



The search for global competence: From international HR to talent management[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This article describes the evolution of the search for global competence through a 50-year content analysis and review of published research in the field of International HR Management (IHRM), and more recently, Talent Management (TM), with special emphasis on the *Journal of World Business*. We present a detailed examination of the IHRM/TM content of the *Journal of World Business* from its inception in 1965 through 2014. To put the results of that review into perspective, we review key themes in global business and strategy from 1965 to the present, noting where IHRM/TM research and business trends correspond, diverge, and lag. Next, we present a brief history of IHRM and TM, showing how the emerging theme of TM offers challenges and promise for connecting future IHRM/TM research with emerging business, strategy, and social trends. We conclude with the implications of our findings for future research, and the importance of the search for global competence.

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“A new role for business is beginning to take shape as a consequence of far-reaching changes in the structure of world commerce . . . at a far faster pace than is sometimes realized, great trading companies, with home offices in many advanced nations, are becoming what has come to be known as multinational organizations . . . This is a powerful unifying influence in the affairs of mankind that has not yet been fully recognized, but which must inevitably make itself more felt in the years to come . . . The multinational company thereby becomes a major vehicle to carry the have-nots toward ‘takeoff’ and the haves into frontier fields.” Courtney C. Brown, Editor, *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 1966.

The celebration of unified multinational organizations (including corporations, but also governments and non-governmental organizations) as the vehicle toward economic prosperity for the “have-nots” and even greater growth for the “haves” contrasts a bit with a more recent prediction for the future in the 21st century. “New competitors are coming from many countries across the world and in numbers that far outpace those of past decades. This

new wave will be far tougher on some established multinationals. The shift in the weight of the global economy toward emerging markets, and the emergence of nearly two billion consumers who, for the first time, will have incomes to support significant discretionary spending, should create a new breed of powerful companies whose global expansion will take place on the back of strong positions in their home markets” (Dobbs, Ramaswamy, Stephenson, & Viguerie, 2014).

Throughout it all, writers have recognized the importance of talent, including all the human and organizational elements that are pivotal to enterprise success, and the pivotalness of leadership that recognizes the human touch: “Executives will be able to make the biggest difference through the human touch . . . asking the right questions of the right people at the right times . . . inspiring the troops, empathizing with customers, [and] developing talent . . . tolerating ambiguity, synthesizing information, and focusing on the ‘softer’ side of management to engage the organization and build its capacity for self-renewal” (Dewhurst & Willmott, 2014, p. 2, 7).

Underlying the evolution of global business, this human touch takes the form of a search for global competence – managerial, cultural, and operational. Global competence is embedded in organizational talent and the systems and leadership that organize and deploy it, but it is increasingly embedded within a workforce that lies beyond the familiar boundaries of regular full-time employment, and is empowered by technologies, platforms, and connectedness that could hardly be dreamt of in the 1960s. The

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search for global competence is a race with no finish line, but instead, it is one with many hurdles and benchmarks.

This article describes the evolution of the search for global competence through a unique lens: a 50-year content analysis and review of published research in the field of International HR Management (IHRM), and more recently, Talent Management (TM), with special emphasis on the *Journal of World Business* (known as the *Columbia Journal of World Business* from 1965 to 1996).

The article is structured as follows. We begin by examining the IHRM/TM content of the *Journal of World Business* from its inception in 1965–2014. We will describe the relative emphasis on IHRM/TM topical areas, as well as changes in them, as reflected in ten 5-year blocks from 1965 to 2014. To put the findings of that review into perspective, we then identify key themes in published work on global business, strategy, and society from 1965 to the present, and show how the results of our 50-year review correspond or do not correspond to those global trends. We then present a brief history of IHRM and the recent emergence of TM, and note the challenges and opportunities of this evolution for enhancing IHRM/TM research, and its relevance to broader trends. We conclude with a discussion of the research implications of our findings with respect to current and emerging trends in business as well as in IHRM/TM. Let us now turn to our central empirical question, the trends and evolution of research as embodied in the 50-year history of the *Journal of World Business*.

