

Chapter 3

HRM Knowledge Transfer in Multinational Companies from the Perspective of Human-centric Management Paradigm



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3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters of this monograph, the focus, within the context of the emerging new human-centric management paradigm, was on one hand on the impact of external environmental factors contributing to labor shortages on HRM practices within organizations (Chapter 1), and on the other hand on the impact of HRM-related factors on employees' work performance and their loyalty to organizations (Chapter 2). All this creates a good context for further deliberations in this chapter regarding HRM knowledge transfer in multinational companies (MNCs). The specific emphasis on MNCs, as opposed to domestic organizations, is due to the unique challenges and opportunities they face in managing a diverse global workforce (Dowling et al., 2023; Listwan and Stor, 2008). MNCs operate across various cultural, legal, and economic environments (Edwards and Rees, 2017), which necessitates a nuanced approach to HRM that can accommodate local differences (Listwan et al., 2009) while maintaining global coherence (Tarique et al., 2022). This complexity makes MNCs a particularly rich subject for studying the dynamics of HRM knowledge transfer, as they must navigate the balance between global standardization and local adaptation in their HRM practices (Stor, 2023a).

MNCs engage in knowledge transfer across various domains, including technology, marketing strategies, operational processes, and research and development (R&D), to maintain

global competitiveness and innovation (Castro and Moreira, 2023). These areas are crucial for the successful execution of corporate strategies, enhancing product development, and entering new markets. Despite the critical nature of these areas, the significance of knowledge transfer within HRM outshines them due to its central role in harnessing the most vital asset of any organization: its people (Minbaeva et al., 2014). It is people who not only constitute the existence of any organization but also determine its success, as they carry out all activities related to its operation. This fundamental understanding underscores why HRM is inherently significant. HRM is pivotal in attracting and retaining talents (Stor, 2023c), shaping the organizational culture (Polo et al., 2018), leadership styles (Haromszeki, 2023), managerial competencies (Domaradzka, 2020a) and employee engagement practices (Stor, 2024), ensuring that the workforce is aligned with the company's strategic objectives. By fostering a unified corporate culture and enhancing employee performance and satisfaction (Katebi et al., 2022), effective HRM practices are indispensable for sustaining a competitive edge in the global marketplace (Stor, 2023a). Thus, despite the importance of other knowledge transfer areas, the focus on HRM is paramount for embedding a cohesive and adaptive organizational structure that supports strategic agility and leverages the full potential of human capital across diverse geographical locations.

Knowledge transfer in HRM between headquarters (HQs) and foreign subsidiaries of MNCs in the context of an emerging human-centric management paradigm may cover a variety of aspects. These can include innovative recruitment and selection practices (Potočnik et al., 2021), tailored training and development programs (Garavan et al., 2023), performance management systems (Stor, 2023b), diversity and inclusion initiatives (Ciuk et al., 2022), and strategies for enhancing employee well-being (Molek-Winiarska and Mikołajczyk, 2022) and engagement (Stor, 2024). The human-centric management paradigm places the individual at the core of organizational practices, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive, and empowering work environment that values employee contributions and fosters personal growth. This paradigm shift necessitates a reevaluation of HRM practices to ensure they are aligned with principles that prioritize employee satisfaction, mental health, and overall well-being as key drivers of productivity and organizational success. Therefore, knowledge transfer in this context involves not only the sharing of policies and practices but also the underlying cultural values and attitudes that promote a people-first approach, emphasizing empathy, respect, and open communication across all levels of the organization.

The shift to a human-centric management paradigm distinguishes the current practice of HRM knowledge transfer from previous approaches by focusing more on the qualitative aspects of work life, such as employee happiness (Farooq et al., 2024), job satisfaction, and workplace culture (Celbis et al., 2023) rather than solely on quantitative metrics like productivity and efficiency. Previously, HRM knowledge transfer might have emphasized standardizing practices for efficiency, control, and risk mitigation (*c.f.* Minbaeva, 2005), often overlooking the unique cultural and social dynamics of each subsidiary. Now, the emphasis is on tailoring HRM practices to fit the local context while aligning with the global corporate culture (Minbaeva et al., 2014), fostering a more inclusive and diverse organizational environment

(Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). This approach recognizes the value of local knowledge and employee perspectives, encouraging innovation and adaptability by embracing different cultural insights and practices. By putting the human at the center of the organization, MNCs aim to create more resilient, agile, and responsive HRM practices that not only adhere to global standards but also respect and leverage local nuances and employee well-being, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and harmonious global operation.

