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15 January 2019

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/91876/>

MPRA Paper No. 91876, posted 12 Feb 2019 09:48 UTC

# Managing Small Business Human Resources: An International Approach

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January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019

# Managing Small Business Human Resources: An International Approach

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## Abstract

While much of our knowledge concerning traditional HR topics (e.g., recruiting, compensation, or performance management) in large firms may also apply in small or emerging organizations, evidence suggests that new ventures are different and that management of people within them may not clearly map to management within larger, more established organizations. This paper reviews extant research on managing people within small and emerging ventures and highlights additional questions that have not yet been addressed. Our review suggests that as scholars, our understanding of the HR issues important to small and emerging firms is limited. While we have begun to understand how these firms should hire, reward, and perhaps even motivate their employees, we lack much of the theory and data necessary to understand how small and emerging firms train their employees, manage their performance, promote or handle organizational change, or respond to potential labor relations and political issues. The existing literature presents an often-confounded relationship between size and age, between the issues important to small firms and the issues important to young ones. Given the potential early HR decisions must impact the organization's downstream success, it is important that we understand how these functional areas of HR (as well as their integration and evolution) affect small and emerging firms, and how the HR decisions made during the formative stages of firm development impact the firm's long-term goals.

### **Keywords**

Emerging Small Business, ethical, Sustainable, Performance Management, entrepreneurial model.

### **Introduction**

The HR literature has been abundant in providing typologies of the roles of HR professionals in organizations. These typologies have focused primarily on the strategic involvement of HR departments, the management of change and organizational culture, the relationship between employer and employee, and transactional personnel administration (see, for example: Caldwell, 2003; Guest, 1990; Legge, 1978; Monks, 1992; Paauwe, 2004; Storey, 1992; Tyson & Fell, 1986; Ulrich, 1997). More recently we have also seen increased attention paid to HR roles in the more knowledge-based economy, identifying the importance of context in the interpretation of role typologies (see, for example: Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003). The different roles chart the progression of the HR profession over time. In this paper we focus on the question: what roles can be identified for the current day HR department in the context of increasing globalization of the corporate domain? Very often the boundaries of organizations are not limited anymore to the domestic setting. Crossing borders has become normal, which gives rise to the issue of HRM in multinational settings and how the HR function and related roles manifest themselves at the various plant, country, regional and corporate levels. How issues of coordination, shared learning (both top-down and bottom-up) and standardization versus leeway for adapting to the local context (customization) become critical in this context.

As a result of this international environment, several new roles of HR departments operating in multinational corporations are emerging based on different HRM strategies for internationalization

Managing Small Business Human Resources: An International Approach, 2019 (Taylor, et al., 1996). At the corporate HR level, these focus on designing and monitoring the implementation of corporate HR policies especially for the company's top management and expatriates. These activities require new roles such as "effective influencer" (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001: 1260), "network leadership" and "process champion" (Evans, et al., 2002: 471-2), "constructive fighting" (ibid: 487), "guardian of culture" (Sparrow, et al., 2003: 27) and "knowledge management champion" (ibid: 24).

Before exploring further what these roles entail, this paper first outlines existing typologies of HR department roles, exploring their association with the period in which they were devised. The modern-day context of multinational organizations operating in a global market is then considered. Subsequently, the emerging roles of HR departments in such organizations are highlighted. We then present the results of six in-depth case studies of multinational corporations designed to identify the activities of corporate HR departments, and the processes through which these activities are designed, developed and implemented. Conclusions are then drawn in terms of a contextually-based model for HR departments within multinational corporations.

## **HR Department Roles in Context**

There are multiple typologies of HR department roles in the literature which consider the extent to which departments are either reactive or proactive – for example, Legge's (1978) conformist or deviant innovator roles – and the level of involvement in corporate strategy – such as Tyson and Fell's (1986) architect (strategic), contracts manager (operational) and clerk of works (administrative) roles, later modified by Monks (1992) to include a fourth innovative/professional

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role which falls between the contracts manager and architect roles – and those that combine the two dimensions – for example, Storey's (1992) change-makers (proactive, strategic), advisers (reactive, strategic), regulators (proactive, operational) and handmaidens (reactive, operational). Guest (1990) also included the unitarist/pluralist and conservative/traditional dimensions in his model of HRM roles, whilst Ulrich (1997) focuses on the people/process and future/operational dimensions of the HR role: strategic partner (future/process), change agent (future/people), administrative expert (operational/process) and employee champion (operational/people). We must consider the relevance of context to the creation of these role typologies. In addition to considering the content of the roles, the typology of HR department roles presented by Monks (1992) suggests that in stable environments, a simple model of HRM practice will suffice.

It is only in complex organizations particularly undergoing substantial change where a more sophisticated approach to practice is required. Other commentators support this linkage between the nature of HRM practices and the needs of the organizational context (Carroll, 1991; Guest, 1991). Indeed, the typologies themselves show the range of roles which HR has developed in a historical context. The initial role of a focus on employee welfare, and increasingly a means of controlling employee absence, developed into the bureaucratic element of the HR role we see today. The rise of the power of trade unions at local company level resulted in the negotiator role, which has since declined again in line with further changes in the industrial relations context. In the 1980s, the rise of HRM turned attention to the strategic role of HR and its role in helping organizations manage change as the business environment became more competitive. Recently, Caldwell (2003) has also suggested a review of the models proposed by Storey (1992) and Ulrich (1997). He suggests that advisory roles offer no more to HR practitioners than a consultancy role

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lacking in real influence, administrative resource and power. The 'handmaiden' or service provider role has become synonymous with cost efficiency issues and outsourcing.

The regulator role is in decline due to the changes in the employee relations' environment, however it is also rising in importance due to increasing employment legislation. Finally, the change agent role is the one perceived by HR practitioners most often as being their new role, although in practice this is not necessarily being recognized. The HR department has been shown to be unlikely to initiate organizational change, although they are frequently invited to comment on the human resource implications of planned change at board level (Evans & Cowling, 1985; Hiltrop, et al., 1995; Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994). Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall (2002) introduce four new roles for HR, which may be interesting to consider in the global economy context, based on what they describe as the knowledge economy in which many organizations are now working:

- (a) human capital steward: acting as a guide and facilitator in partnership with employees with the aim of achieving the highest return possible on a company's human capital investments;
- (b) knowledge facilitator: facilitating both knowledge capital (held in explicit and implicit sources) and knowledge flows;
- (c) relationship builder: managing relationships between individuals and groups both internal and external to the organization to enhance social capital across the total value chain; and
- (d) rapid deployment specialist: taking responsibility for the development of flexible human capital resources with an emphasis on adaptability, tolerance and capacity to learn.

