

FOR SOME TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN NOVELTIES IN THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. We live in a digital world. Nowadays, even the kids are well equipped with technology – phones, tablets, laptops, and interactive toys. In the international business world, technologies are quite applicable as well. They have changed and improved the way international companies do business nationally and internationally and influenced all business processes. This is valid not only for the production processes but also for the global human resource management activities. The paper outlines some of the most visible novelties that are found in international human resource management, thanks to technology development. The article's main purpose is just to mark the main influences visible in the field of IHRM as part of the companies' international business processes. The main methods are analysis and synthesis, literature summary, discussions and overviews. The paper is part of a larger empirical study dedicated to the influence of technology on the IHRM.

Keywords: international management; human resource management; technology; digitalization, artificial intelligence

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Introduction

In today's globalized world full of different technological gadgets and numerous communication applications, the international human resource management (IHRM) becomes more and more important for ensuring the success and sustainability of the international companies. Managing a diverse and geographically dispersed workforce presents unique challenges that demand innovative approaches and adaptable strategies. In the past decade, especially in the pandemic period, technology has become a transformative force in reshaping the landscape of human resource management across borders. The use of technology has revolutionized talent acquisition, employee development, collaboration, data analysis, and decision-making processes, offering unprecedented opportunities for organizations to be more efficient and flexible in international context. The process of globalization of the business operations has changed the traditional human

resource management approaches, forcing the companies to focus not only on the human capital as such but also to seek new and effective ways to attract, retain, and develop their staff from various cultural backgrounds. This has changed the very idea of the human resource management by transforming the human resources into talents and trying to develop these talents as much as possible. In this sense, technology has become an irreplaceable tool, as it provides a means to easily overcome geographical barriers, facilitate the international HR activities, and to improve the strategic decision-making processes. The main purpose of the present article is to collect at one place, to outline and to discuss some of the novelties that are visible in the IHRM field thanks to the technology developments in the past ten to fifteen years. It does not present a comprehensive list and analysis of all changes in the international human resource management field but just the most notable ones that make some change not only in the IHRM practices but also create new economic fields like the GIG economy. The paper presents only the initial findings of author's larger research project aimed at finding the main changes that occur in the field due to the technology developments and the introduction of the artificial intelligence in the companies, especially in Bulgarian context.

1. The international human resource management in brief

International human resource management addresses the management of human resources in a global context. It involves the effective coordination and utilization of human capital across national borders to achieve company's objectives. There are various definitions of what international human resource management is each highlighting different aspects of its significance for the international business and the companies involved in international business operations. Some authors define it as "the process of deploying human resources in international business operations, encompassing tasks such as recruitment, training, performance management, and ensuring compliance with local labor laws and cultural norms." (Dowling, Festing, & Engle 2017). According to these authors the international human resource management encompasses strategies to attract, recruit, and deploy the right talent across borders. It involves sourcing candidates globally, assessing their suitability for international roles, and facilitating mobility through expatriation and international assignments. It also addresses the complexities of managing compensation and benefits across various countries to ensure competitiveness, compliance with local regulations, and equitable treatment of employees. In this respect the human resource professionals must navigate complex legal frameworks and labor laws in different countries to ensure compliance with employment regulations including issues related to hiring, termination, working hours, and employee benefits which is quite a big challenge for them (Dowling et al. 2017).

According to other definition the international human resource management "involves the effective management of people in a multinational organization,

ensuring that HR policies, practices, and strategies are aligned with the company's international business objectives.” (Tarique, Briscoe, Schuler 2022). It actually relates to the effective IHRM practices focus on providing training and development opportunities that equip employees with the necessary skills and competencies to excel in diverse cultural contexts. This includes cross-cultural training to foster cultural intelligence and intercultural communication. An essential aspect of IHRM is managing expatriates, individuals who work in a foreign country on a temporary basis. This includes supporting expatriates and their families during international assignments, providing necessary resources, and facilitating their reintegration upon repatriation (Tarique et al. 2022). In this respect the language and communication could be great challenge for the employees. Effective communication is essential for successful global collaboration. Language barriers can hinder effective teamwork and knowledge sharing. Therefore some of the international human resource strategies may include language training and the use of digital communication tools to bridge these gaps (Tarique et al. 2022).