In the above context, **the main goal of this chapter** is to determine what knowledge transfer within HRM between HQs and foreign subsidiaries of MNCs means from the perspective of the human-centric management paradigm, as well as to identify the related conditions. Hence, the discussions undertaken will cover the key mechanisms of HRM knowledge transfer between HQs and foreign subsidiaries, the unique challenges and opportunities presented by cross-cultural knowledge sharing within these entities, and the significant impact of adopting a human-centric management approach on the strategies and effectiveness of HRM knowledge transfer across the global landscape of MNCs. Additionally, the chapter will conclude with a summary and key conclusions derived from the discussion, providing insights and implications for HRM practices in MNCs.

3.2. Mechanisms of HRM Knowledge Transfer in MNCs

When addressing the mechanisms of HRM knowledge transfer in MNCs, it's essential to explore the diverse approaches employed to navigate the complexities of global operations (Domaradzka, 2020b). This exploration includes both formal and informal mechanisms, with a special focus on digital platforms, training programs, expatriate assignments, and interpersonal networks. These methods are fundamental in aligning HRM practices across various cultural, legal, and economic contexts, ensuring that knowledge sharing enhances global coherence while respecting local nuances (Dowling et al., 2023). Through this multifaceted approach, MNCs can maintain a balance between global standardization and local adaptation, which is crucial for the successful implementation of human-centric HRM strategies across their international subsidiaries.

The adoption of sophisticated digital platforms plays a crucial role in facilitating HRM knowledge transfer across MNCs (Bissola and Imperatori, 2020). For instance, Siemens AG, a global leader in electronics and electrical engineering, implemented the "Siemens Global Learning Campus" as a global HR information system. This platform integrates data from all its subsidiaries, providing a unified platform for HR management practices (see Figure 3). It enables the real-time sharing and updating of HR policies, training materials, and best practices, ensuring consistency while allowing for localization. Through the platform's forums and chatrooms, Siemens employees across different regions can exchange ideas, fostering a global community of practice that enhances HR knowledge sharing (Rosen, 2019). This approach not only streamlines HR processes across Siemens' worldwide operations but also supports the company's commitment to continuous learning and employee development.

