Several scholars, while acknowledging that a degree of convergence continues to emerge in culturally and economically similar regions, argue the importance of context in relation to the realization of specific practices (Budhwar and Khatri 2001; Pudelko 2006). Thus, the ability to adopt ‘best practices’, for instance, continues to be constrained by institutional, socio-economic, and cultural conditions in which organizations operate.

2. Talent management The development and retention of human capital in a globalizing world has been a key challenge for modern organizations. Talent management has therefore attracted a considerable amount of research attention (27 articles in total). It was the second most studied theme arising from the analysis, accounting for a fifth of the publications. These 27 articles were concerned with issues related to local and global talent management and these could be sub-divided into seven categories (see Table 7). The globalized characteristic of human capital development and talent management has been highlighted by a considerable number of studies that derived data from multiple regions (17 of 27).

The most studied aspect of talent management was the training and development of managers and employees. This is an important HRM capability that organizations need to develop in order to have the right human capital in-house. Management and employees need

the right skill base and capabilities to deal with the challenges of an increasing competitive global environment. In order to inform organizations how to meet today's human capital requirements, research needs to concentrate on macro-level institutional structures that support labour markets (e.g. training providers) as well as organizational capabilities (HR practices and policies) (Connell and Stanton 2014).

In addition, a number of articles (6) focused on leadership in cross-country settings. For example, the impact of culture on leadership styles (Van Emmerik et al. 2008; Kono et al. 2012) and employee preferences for particular styles across culture (Zander and Romani 2004) were researched. Moreover, the existence of ideal types of leadership were explored across different cultural settings (Pekerti and Sendjaya 2010). Other studies focused more specifically on differences in leadership styles across various sectors, for example, bureaucratic leadership (Berman, Wang, Chen, Wang, Lovrich, Jan, Jing, Liu, Gomes and Sonco 2013; Ren, Collins and Zhu 2014). The selected journals, however, do not cover the full range of publications in the leadership field. Hence there could be more leadership articles with a cross-country comparative focus which we did not capture (see also limitations of the study below). The focus of our study, however, is on HRM, of which leadership is arguably an important part, despite the fact that leadership has emerged as a strong sub-field in management studies in its own right.

3. Diversity management Our findings indicate that there is an increasing interest from international HRM scholars to compare gender and diversity related HRM issues across different country contexts, as noted earlier. A total of 18 papers related to this theme were found, of which ten were published in the last five years. It is also noteworthy that only a third of these studies adopted quantitative research methods, which is in stark contrast to the

bulk of the articles included in this study. This was further reflected by the fact that the majority of articles compared two countries (15).

Diversity management issues are more studied in the European context than any other regions. Eight of the nine within-region studies focused on comparing data from European countries, whereas eight of the nine cross-region studies also included Europe. Thus there are plenty of opportunities to compare diversity issues in other regional settings in cross-country comparative studies.

There is a heavy focus on gender issues in the body of diversity management studies, reflecting the state of diversity management research more generally (Cooke 2015). These articles centred around quite diverse aspects of gender including issues related to labour market participation (Cooke 2010), the gendered nature of work practices (Gunkel, Lusk, Wolff and Li 2007), and experiences of particular groups of workers (Herman, Lewis and Humbert 2013). Other foci included: gender-based quotas for management boards (Tienari, Holgersson, Meriläinen and Höök 2009), differences in women managers across different political and economic systems (Bliss and Polutnik 2003), and the ability to transfer gender equality measures to non-western countries, especially in the Islamic environment (Özbilgin, Syed, Ali and Torunoglu 2012).

4. Cross-cultural studies Cross-cultural management is a large sub-field, evidenced in the publication of two academic journals *CCM* and *IJCCM*. For the purpose of this review study, we only selected cross-cultural articles that have a focus on HRM. As we can see, cross-cultural considerations have attracted a substantial amount of research interest as a segment of the cross-country comparative HRM studies – 18 articles were classified in this category. This is perhaps not surprising as cross-cultural differences have been of long standing interest

to international HRM scholars. However, cross-cultural differences should not be conflated with cross-national differences (Brewster and Suutari 2005: 7).