## **Internationalization Strategies**

Multinational organizations have varying reasons for global expansion, largely aiming to increase competitive advantage by realizing economies of scale or economies of scope (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 2004). There are however stages in the process of internationalization, and choices in the strategies and related structures adopted by MNCs. The range of MNC subsidiary strategies are described in Perlmutter's (1969) and Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) well-known classifications:

- ethnocentric, global strategy: control is centralized and subsidiaries resemble the parent company;
- polycentric, multi-domestic strategy: control is decentralized and subsidiaries conform to local practices;
- geocentric (or egocentric as added by Perlmutter & Heenan, 1974), transnational strategy: subsidiaries and headquarters alike adhere to worldwide (or regional) standards as part of the organizational network.

### **International HR strategies**

As we have seen, the MNC is based in a context, and as such it has an HRM heritage based on the resources and competencies available at head office and subsidiary levels. This HRM competence can be considered as context specific or context generalizable, depending on its usefulness outside the location in which it was developed (Taylor, et al., 1996). Based on this usefulness, there is a choice to be made by top management on the approach to the design of the overall international

### **HRM system:**

- adaptive: low internal consistency with the rest of the firm and high external consistency with the local environment – little transfer of practices;

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- extortive: high integration of subsidiary HRM systems across the company– replicating practices developed at head office;
- integrative: substantial global integration with an allowance for some local differentiation – two-way transfer of HRM practices between head office and subsidiaries.

This choice of HRM strategy is largely dependent on the internationalization strategy adopted by the firm discussed earlier: • multi-domestic: subsidiaries are seen as an independent business therefore the adaptive approach to HRM systems is most appropriate; • global: subsidiaries are managed as dependent businesses, therefore an extortive approach to HRM systems is most appropriate; • transnational: subsidiaries are managed as interdependent businesses, therefore an integrative approach to HRM systems is most appropriate.

For firms starting the internationalization process, or those changing from a multidomestic to a trans-national strategy, the demands for internal consistency will generally outweigh the demands for local responsiveness. The context generalizability of HRM systems will therefore change over time as the company, top management and the HRM systems themselves change (Taylor, et al., 1996).

If we consider the variation of cultural and business system environments in which MNCs operate, there is also likely to be a tendency to take an extortive approach to HRM systems where there is the highest degree of similarity between the head office and the subsidiary's environment. Equally, this will be the case where the most dependency exists between the subsidiary and HQ in order to maintain control over a critical resource within the company (Taylor, et al., 1996). This means that

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the HRM strategy adopted may not be the same for all subsidiaries in a firm – HQ may wish to be more extortive or more adaptive with some subsidiaries than others based on the many factors discussed here. Likewise, when a greenfield-site operation is established, it is most likely that HQ will export its HRM practices, and possibly senior managers, to set up the operation. Over time, this dependency relationship may change and a more adaptive or integrative approach to HRM may be adopted.

Ultimately, there is a fundamental goal for HR to achieve a balance between centralized control of international HRM strategy and responsiveness to local circumstances. Evans and colleagues (2002: 465) suggest that there are three approaches to achieving this aim: centralization, coordination and decentralization. Centralization refers to focusing on activities carried out at global level, and decentralization on activities carried out at local subsidiary level. Coordination refers to a middle ground, balancing those activities that would best be undertaken by local subsidiaries with those managed by global or regional centers. This is dependent on the degree of integration or differentiation desired (Ulrich 1997). Earlier research showed that the role of HR departments in multidivisional companies was more ambiguous as a result of increasing decentralization (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994). The corporate HR department was often small, with a minor controlling role through a limited number of high-level employment policies. More recently, a trend towards re-centralization has been observed (Arkin, 1999) and global companies operating in a large number of countries have been shown to have a high degree of co-ordination and integration of their international operations and have large well-resourced corporate HR departments (Scullion & Starkey, 2000). However, in research by Kelly (2001), irrespective of a centralization or decentralization strategy, all MNC subsidiaries surveyed were found to exercise

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some degree of autonomy in formulating their own HR policies but may require head office permission for significant developments involving major expenditure. Local subsidiaries were found to develop proactively strategic proposals and persuade head office to adopt these, as well as the corporate head office looking to subsidiaries to learn new ideas and fill gaps in corporate policies (ibid.: 555).

International HR roles in general, there has been limited attention paid to the role of the corporate HR function (Scullion & Starkey, 2000: 1061) and it has been assumed to be relatively weak given the literature on board membership which emphasizes that HR is not typically a key player in the development of corporate strategy (Hunt & Boxall, 1998:770). There is also the danger that the HR function is not perceived as a full partner in the globalization process due to the burden of bureaucratic central procedures and ethnocentric and parochial HR systems and policies (Evans, et al., 2002: 465). However, the rapid pace of internationalization and globalization is argued to lead to a more strategic and influential role for the HR department (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001; Scullion & Starkey, 2000). There are several activities of the corporate HR department in the international MNC context discernable. These focus particularly on high-grade management positions and high potential staff worldwide, managing issues such as employer branding, talent development, performance management, project team-working, and rewards and succession planning to develop a cadre of international managers (Kelly, 2001; Novicevic & Harvey, 2001; Scullion & Starkey, 2000; Sparrow, et al., 2003).

Organizations often operate with a centralized policy for top managers and high potentials, but a more decentralized policy for other employees (Scullion & Starkey, 2000). These centralized

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activities are seen as a major determinant of international business success or failure (Stroh & Caligiuri, 1988), and as such provide an arena for HR involvement in corporate strategy formulation and implementation (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001). Corporate HR can also play a significant role in monitoring the implementation of corporate HR policies throughout overseas subsidiaries (Kelly, 2001: 543). HR can thus become “champions of processes” (Evans, et al., 2002: 472), building the commitment of top management, providing training for managers, and monitoring these processes. Equally, HR has a social responsibility to ensure future leaders are sensitive to and equipped to deal with global challenges. This creates a new role for HR as ‘guardian of culture’, overseeing the implementation of global values and systems (Sparrow, et al., 2003).

