



Mapping the terrain of international human resource management research over the past fifty years: A bibliographic analysis

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ABSTRACT

This review aims to take stock of the extant international human resource management (IHRM) research by identifying gaps and mapping out a future research agenda for IHRM scholars. Based on an extensive bibliographic analysis of 1924 articles published in the field of IHRM, we confirm three key clusters of existing knowledge: (a) expatriation management; (b) global human capital; and (c) international human resource policies and practices. Moreover, using scientific mapping tools, sub-themes in each cluster are classified, issues and deficiencies are examined and discussed. Furthermore, a future IHRM research agenda is proposed, including managing global work to cope with the adverse social and economic conditions, and to localize emerging market multinationals; building global human capital towards developing sustainability and nurturing digital multinationals; developing new perspectives and theories on transferring IHRM policies and practices; and embracing rigorous or innovative empirical methods in the field.

1. Introduction

International human resource management (IHRM) is defined as “the set of distinct activities, functions, and processes that are directed at attracting, developing, and maintaining multinational enterprises’ human resources” (Taylor, Beechler, & Napier, 1996, p. 960). Since the publication of the pioneering study of Perlmutter (1969) in mainstream international business (IB) journal—the *Journal of World Business*, the five decades have witnessed a rapid development of IHRM theories and practices. Based on scholars’ early contributions (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Dowling, 1999; Harris & Brewster, 1999; Taylor et al., 1996), the boundaries of the field of IHRM became established with a focus on HRM within multinational enterprises (MNEs), management of cross-cultural work practices, and comparative IHRM among various institutions.

As one of the IB sub-fields, IHRM addresses a key challenge for MNEs in practice, and for IB theory broadly—how organizations can attract, develop and retain highly talented individuals to lead in international operations, and implement their growth strategies (Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). Yet it is not assumed that training and developing such a capable global workforce can be achieved through established processes

designed for more conventional local workers. These people with global mindsets cannot be simply trained through domestic education and work experience; they must be “grown” with hands-on experience in a variety of different cultural environments (Meyer & Xin, 2018). Further, recent developments such as the rise of populist nationalism, the global health emergency, and security threats create substantially increased uncertainty and risks to firms and individuals for conducting international businesses (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019; Cooke, Schuler, & Varma, 2020; Horak, Farndale, Brannen, & Collings, 2019). Thus, it is time for all of us as members of a community of a shared future for humankind to reflect and extend the accumulated wisdom generated from the IHRM field to increase the capacity of society to cope with the increasingly adverse economic and social conditions worldwide. In this context, this review work addresses two research questions: *What is the current state of knowledge of IHRM research, and how can this growing body of research be fruitfully extended?*

While a growing and substantial body of knowledge, the past fifty years of IHRM research have surprisingly witnessed only a handful of review articles (Cooke et al., 2019). Moreover, with only a few

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exceptions, these either focus narrowly on one particular aspect of IHRM, such as global staffing in Collings, Scullion, and Dowling (2009); global careers in Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, and Bolino (2012), expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in Takeuchi and Chen (2013), and research logics and paradigms in IHRM (Primecz, 2020); or concentrate only on a certain time period, such as 1990–2010 in Welch and Björkman (2015), and 1993–2007 in Schuler and Tarique (2007). Since it would be of great value to integrate all of these elements, scholars (e.g. Cooke et al., 2019; De Cieri, Cox, & Fenwick, 2007) have called for a more holistic review and synthesis in the IHRM field.

Responding to this call, we perform a unique in-depth bibliometric analysis to map the terrain of the IHRM research field in the past fifty years. This review not only provides the structures and the dynamics of IHRM research, but also paves new avenues for future studies in relation to the various emerging areas identified. Compared with the conventional structured review method, bibliometric analysis has gained an edge in handling massive numbers of articles to construct a scientific structure of research topics, identify areas of interests, and elucidate the internal relationships of the focal literature without interference from a potential bias of researchers (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Zupic & Cater, 2015). VOSviewer, as a specific mapping technique, is adopted in this review to analyze the conceptual structure of IHRM because of its powerful user graphic-interface that can generate maps to describe the connections of each analytical theme.