The majority of the cross-cultural studies focused on cultural values (8) and cross-cultural management (7). Several of the cultural value studies analyzed differences and similarities in value orientations amongst similar cohorts across different countries, for example, managers, employees, or business students (Zhang, Straub and Kusyk 2007; Woldu, Patel and Crawshaw 2013; Geare, Edgar, McAndrew, Harney, Cafferkey and Dundon 2014). The study by Almond and Gonzalez Menendez (2014) is worth highlighting here in that it provides a comprehensive review of how the cross-cultural scholarship has dealt with ideas, values and norms. Almond and Gonzalez Menendez (2014: 2603) argued that the majority of the existing work is under-theorized – an observation we are inclined to agree based on our assessment of the body of literature in this study. The fact that few studies included in this review has made their way into top ranking management journals may be indicative of this deficiency; however, it may also reflect declining interest after a heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Challenges to operationalizing cross-cultural research persist, as identified by Taras, Roney and Steel (2009), which are also relevant in the cross-country comparative HRM context with a focus on cross-cultural issues. It is also worth noting that the vast majority of the cross-cultural studies have been conducted in a positivist tradition, perhaps in part due to the strong influence of the North American scholarship in the design of cross-cultural studies. Nevertheless, some cultural origins and effects may be better understood through in-depth qualitative studies. There have been recent attempts to bring to bear the theoretical work of the Comaroffs, who argue that objective forces are moderated, and reshaped by locally socially embedded processes (Kamoche 1995; Brookes et al. 2005). By the same manner, it has been argued that neo-liberalism re-shapes the identity of individuals from workers to

consumers (McDonald, Wearing and Ponting 2007); in turn, this drives a more instrumental approach to HRM and the employment relationship by employers and managers alike.

5. Organizational behaviour A fifth thematic trend identified by our analysis involves studies that had an OB orientation (12 articles or around 9.6 per cent of the articles in the study). Issues that these studies compared in the cross-country settings included: organizational citizenship behaviour, role stress and psychological strain, boundary permeability, employee commitment, psychological contracts, absenteeism, cognitive styles, turnover intentions, and employee control over working hours. The findings of these studies can be most valuable for the development of organizational policies and practices.

The preferred data collection method adopted by the OB studies was quantitative surveys (10). It is also noteworthy that no review articles on OB topics in cross-country comparative research were found. This is perhaps because the number of cross-country OB studies available is too small to generate a review study (also see below for limitation of this study). It was further revealed that all OB studies compared data from more than one region. The OB studies on average relied on four countries and the most frequently compared regions were Asia, Europe and North America.

6. Strategic HRM This strand of literature in our study centred on the use of strategic HRM approaches, HR philosophies adopted, the use of high performance/commitment work practices, organizational structures, knowledge management, and organizational development. The majority of these studies utilized quantitative data collection methods (9 out of 12). Within-region comparative studies focused on Europe (5) and Asia (3), whereas cross-region studies also included data from North America and Oceania. A key finding in this emerging body of literature is that, as Bowen et al. (2002) and de Guzman, Neelankavil

and Sengupta (2011) demonstrate, strategic HRM as prescribed in the western literature may not exist and/or that strong regional characteristics can be found (Kramar and Parry 2014). This finding has important implications for MNCs that seek to manage their subsidiaries globally through the operationalization of strategic HRM.

As we can see, the proportion of cross-comparative literature that focused on strategic HRM issues is relatively small. Key scholars on strategic HRM (e.g. Jackson, Schuler and Jiang 2014) have been calling for more studies that go beyond the national border and from a non-western perspective. Our study provides evidence to support this agenda.

7. Impact of external and institutional environment on HRM There has been growing interest in the effects of institutions on the practice of HRM, following on the surge of interest in comparative institutional analysis. Studies in this theme have focused on the institutions, including labour markets (Harbridge and Walsh 2002; Baum and Thompson 2007), employment systems (Bruining, Boselie, Wright and Bacon 2005) and regulatory environment (Kimber et al. 2005; Sebardt 2004) for comparison. Both endogenous and exogenous forces were found disrupting the 'equilibrium' of external environments, and the subsequent impact on HRM were assessed by researchers. Given the substantial impact that the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC) has had on organizations across the globe, it is noteworthy that only one study in our sample compared the consequences of GFC on labour market conditions and employment relations (Waring and Lewer 2013); this is clearly a collective failing on behalf of the scholarly community and an urgent area for future enquiry.