The extent of decentralization of the organisation structure impacts on the uptake of these activities. Decentralized companies (most popular in 1980s) have a smaller corporate head office, hence a limited number of corporate HR executives with a more limited range of activities, but still with the primary focus on an elite set of top management and expatriates (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994; Scullion & Starkey, 2000). The result is less of a strategic role for HR and more reliance on informal and subtle management processes. Particularly in this environment, but also in centralized organizations, there is thus a need for HR to become an “effective political influencer” (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001: 1260) to be able to manage the internal labor market for global managers. Network leadership is a further requirement for HR: having an awareness of leading edge trends and developments (being well networked internally and externally), the ability to mobilize the appropriate resources (bringing people together to work in project teams), and a sense of timing

Managing Small Business Human Resources: An International Approach, 2019 and context (sensitivity to what is going on at both local and global levels) (Evans, et al., 2002: 471).

The stage of internationalization also influences the required HR role. Evans and colleagues (2002) suggest three progressive stages of HR roles: the builder - building appropriate HRM basics at the start of the internationalization process; the change partner - realigning HRM to meet the needs of the changing external environment as the company increases its overseas operations; and the navigator - developing the capabilities of the organisation and its people, managing the balance between short-term and long-term, global integration and local responsiveness, change and continuity in the global environment.

The complexity of the corporate HR role thus increases as a company moves closer towards an integrative HR strategy. Fundamental to HR being able to carry out these roles and activities is the departments own level of expertise. Should an extortive or integrative approach to HRM systems be desired, the actual transfer of HRM systems can only occur when sufficient mechanisms are put in place (Taylor, et al., 1996). Appropriate mechanisms include regional/global meetings of subsidiary HR directors, the transfer of HRM materials and tools, and the mobility of HR directors between the HQ and subsidiaries. HR excellence and knowledge transfer are thus essential factors in HR globalization efforts (Sparrow, et al., 2003). Global knowledge transfer is coordinated through creating global centers of HR excellence as forms of knowledge networks, facilitated by the choice of the most effective technological platforms and agreement about the content of knowledge to be shared. This global horizontal and vertical networking is critical to sharing information about both local conditions and best practices.

Reflecting on the above range of HR roles and typologies and the contextual factors having an impact, there is a pressing need to supplement this theorizing with empirical data on how the HR function at different levels manifests itself in an increasingly international business setting, and how it is involved in sharing and coordinating HR knowledge. To explore this further, we do not focus here on how HR managers see themselves in respect to the typologies and roles; instead, we focus on how HR managers at different levels are involved in initiating, implementing and coordinating HR policies and practices. Based on these insights and analyses, we can identify the different roles at the various corporate, regional, national and local/plant levels and the varying degree of involvement in sharing knowledge and coordinating HRM activities. Based on the explorative nature of this study, in-depth case-study research has been carried out among MNCs displaying wide variation in degrees of internationalization and the related strategies.

### **Methodology**

So the way in which HR practices come into being and how they are implemented can help us understand further these corporate HR roles that are being identified. To explore this further, a series of in-depth case studies in multinational firms has been undertaken. The cases reported here form part of a larger study of nineteen multinational corporations from across the globe (including well-known brands in engineering, financial services, aerospace, telecommunications, utilities, information technology, electronics, FMCG, automotive, and petrochemical industries). The study has been funded commercially, designed to explore HR-functional excellence in MNCs, and is a collaborative research project between four universities based in the USA, Asia, UK and continental Europe. This paper draws on the continental European sub-sample from this larger

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study. During the period September to December 2004, interviews were held with 65 interviewees in six multinationals based in eight countries across Europe. A multiple respondent approach was adopted, including interviews with 40 HR professionals and 25 senior executives and line managers. 16 of the interviews were carried out at corporate headquarters, 36 at either country or divisional head office level, and 13 at plant level within a specific business division. The majority of interviews were carried out face-to-face, with only around five being conducted by telephone due to time restrictions. Two interviewers were present at each interview, and where permitted the interview was recorded. The content of the interviews has been summarized in individual case studies, which were checked for accuracy by all the companies involved. The interviews were semi-structured, based on a schedule designed and piloted by the four academic partners to the research study. The questions covered issues around the company context, HRM practices, HR learning and knowledge sharing, HR alignment, and the role of the HR department (see Appendix for a fuller overview of the questions used). Companies were selected for inclusion based on superior business performance and reputation for HRM and as an employer. Letters were sent to the head of HR at corporate headquarters inviting the company to take part in the study. Based on subsequent discussions at either headquarters or country level, companies were then invited to confirm their participation. One contact person per company was established, and this person provided an appropriate list of interviewees for the study, including HR professionals, senior executives, line managers and employee association representatives. Interviews, which lasted between one and two hours, were arranged at convenient times at the interviewee's office location.

The companies in this sample (see table 1) display a range of different internationalization strategies and size in terms of employee numbers. All have headquarters based in Europe except for P&G (which is headquartered in the USA).

The case studies were analyzed looking for themes identified from the literature affecting the role of corporate HR departments. Specifically, the data was coded based on issues of centralization/decentralization, subsidiary leeway, internationalization strategy, the size of the HR resource, head office/subsidiary interaction, knowledge sharing, the nature of HRM policy areas, the initiation and coordination of new initiatives. The data was then collated under each of these headings and analyzed further. The results are presented below.

**Table 1:  
Case Companies**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Internationalisation strategy</b>
ABB	Engineering / electrical engineering	116,000	Formerly highly decentralised, now increasing central control
EDF	Power generation & distribution	167,000	A holding company increasing its internationalisation
IKEA	Retail	84,000	Highly decentralised but with a strong corporate culture
P&G	FMCG	98,000	Operating as a transnational company, but with a history of decentralisation
Siemens	Electronics / electrical engineering	417,000	Recently increasing its transnational focus, shifting from a global strategy
Unilever	FMCG	234,000	Currently undergoing major restructuring to focus more on regional and global operations

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The role of management is indispensable in the economic, social and political transformation of any nation. Therefore, it is imperative to note that access to a computer and its usage at every level of management system will go a long way in actualizing its goals and objectives most especially at secondary schools in the 21st century. This has necessitated its adoption as a strategy for instructional delivery at various management levels. According to Moursund (2005) information acquired through digital technology has the capability of promoting innovation, increasing productivity and enriching the quality of lives.

Further, the scholar posits that the application of ICT in management has the potential of contributing substantially towards improving the management system. According to Rikala, Vesisenaho, and Myllari (2013), contemporary students are regarded as “digital natives” due to their commitment to the use of ICT tools. In the view of Singh and Chan (2014), integration of ICT in the classroom environment provides opportunities for students to learn and operate in the information age.