In our extensive review, we begin by setting up a time frame of studies in the IHRM field as the years from 1956 (the starting year from which the Social Sciences Citation Index collects data) to 2020 (February), and identify and map the clusters that comprise IHRM research (expatriation management, global human capital, and human resource policies and practices). Then, we conduct a segmental co-occurrence analysis to validate the robustness of our main clusters and sub-themes within them. Using the highest impact articles in IHRM, we further review and analyze the evolving process of each specific theme of IHRM research. Finally, we draw together observations from our analysis and propose a future research agenda, which includes managing global work practices to cope with social-economic adversity, and assisting emerging market MNEs (EM-MNEs) to adapt to host countries; building global human capital towards sustainable development, and value creation in digital MNEs; developing new perspectives on transferring IHRM policies and practices; and embracing rigorous and innovative analytical techniques in IHRM research.

2. Mapping the field

To address our research questions and avoid a typical problem of the conventional literature review –“the endless attention to trees at the expense of forests”, we have employed the bibliographic analytical approach in this study. The bibliographic analysis method is one stream of a number of computer-aided text analysis (CATA) approaches, which prevents researcher bias and enables researchers to increase the efficiency and accuracy of content analysis (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). Powered by statistical methods, bibliographic analysis, as a part of the bibliometric field, can trace relationships amongst academic publications and determine the popularity and impact of specific publications and authors (de Solla Price, 1965). The method has been applied in the mainstream management research field in recent years (e.g., Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017; Wilden, Devinney, & Dowling, 2016; Zupic & Cater, 2015). Thus, a comprehensive bibliographic analysis of IHRM research can be beneficial to various interested parties, namely researchers, educators, and global business practitioners (cf. Cooke et al., 2019).

Guided by best practices and the logical sequence set out in Gaur and Kumar (2018), we conducted the bibliographic analysis in four steps (see the analytical details in Appendix A): (1) we collected 1,924 articles from Web of Science (WOS) on the basis of identified keywords; (2) we conducted three descriptive analyses among the collected 1,924 articles,

Table 1
Top Sources Titles of IHRM in the Fields of Management and Business.

	Source Titles	Record Count	% of The Identified Articles
1	International Journal Of Human Resource Management	528	27.44
2	Journal Of World Business	107	5.56
3	Human Resource Management	102	5.30
4	Journal Of International Business Studies	69	3.59
5	Personnel Review	67	3.48
6	International Business Review	60	3.12
7	European Journal Of International Management	48	2.50
8	International Journal Of Manpower	47	2.44
9	Asia Pacific Journal Of Human Resources	36	1.87
10	Human Resource Management Review	34	1.77
11	Human Relations	33	1.72
12	Journal Of International Management	27	1.40
13	Management International Review	27	1.40
14	Cross Cultural Management An International Journal	25	1.30
15	Employee Relations	24	1.25
16	Asia Pacific Business Review	23	1.20
17	Journal Of Business Research	22	1.14
18	Human Resource Management Journal	21	1.09
19	Journal Of Business Ethics	21	1.09

Note: sources counting for more than 1% of the identified articles were included;

^ The journal of Cross-Cultural Management was renamed to Cross Cultural & Strategic Management from 2016.

which listed the top sources of identified articles (see Table 1), and top ten countries and top ten organizations that produce IHRM research (see Appendix B); (3) we then conducted a bibliographic analysis on the 1,924 articles within the field of Management and Business. We adopted the VOS (visualization of similarities) approach, which generates three clusters of IHRM research, with each cluster containing strongly associated terms (see Fig. 1). Thus the largest cluster (red, N = 143 terms/key words), labelled *Expatriation Management*, covered research topics (i.e., cross-cultural adjustment, global career, expatriate roles and characteristics, interactions and support). The second largest cluster (green, N = 126 terms/key words), *Global Human Capital*, maps the highly influential human resource factors for a firm's behavior and performance (i.e., knowledge transfer, capability building). The third cluster (blue, N = 83 terms/key words), labelled *IHRM Policies and Practices*, includes research on the divergence-crossvergence-convergence debate, international staffing, and strategic international human resource management (SIHRM). We then elaborated each of the three IHRM themes that are reflected in the above distinctive clusters in the scientific map; (4) Finally, we identified the most influential articles and developed the timeline of the development of each theme under three clusters (see Table 2 and Fig. 2).

