



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Journal of World Business

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jwb](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jwb)

## New perspectives on human resource management in a global context



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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Available online 31 October 2015

## ABSTRACT

In the past three decades or so, globalization/regionalization, migration and reverse migration (also referred to as “brain circulation”), the ascendancy of emerging markets, the demand for people with a global mindset, and the worldwide war for talent have brought about fundamental changes to the nature, magnitude, and *raison d’être* for human resource management (HRM) in a global context. These changes require us to adopt new lenses to fully understand the dynamics that impact international human resource management (IHRM) policies and practices. This paper presents new perspectives on IHRM as they relate to research on multicultural teams under the three dimensions of diversity (separation, variety, and disparity) posited by Harrison and Klein (2007), and brain circulation in the context of movement of peoples across countries. These perspectives go toward the traditional approach of studying expatriates, whether company-sponsored or self-initiated assignments. The paper discusses how these new perspectives can set the agenda for future research on IHRM.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the publication of my 1981 article, “Selection and training of personnel for overseas assignments”, in the *Columbia Journal of World Business* (now known as the *Journal of World Business*, *JWB* in short), most countries around the world have embarked on the inexorable path toward globalization or regionalization.<sup>1</sup> A major consequence of globalization is global mobility where the movement of people across international boundaries, whether temporary or permanent, has become a common phenomenon.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *JWB*, this paper will first present a brief overview of how HRM in the context of global mobility has changed since 1981, albeit some aspects have evolved more slowly than others. The paper will then examine the changes and challenges in the international human resource management context, particularly in light of the global war for talent and brain circulation, that render the need for fresh perspectives to better understand the evolving phenomenon of HRM policies and practices. Finally, the paper will elaborate on

these new perspectives in terms of their implications for research and practice.

## 2. Overview – From MNC-sponsored expatriation to global war for talent

My 1981 paper (Tung, 1981) is generally recognized as the first systematic attempt to understand the reasons for expatriate failure among U.S. multinationals (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2013). My study of U.S. multinationals was followed by a succession of studies on European, Japanese and Australian multinationals to compare and contrast selection policies and training programs from major source countries of expatriation (Tung, 1982, 1984). Through a critical analysis of studies published on the subject, Harzing (1995) traced how my 1981 publication has inspired many subsequent studies of expatriate failure and ways for remedying the situation. These subsequent studies (see, for example, Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Torbiorn, 1982), in turn, spawned an exponential growth in interest on different aspects of expatriate assignments – selection, training, compensation, performance appraisal, etc. – to catapult the subject to become one of the most widely researched topics in the field of international human resource management.

In the three decades since my 1981 article, we have learned a lot about the experience of expatriates from countries, both developed and emerging markets, including but not limited to the following: The reduced incidence of American expatriate failure abroad

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<sup>1</sup> Some researchers, such as the late Alan Rugman, have asserted that regionalization is a more accurate characterization of developments in most parts of the world. In this paper, I will not go into the debate of globalization versus regionalization. Rather, the assertion here is that most countries in the world are engaged with other countries, whether on a regional or global basis.