Schneider and Barsoux (2003) claim that “international human resource management refers to the identification, recruitment, and development of talented individuals capable of contributing to the success of a global enterprise, while also addressing the challenges of cultural diversity and cross-border collaboration”. Therefore according to these authors it involves managing employee relations in a global context, including addressing cultural differences, managing diverse teams, and promoting employee engagement across borders. And here one of the most significant challenges is managing cultural diversity within an organization. Different cultural norms, communication styles, and work attitudes can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Effective IHRM practices foster cultural sensitivity and inclusivity to create a harmonious global workforce. And the other side of the process is also important according to Schneider and Barsoux and should be paid the necessary attention. Managing the repatriation of employees returning from international assignments is critical for retaining valuable knowledge and skills. Organizations must develop programs to support returning expatriates and facilitate the transfer of knowledge gained abroad to the broader organization. (Schneider, Barsoux 2003).

Considering the above several and not very comprehensive views about the international human resource management it could be summarized that it refers to the selection and hiring the most appropriate people for the company in order it to be successful on the international markets. Therefore it requires a lot of skills and efforts from the human resource professionals to be able to find and retain the most appropriate staff as well as the application of different strategic activities aimed at effectively managing this staff across borders. By applying the opportunities that the technology gives nowadays the HR specialists have more way to address the challenges related to cultural diversity, legal compliance, communication, expatriation and repatriation of company's employees.

2. International Talent Acquisition

One of the biggest impacts of technology in the international human resource management area is evident in the field of talent acquisition. Digital platforms and applicant tracking systems have immensely changed the recruitment process, enabling organizations to develop a wider net and connect with candidates from diverse locations. The use of artificial intelligence and data analytics has transformed candidate screening, making it more efficient and precise. As a result, HR professionals can now identify top talent faster and easier than ever, reducing recruitment cycles and enhancing the overall quality of hires. Additionally, technology-driven recruitment methods facilitate seamless candidate engagement and promote employer branding, crucial for attracting the best talent in the competitive global job market.

Thanks to continuous technological development, the way companies attract and recruit talent on a global scale has changed. Digital platforms, such as different social media like LinkedIn, professional networks, and online job portals, have become crucial tools for reaching potential candidates across borders. Parry and Tyson (2011) emphasize that technology has enabled a more extensive and diverse talent pool, facilitating the identification of skilled individuals regardless of their physical location. Moreover, Sparrow, Brewster, and Chung (2017) highlight that the existing e-recruitment systems have made the application and selection processes easier, improving the overall efficiency of talent acquisition in International human resource management. Automated screening processes and applicant tracking systems have reduced manual workload and enabled recruiters to focus on evaluating candidates' suitability for cross-border roles. This trend will intensify with the development and improvement of artificial intelligence and software like ChatGPT.

The adoption of technology in International human resource management has allowed multinational corporations to manage more easily and effectively their employees at different parts of the world. Cloud-based collaboration tools, virtual team meetings, and online project management platforms have facilitated communication and cooperation among employees from different parts of the world (Strohmeier, Kabst 2014) and facilitated the HR professionals to be more connected with the company staff no matter where they are located and more informed about the needs and expectations of the employees abroad. These technological advancements have broken down barriers of time zones and physical distance, enabling real-time interactions and fostering cross-cultural collaboration (Brewster, Mayrhofer, Farndale 2012). Video conferencing, instant messaging, and project management tools have become essential components for the work of the international companies. These technologies enable real-time communication, fostering effective collaboration, knowledge exchange, and decision-making across borders. As companies increasingly rely on global teams to drive innovation and

execute strategic initiatives, technology-driven collaboration has become a vital asset for achieving organizational goals. These trends were present in the business world but they were really fostered by the COVID-19 pandemic when suddenly the whole world was locked down at home and the only way of doing business and communicating with people was by using technology.