In summary, this review found both a strong regional bias to certain regions of Asia, North America and Western Europe, and upswellings of interest in topical applied areas of HR practice, most notably talent management. Only time will tell if the latter represent fads, or the development of distinct and rigorous fields of enquiry in HRM. Again, the influence

of cross-cultural studies in the 1990s and early 2000s seems to be being increasingly supplanted by comparative institutional ones. A widely researched area is on whether HR practices are converging or diverging worldwide. Although in the 1990s and early 2000s, it seemed that neo-liberalism, labour market deregulation and individualist hard forms of HRM all represented unstoppable trends, the 2008 global financial crisis, the revival of the German model, and the persistence of more collaborative HRM in specific regions and capitalist archetypes, would suggest that this debate is by no means settled.

Although the identification of the above areas of concern might suggest a persistent fragmentation of the field, a closer scrutiny of the most recent work published will reveal a growing synthesis, and moves towards increased common ground with other areas of management inquiry. Firstly, much of the literature implicitly or explicitly links trends and developments in the practice of HRM to structural changes in the global economy. It could be argued that much of the literature, whatever its disciplinary foundations, increasingly draws on insights from political economy. With this goes concerns as to the inherent contradictions between firms in specific sectors in at least some of the advanced economies moving to ever more sophisticated HR systems, with the revival and proliferation of traditional forms of labour repression in the emerging markets, and the extent to which one may be at the very least be compatible with the other. Secondly, there has been a growing common ground with key debates in other areas of business and economic studies. For example the institutional literature on comparative HRM shares the comparative corporate finance's concern with persistent institutional differences, and the extent to which alternative paradigms for regulation and associated firm level practices may coexist across the global economy, even if some of the underlying assumptions regarding the nature and structure of institutions may be fundamentally different. This common ground raises new possibilities for cross-disciplinary comparative work, and the development of new theoretical paradigms and syntheses.

Limitations, research gaps and avenues for future studies

Limitations of the study

This study provided a relatively comprehensive review of the state of art in the field of cross-country comparative studies as an important segment of international HRM research in the last 15 years up to 2014. A number of limitations exist in this study. First, our search might not have captured each and all academic journal articles published in the English language as stated earlier. Second, our study only focused on literature published in the English language, which means that we do not have a full picture. Third, our search key words might not have been detailed enough to enable relevant articles to surface. For example, there is a strong overlap between HRM and OB issues, despite continuing demarcations, especially in the US context, between the two disciplines. We did not include OB journals in Table 1 for fine combing, although some of the journals listed in Table 1 also publish OB studies and at least some relevant articles have emerged from the more general search of Ebsco, Emerald and Monash Library database. As a result, although our search has surfaced a number of articles that examined various aspects of issues related to employee behaviour from an HRM perspective (see Table 9), this may not be exhaustive. Moreover, where to draw the line of HRM and OB studies for inclusion or exclusion is somewhat arbitrary. Nonetheless, we are confident that our search has captured the bulk of the studies on the topic and our analysis is aimed at identifying a broad pattern instead of creating a precise picture. Fourth, while this study has provided a useful systematic overview of the field of cross-country comparative study of HRM, the focus has been on the demographics of the stock. Given the large number of studies included for analysis, it is beyond the scope of one single study to provide a substantive analysis on thematic patterns within this body of study or theoretical advancements in this field.

Research gaps and avenues for future studies

Cross-country comparative studies remain a challenging undertaking for HRM researchers, as observed by a number of authors (e.g. Tayeb 2001). For instance, Vernon's (2003) work revealed some of the problems and challenges associated with comparing managerial hierarchies and occupational classification across countries. Even more challenging is how to categorize both countries and HR systems. The original dichotomous Hall and Soskice (2001) Varieties of Capitalism approach, and all the crudities of the Hofstede taxonomies (see McSweeney 2002) have been largely superseded by more rigorous taxonomies that take account of a wider range of societal features (see, for example, Amable 2003; Hancke et al. 2007; Wood et al. 2014). At the same time, identifying ever more capitalist archetypes means that the impact of structural trends in the global capitalist ecosystem may be discounted (Jessop 2014). Hence, it is important to infuse into comparative approaches an awareness of the contemporary nature of world capitalism, and the multiple structural causes of the ongoing economic crisis. In addition, whilst it is recognized that new investor categories will have far reaching effects on HRM, only recently has such work been infused with a comparative dimension (Guery, Stevenot, Wood and Brewster 2016). Here, initial findings indicate that LME private equity is particularly associated with driving hardline approaches to HRM. Yet, and more generally, what precisely are the defining features of specific HR systems is more debatable. As noted above, whilst investment in people may seem a feature of cooperative HRM, firms with high staff turnovers have to spend a great deal on basic induction training. However, key issues are the relative proclivity of firms to shed staff, and mechanisms for downsizing, volume of training, and the relative extent of individual and collective employee involvement and participation (Goergen, Brewster and Wood 2013).