The computer can help facilitate the knowledge-constructed classroom. Some researchers; Bork, (1985), Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition, (1989), Papert, (1980), and Ragosta, (1983) computers are having influential effects on the teaching and learning processes. They posit that with the use of computers in the classroom, schools would become more student-centered and that more individualized learning would take place than ever before in the student-centered classrooms of today. With the aid of the computer, students can collaborate, think critically, and able to find alternative solutions to problems (Jaber,1997). Research done by Dwyer, Ringstaff, and Sandholtz (1991) indicated that computers can be used in collaboration for all subject areas,

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but that teachers have to take into account the different styles of teaching and the students involved in this learning. This type of teaching requires a change in the teacher's method of teaching and learning, the amount of time needed to learn how to use the technology and the location of models that work with the technology (Sheingold & Hadley, 1990).

Negroponte, Resnick, and Cassell (1997) argued that Laptop Computer could enable students to become more active and independent learners, to them the Internet will allow new "knowledge-building communities" in which children and adults from around the globe can collaborate and learn from each other. They are of the view that Computers will allow students to take charge of their learning through direct exploration, expression, and experience. This shifts the student's role from "being taught" to "learning" and the teacher's role from an "expert" to a "collaborator" or a "guide".

It is also important to note that, despite several positive contributions of this to managerial development in this age, students are to be conscious of the severe damage which the usage of a laptop computer in schools can cause to their academic performance and improvement. Olofinniyi, Fashiku, Fashiku, and Owombo (2012) concluded in related findings that the personal access of students to GSM and computer devices in schools had done more harm than good in academic achievements of students in secondary schools in Ondo State. This is because the device is adding more negative values than positive ones which included distractions in secondary students when they are supposed to be busy with their lessons or works in the class room.

Fried (2008) concluded in his findings that the more students use their laptops in classes, the lower their class academic performances in schools. Other negative impacts of this device on the moral and academic performance of students as highlighted by Fried (2008) include; watching films of

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pornography while in class, school environment and at home; playing of games and music at the expense of personal study and home work or assignment. As it is cleared that the larger percentage of students of secondary schools in UK are teenagers and adolescent, therefore, full access to a personal computer could endanger their management, most especially, academic performance. It also encourages moral decadence in our society as a result of too much exposure to foreign cultures through their access to computer usage.

The potential for the laptop to distract students may be the most significant drawback to its use. Hembrooke and Gay (2003) set out to systematically investigate students' multitasking behavior, as they found evidence that students were "engaged in computing activities that were often unrelated to the immediate class lecture and tasks." Barkhuus (2005) also observed that students with laptops in class were surfing the internet, emailing. Watching film, playing computer games or writing assignments during their lessons.

The issue of globalization and the need for every nation to be relevant in the global environment requires the incorporation of ICT into the teaching-learning process. However, the level of its integration into the classroom is still below expectation in UK. The United. States National Centre for Managerial Statistics (2005) observes a wide gap between the inherent benefits of ICT in management and the level of its adoption in schools despite considerable investment on it by the various countries. The above postulation also applies to UK where the traditional mode of instructional delivery remains the order of the day despite government various positive ICT policies.

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Academic performance according to the Cambridge University Reporter (2003) is frequently defined regarding examination performance of which examination could be categorized into two important stages that include internal and external. Internal examinations are series of mid-test, assignments, class works, terminal and promotional examinations while external are examinations conducted by the examination or professional bodies such as West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the likes, who are saddled with the responsibilities of conducting examinations for the final year students of secondary schools in order to gain admission into higher Institutions of learning ( Adepoju 2012).

In 2011, recognizing the importance of good students' academic performance at all levels of management as a powerful instrument for national progress and development, Osun State government came up with an management summit. The summit was summoned in the year against the background of the decay met in Osun State public schools, which was found simply unacceptable. For instance, public management in the state appeared to be badly managed, that only children whose parents could not afford the financial implications of a private school were left in public schools. The students, especially pupils in primary schools were roughly dressed and mal-nourished. Equally, many school buildings were dilapidated, students' performance both at the internal and external examinations were abysmally poor. There were no instructional materials, while the tuition fees in the state-owned institution were beyond the reach of most Osun state citizens. However, regardless of the poor managerial system, the parent had to struggle to pay tuition fees for their wards.

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In response to all the forgoing, the management summit convened then came up with a reform blueprint and some policies to overhaul the public sector management in the state with some management policies among which was the introduction of laptop usage in secondary schools by the government for the senior secondary school students.

The government of Osun State in UK given this took a bold step to incorporate digital technology-based learning into high schools in the state through the invention of a tablet of knowledge” popularly called “Opon Imo.” The “ tablet of knowledge” is in the form of mini I pad with touch screen Android processed e-learning devices. It is a “stand-alone” managerial multimedia e-learning content platform with preloaded applications for West African Examination Council (WAEC) and Joint Admission, and Matriculation Body (JAMB) approved textbooks.

The tablet of knowledge is divided into three major content categories which are; textbooks, tutorials and practice questions coupled with audio voiceover and video tutorials. It also has a dictionary, Bible, Quran, health books, and some managerial games but internet de-activated to avoid distraction which could emanate from students access to the internet at that level. The tablet according to the government was meant to ease the problem of students’ carrying a heavy bag of books to school, allow access to relevant textbooks in different subjects thereby leading to improved academic performance. It was distributed to the senior secondary two students in batches and to be collected back from them after their final year examination at senior secondary three.

**This the government hope** this will improve their academic performance. It is worthy of note that the incorporation of technological tools into the teaching-learning process did not eliminate the role of teachers in instructional delivery in the affected schools. On this note, it is quite imperative

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to assess the extent to which the desire of Osun State Government in incorporating ICT-based learning into secondary schools in the state is achieved on students' academic performance.

### **Research Question**

What is the general assessment of the distributed tablet of knowledge influence on students' academic performance in Osun State Secondary schools?