3. The evolving process of IHRM research

3.1. The landscape of the field

Through our analyses, we obtained an overall picture of the vast IHRM literature. Our analysis generates 19 academic journals in the management and business field, of which each has over 1% identified articles being relevant to IHRM related knowledge. The top three journals are *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (IJHRM) with 528 articles, *Journal of World Business* (JWB, 107 articles) and *Human Resource Management* (HRM-US, 102 articles). However, in conjunction with Table 2—the list of highly influential IHRM articles (by counting the average citations above 10 on the annual basis on WOS), it is found that the top three most impactful journals on IHRM research are: JWB (18 out of 65 most influential articles), *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) and IJHRM (each with 11 out of 65 most

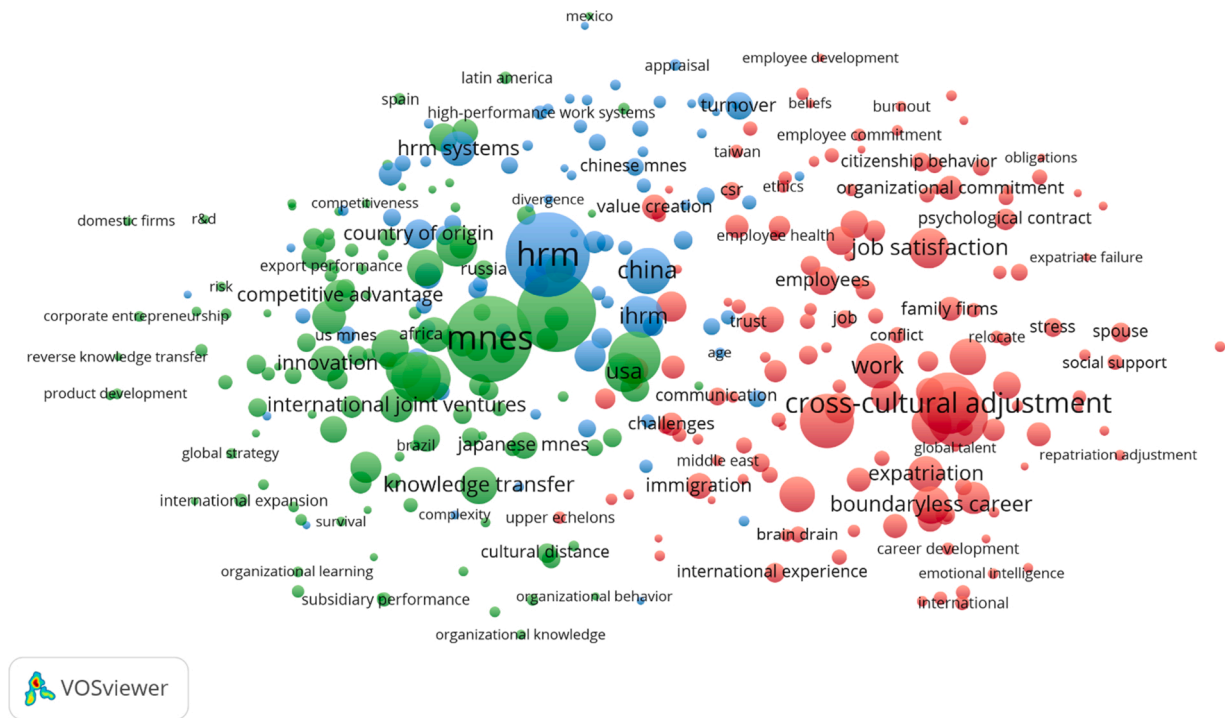


Fig. 1. The Cluster Map of Human Resource Management in Management/Business Journals.

Note: Cluster 1 (red, N = 143 terms/key words) = Expatriation Management; Cluster 2 (green, N = 126 terms/key words) = Human Capital; Cluster 3 (blue, N = 83 terms/key words) = IHRM Policies and Practices.

influential articles). Compared with other general management journals, and HRM specialized journals, it is concluded that JWB and JIBS have taken the leading positions on IHRM research in the IB field.