Building on this body of scholarship, we summarize here research gaps that we have identified in this study, some of which were touched upon in our discussion above. We present these research avenues here as opportunities for future research.

First, in terms of research themes, it is clear that a wider range of HRM topics could be examined, particularly on strategic HRM. Jackson et al. (2014: 32) comprehensive review paper suggested that more research is needed to better understand the dynamics of strategic HRM in non-western cultures, for example, Eastern cultures. Given the increasing challenges to talent management, more studies may be conducted to identify what talents need in specific societal context and likely industrial-based variations in these needs. One HRM topic that has been under-examined but is highly relevant to individuals and organizations is compensation and benefits, which play an important role in talent retention in high workplace benefits countries like China and India (Cooke et al., 2014), in spite the perceived superior value of intrinsic rewards over monetary incentives by HRM/OB scholars.

Similarly, more research may be carried out to examine what HRM/HPWS practices may be most effective and under what organizational circumstances in order to align the interests of individuals and organizations to optimize outcomes. Moreover, although diversity management has been quite well featured in this body of cross-country comparative studies, the focus has been heavily on gender issues. This could reflect the use of the keyword gender in our search, but may also reflect the existence of two gender studies journals, *Gender Work and Organization*, and *Women in Management Review*, both of which regularly carry articles that encompass international or comparative dimensions. But a quick search on the topic in the database did not show up any cross-country comparative studies on age and religiosity as some of the key diversity issues in HRM. Given the growing problems associated with the aging population on the one hand, and the young workforce on the other in different parts of the world, age-related HRM deserves more research attention. Similarly, the role of

religiosity and spirituality in HRM also warrants more detailed examination. There is now an emerging body of literature on religiosity and HRM (Metcalf 2007), but few exist in comparative studies.

Second, future studies may utilize qualitative and/or mixed methods more in order to elicit richer details and more in-depth understanding on the thematic topics indicated above and more. Societal context is an important part of cross-country comparative studies, and qualitative methods remain powerful tools to unveil contextual factors embedded at all levels.

Third, extant research on cross-country comparative HRM is heavily tilted towards developed countries, North America, Europe and Asia. Under-researched regions are Africa, Middle and South America, and the Middle East. A substantial part of (less developed) Asia is also less well covered. In addition, China is the only country that has been regularly studied amongst the BRICS countries. The under coverage of less developed regions/countries in the body of cross-country comparative HRM research may be strongly associated with the relatively poor research capacity in, as well as the limited research interest/capacity from well-established scholars from other regions, on these locales. Nonetheless, there are plenty of research potentials and capacity building needs in these places.

Fourthly, in an age where owners of highly fungible assets have assumed a disproportionate clout in the global capitalist ecosystem, the relationship between corporate finance and HRM is both immediately obvious – mobile and short-termist investors lead to instrumentalist HRM policies and job insecurity – yet relatively under-investigated. This highlights the need for further multidisciplinary work that brings together these two fields. Whilst a fundamental difference is that the bulk of the literature on corporate finance has a strong neo-liberal bias, and that on comparative HRM tends to be more stakeholder orientated, this is not to suggest that critical or even radical scholarship within corporate finance is any more impossible than highly quantitative comparative HR work, making usage

of the most advanced econometric tools and companies data. Recent work in this area highlights the potential for further investigation. There is little doubt that the current investment environment is a highly complex one, yet without a more detailed and nuanced understanding of this, it is increasingly difficult to get a full understanding as to why people management practices are more prone to disruption in some regions, areas, sectors and types of firm than others.

Related to this is a need to more explicitly take account of structural changes in the global political economy. Whilst it is generally recognized that both cooperative HRM – and even good work – is increasingly under threat in many national economies, the links drawn to changes in the global capitalism ecosystem are often more implicit than explicit. In addition to the analysis of the consequences of different investor categories, other issues could encompass further exploration of the role of elites in driving particular models of economic organization and associated firm practice, and the role of transactional actors and value chains. Again, an unprecedented proportion of the global population is on the move; this will result in increasing numbers of highly vulnerable workers in the developed world and more prosperous regions of the developing one. On the one hand, this may undermine higher value added HRM. On the other hand, the influx of large numbers of mobile workers at the early stages of their careers may provide a dynamic new source of talent.