On the other hand, technology is not only for recruiting employees. The dynamic nature of business requires employees to continuously acquire and develop new skills and knowledge. In this sense, technology has played a crucial role in changing the way employees learn and develop. E-learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital training modules have almost entirely replaced traditional learning methods. Nowadays employees can access different training materials and personalized courses from anywhere in the world, thus facilitating continuous skill enhancement and knowledge sharing among the company's staff in offices all around the world. This approach also saves a lot of time and costs both for employees and the companies. The employees could reach the training materials whenever they have time for that and the companies do not have to pay for educators or for missing people that have gone to different courses.

3. GIG economy and the International human resource management

Thanks to the technology development nowadays we see a new branch in the economy and in the international human resource management called GIG economy. This economy is modification of the standard labor market where "workers contract with organizations for short-term engagements, selling their skills, capabilities and time directly to businesses on an "as needed" basis" (KPMG 2019). Stimulated by technology developments, the GIG economy has changed traditional models on the labour market, offering workers and businesses unprecedented opportunities (Harpur, Blanck 2020). This newly born modification of the labour market has seen incredible growth over the past decade, mostly because of the technology development. Mobile applications, online platforms, and the internet have connected freelancers, independent contractors, and small businesses with clients and customers worldwide (Graham et al. 2017). This digital infrastructure has created new possibilities for remote work, enabling individuals to provide services, sell products, or complete tasks from the comfort of their homes (Eckhardt, Houston, et.al. 2019).

One of the main characteristics of the GIG economy is the high degree of flexibility, with self-employed workers often engaging in project-based work for multiple clients using digital labor platforms such as Upwork and Freelancer.com which allow them to connect with clients and bid on projects in real-time (Meijerink, Keegan, Bondarouk 2021). In this sense one of the main challenges for HR professionals is the necessity to know and coordinate complex international legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure compliance with labor laws. Another

challenge is the fact that this new type of employees are less committed to a particular organization than traditional employees and the HR specialists must find the right way to motivate them. On other hand these platforms could be very useful for the companies to find talents more efficiently, reducing the time and cost associated with traditional recruitment methods (Kuhn, Meijerink, Keegan 2021). Another advantage from business viewpoint might be that the companies will not have to allocate time and money for staff management and training but they will just hire the necessary skills. The workers engaged in the GIG economy face one particular challenge namely the possibility to be treated unfairly and inequitably in comparison with the company's employees (Lustig et al. 2020).

Despite the above mentioned disadvantages for the participants in the GIG economy it is absolutely sure that this model will continue to grow and develop just like the technologies will continue to advance and change our lives.

4. Digital Nomads as part of International Human Resource Management

Another interesting phenomenon resulting from technological advancements is the so-called “digital nomads”. This considerably new trend, dating from the past 10 – 15 years, represents quite a different work style from the traditional one that allows the workers to do their job remotely from any location all around the world. Digital nomads, equipped with technological advancements, have become part of the international workforce and the international companies have to pay them the necessary attention. However, these employees, similar to the GIG workers, present both opportunities and challenges for the human resource management departments in the international organizations.

There are different definitions of digital nomads. According to Hermann and Paris (2020), digital nomads use telecommunications and digital technology to work remotely and lead a nomadic lifestyle, typically travelling and living in different locations while performing their tasks. They leverage technology to stay connected with their employers, clients, or businesses, allowing them to work from various destinations worldwide. According to another view, digital nomadism refers to a modern work lifestyle where individuals can choose their work environment, often moving between multiple locations, and relying on digital technology to conduct their work. These nomadic professionals may work from coworking spaces, coffee shops, or even remote areas while maintaining their productivity and online presence (Verhoef et al. 2021). Digital Nomads are a growing community of individuals who embrace remote work opportunities and use digital tools to stay connected and productive while travelling and exploring the world. They often seek a balanced lifestyle that allows them to combine work and leisure, taking advantage of flexible work arrangements and the possibilities provided by modern technology (Giannikis, Mihail 2011).