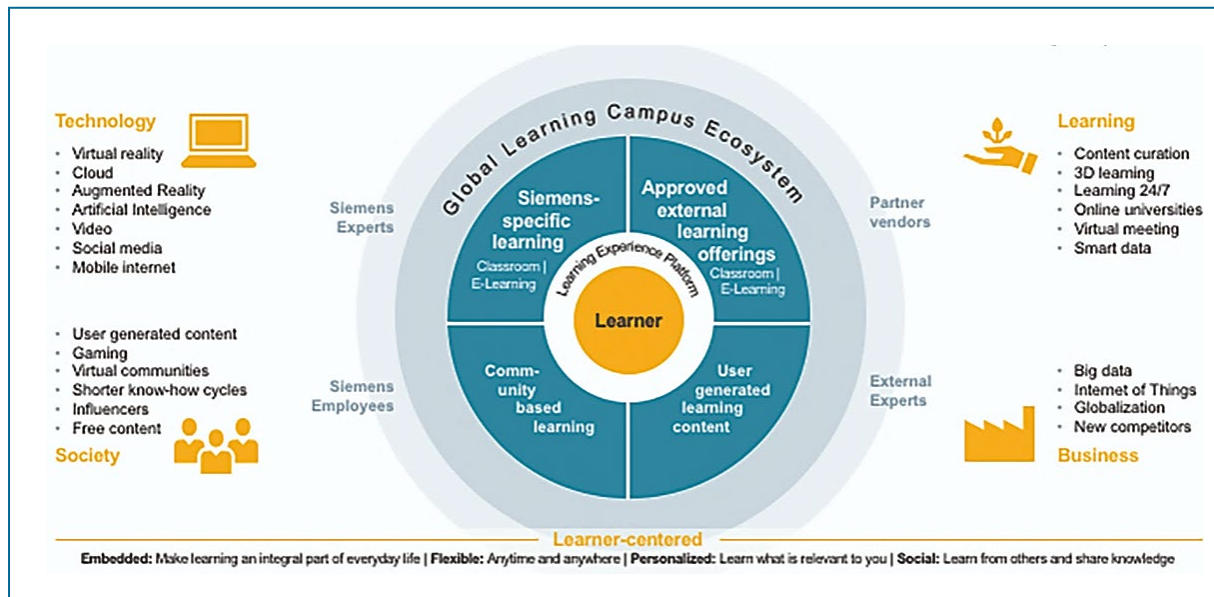


Figure 3. Siemens Global Learning Campus

Source: (Rosen, 2019, s. 27).

Digital platforms serve as a crucial tool for HRM knowledge transfer, enabling real-time sharing of HR policies, training materials, and best practices across geographically dispersed units. Through intranets, specialized HR software, and corporate social networks, MNCs can foster a sense of unity and shared learning among their global workforce. These platforms not only facilitate the dissemination of standardized procedures but also allow for feedback and adaptation based on local needs and experiences. Furthermore, training programs, both in-person and online, are another critical mechanism. They offer structured environments for transferring knowledge directly from HQs to foreign subsidiaries (da Silva et al., 2022). Such programs can be tailored to address the specific requirements of different locales while ensuring that the overarching principles of the company’s HRM approach are communicated effectively. Workshops, seminars, and webinars provide opportunities for interactive learning and the exchange of ideas among employees from various parts of the world.

Expatriate assignments have proven to be effective in bridging knowledge gaps between HQs and foreign subsidiaries (Duvivier et al., 2019). A notable example of this practice is Shell, a global energy and petrochemical company with operations in over 70 countries. Shell has developed a structured expatriate program where experienced HR managers and professionals from the HQs are stationed in foreign subsidiaries for periods ranging from six months to two years. These expatriates play a dual role: they are tasked with transferring Shell’s HRM best practices and strategies to the local context and, conversely, bringing back valuable insights into local HRM challenges and innovations to the HQ. This two-way knowledge transfer is a cornerstone of Shell’s global HR strategy, enriching the company’s understanding and practices in HRM across its worldwide operations. Through such initiatives, Shell ensures that its global

workforce management remains agile, culturally sensitive, and aligned with both corporate objectives and local needs (Kunz, 2023). Thus, it can be said that expatriate assignments play a unique role in the transfer of HRM knowledge (c.f. Strzelec, 2022). By sending experienced managers and HR professionals from the HQs to foreign subsidiaries (and vice versa), MNCs facilitate a hands-on approach to knowledge sharing (Ismail, 2015). Expatriates can directly implement HR practices from the HQ, adapt them to fit the local context, and bring back insights to the parent company, enriching the global HRM strategy with diverse perspectives.

Lastly, inter-unit communication networks, such as cross-border project teams and joint task forces, enable the flow of HRM knowledge across units (Prihadyanti et al., 2022). These networks encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange among employees from different countries, fostering a culture of learning and innovation (Domaradzka, 2021). Through regular meetings, shared projects, and collaborative platforms, team members can discuss HR challenges, share solutions, and develop new approaches that are informed by a wide range of experiences.

Together, these mechanisms ensure that HRM knowledge transfer in MNCs is dynamic, responsive, and inclusive, supporting the development of a cohesive yet flexible global HR strategy that aligns with the human-centric management paradigm. By leveraging these varied channels, MNCs can navigate the complexities of global HRM, ensuring that their practices not only meet global standards but also resonate with local cultural and operational realities.