Finally, more critical review studies could be carried out that focus on research themes and theoretical advancements, such as that conducted by Gerhart (2008) and by Almond and Gonzalez Menendez (2012), to take the scholarship of the cross-country comparative research to the next level by identifying theoretical contributions and limitations. These review studies may also help shed light on what theories may be useful in offering explanatory power to make sense of cross-country comparative issues, and how future studies can make more effort to conceptualize their findings in order to raise the research quality.

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Table 1. List of business and management related journals searched in alphabetical order

No.	Journal titles (2000-2014)	No.	Journal titles (2000-2014)
1.	Academy of Management Journal	19.	International Journal of Cross-cultural Management
2.	Academy of Management Review	20.	International Journal of Management
3.	Administrative Science Quarterly	21.	International Journal of Management Review
4.	Asia Pacific Business Review	22.	International Journal of Manpower
5.	Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	23.	International Journal of Training and Development
6.	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	24.	Journal of Business Ethics
7.	British Journal of Industrial Relations	25.	Journal of Industrial Relations
8.	British Journal of Management	26.	Journal of International Business Studies
9.	Cross-cultural Management	27.	Journal of Management Studies
10.	Employee Relations	28.	Leadership Quarterly
11.	Gender, Work and Organization	29.	Management and Organization Review
12.	Human Relations	30.	Organization Studies
13.	Human Resource Management	31.	Organization Science
14.	Human Resource Management Journal	32.	Journal of World Business
15.	International Journal of Human Resource Management	33.	Personnel Review
16.	Industrial and Labor Relations Reviews	34.	Strategic Management Journal
17.	Industrial Relations	35.	Women in Management Review
18.	Industrial Relations Journal	36.	Work, Employment and Society

Table 2. List of journals and number of articles found related to cross-country comparative studies of HRM (2000-2014) (N=125: 109 empirical and 16 review articles)

No.	Journal titles in descending order of number of articles	No. of articles found
1.	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)</i>	34
2.	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources (APJHR)</i>	16
3.	<i>Cross Cultural Management (CCM)</i>	10
4.	<i>Employee Relations (ER)</i>	10
5.	<i>International Journal of Cross Cultural Management (IJCCM)</i>	7
6.	<i>Personnel Review (PR)</i>	7
7.	<i>Gender, Work and Organization (GWO)</i>	5
8.	<i>International Journal of Training and Development (IJTD)</i>	4
9.	<i>Asia Pacific Business Review (APBR)</i>	3
10.	<i>Human Resource Management Journal (HRMJ)</i>	3
11.	<i>Human Relations (HR)</i>	2
12.	<i>Human Resource Management (HRM)</i>	2
13.	<i>Journal of European Industrial Training (JEIT)</i>	2
14.	<i>Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)</i>	2
15.	<i>Journal of World Business (JWB)</i>	2
16.	<i>Organization Studies (OS)</i>	2
17.	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)</i>	1
18.	<i>British Journal of Industrial Relations (BJIR)</i>	1
19.	<i>British Journal of Management (BJM)</i>	1
20.	<i>International Journal of Manpower (IJM)</i>	1
21.	<i>Journal of Business Ethics (JBE)</i>	1
22.	<i>Industrial and Labor Relations Review (ILRR)</i>	1
23.	<i>Industrial Relations (IR)</i>	1
24.	<i>Industrial Relations Journal (IRJ)</i>	1
25.	<i>Journal for East European Management Studies (JEEMS)</i>	1
26.	<i>Journal of Knowledge Management (JKM)</i>	1
27.	<i>Journal of Vocational Behavior (JVB)</i>	1
28.	<i>Public Administration (PA)</i>	1
29.	<i>Review of Public Personnel Administration (RPPA)</i>	1
30.	<i>Thunderbird International Business Review (TIBR)</i>	1

Table 3. Research methods used by cross-country comparative empirical studies (N=109)

Research methods		No. of articles	% of N
Qualitative	Interviews*	13	
	Survey	1	
	Case study/studies (interviews)*	8	
	Secondary data	4	
	Sub-total	26	24%
Quantitative	Surveys	58	
	Surveys & Secondary data	2	
	Secondary data	16	
	Sub-total	76	70%
Mixed	Interviews and surveys	3	
	Case studies (interviews) and surveys	4	
	Sub-total	7	6%
Total		109	

Note: A total of 125 articles were included in the ‘cross-country comparative studies’ category, 16 of which are review articles which do not contain research methods.