In addition, to focus on the topics discussed in leading IB journals, we repeated the mapping method to analyze the IHRM articles published in JWB and JIBS, respectively (see Figs. C1 and C2 in Appendix C). The cluster maps in Appendix C indicate that the research topics that can be drawn from JWB and JIBS articles are identical: (a) expatriation management (including cross-cultural adjustment); (b) global human capital; and (c) IHRM policies and practices. However, the crossover of a key aspect in JIBS articles, knowledge transfer, should be noted. In the main analysis (Step 3, Fig. 1), knowledge sharing is mapped in the “human capital” cluster, while the JIBS map categorizes this term in the “IHRM policies and practices” cluster. This may be explained by the fact that articles appearing in JIBS usually consider that knowledge transfer is embedded in the IHRM system (e.g., Björkman, Barner-Rasmussen, & Li, 2004; Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey, & Park, 2003), whereas articles outside JIBS are concerned more about the human side in transferring knowledge (e.g., Chang, Gong, & Peng, 2012). Moreover, the absence of knowledge transfer from the map of JWB articles reveals that few publications in JWB concern the topic of knowledge transfer.

3.2. The evolution of IHRM knowledge

The IHRM field has experienced two major stages of development. The first stage can be identified as 1969–1995 which, as in many other disciplines, embraces scattered research findings, in this case relating to human functions in global business activities, and establishes findings and understandings which are of great relevance toward practitioners, such as in this field international managers and workers. During the first stage, two landscape settings are remarkable. One is that IB researchers gradually come to recognize the importance of human issues in managing global businesses (cf. Meyer & Xin, 2018). For instance, Tung (1984) claims that the global operation of any multinational enterprise

is contingent upon how its strategic resources—people—are effectively utilized. The other is that researchers start absorbing IB and HRM discipline-based knowledge to think of effectively managing international human resources. Some classic works include, but are not limited to, Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triandis (1971) for providing a cross-cultural training approach; Hofstede (1980) for providing scientific bases of managing cross-cultural adjustment and training; Child (1981) for recognizing culture difference for managing people and cross-national organizations; Miller and Cattaneo (1982) for suggesting leadership attitudes toward managing expatriates; and Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) for making arguments as to the strategic principles for international management with a particular emphasis on international HRM.

The second stage is arguably the most recent 25 years from around 1996–2020. During this period, IHRM gradually matured as an integrated body of knowledge (e.g., Cooke et al., 2019; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Schuler, Dowling, & De Cieri, 1993; Taylor et al., 1996). Within this time period, a key feature of the research is the rapid development of a greater number of theoretical studies and empirical tests relating to IHRM. Some highly influential works include Minbaeva et al. (2003) and Chang et al. (2012) on knowledge transfer; Yiu, Lau, and Bruton (2007) on capability building; Collings, Scullion, and Morley (2007) on adaptive IHRM policies within an MNE, Farndale, Scullion, and Sparrow (2010) on global careers, and Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, and Jonsen (2010) on the relationship between cultural diversity and team outcomes, among others.

In the above context, to detail the process of evolution of research findings in the IHRM field in recent years, this study included performance of robustness analysis on each of four five-year windows from the past two decades. Our results are presented in four cluster maps (see Fig. 3). Our findings indicate that IHRM has drawn increasing attention from researchers as a result of the significant increase in the co-occurrence of keywords and representative connections in a more frequent and intricate pattern. For example, the number of articles related to IHRM nearly quadrupled over the time between the first

Table 2
Highly Influential IHRM Articles and Corresponding Citations.