1. Methodology

We used content analysis, a method that converts qualitative material into quantitative material that subsequently can be analyzed, subject to the limitations of nominal-level measurement (Aguinis, Henle, & Ostroff, 2001). More specifically, our data-collection procedure consisted of reviewing every article published in every issue of the *Journal of World Business* (from 1965 to 1996 known as the *Columbia Journal of World Business*) between the inaugural issue in 1965 and the final issue of 2014 on the basis of its content. In total, we reviewed 2444 articles that were published during that 50-year span. At a general level, our objective was to identify every article that was relevant to the broad domain of international human resource management, defined earlier as the study and application of all HR management activities as they impact the process of managing people in enterprises in the global environment (Tarique, Briscoe, & Schuler, 2015). A total of 358 of the 2444 published articles, 14.6 percent, addressed IHRM topics. Thus, this field is clearly not the dominant focus of the journal, as would be expected for a journal designed to reflect the full array of global business research. To appreciate the trends of other articles published in the *Journal of World Business* over the same time period, see, for example, the following articles in this Special Issue: Hitt, Li, and Xu on international strategy; Knight and Liesch on internationalization and entry mode; Beamish and Lupton on cooperative strategies in international business and management; and Anderssen, Dasi, Mudambi, and Pedersen on technology, innovation, and international connectivity.

The 50-year period from 1965 to 2014 spans five decades; for most researchers that is longer than their entire professional careers. Assuming a 5-year graduate training period, 50 years spans ten cohorts of new scholars and practitioners in the field who contributed to the published literature, and thus it is important to assess the aggregate nature of changes in that literature.

1.1. Taxonomy for classifying articles

To provide a systematic basis for content coding each article, we initially developed a taxonomy that included 9 broad categories,

which we expanded subsequently to include a total of 21 categories (plus two additional ones to account for various dimensions of authorship). The final version of the taxonomy, plus definitions of each category, which we used to code all the articles, is contained in Appendix A. We developed the taxonomy in an iterative fashion. We began by identifying key themes, as reflected in review articles and textbooks that described the field of international human resource management. We then pilot tested several early versions of the taxonomy by content coding the first 20 years of articles published in the journal. The pilot test revealed the need for a more refined classification scheme to cover the broad range of topics in the field of IHRM.

The inclusion of the full range of 21 subcategories shown in Appendix A resulted in a content-coding scheme that provided complete coverage of all articles in the 20 years that comprised the pilot test. We then applied the taxonomy to all other years of published articles.

Like any other taxonomy that is created inductively, we cannot say unequivocally that this is the only possible taxonomy. We can say, however, that it is sufficiently comprehensive to classify each of the 358 IHRM articles included in our review. Also, it is important to note that the comparison of publication trends with broader business trends involves the inevitable task of trying to map categories from one area onto the other. This can be challenging, especially when the terms used by academics and practitioners do not always overlap.

1.2. Time blocks

Although the coding of the articles was done year by year, we aggregated the results on the basis of 5-year time blocks, resulting in the following ten time periods: (a) 1965–1969, (b) 1970–1974, (c) 1975–1979, (d) 1980–1984, (e) 1985–1989, (f) 1990–1994, (g) 1995–1999, (h) 2000–2004, (i) 2005–2009, and (j) 2010–2014. Five-year time blocks are arbitrary, but they represent a smoothing technique that is more likely to reveal underlying trends. As we noted earlier, they also generally represent a complete period of doctoral training. Examination of content categories on a yearly basis creates noise, or illusory trends, that tends to be clarified over longer time periods.

2. Results

Two individuals independently categorized 120 articles using our taxonomy, the first author's research assistant at the University of Colorado Denver, a second-year graduate student, and a librarian at the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. Of the 120 articles, the two raters agreed on the categorization of 107 of them, for an 89 percent level of agreement. Of the remaining 13 articles, there was no single category that accounted for the bulk of the disagreements. The two most common areas of disagreement were "management practices" and "training, development, and learning".

We found the following numbers of IHRM-related articles, the total number of articles, and the percentage of IHRM-related articles for each of the 10 selected time blocks:

1965–1969, 20/301 Articles (6.64%)	1990–1994, 12/244 Articles (4.92%)
1970–1974, 38/369 Articles (10.3%)	1995–1999, 32/154 Articles (20.78%)
1975–1979, 34/264 Articles (12.88%)	2000–2004, 45/150 Articles (30%)
1980–1984, 22/222 Articles (9.91%)	2005–2009, 40/207 Articles (19.32%)
1985–1989, 21/252 Articles (8.33%)	2010–2014, 95/308 Articles (30.84%)

With the exception of the 1990–1994 and 2010–2014 time frames, the number of IHRM-related articles published every five years by the *Journal of World Business* varies from 20 to 45, or roughly 4–9 per year. From 2010 through 2014, however, the

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