* ‘Interviews’ refer to studies that only use interviews but not case studies. Case study is a methodological approach that can include both quantitative (e.g. survey) and qualitative (e.g. interview, focus group) methods. In this review, those studies that use case study as a methodological approach mainly use interviews for data collection, indicating that interviews are the main methods used in the qualitative and mix-method studies of cross-country comparative HRM.

Table 4. Frequency of countries studied in descending order of most studied in the period of 2000-2014*

Countries	2000 - 2004		2005 -2009		2010 - 2014		Grand Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
USA	15	8.8%	13	7.5%	10	5.6%	38	7.3%
UK	9	5.3%	15	8.7%	12	6.8%	36	6.9%
China	12	7.1%	10	5.8%	9	5.1%	31	6.0%
Japan	12	7.1%	4	2.3%	8	4.5%	24	4.6%
Germany	2	1.2%	12	6.9%	9	5.1%	23	4.4%
Australia	9	5.3%	5	2.9%	5	2.8%	19	3.7%
South Korea	9	5.3%	4	2.3%	5	2.8%	18	3.5%
France	3	1.8%	6	3.5%	7	4.0%	16	3.1%
Taiwan	10	5.9%	2	1.2%	3	1.7%	15	2.9%
Spain	1	0.6%	9	5.2%	4	2.3%	14	2.7%
The Netherlands	2	1.2%	7	4.0%	5	2.8%	14	2.7%
Canada	8	4.7%	2	1.2%	3	1.7%	13	2.5%
Sweden	4	2.4%	6	3.5%	1	0.6%	11	2.1%
Hong Kong	8	4.7%	3	1.7%	--	--	11	2.1%
Italy	2	1.2%	3	1.7%	5	2.8%	10	1.9%
India	2	1.2%	2	1.2%	6	3.4%	10	1.9%
Indonesia	6	3.5%	--	--	4	2.3%	10	1.9%
Finland	2	1.2%	6	3.5%	1	0.6%	9	1.7%
Mexico	6	3.5%	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	8	1.5%
Ireland	2	1.2%	3	1.7%	3	1.7%	8	1.5%
Belgium	1	0.6%	3	1.7%	4	2.3%	8	1.5%
Singapore	3	1.8%	3	1.7%	2	1.1%	8	1.5%
Turkey	--	--	3	1.7%	4	2.3%	7	1.3%
Hungary	--	--	3	1.7%	4	2.3%	7	1.3%
Poland	1	0.6%	2	1.2%	4	2.3%	7	1.3%
Philippines	4	2.4%	1	0.6%	2	1.1%	7	1.3%
Greece	1	0.6%	3	1.7%	2	1.1%	6	1.2%
New Zealand	2	1.2%	--	--	4	2.3%	6	1.2%
Vietnam	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	4	2.3%	6	1.2%
Bulgaria	--	--	3	1.7%	3	1.7%	6	1.2%
Denmark	1	0.6%	3	1.7%	2	1.1%	6	1.2%
Czech Republic	--	--	5	2.9%	1	0.6%	6	1.2%
Malaysia	2	1.2%	--	--	4	2.3%	6	1.2%
Estonia	--	--	3	1.7%	2	1.1%	5	1.0%
Norway	2	1.2%	3	1.7%	--	--	5	1.0%
Austria	2	1.2%	2	1.2%	1	0.6%	5	1.0%
Slovenia	--	--	3	1.7%	1	0.6%	4	0.8%
Slovakia	--	--	3	1.7%	1	0.6%	4	0.8%
Russia	2	1.2%	--	--	2	1.1%	4	0.8%
Thailand	2	1.2%	2	1.2%	--	--	4	0.8%
Latin America	3	1.8%	--	--	--	--	3	0.6%
South Africa	--	--	1	0.6%	2	1.1%	3	0.6%
Brazil	1	0.6%	--	--	2	1.1%	3	0.6%
Serbia	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.6%	2	0.4%