Some of the main characteristics of the digital nomads include (Lim V., <https://nomadsworld.com/digital-nomads/>):

- Constantly changing the location – digital nomads constantly move from one place to another and that is one of the main features that determines them. They do have homes and families but they prefer to travel most of the time and go back home not more than a couple of months throughout the year;

- Avoiding attachments – something typical for these type of people is that they prefer not to be connected for long time to people or places as every attachment would mean longer stay at on location and rearranging of the lifestyle;

- Love for travelling – this actually is the guiding light of the digital nomads. They really love to travel and visit new places, try new things, meet new people, and taste new food.

Other views on digital nomads divide them into different groups depending on their desire to travel (Hanonen 2020). Digital nomads are categorized by Reichenberger (2017) as flexible employees who do not include travel, extensive travelers who have a permanent address, and lifestyle movers who do not have a permanent location. Toussaint (2009) also views three categories of digital nomads: business employees who travel the world and manage their business from different places, and the only condition is to have a living environment that serves their business needs; constant travelers who live as simply as possible; independent workers who are in love with travelling.

The emergence of this type of employees with the specificities described above actually provides both opportunities and challenges to the international human resource management. These are people that offer specific skills and know-how thus leading to enhanced creativity and innovation for the companies. They also provide the companies the opportunity to hire people located in different parts of the world by saving from office space and all other costs related to applying the traditional hiring approach. On the other hand managing digital nomads presents specific challenges for the international HR teams. They need to tailor the different company policies that accommodate the unique lifestyle and work preference of digital nomads. Maintaining a sense of organizational belonging and culture among digital nomads is another critical challenge. HR managers need to invest in virtual team-building activities, cross-cultural training, and continuous feedback mechanisms to strengthen the bonds among remote workers. Another critical issue is related to the data security and privacy. Remote work arrangements may raise data security concerns. Implementing robust data protection measures and providing cybersecurity training are essential for safeguarding sensitive organizational information.

5. The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on International human resource management

In 2020, the world faced an unexpected and unimaginable situation in the face of a virus disease. The 2009 H1N1 pandemic forced the health authorities and

organizations all around the world to review and update their infectious diseases protocols and yet this situation caught the world unprepared for the magnitude of this pandemic (Valcheva 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic affected all levels of society, including how companies manage their employees domestically and internationally. Thanks to the already existing technologies, the pandemic impact was considerably governed in most of the economic sectors all around the world. This includes also International Human Resource Management, which had to become more flexible and more directed to the needs of the employees, their well-being, the remote work, cross-border mobility, talent management, and company culture. When the pandemic was first announced suddenly life stopped. Governments worldwide imposed lockdowns and social distancing measures and for a while the whole business world was frozen. The only business activities were made by the IT companies which even before the pandemic had introduced work from home benefits for their employees. But when the pandemic hit the world then the companies had to think about transitioning to remote work models to ensure employee safety and at the same time to continue existing on the business map (Beilsten et al. 2021). This situation actually influenced greatly the international human resource management specialists as they had to think of ways to change the way the employees were working and to introduce the remote work as fast and easy as possible and at the same time to solve the numerous challenges related to providing the employees with necessary technology, managing remote teams, and addressing employee well-being concerns related to social isolation, and uncertainty. Flexible work hours, virtual team-building activities, and mental health support became essential components of the international human resource management strategies (Griffith et al. 2023). Remote work has become increasingly common in recent years but the sudden and widespread shift to remote work during the pandemic has highlighted the need for companies to adapt their work mode to support remote workers and this had to be done by the human resource management departments. Wang et al. (2021) outline several key factors that contribute to effective remote work. These include clear communication and expectations, access to necessary resources and technology, opportunities for social interaction and collaboration, and a supportive organizational culture. One of the main tasks of the international human resource management specialists in the companies during the pandemic was to establish clear communication channels and expectations as the employees that were remote working felt isolated or disconnected from their colleagues. This could be done thanks to the technology developments and introduction of different software programs. Another important issue is related to establishment of supportive organizational culture which again is a task of the international human resource management specialists. In the international companies, even in “normal” times it is quite difficult to establish and maintain appropriate and supportive organizational culture for all international employees and in the COVID-19 pandemic this task is

