

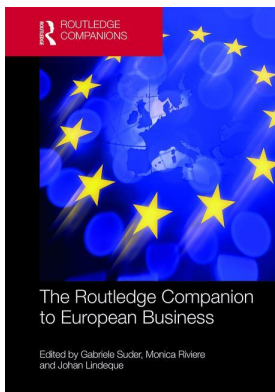
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On: 22 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to European Business

Gabriele Suder, Monica Riviere, Johan Lindeque

Human resources management and European business

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315397306-16>

Cordula Barzantny

Published online on: 26 Jul 2018

How to cite :- Cordula Barzantny. 26 Jul 2018, *Human resources management and European business* from: The Routledge Companion to European Business Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315397306-16>

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16

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND EUROPEAN BUSINESS

Cordula Barzantny

Introduction

Following Brewster (2007, p. 239) 'Europe offers a wider ranging and more critical concept of HRM.' We are intrigued by the tensions of international standardisation, largely present on the global level, in line with European harmonisation efforts versus still regional, national, cultural particularities and divergences across Europe.

With this chapter, we want to assess the state of the art in the human resources management (HRM) literature across Europe and underline the impact for managers and the influences and requirements for the European managerial mindset. The variety of European businesses requires contextual as well as more global configurations of HRM systems, since Europe is far from being a homogenous group of countries or a region of only (sub-)cultures. The European Union (EU) is striving for common, supranational regulations at the lowest and least intrusive level ('Subsidiarity' principle – for a definition see EU 2017; also Gelauff with Grilo and Lejou 2008; Sinn 1994; Henkel 2002), while considering its countries' differences in the historical, political, legal, social, cultural, economic and ideological environment (Nikandrou et al. 2005; Brewster 1994). Nikandrou et al. (2005, p. 542) state that Europe is 'characterized by internal variation among various clusters of countries and, at the same time, by external uniformity compared to the rest of the world'.

Within the course of discussions centering on the concept of HRM in the nineties, it became clear that this concept is difficult to apply in the same way as it is used in the USA, where the concept has been developed (Brewster 1995; Guest 1994). Guest (1994) argues that the unitarist perspective contradicts the prevailing European tradition of pluralism. Furthermore, the strong individualist orientation inherent in this concept is difficult to realise in societies characterised by a higher degree of collectivism and more emphasis on social welfare and social responsibility for the more disadvantaged in society. Other barriers include differences in the ownership and control systems of organisations in Europe and the strong legal environment in many countries (Guest 1994; Laurent 1983). Limited organisational autonomy is of major importance, too, as suggested by Brewster (1994).

Brewster (1994, 1995, 1999) emphasises the need to pursue a contextual paradigm, i.e. addressing explicitly the external context of firms for defining, understanding and framing HRM. Other researchers have confirmed the impact of the country-specific institutional

or socio-economic background (see for example Gooderham et al. 1999; Gooderham and Nordhaug 2010) or of cultural values on HRM (see for example Lindholm 2000; Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou 2004; Cascio 2006). To sum up, it can be said that 'a single universal model of HRM does not exist' (Pieper 1990, p. 11).

'Clearly, the European evidence suggests that management can see the unions, for example, as social partners with a positive role to play in HRM: and the manifest success of many European firms which adopt that approach shows the, explicit or implicit, anti-unionism of many American views to be culture-bound' (Brewster 1994, p. 81; see also Pudelko 2005)

Farndale (2010) examines the possible influence factors on HRM practices leading to differences among European countries in more detail. Consequently, she tests the impact of national culture, national institutions and supranational institutions, such as the Social Charter in the EU. All three variables appear as significant elements of the environment influencing HRM practices in organisations. The unity in diversity of the EU offers a huge cultural, economic, educational, political and social variety in a rather reduced geographical space (compared to the United States or China, for example). The variety of languages spoken linked to a wide array of cultural diversity and the combination of numerous customs and traditions across the Single Market pose the complex reality for European managers as well as managers in Europe overall (for a critical illustration, see Berglund et al. 2009). It is a challenge to be at ease in the diverse European business environment and the effective manager will have to display a quite versatile global mindset for Europe, functional in various European countries and cultural context configurations.

Global mindset

Since we live in a world of global competition, the concepts of cultural intelligence and global mindset have emerged as critical success factors for sustaining the long-term competitive advantage of individuals and organisations in the global marketplace (Gupta and Govindaran 2002; Earley and Peterson 2004; Pucik 2006; Hitt et al. 2007; Javidan et al. 2007a, 2007b; Levy et al. 2007a, 2007b; Thomas et al. 2008); for a systematic review and differentiation of both concepts see Andresen and Berdolt (2017). These authors underline that 'a global mindset becomes highly relevant at the strategic and normative management levels'.