	Authors	Journal	WOS (T)	WOS(A)	GS(T)	GS(A)	Theme	Empirical/ Theoretical
1	Minbaeva et al. (2003)	JIBS	562	33.06	1492	87.76	Theme 5	E
2	Yiu et al. (2007)	JIBS	375	28.85	769	59.15	Theme 6	E
3	Westhead et al. (2001)	JBV	485	25.53	1370	72.11	Theme 6	E
4	Collings et al. (2007)	JWB	321	24.69	728	56.00	Theme 8	T
5	Chang et al. (2012)	AMJ	192	24.00	416	52.00	Theme 5	E
6	Hitt et al., (2006)	AMJ	330	23.57	796	56.86	Theme 6	E
7	Farndale et al. (2010)	JWB	233	23.30	608	60.80	Theme 2	T
8	Johnson et al., (2006)	JIBS	277	19.79	982	70.14	Theme 1	T
9	Shaffer et al.,(2006)	JAP	276	19.71	751	53.64	Theme 3	E
10	Carpenter et al., (2001)	AMJ	370	19.47	928	48.84	Theme 3	E
11	Bjorkman et al.,(2004)	JIBS	298	18.63	794	49.63	Theme 5	E
12	Schuler et al. (2011)	JWB	155	17.22	471	52.33	Theme 2	T
13	Rosenzweig and Nohria (1994)	JIBS	432	16.62	1230	47.31	Theme 7	E
14	Gaur et al. (2007)	JoM	213	16.38	408	31.38	Theme 8	E
15	Jokinen et al.,(2008)	IJHRM	188	15.67	447	37.25	Theme 2	E
16	Harzing et al. (2016)	HRM(US)	61	15.25	122	30.50	Theme 5	E
17	Shaffer et al. (1999)	JIBS	314	14.95	833	39.67	Theme 1	E
18	Chen et al. (2010)	AMJ	147	14.70	361	36.10	Theme 1	E
19	Andresen et al.,(2014)	IJHRM	88	14.67	192	32.00	Theme 3	T
20	Doherty et al. (2011)	IJHRM	132	14.67	301	33.44	Theme 3	E
21	Froese (2012)	IJHRM	117	14.63	192	24.00	Theme 3	E
22	Iles et al., (2010)	JWB	144	14.40	443	44.30	Theme 2	E
23	Kostova et al.,(2016)	JWB	57	14.25	112	28.00	Theme 5	T
24	Suutari and Brewster (2000)	JWB	277	13.85	611	30.55	Theme 3	E
25	Pudelko &Harzing (2007)	HRM(US)	177	13.62	386	29.69	Theme 6	E
26	Shen et al., (2009)	IJHRM	149	13.55	437	39.73	Theme 4	T
27	Carr et al.,(2005)	JWB	203	13.53	520	34.67	Theme 2	E
28	Foss (2007)	Organization	174	13.38	539	41.46	Theme 6	T
29	Stahl et al. (2002)	JWB	239	13.28	681	37.83	Theme 2	E
30	Cooke et al.,(2014)	JWB	79	13.17	218	36.33	Theme 6	E
31	Collings (2014)	JWB	79	13.17	201	33.50	Theme 8	T
32	Takeuchi et al.,(2005)	AMJ	196	13.07	451	30.07	Theme 1	E
33	Caligiuri (2000)	PP	261	13.05	910	45.50	Theme 3	E
34	Al ariss & Crowley-Henry(2013)	CDI	91	13.00	219	31.29	Theme 3	T
35	Taylor &Napier (1996)	AMJ	312	13.00	934	38.92	Theme 9	T
36	Bader et al.,(2019)	IJHRM	13	13.00	25	25.00	Theme 4	E
37	McNulty &Brewster (2017)	IJHRM	39	13.00	98	32.67	Theme 3	T
38	Cerdin &Selmer (2014)	IJHRM	77	12.83	183	30.50	Theme 3	T
39	Ferner et al.,(2005)	JIBS	190	12.67	412	27.47	Theme 7	E
40	Bjorkman et al., (2007)	JIBS	162	12.46	372	28.62	Theme 7	E
41	Weber et al.,(1996)	MS	291	12.13	766	31.92	Theme 9	E
42	Peltokorpi &Froese(2009)	IJHRM	131	11.91	289	26.27	Theme 4	E
43	Templer et al.,(2006)	GOM	166	11.86	537	38.36	Theme 1	E
44	Harzing (2001)	JWB	225	11.84	576	30.32	Theme 3	T
45	Sarala et al.,(2016)	JoM	47	11.75	152	38.00	Theme 5	T
46	Al ariss & Syed (2011)	BJM	105	11.67	218	24.22	Theme 3	T
47	Caligiuri &Bonache (2016)	JWB	46	11.50	91	22.75	Theme 4	T
48	Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014)	JIBS	69	11.50	143	23.83	Theme 4	E
49	Gong (2003)	AMJ	195	11.47	447	26.29	Theme 8	E
50	Tung (1998)	JWB	251	11.41	750	34.09	Theme 2	E
51	Lee &Sukoco (2010)	IJHRM	114	11.40	326	32.60	Theme 1	E
52	Bird &Mendenhall (2016)	JWB	45	11.25	119	29.75	Theme 4	T
53	Andresen et al., (2015)	IJHRM	56	11.20	120	24.00	Theme 3	E
54	Ferner et al.,(2012)	HR	89	11.13	213	26.63	Theme 7	T
55	Michailova &Mustaffa (2012)	JWB	88	11.00	207	25.88	Theme 5	E
56	Collings et al. (2019)	JoM	11	11.00	32	32.00	Theme 2	T
57	Sidani &Al Ariss(2014)	JWB	65	10.83	150	25.00	Theme 2	E
58	Leung et al. (2014)	AROP&OB	65	10.83	219	36.50	Theme 1	T
59	Al ariss (2010)	CDI	108	10.80	282	28.20	Theme 2	E
60	Cerdin and Brewster (2014)	JWB	62	10.33	150	25.00	Theme 3	T
61	Sambharya (1996)	SMJ	248	10.33	623	25.96	Theme 9	E
62	Luo and Shenkar (2006)	JIBS	144	10.29	339	24.21	Theme 6	T
63	Peltokorpi and Vaara (2014)	JIBS	61	10.17	104	17.33	Theme 5	E
64	Cascio & Boudreau (2016)	JWB	40	10.00	114	28.50	Theme 8	T
65	Yan et al. (2002)	AMJ	180	10.00	423	23.50	Theme 2	T