### **Methodology**

The design of this study was quasi-experimental research of the descriptive survey type carried out by making use of three intact graduating sessions of final year students from Osun State secondary schools. Pre –laptop and post- laptop distribution results of the students in years 2011 and 2013 (controlled groups) were compared with their performance in the year 2012 (experimental group) when the tablet of knowledge was introduced into schools. The population of this study was made up of 24975, 2431 and 22750 students who wrote West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) in years 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively in Osun State secondary schools. A census sampling technique was used in making use of the results of all the students who sat for the examination in the core subjects of the three years. In those years, candidates were stratified into Arts, Commercials and Science subjects. Students' examination scores and grades in WASCE in years 2011, 2012 and 2013 as well as a self-designed proposal were used as instruments in the study. The examination questions for the scores used in the study were standardized through an established norm. Therefore, its reliability and validity had been

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ensured before use. Frequency counts and percentage scores were used in analyzing the data collected.

## Results and Discussion

The results of data collected were discussed as follows:

**Table 1**

*Percentage analysis of students' scores in West African School Certificate Examination in five core Art subjects for three consecutive years in Osun State Secondary schools*

Subject	2011			2012			2013		
	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%
Eng	24975	10125	41	24311	7125	29	22750	4605	20
Math	2482	6519	26	24588	6947	28	22670	6379	28
Gov	7960	3699	46	8559	2319	27	830-9	4263	51
CRS	2859	1231	43	2833	1142	40	2997	1150	38
Lit	4195	1174	28	4630	784	17	5131	477	9

**Source:** *Osun State Ministry of Management, Science, and Technology, Department of Planning Research and Statistics WAEC Analysis*

Table 1 indicated that 41% of the students passed the English language in the year 2011 while 29% and 20% of them passed the subject at credit levels in the years 2012 and 2013. In mathematics, 26% of the students succeeded in 2011 while just 28% of them passed at credit level in years 2012 and 2013 respectively. In Government, 46% of the students passed at credit level in the year 2011

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while it was at 27% and 51% in the years 2012 and 2013. In Christian Religion Studies, the passes were 43%, 40%, and 38% respectively in the three years. In Literature in English, 28% of students passed at credit level in the years 2011 while it was 17% and 09% passed respectively in the years 2012 and 2013.

**Table 2**

*Percentage analysis of students' scores in West African School Certificate Examination in five core Commercial subjects for three consecutive years in Osun State Secondary schools*

Subject	2011			2012			2013		
	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%
Eng	24975	10125	41	24311	7125	29	22750	4605	20
Math	24782	6519	26	24588	2947	28	22670	6379	28
Acc	6919	2328	24	7539	6545	48	7092	1852	26
Com	7818	2238	29	8252	3864	47	7516	1805	24
Eco	25197	9200	57	3342	6545	28	22166	9020	41

**Source:** *Osun State Ministry of Management, Science, and Technology, Department of Planning, Research and Statistics WAEC Analysis*

In Table 2, 41% of students who registered for the English language passed with credits while it was 29% and 20% in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively. In mathematics, 26% of the students had credits in 2011 while only 28% of them passed the subject at credit level in the year 2012 and 2013. Twenty Four percent of Account students in 2011 had credits in the year 2011 while only

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28% and 26% of them passed it in years 2012 and 2013. In Commerce, the percentage passes were 29%, 47%, and 24% respectively in the years 2011, 2012 and 2013. As well, 37% of the students who offered Economics passed in the year 2011 while 28% and 41% of them passed it at credit levels in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively.

**Table 3**

*Percentage analysis of students' scores in West African School Certificate Examination in five core Science subjects for three consecutive years in Osun State Secondary schools*

Subject	2011			2012			2013		
	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%	No Reg.	No Passed	%
Eng	24975	10125	41	24311	7125	29	22750	4605	20
Math	24782	6519	26	24588	6947	28	22670	6379	28
Bio	24609	5267	21	24887	3565	14	22402	6435	29
Chem	11877	5144	43	11276	2877	26	10231	5055	49
Phy	11751	6699	57	10754	5811	54	10024	3441	34

**Source:** *Osun State Ministry of Management, Science, and Technology, Department of Planning,*

*Research and Statistics WAEC Analysis*

In Table 3, 41% of the registered students for the English language passed at credit level in the year 2011 while it was 29% and 20% passed respectively in the years 2012 and 2013. In mathematics, 29% of the students had credits in 2011 while 28% of them passed the subject at credit level in years 2012 and 2013. Twenty-one percentages of the Biology students passed at credit level in the year 2011 while they passed it at 14% and 29% respectively in the years 2012 and 2013. Forty-three percentage of the students passed Chemistry at credit level in 2011 while

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26% and 49% of the students passed it in the year 2012 and 2013 respectively. In Physics 57% students had credits in 2011 while 54% and 34% of them passed at credit levels in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively.

In Table 3 as well, students' academic performance in Science subjects among the public secondary school students in Osun State was not improved through the introduction of laptop computers. In Biology students, percentage at credit level was 4% in the year 2011 when computer laptop was not used by the students in those schools. In Chemistry, students' percentages at credit level were 43% in 2011 when the laptop was not introduced as against 26% credit pass of students in 2012 when an improvement was expected. In Physics, students' academic performance was at 54% pass in 2012 as against 57% credit pass of students in 2011 when laptop usage by students was yet to be introduced.

### **Discussion**

Going by the observed results analyzed in Table 1, 2 and 3, students' performance in the English language as a general subject was 41% in the year 2011 when Opon Imo (laptop) was not introduced in the schools. The performance dropped from 41% to 28% in the year 2012 when students were using it and 20% in 2013 when its usage was canceled. This results indicated that introduction of laptop usage in schools had a negative effect on students academic performance in the English language in Osun State secondary schools. The results negate the findings of Fakokunde (2016) whose work indicated a positive impact of the use of laptop computers on students' academic performance in Osun State Secondary Schools. However, the findings are in consonance with Fashiku, Olofiniyi, Fashiku, and Adewumi (2014) whose study revealed no significant relationship between students' academic performance and laptop usage in Ondo and

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Osun State. That laptop usage had a negative influence on students', academic performance in the English language in secondary schools of the two states.

A bit improvement can be observed in students' academic performance in Mathematics as students' performance in the years 2012 and 2013 were 28% as against 26% of the year 2011. However, the improvement was still below average. More than 50% that is 72% of the students still did not pass mathematics at credit levels in Osun State secondary schools.

As indicated in Table 1, One can observe that students' academic performances were not improved with the introduction of Opon Imo to students in Osun State secondary schools in the year 2012. Going by the percentage analysis of students, West Africa Examination results of students in the three major Art subjects of Government, Christian Religion Studies and Literature in English in years 2011 and 2012, the introduction of Laptop usage did not help in improving their academic performance. The result reduced in percentage in Government from 46% to 27% when the laptop was introduced. In CRS, it reduced from 43% in the year 2011 to 40% in the year 2012. Drastically, in Literature in the English language, it dropped from 20% pass in 2011 to 17% passed in the year 2012.