Competition has generated a substantial amount of management literature (Rosen et al. 2000; Earley and Ang 2003; Boyacigiller et al. 2004; Earley with Ang and Tan 2006; Levy et al. 2007a, 2007b; Javidan et al. 2007b; Earley et al. 2007; Ang and Van Dyne 2008; Thomas and Inkson 2009; also Bouquet 2005). Since the 1980s Prahalad and Doz (1987) have underlined the importance of understanding the cognitive orientation of managers, and we observe a re-emergence of management interest in cognitive structures and processes, notably in the cross-cultural context (Smith with Peterson and Thomas 2008; Peterson and Wood 2008; Thomas 2010). With the particular multicultural patchwork of countries and regions in Europe, also facing the global competitive environment, we are inspired to address the contrasting patterns of development of a global mindset for managers in Europe in the context of HRM.

To succeed as a manager in Europe and beyond, the global mindset literature emphasises two constructs described as cosmopolitanism (as an underlying dimension of the cultural perspective) and cognitive complexity (as an underlying dimension of the strategic perspective; see Boyacigiller et al. 2004; Levy et al. 2007a, 2007b). Since it is not only the cultural diversity

of Europe that sustains cosmopolitanism, we expect the building of the globally minded manager to be straightforward with basic abilities, requested since a certain time by Adler and Bartholomew (1992) as well as by Roberts with Kossek and Ozeki (1998), by Stanek (2000) and Khilji et al. (2010) to lead the future multinational, global and transnational firms (Begley and Boyd 2003; Beechler and Baltzley 2009a; Beechler and Javidan 2007). Europe offers something of a nursery ground for the truly global manager developing through an HRM leadership approach with a focus on European integration in diversity.

A global mindset for Europe

Even if we have emphasised the countries of the EU, we define Europe mainly accordingly to the geographic continental understanding from the Atlantic shores, the Irish and British Islands in the West towards the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea in the East, from Iceland and the Arctic Sea in the North to the Mediterranean shores in the South. Europe has a resident population of roughly 800 million, divided into 51 nation states (including the Vatican City), where about 35 different official languages are spoken but more than 200 unofficial languages, dialects and regionally used languages exist. Two states are geographically Asian but culturally attached to Europe (Cyprus and Armenia) and five countries geographically span the European and the Asian plates (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey).

In the majority of cross-cultural management studies, most often the country is taken as a proxy for culture (Hofstede 1993, 2001; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Leung et al. 2005). This is mainly based on the fact that the legal, administrative, educational and political frameworks arise historically at the nation state level and despite further European (Union) integration, the ultimate official governmental unit is still the *nation* state. Therefore, if we talk about a country, we focus mainly on the administrative state unit, with a dominant (state) culture. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that in one country various regional cultures can be found, as well as more or less visible ‘minority’ cultures, which make the overall diversity of cultural heritage far greater than the number of countries may suggest.

Interestingly, Pudelko and Harzing (2007) observed that the general management practice in Europe is strongly influenced by US models. They characterise present European management as showing *continued national diversity with increasing global convergence*, whereas they expect that in the future the European approach might become more important, taking a more ‘balanced’ approach between economic efficiency and social concerns. A European management model may even provide an additional source of inspiration, both within Europe and beyond, notably in times of shrinking US supremacy and shifting world focus to Asia and emerging powers like China. This results in a more multi-polar world compared to the rather US-dominated one since the beginning of this century. Evidently, this also has an impact on the building and evolution of the global mindset of today’s managers.

An extensive body of literature addresses the cultural differences among European countries and the impact these cultural differences have on the various management systems (e.g., Lane 1989; Thurley and Wirdenius 1990; Tixier 1994; Calori and De Woot 1994; Leeds et al. 1994; Propenko 1994; Lessem and Neubauer 1994; Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994; Calori and Dufour 1995; Myers et al. 1995; Schreyögg et al. 1995; Puffer et al. 1996; Lawrence and Edwards 2000; Dülfer 2001; Hofstede 2002; Kets de Vries and Korotov 2005; Larsen and Mayrhofer 2006; Scholz and Böhm 2008). Furthermore, academic research continues the debate about convergence or divergence of European HRM (Sparrow et al. 1994; Claus 2003; Brewster 2004, 2007; Brewster et al. 2004; Mayrhofer et al. 2004; Morley 2004; Farndale 2010; Gooderham and Nordhaug 2010; Mayrhofer et al. 2011). The European mindset may stand as a specific form of

a global mindset, since the variety of European cultures can only be successfully addressed by a manager with a truly versatile, multicultural approach. This has also a decisive influence on European HRM.