Nicaragua	2	1.2%	--	--	--	--	2	0.4%
Luxembourg	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Pakistan	--	--	--	--	2	1.1%	2	0.4%
Chile	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Cyprus	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Costa Rica	2	1.2%	--	--	--	--	2	0.4%
Switzerland	--	--	2	1.2%	--	--	2	0.4%
Kyrgyzstan	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Montenegro	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Guatemala	2	1.2%	--	--	--	--	2	0.4%
Romania	--	--	--	--	2	1.1%	2	0.4%
Lithuania	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Latvia	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Venezuela	2	1.2%	--	--	--	--	2	0.4%
Panama	2	1.2%	--	--	--	--	2	0.4%
West Germany	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	--	--	2	0.4%
Peru	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	--	--	2	0.4%
Portugal	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	2	0.4%
Morocco	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Samoa	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Tonga	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Albania	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Egypt	1	0.6%	--	--	--	--	1	0.2%
Mongolia	--	--	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.2%
Bosnia	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Ghana	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Trinidad	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Croatia	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
East Germany	--	--	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.2%
Kosovo	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Uzbekistan	--	--	1	0.6%	--	--	1	0.2%
Nigeria	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
England	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Brunei	1	0.6%	--	--	--	--	1	0.2%
Papua New Guinea	1	0.6%	--	--	--	--	1	0.2%
Malta	--	--	--	--	1	0.6%	1	0.2%
Total	170		173		177		520	

* Note: for 3 studies (Gerhart 2008; Van Emmerik, Euwema and Wendt 2008; Almond and Gonzalez Menendez 2014) no countries were included in this, and following, tables – regions were included where possible.

Table 5. Frequency of countries studied by regions in the period of 2000-2014

Region	2000-4	%	2005-9	%	2010-4	%	2000-14	%
Africa (AF)	1	0.6%	1	0.6%	5	2.8%	7	1.3%
North America (NA)	23	13.5%	15	8.7%	13	7.3%	51	9.8%
Middle & South America (MSA)	22	12.9%	2	1.2%	5	2.8%	29	5.6%
Asia (AS)	73	42.9%	35	20.2%	50	28.2%	158	30.4%
Oceania (OC)	11	6.5%	5	2.9%	11	6.2%	27	5.2%
Europe (EUR)	40	23.5%	115	66.5%	93	52.5%	248	47.7%
Total	170		173		177		520	100.0%

Table 6. Comparative studies of multiple regions (2000-2014)

Region	Multiple regions compared					
	Africa	Asia	Europe	NA	MSA	Oceania
Asia	4	--	--	--	--	--
Europe	3	14	--	--	--	--
North America	3	20	14	--	--	--
MSA	2	11	4	11	--	--
Oceania	2	8	4	9	7	--

Table 7. Themes studied in the cross-country comparative studies

Themes	No. of articles in 2000-14	Total	%
HR practices		28	22.4%
Convergence-divergence analysis of HRM practices	18		
Comparisons HRM/ER practices	6		
Transferability HRM practices	2		
Employee participation and involvement	2		
Talent Management		27	21.6%
Training, development, learning and education	10		
Leadership	6		
Performance and appraisal management systems	4		
Compensation and remuneration	3		
Knowledge workers	2		
Conceptualizing and operationalizing talent management	1		
Recruitment and selection processes	1		
Diversity Management		18	14.4%
Equal employment opportunities and participation	4		
Age management	3		
Gender dimensions and (in)equality	3		
Gender and management	3		
Work-life balance	3		
Working time and workplace flexibility	2		
Cross-cultural studies		18	14.4%
Cultural values	8		
Cross-cultural management	7		
Job seeker characteristics and preferences	1		
Cultural change	1		
Ethical decision making	1		
Organizational behaviour		12	9.6%
Employee experiences and perceptions	2		
Absenteeism	1		
Boundary permeability	1		
Cognitive styles	1		
Employee commitment	1		
Employee control over working times	1		
Managerial attitudes	1		
Organisational citizenship behaviour	1		
Psychological contract	1		
Role stress and psychological strain	1		
Turnover intentions	1		
Strategic HRM		12	9.60%
High performance and high commitment work practices	4		
Strategic HRM and HR philosophy	4		
Organizational development	2		

Knowledge management	1		
Organisational structures	1		
Impact of external and institutional environment on HRM		10	8.00%
Institutions, including labour markets and employment relations systems	5		
Impact external factors on international HRM	2		
Legal comparisons	2		
New public sector management	1		
Total No. of articles		125	100.00%