Note. 1) Citation data obtained on 19 Jan 2020 from GS (Google Scholar) and WOS (Web of Science). T (in brackets) represents the total number of citations of an individual article shown by Google Scholar or Web of Science. A (in brackets) represents the average number of citations per year of an individual article shown by Google Scholar or Web of Science.

2) IHRM Articles with the average citations above 10 on WOS were considered as highly influential IHRM articles.

3) JIBS = Journal of International Business Studies, JBV = Journal of Business Venturing, JWB = Journal of World Business, AMJ = Academy of Management Journal, JAP = Journal of Applied Psychology, JoM = Journal of Management, IJHRM = The International Journal of Human Resource Management, HRM(US) = Human Resource Management, PP = Personnel Psychology, CDI = Career Development International, MS = Management Science, GOM = Group & Organization Management, BJM = British Journal of Management, HR = Human Relations.

AROP&OB = Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, SMJ = Strategic Management Journal.

4) E stands for empirical study; T stands for theoretical study.

5) Due to word limit, we only provide the full reference information of papers that we cited in text, and the remaining ones are available upon request.

lustrum (2000–2004) and the fourth (2015–2020). Also, research contexts become more enriched and diversified. For instance, the first lustrum illustrates quite concentrated research contexts in terms of countries, relating to major ones only such as the US, China and Japan, while the fourth lustrum shows a much more extensive range of countries/regions included, such as India, Taiwan (China), and Brazil.

In addition, a comparison of the four maps in Fig. 3 reveals that the cluster maps drawn from each lustrum are similar, composed of: (a) expatriation management (including cross-cultural adjustment); (b) global human capital; and (c) IHRM policies and practices. These maps also share an identical structure with the overall cluster map drawn from the 1,924 IHRM articles in the field of management and business analyzed in this study. It is worth noting, in the first lustrum, that the issue of expatriate management (see Fig. 3), especially the cultural diversity/cross-cultural adjustment issues, attracted the most attention from IHRM researchers. Then scholars switched their research focus to the topic of global human capital, in which firm performance and knowledge sharing were intensively debated. The discussion of global human capital remained heated from 2010 to 2014, the same time period in which research interests around IHRM policy and practice transfer (e.g., international staffing) also emerged. In the most recent five years, the topic of expatriate management became rejuvenated with the most substantial body of IHRM studies in this time (cf. Cooke et al., 2019). Studies on global human capital and IHRM policy and practice transfer ranked second and third in number in this period, respectively.