Looking through Table 2, one can only observe that, the result of students in Commerce as a commercial subject only improved from 29% in the year 2011 when the computer usage was not introduced to 47% when laptop usage was introduced in the schools. Students' academic performance in Accounting and Economics as subjects still had no improvement in 2012 when the computer laptop was introduced in Osun State secondary schools.

As can be observed, quite some extraneous factors can be adduced to the failure in government's efforts in improving management at the secondary school levels in Osun State through the introduction of Open Imo. Among such factors is the fact that students in the state have been

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negatively making use of their handsets before the introduction of the laptop computer into schools. This position is supported by Olofinniyi, Fashiku., Fashiku, & Owombo, (2012) whose work indicated that students' access to GSM has a negative influence on their academic performance in Osun State secondary schools. Another observed major factor in the failure of use of laptop among the secondary school students in Osun State is that the school teachers were not carried along in government's efforts to improve management at the secondary schools through the use of open imo. Majority of the teachers who would teach the students in the classes are not computer literate. This assertion is supported by Fashiku, , Olofinniyi, Fashiku, & Adewumi, (2015) whose work found no significant relationship between ICT skills and teachers' job performance in Osun State secondary schools. Through the study, secondary school teachers in Osun State were found not to have adequate skills and knowledge in the use of Information Technology Equipments in the performance of their teaching jobs. Another major perceived reason for the failure, is that the distribution of the open imo (tablet of knowledge) was politically motivated. Osun State government was believed to have distributed the laptop to gain more political popularity among the electorates who are the masses in the State.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The use of ICT equipment like the computer laptop to enhance teaching-learning situation in secondary schools is so indispensable and a welcomed phenomenon in the modern-day classroom. Its proper usage is so tremendous and significant that it will go a long way in enabling the students and teachers to be abreast of global trends in classroom teaching-learning for effective outcomes. It is therefore pertinent that Osun State government put all hands-on deck to salvage the

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disheartening situation about the state of negative students' use of the distributed laptop in the classroom for its intended aims to be achieved in Osun State secondary schools.

Given the findings in the study, the following recommendations are made: Government in Osun State should endeavor to always carry the teachers along in formulating policies that will affect their jobs performance in the school. Teachers in Osun State secondary schools should be made to be computer literate and should be given laptop each as it was given to students. Seminars and workshops should be organized from time to time for the teachers to improve their skills and update their knowledge in the manipulation of ICT equipment in schools. Students' use of the given laptop should be appropriately monitored by each school authority and parents. Students should be encouraged to utilize the state ICT centers from time to time and the government should try as much as possible to avoid politicizing management matters in the state.

The HR literature has been abundant in providing typologies of the roles of HR professionals in organizations. These typologies have focused primarily on the strategic involvement of HR departments, the management of change and organizational culture, the relationship between employer and employee, and transactional personnel administration (see, for example: Caldwell, 2003; Guest, 1990; Legge, 1978; Monks, 1992; Paauwe, 2004; Storey, 1992; Tyson & Fell, 1986; Ulrich, 1997). More recently we have also seen increased attention paid to HR roles in the more knowledge-based economy, identifying the importance of context in the interpretation of role typologies (see, for example: Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003). The different roles chart the progression of the HR profession over time. In this paper we focus on the question: what roles can be identified for the current day HR department in the context of increasing globalization of the corporate domain? Very often the boundaries of organizations are not limited anymore to the

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domestic setting. Crossing borders has become normal, which gives rise to the issue of HRM in multinational settings and how the HR function and related roles manifest themselves at the various plant, country, regional and corporate levels. How issues of coordination, shared learning (both top-down and bottom-up) and standardization versus leeway for adapting to the local context (customization) become critical in this context.

As a result of this international environment, several new roles of HR departments operating in multinational corporations are emerging based on different HRM strategies for internationalization (Taylor, et al., 1996). At the corporate HR level, these focus on designing and monitoring the implementation of corporate HR policies especially for the company's top management and expatriates. These activities require new roles such as "effective influencer" (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001: 1260), "network leadership" and "process champion" (Evans, et al., 2002: 471-2), "constructive fighting" (ibid: 487), "guardian of culture" (Sparrow, et al., 2003: 27) and "knowledge management champion" (ibid: 24).

Before exploring further what these roles entail, this paper first outlines existing typologies of HR department roles, exploring their association with the period in which they were devised. The modern-day context of multinational organizations operating in a global market is then considered. Subsequently, the emerging roles of HR departments in such organizations are highlighted. We then present the results of six in-depth case studies of multinational corporations designed to identify the activities of corporate HR departments, and the processes through which these activities are designed, developed and implemented. Conclusions are then drawn in terms of a contextually-based model for HR departments within multinational corporations.

There are multiple typologies of HR department roles in the literature which consider the extent to which departments are either reactive or proactive – for example, Legge’s (1978) conformist or deviant innovator roles – and the level of involvement in corporate strategy – such as Tyson and Fell’s (1986) architect (strategic), contracts manager (operational) and clerk of works (administrative) roles, later modified by Monks (1992) to include a fourth innovative/professional role which falls between the contracts manager and architect roles – and those that combine the two dimensions – for example, Storey’s (1992) change-makers (proactive, strategic), advisers (reactive, strategic), regulators (proactive, operational) and handmaidens (reactive, operational). Guest (1990) also included the unitarist/pluralist and conservative/traditional dimensions in his model of HRM roles, whilst Ulrich (1997) focuses on the people/process and future/operational dimensions of the HR role: strategic partner (future/process), change agent (future/people), administrative expert (operational/process) and employee champion (operational/people). We must consider the relevance of context to the creation of these role typologies. In addition to considering the content of the roles, the typology of HR department roles presented by Monks (1992) suggests that in stable environments, a simple model of HRM practice will suffice.