3.3. The Challenges and Opportunities in Cross-cultural HRM Knowledge Sharing

Navigating the landscape of cross-cultural HRM knowledge sharing presents both challenges and opportunities for MNCs. The complexities inherent in transferring HRM knowledge across diverse cultural contexts are shaped by the interaction between varying cultural norms and practices (Tarique et al., 2022). This interaction is particularly evident in the exchange between HQs and foreign subsidiaries, significantly influencing the effectiveness of knowledge sharing, posing potential obstacles but also providing unique opportunities for enrichment and innovation in HRM practices (Castro and Moreira, 2023). The ability of MNCs to effectively manage these dynamics is crucial for leveraging the full potential of their global workforce.

One of the primary challenges in cross-cultural HRM knowledge sharing is overcoming cultural barriers that can hinder communication and mutual understanding. These barriers are often more pronounced when HRM practices are shared between HQs and foreign subsidiaries, due to differing values, beliefs, and business etiquettes, which can lead to misinterpretations and resistance to new practices (Edwards and Rees, 2017). To address these challenges, MNCs increasingly rely on cultural competency training and the development of cross-cultural teams (Dowling et al., 2023). Such strategies aim to build empathy and understanding among employees, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and leveraged for collective growth.

Existing research demonstrates that cultural distance as an external variable and the significance of HRM to the subsidiary's performance results as an internal variable can interact with each other in influencing various configurational bundles of HRM subfunctions, their centralization practices, and knowledge flows between HQs and local subsidiaries of MNCs (Stor, 2021). Therefore, the knowledge transfer regarding which HRM subfunctions configurations are effective in local conditions is crucial for building global HRM systems that are adapted to local requirements.

Another significant challenge in cross-cultural HRM knowledge sharing is the negotiation of cultural differences (Edwards and Rees, 2017). Cultural differences can be considered from the perspective of cultures at the level of individual countries, regions, or even continents (Stor, 2012). For example, IBM, a global technology and consulting company with operations across Asia, Europe, and America, encountered this challenge firsthand when attempting to implement a unified performance management system. The diversity of cultural perceptions of feedback and appraisal across its global workforce presented a considerable obstacle. To address this, IBM initiated a series of cross-cultural workshops aimed at harmonizing understanding and practices around performance management across its worldwide operations. These workshops provided a forum for managers and HR professionals to exchange cultural insights and adapt the performance management system to be more culturally sensitive (Kiron and Spindel, 2019). This initiative by IBM not only facilitated a better alignment of performance management practices with local cultural norms but also underscored the opportunity to enhance HRM practices through embracing cultural diversity. By leveraging the rich tapestry of its global workforce's cultural backgrounds, IBM has been able to foster a more inclusive, adaptive, and effective HRM strategy (*c.f.* Neher et al., 2024). This is particularly important because, as empirical studies show, on one hand, employee performance appraisal can directly influence company performance results, but on the other hand, HRM outcomes may play a mediating role in this relationship. Therefore, this is another example that highlights the importance of knowledge transfer in the field of HRM in achieving business success through a focus on the central position of people within the organization (Stor, 2023b).

Moreover, language differences can complicate the transfer of HRM knowledge, as nuances and specific terminologies may be lost in translation (Ciuk et al., 2022). MNCs address this issue by fostering clear communication channels between HQs and foreign subsidiaries, adopting a common corporate language for official communications while also providing language training and translation services to minimize misunderstandings and ensure that HRM knowledge is accurately conveyed and received (Dowling et al., 2023). Conversely, the diverse cultural contexts within which MNCs operate offer a rich tapestry of insights and practices that can enhance HRM knowledge. By embracing these differences, companies can ensure that HRM strategies are effectively adapted and applied within both HQs and their foreign subsidiaries. This can lead to the development of more inclusive, flexible, and responsive HRM practices that take into account the unique needs and potentials of employees from different cultural backgrounds.

Diversity within MNCs offers a unique opportunity to innovate HRM practices (Ciuk et al., 2022). An excellent example of this is Accenture, a global professional services company known for its commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse workplace. Accenture leveraged the diverse cultural backgrounds of its workforce to redesign its leadership development program, focusing on inclusive leadership. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding and integrating various leadership styles and practices from different cultures, thereby making the program more inclusive and effective. By incorporating these diverse perspectives, Accenture's leadership development program reflects a broader spectrum of leadership approaches, catering to a global market. This diversity-driven innovation in HRM practices has not only improved leadership development outcomes at Accenture but also significantly increased employee engagement and loyalty across the company's global operations (Beck and Kreis, 2006). By valuing the unique contributions of each employee and fostering an environment where diverse teams are empowered, Accenture demonstrates how embracing diversity can lead to enhanced innovation and effectiveness in HRM practices. This example showcases the potential for MNCs to harness diversity as a strategic asset, improving leadership development and fostering a more inclusive corporate culture.