HRM and European business: State of the art and current debates revisited

With the fall of the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe for more than 44 years, dissolving at least the economic and political gap between East and West, there has now been a rediscovery of the differences between Northern Europe and Southern European countries that finally seem to overshadow the reconnected East and West, also in terms of the global mindset evolutions. This also influences HRM in companies originating from and doing business in Europe. Since EU cooperation and the Single Market have seemed rather successful until recently, representing a powerful economic and moreover political block on world markets and affairs, other countries have applied to join. Turkey started the accession process in 1987; Croatia became the 28th member state in July 2013. Other countries, such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine, as future potential candidates will lead, one day, to the EU encompassing most democracies of the European continent. Nevertheless, recent political struggles in Ukraine and Turkey, and also the migrant crisis originating in the Balkans but expanding with exiles from the Syrian civil war, were perceived very negatively by many citizens, notably from Hungary, Poland, Austria. This has led to the regaining of influence for right-wing and nationalistic political forces, which challenge the European democracies and the EU as a whole. Particularly with the UK referendum on Brexit, on 23 June 2016, the EU Exit parties and xenophobia gained momentum and the EU will see its first secession when the UK leaves the bloc in 2019.

All these often-countervailing influences and events challenge the integrated HRM model and add to the genuine European HRM diversity. Mayrhofer and colleagues (2002, 2004, 2011) and Cranet data have offered longitudinal empirical evidence for the contextualisation of HRM practices across Europe. They understate the important differentiation of various national contexts despite some general converging influence through more globalising management. Nevertheless, the more recent political and socio-economic developments are still to be integrated into academic research and will inform future debates. This is certainly true for the impact of Brexit on various aspects of management, society and beyond.

Following Morley (1994) and Morley and Collings (1994) who have offered previous debates on European HRM and industrial relations, present times have seen important changes (Lane 1989; Legge 1995, 2005; Due, Madsen and Jensen 1991; Bartlett and Ghoshal 1992; Stanek 2000; Hyman and Frege 2002; Riby et al. 2004; Rasmussen and Andersen 2006; Bamber et al. 2016). The globalising workplace seems to be a reality around the world (Adler and Bartholomew 1992; Roberts with Kossek and Ozeki 1998; Rosen et al. 2000; Javidan and House 2001; Dalton et al. 2002; McCall and Hollenbeck 2006; 2002; Bird and Osland 2004; Carr 2004; Jokinen 2004; Black 2006; Edwards and Rees 2006; Vance and Paik 2006; Bhagat et al. 2007; Mendenhall et al. 2013; Kaya and Martin 2016) and cross-cultural teams are a genuine continuous challenge, across Europe and beyond (Myers et al. 1995; Earley and Gibson 2002; Athanassiou and Nigh 2002). These teams emphasise interpersonal relationships across cultures into the various contexts (Jackson 1995, 2002, Jackson and Schuler 1995; Bhagat et al. 2009).

Future research agenda for European HRM towards the global mindset

In the face of the present challenges to people management and the European workplace, we expect migration and exclusion–inclusion issues as well as mobility to be the core themes

important for HRM managers today and the near future (Brislin 1993, 2008; Brewster and Tregaskis 2001; Kirton and Greene 2005; Ferdmann and Deane 2014). The ever-growing mobility of a globalising workforce will lead to a more culturally mixed workplace than ever before and even local employees who have never left their country of origin will meet the global mix of employees across Europe. However, corporate boards and top management teams of most MNCs remain highly homogenous in their nationalities and are often staffed with home country nationals (Staples 2008; Van Veen and Marsman 2008). This has to evolve if companies want to benefit from the cross-cultural mix and address the multiple stakeholders at the local, international and global level.

This will also enhance the need for proficient global leadership (Davis et al. 2008; Fatehi 2008; Beechler and Baltzley 2009a, b; Ng et al. 2009; House et al. 2014) and advanced firms will prepare their employee leadership talent accordingly.

One core purpose of HRM is certainly performance management (Delaney and Huselid 1996), but furthermore, offshoring and rightshoring continue to be important HRM tools. The global mindset coming from European roots will also play a decisive role for global leaders and cosmopolitanism.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that what can be characterised as a particular ‘European’ mindset of European managers as well as of successful business managers in Europe may also be an entry point to the global mindset.

To be at ease in the diverse European business environment is a challenge and the effective manager will have to display a versatile global mindset for Europe to be functional in various European countries and cultural contexts. Managers raised in Europe seem to have a ‘natural’ advantage because of exposure and the prolific context they are exposed to in the comparatively small geographical space that is Europe. This chapter provides insights that this appeals also as a positive base to educate and train future management for a truly global mindset as well as the already very versatile European mindset. This is a core assignment for HRM to be taken up in Europe and elsewhere.

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