It is only in complex organizations particularly undergoing substantial change where a more sophisticated approach to practice is required. Other commentators support this linkage between the nature of HRM practices and the needs of the organizational context (Carroll, 1991; Guest, 1991). Indeed, the typologies themselves show the range of roles which HR has developed in a historical context. The initial role of a focus on employee welfare, and increasingly a means of controlling employee absence, developed into the bureaucratic element of the HR role we see

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today. The rise of the power of trade unions at local company level resulted in the negotiator role, which has since declined again in line with further changes in the industrial relations context. In the 1980s, the rise of HRM turned attention to the strategic role of HR and its role in helping organizations manage change as the business environment became more competitive. Recently, Caldwell (2003) has also suggested a review of the models proposed by Storey (1992) and Ulrich (1997). He suggests that advisory roles offer no more to HR practitioners than a consultancy role lacking in real influence, administrative resource and power. The 'handmaiden' or service provider role has become synonymous with cost efficiency issues and outsourcing.

The regulator role is in decline due to the changes in the employee relations' environment, however it is also rising in importance due to increasing employment legislation. Finally, the change agent role is the one perceived by HR practitioners most often as being their new role, although in practice this is not necessarily being recognized. The HR department has been shown to be unlikely to initiate organizational change, although they are frequently invited to comment on the human resource implications of planned change at board level (Evans & Cowling, 1985; Hiltrop, et al., 1995; Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994). Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall (2002) introduce four new roles for HR, which may be interesting to consider in the global economy context, based on what they describe as the knowledge economy in which many organizations are now working:

- (a) human capital steward: acting as a guide and facilitator in partnership with employees with the aim of achieving the highest return possible on a company's human capital investments;
- (b) knowledge facilitator: facilitating both knowledge capital (held in explicit and implicit sources) and knowledge flows;

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(c) relationship builder: managing relationships between individuals and groups both internal and external to the organization to enhance social capital across the total value chain; and

(d) rapid deployment specialist: taking responsibility for the development of flexible human capital resources with an emphasis on adaptability, tolerance and capacity to learn.

Multinational organizations have varying reasons for global expansion, largely aiming to increase competitive advantage by realizing economies of scale or economies of scope (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 2004). There are however stages in the process of internationalization, and choices in the strategies and related structures adopted by MNCs. The range of MNC subsidiary strategies are described in Perlmutter's (1969) and Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) well-known classifications:

- ethnocentric, global strategy: control is centralized and subsidiaries resemble the parent company;
- polycentric, multi-domestic strategy: control is decentralized and subsidiaries conform to local practices;
- geocentric (or egocentric as added by Perlmutter & Heenan, 1974), transnational strategy: subsidiaries and headquarters alike adhere to worldwide (or regional) standards as part of the organizational network.

As we have seen, the MNC is based in a context, and as such it has an HRM heritage based on the resources and competencies available at head office and subsidiary levels. This HRM competence can be considered as context specific or context generalizable, depending on its usefulness outside the location in which it was developed (Taylor, et al., 1996). Based on this usefulness, there is a choice to be made by top management on the approach to the design of the overall international

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- adaptive: low internal consistency with the rest of the firm and high external consistency with the local environment – little transfer of practices;
- extortive: high integration of subsidiary HRM systems across the company– replicating practices developed at head office;
- integrative: substantial global integration with an allowance for some local differentiation – two-way transfer of HRM practices between head office and subsidiaries.

This choice of HRM strategy is largely dependent on the internationalization strategy adopted by the firm discussed earlier: • multi-domestic: subsidiaries are seen as an independent business therefore the adaptive approach to HRM systems is most appropriate; • global: subsidiaries are managed as dependent businesses, therefore an extortive approach to HRM systems is most appropriate; • transnational: subsidiaries are managed as interdependent businesses, therefore an integrative approach to HRM systems is most appropriate.

For firms starting the internationalization process, or those changing from a multidomestic to a trans-national strategy, the demands for internal consistency will generally outweigh the demands for local responsiveness. The context generalizability of HRM systems will therefore change over time as the company, top management and the HRM systems themselves change (Taylor, et al., 1996).

If we consider the variation of cultural and business system environments in which MNCs operate, there is also likely to be a tendency to take an extortive approach to HRM systems where there is the highest degree of similarity between the head office and the subsidiary's environment. Equally,

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this will be the case where the most dependency exists between the subsidiary and HQ in order to maintain control over a critical resource within the company (Taylor, et al., 1996). This means that the HRM strategy adopted may not be the same for all subsidiaries in a firm – HQ may wish to be more extortive or more adaptive with some subsidiaries than others based on the many factors discussed here. Likewise, when a greenfield-site operation is established, it is most likely that HQ will export its HRM practices, and possibly senior managers, to set up the operation. Over time, this dependency relationship may change and a more adaptive or integrative approach to HRM may be adopted.

Ultimately, there is a fundamental goal for HR to achieve a balance between centralized control of international HRM strategy and responsiveness to local circumstances. Evans and colleagues (2002: 465) suggest that there are three approaches to achieving this aim: centralization, coordination and decentralization. Centralization refers to focusing on activities carried out at global level, and decentralization on activities carried out at local subsidiary level. Coordination refers to a middle ground, balancing those activities that would best be undertaken by local subsidiaries with those managed by global or regional centers. This is dependent on the degree of integration or differentiation desired (Ulrich 1997). Earlier research showed that the role of HR departments in multidivisional companies was more ambiguous as a result of increasing decentralization (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994). The corporate HR department was often small, with a minor controlling role through a limited number of high-level employment policies. More recently, a trend towards re-centralization has been observed (Arkin, 1999) and global companies operating in a large number of countries have been shown to have a high degree of co-ordination and integration of their international operations and have large well-resourced corporate HR

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departments (Scullion & Starkey, 2000). However, in research by Kelly (2001), irrespective of a centralization or decentralization strategy, all MNC subsidiaries surveyed were found to exercise some degree of autonomy in formulating their own HR policies but may require head office permission for significant developments involving major expenditure. Local subsidiaries were found to develop proactively strategic proposals and persuade head office to adopt these, as well as the corporate head office looking to subsidiaries to learn new ideas and fill gaps in corporate policies (ibid.: 555).

International HR roles in general, there has been limited attention paid to the role of the corporate HR function (Scullion & Starkey, 2000: 1061) and it has been assumed to be relatively weak given the literature on board membership which emphasizes that HR is not typically a key player in the development of corporate strategy (Hunt & Boxall, 1998:770). There is also the danger that the HR function is not perceived as a full partner in the globalization process due to the burden of bureaucratic central procedures and ethnocentric and parochial HR systems and policies (Evans, et al., 2002: 465). However, the rapid pace of internationalization and globalization is argued to lead to a more strategic and influential role for the HR department (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001; Scullion & Starkey, 2000). There are several activities of the corporate HR department in the international MNC context discernable. These focus particularly on high-grade management positions and high potential staff worldwide, managing issues such as employer branding, talent development, performance management, project team-working, and rewards and succession planning to develop a cadre of international managers (Kelly, 2001; Novicevic & Harvey, 2001; Scullion & Starkey, 2000; Sparrow, et al., 2003).