Furthermore, the process of cross-cultural knowledge sharing can strengthen the global cohesion of MNCs, promoting a sense of unity and shared purpose among employees worldwide. Particularly, the synergy between HQs and foreign subsidiaries plays a crucial role in this context, enhancing their global HRM capabilities and fostering a truly inclusive organizational culture (Minbaeva et al., 2014). Through the careful navigation of challenges and the strategic harnessing of opportunities, MNCs can transform cross-cultural differences into a competitive advantage.

3.4. The Impact of Human-centric Management on HRM Knowledge Transfer Strategies

The shift towards human-centric management has significantly impacted how MNCs transfer HRM knowledge, particularly in enhancing employee engagement (Stor, 2024) and well-being (Molek-Winiarska and Mikołajczyk, 2022). Google, a global technology firm renowned for its innovative and employee-focused HRM practices, exemplifies this approach. The company has developed HRM practices that prioritize flexible working arrangements, mental health support, and continuous learning opportunities, which has fostered a more engaged and productive workforce. This is evidenced by Google's high job satisfaction scores and notably low turnover rates. By focusing on the well-being and growth of employees, Google has successfully created a supportive and empowering work environment that reflects the core principles of human-centric management. Through initiatives like "Grow with Google", the company provides valuable skills development resources, underscoring its commitment to continuous learning and personal growth (Benefits at Google, 2024). Google's dedication to the well-being and development of its employees showcases the profound impact of adopting human-centric HRM practices on enhancing employee engagement and organizational success.

The transition to a more people-focused approach in managing human resources underscores the importance of tailoring HRM practices not only to align with corporate objectives but also to address the diverse needs and expectations of a global workforce (Celbis et al., 2023), including expatriates (Ismail, 2015). In this context, human-centric management principles have led to the development of more inclusive and adaptive HRM knowledge transfer strategies. These strategies recognize the value of understanding and integrating local cultural nuances into HRM practices. For instance, training programs (*c.f.* Garavan et al., 2023) and leadership development initiatives (*c.f.* Haromszeki, 2024) are increasingly designed to be flexible, allowing for customization that respects local cultural norms and values. This flexibility ensures that the transfer of HRM knowledge does not merely impose a one-size-fits-all solution but rather adapts to the specific context of each subsidiary.

Moreover, the emphasis on employee well-being (Molek-Winiarska and Mikołajczyk, 2022), engagement (Domaradzka, 2016) or even their happiness (*c.f.* Farooq et al., 2024) within the human-centric management framework has encouraged MNCs to adopt more participative and transparent knowledge sharing practices. Employees are not just passive recipients of transferred knowledge; they are actively involved in the creation and dissemination of HRM practices (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). Such participatory approaches facilitate a two-way exchange of knowledge, where insights from local subsidiaries can inform and enrich the global HRM strategy. This collaborative environment fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among employees, particularly from different cultural settings (Polo et al., 2018), enhancing the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. However, this, of course, necessitates support through the appropriate managerial competencies to enable the transfer of such knowledge (Domaradzka, 2021).

Additionally, technology plays a crucial role in supporting the human-centric approach to HRM knowledge transfer (Bissola and Imperatori, 2020). Digital platforms and social media tools are increasingly used to facilitate communication and collaboration across borders, enabling real-time sharing of ideas and feedback (da Silva et al., 2022). These technologies support a more dynamic and interactive process of knowledge transfer, aligning with the principles of human-centric management by promoting connectivity and community among employees worldwide.