even harder. During this period the remote workers faced unique challenges, such as difficulty separating work and personal life, and the appropriate organizational culture was one of the main tools for mitigating these challenges (Wang et al. 2021). Digital communication tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Skype played a crucial role in fostering employee engagement and facilitating cross-team collaboration. Regular virtual meetings, constant online communication between the employees and their direct manager as well as the human resource department using different applications like Zoom, Viber or Teams, even virtual coffee-breaks with colleagues allowed employees to stay connected and informed (Kicheva 2022). However, the absence of face-to-face interactions posed challenges in nurturing a sense of belonging to the company and its values.

Discussion

While technology has offered numerous benefits to international human resource management, it also poses challenges and ethical considerations. The use of different technologies and artificial intelligence improved a lot of business processes, but it also raised concerns about their influence on employment, job security, and quality of work. Ogunyemi (2014) claims that ethical considerations should lead companies adopting and implementing technologies that eliminate firm boundaries, especially if the enterprise is interested to be sustainable and responsible, not only to improve its financial indicators. This means that companies need to take into account the impact of new technologies on their employees, customers, and other stakeholders, and ensure that they are not being unfairly exploited or harmed in any way. The reliance on digital recruitment platforms may inadvertently perpetuate bias in hiring processes if algorithms are not carefully designed and monitored. IHRM professionals must ensure that the use of technology in talent acquisition is fair and free from discriminatory practices (Hunkenschroer, Kriebitz 2023).

Additionally, the transition to remote work and virtual teams may present cultural challenges and communication barriers. Cultivating a shared organizational culture and fostering team cohesion in a digital environment require thoughtful HR interventions and cross-cultural training (Morrison-Smith, Ruiz 2020).

Conclusion

Technology has become an integral part of the International Human Resource Management. From talent acquisition to employee development, from virtual collaboration to data-driven decision-making, technology-driven solutions have redefined the way companies manage their international workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the power of technology and its influence and presence in every sector of the economy. From remote work and employee well-being to talent management and organizational culture, the pandemic forced companies to adapt and innovate in response to unimaginable challenges. This situation influenced

also the work of the international human resource management specialists as they had to react fast and to tailor their strategies and working mode to the specific situation where all employees were working remotely. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that the technologies were slowly reshaping the work of the international HR specialist long before the pandemic. Digital nomads for example have been a phenomenon in the past 10 years or so and it requires HR managers to recognize the unique needs of these employees, tailor the HR policies accordingly, and invest in fostering a sense of community and belonging in this specific type of employees. Another interesting result from the technology development is the GIG economy and the specific type of employees this economy produces. The freelance experts who work mostly on a project base and are not part of one company or another are employees that require specific approaches, knowledge and skills from the human resource managers. Today the COVID-19 virus has become more manageable and the world is slowly going back to the old lifestyle but this is not the case for the employees. No matter the desire and efforts of the companies' top management to return the employees in the offices, the remote and hybrid way of work will be something very common in the future. Therefore, companies must focus on building a resilient and adaptive workforce, nurturing a culture of inclusivity and well-being, and using technology to enable seamless collaboration in a hybrid work environment. All these issues lay mainly in the international human resource management department's responsibilities. Nevertheless, international human resource management professionals must remain mindful of the ethical implications of technology in talent acquisition and consider the cultural challenges in managing remote international teams. By using technology responsibly and embracing its potential, companies can create an international workforce that drives innovation, collaboration, and success in an increasingly digital world.

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