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Organizations often operate with a centralized policy for top managers and high potentials, but a more decentralized policy for other employees (Scullion & Starkey, 2000). These centralized activities are seen as a major determinant of international business success or failure (Stroh & Caligiuri, 1988), and as such provide an arena for HR involvement in corporate strategy formulation and implementation (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001). Corporate HR can also play a significant role in monitoring the implementation of corporate HR policies throughout overseas subsidiaries (Kelly, 2001: 543). HR can thus become “champions of processes” (Evans, et al., 2002: 472), building the commitment of top management, providing training for managers, and monitoring these processes. Equally, HR has a social responsibility to ensure future leaders are sensitive to and equipped to deal with global challenges. This creates a new role for HR as ‘guardian of culture’, overseeing the implementation of global values and systems (Sparrow, et al., 2003).

The extent of decentralization of the organisation structure impacts on the uptake of these activities. Decentralized companies (most popular in 1980s) have a smaller corporate head office, hence a limited number of corporate HR executives with a more limited range of activities, but still with the primary focus on an elite set of top management and expatriates (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1994; Scullion & Starkey, 2000). The result is less of a strategic role for HR and more reliance on informal and subtle management processes. Particularly in this environment, but also in centralized organizations, there is thus a need for HR to become an “effective political influencer” (Novicevic & Harvey, 2001: 1260) to be able to manage the internal labor market for global managers. Network leadership is a further requirement for HR: having an awareness of leading edge trends and developments (being well networked internally and externally), the ability to mobilize the

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appropriate resources (bringing people together to work in project teams), and a sense of timing and context (sensitivity to what is going on at both local and global levels) (Evans, et al., 2002: 471).

The stage of internationalization also influences the required HR role. Evans and colleagues (2002) suggest three progressive stages of HR roles: the builder - building appropriate HRM basics at the start of the internationalization process; the change partner - realigning HRM to meet the needs of the changing external environment as the company increases its overseas operations; and the navigator - developing the capabilities of the organisation and its people, managing the balance between short-term and long-term, global integration and local responsiveness, change and continuity in the global environment.

The complexity of the corporate HR role thus increases as a company moves closer towards an integrative HR strategy. Fundamental to HR being able to carry out these roles and activities is the departments own level of expertise. Should an extortive or integrative approach to HRM systems be desired, the actual transfer of HRM systems can only occur when sufficient mechanisms are put in place (Taylor, et al., 1996). Appropriate mechanisms include regional/global meetings of subsidiary HR directors, the transfer of HRM materials and tools, and the mobility of HR directors between the HQ and subsidiaries. HR excellence and knowledge transfer are thus essential factors in HR globalization efforts (Sparrow, et al., 2003). Global knowledge transfer is coordinated through creating global centers of HR excellence as forms of knowledge networks, facilitated by the choice of the most effective technological platforms and agreement about the content of

knowledge to be shared. This global horizontal and vertical networking is critical to sharing information about both local conditions and best practices.

Reflecting on the above range of HR roles and typologies and the contextual factors having an impact, there is a pressing need to supplement this theorizing with empirical data on how the HR function at different levels manifests itself in an increasingly international business setting, and how it is involved in sharing and coordinating HR knowledge. To explore this further, we do not focus here on how HR managers see themselves in respect to the typologies and roles; instead, we focus on how HR managers at different levels are involved in initiating, implementing and coordinating HR policies and practices. Based on these insights and analyses, we can identify the different roles at the various corporate, regional, national and local/plant levels and the varying degree of involvement in sharing knowledge and coordinating HRM activities. Based on the explorative nature of this study, in-depth case-study research has been carried out among MNCs displaying wide variation in degrees of internationalization and the related strategies.

So the way in which HR practices come into being and how they are implemented can help us understand further these corporate HR roles that are being identified. To explore this further, a series of in-depth case studies in multinational firms has been undertaken. The cases reported here form part of a larger study of nineteen multinational corporations from across the globe (including well-known brands in engineering, financial services, aerospace, telecommunications, utilities, information technology, electronics, FMCG, automotive, and petrochemical industries). The study has been funded commercially, designed to explore HR-functional excellence in MNCs, and is a collaborative research project between four universities based in the USA, Asia, UK and

continental Europe. This paper draws on the continental European sub-sample from this larger study. During the period September to December 2004, interviews were held with 65 interviewees in six multinationals based in eight countries across Europe. A multiple respondent approach was adopted, including interviews with 40 HR professionals and 25 senior executives and line managers. 16 of the interviews were carried out at corporate headquarters, 36 at either country or divisional head office level, and 13 at plant level within a specific business division. The majority of interviews were carried out face-to-face, with only around five being conducted by telephone due to time restrictions. Two interviewers were present at each interview, and where permitted the interview was recorded. The content of the interviews has been summarized in individual case studies, which were checked for accuracy by all the companies involved. The interviews were semi-structured, based on a schedule designed and piloted by the four academic partners to the research study. The questions covered issues around the company context, HRM practices, HR learning and knowledge sharing, HR alignment, and the role of the HR department (see Appendix for a fuller overview of the questions used). Companies were selected for inclusion based on superior business performance and reputation for HRM and as an employer. Letters were sent to the head of HR at corporate headquarters inviting the company to take part in the study. Based on subsequent discussions at either headquarters or country level, companies were then invited to confirm their participation. One contact person per company was established, and this person provided an appropriate list of interviewees for the study, including HR professionals, senior executives, line managers and employee association representatives. Interviews, which lasted between one and two hours, were arranged at convenient times at the interviewee's office location.

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The companies in this sample (see table 1) display a range of different internationalization strategies and size in terms of employee numbers. All have headquarters based in Europe except for P&G (which is headquartered in the USA).

The case studies were analyzed looking for themes identified from the literature affecting the role of corporate HR departments. Specifically, the data was coded based on issues of centralization/decentralization, subsidiary leeway, internationalization strategy, the size of the HR resource, head office/subsidiary interaction, knowledge sharing, the nature of HRM policy areas.

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