Adopting a human-centric management paradigm also means that MNCs must be adept at adapting HRM practices to fit local nuances (Edwards and Rees, 2017). Starbucks, a retail giant operating in over 80 countries, serves as a prime example of this approach. The company conducted an extensive review of its HRM practices through the lens of human-centric management, identifying areas for alignment with local cultural values and employee expectations. This led to a series of localized adaptations, such as the “Partner of the Quarter” program in China, which acknowledges outstanding employees based on peer nominations, aligning with the cultural emphasis on community and collective achievement. Furthermore, Starbucks has initiated community engagement activities across various countries, allowing employees to contribute to local causes, which resonates deeply with many cultures (Starbucks Equity..., 2022). These adaptations significantly improved local employee engagement levels

and operational performance (Katebi et al., 2022), demonstrating how MNCs can benefit from integrating human-centric HRM practices that respect and reflect local nuances.

The impact of human-centric philosophy on HRM knowledge transfer strategies represents a transformative shift in how MNCs approach the development and dissemination of HR practices. By prioritizing the human element, companies can ensure that their knowledge transfer processes not only achieve strategic objectives but also contribute to a positive and engaging work environment for all employees, regardless of their location. This alignment between strategic goals and employee well-being is essential for sustaining a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

3.5. Summary and Final Conclusions

The main goal of this chapter was to determine what knowledge transfer within HRM between HQs and foreign subsidiaries of MNCs means from the perspective of the human-centric management paradigm, as well as to identify the related conditions. In the context of the discussions undertaken, this goal can be considered as achieved. The chapter has comprehensively addressed the mechanisms of HRM knowledge transfer, illuminated the unique challenges and opportunities presented by cross-cultural knowledge sharing, and highlighted the significant impact of adopting a human-centric management approach on the strategies and effectiveness of HRM knowledge transfer across the global landscape of MNCs.

The exploration of various mechanisms, including digital platforms, expatriate assignments, and inter-unit communication networks, has illustrated the dynamic ways through which MNCs can align HRM practices across different cultural, legal, and economic contexts. These mechanisms not only enhance global coherence but also respect and adapt to local nuances, embodying the essence of human-centric management.

Furthermore, the chapter discussed the negotiation of cultural differences and the importance of adapting HRM practices to local contexts, as exemplified by companies like IBM and Accenture. These examples demonstrated how MNCs could leverage cultural diversity to innovate HRM practices and improve leadership development outcomes, thereby increasing employee engagement and loyalty across global operations.

The shift towards human-centric management, as evidenced by practices adopted by firms such as Google and Starbucks, was shown to significantly enhance employee engagement and well-being. By prioritizing flexible working arrangements, mental health support, and continuous learning opportunities, these companies have successfully created work environments that not only meet strategic objectives but also foster employee satisfaction and growth.

To specifically identify the related conditions necessary for the successful transfer of HRM knowledge in the context of the human-centric management paradigm, it is essential to recognize the critical role of managerial competencies in facilitating this process. These competencies include cultural sensitivity, effective communication skills, and the ability to adapt HR practices to local nuances while maintaining global coherence. Additionally, creating

an organizational culture that values and supports continuous learning and knowledge sharing is pivotal in enabling the transfer of HRM knowledge.

Moreover, it is crucial to highlight that all fundamental conclusions regarding the impact of human-centric management on HRM knowledge transfer strategies have been thoroughly discussed. One key oversight, however, is the explicit mention of the necessity for a strong leadership commitment to the human-centric paradigm. This commitment should be bolded as it ensures the allocation of resources and support for initiatives that enhance HRM knowledge transfer, such as investment in technology for digital platforms and the development of cross-cultural training programs.

In conclusion, the chapter has provided insights and implications for HRM practices in MNCs, emphasizing the importance of a human-centric approach in the effective transfer of HRM knowledge. By embracing this paradigm, MNCs can ensure that their HRM practices are not only efficient and globally coherent but also deeply respectful of and responsive to the diverse needs of their global workforce. This alignment between strategic objectives and employee well-being is crucial for sustaining a competitive advantage and achieving organizational success in the global marketplace. The recognition and incorporation of these conditions and the overarching need for leadership commitment further solidify the chapter's conclusions and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the critical elements for successful HRM knowledge transfer in MNCs.

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