4. Clustering the extant IHRM knowledge

4.1. Cluster 1: expatriation management

4.1.1. Cross-cultural adjustment

Expatriate adjustment refers to the degree to which expatriates become psychologically familiar with a new environment and behaviorally competent to effectively function in a foreign culture (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi & Chen, 2013). In the field of expatriate management, social learning theory is most widely used to explain the acquisition and applications of skills that lead to successful cross-cultural adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 2002), learning is essential to change and development in an individual's behavior through the continuous interactions between the individual and the surrounding environment. From this perspective, expatriation itself is a learning experience, including doing, belonging and becoming (Wenger, 1998). Specifically, after being assigned to a host country, expatriates are stimulated to gain greater understanding of the local culture, norms and routines, which contributes to a constant adjustment of their established assumptions and value system (Chang, 2009). They also gradually modify their behaviors in interacting with locals (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, & Zhu, 2014) in order to behave effectively in communicating in the cross-culture context (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

Beyond the social learning perspective, researchers have adopted a

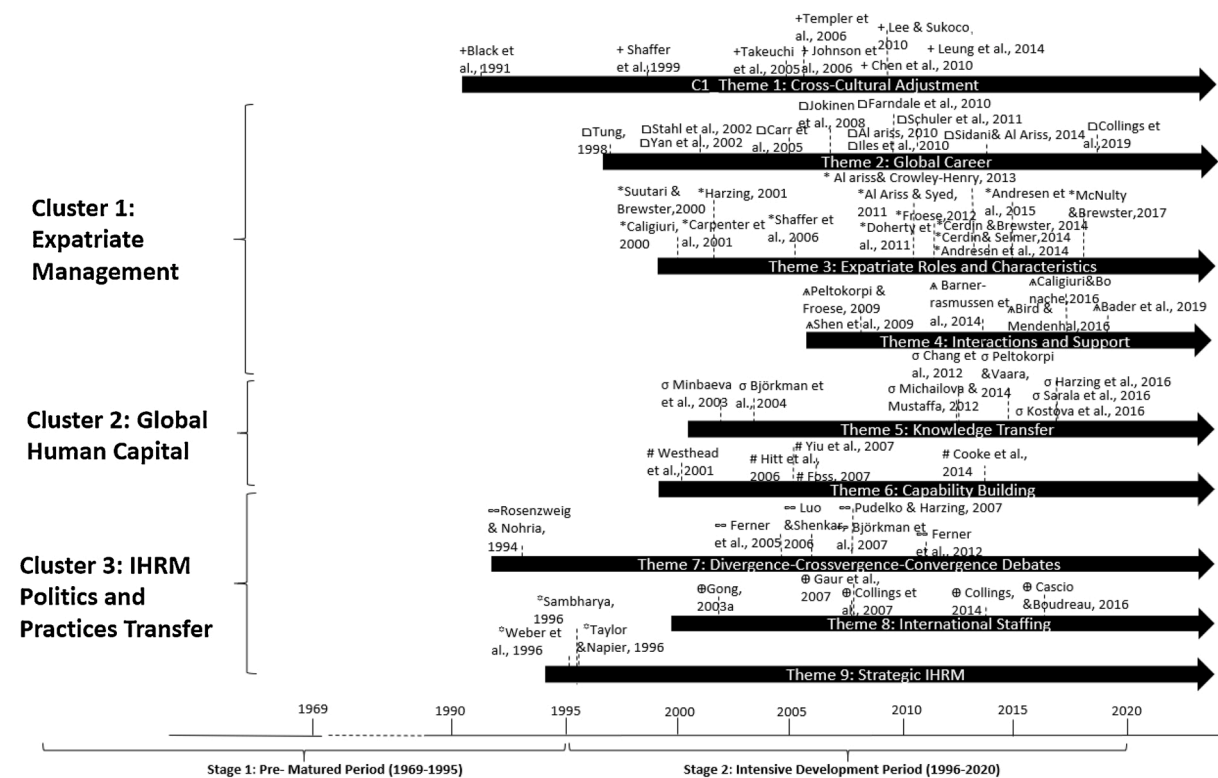


Fig. 2. Timeline of Key Developments in the Field of IHRM.

Note: Studies selected here are the most influential papers in each theme (combined with both WOS and Google Scholar with a threshold of averagely over 10 annual citations).

advancement after repatriation (Reiche, Kraimer, & Harzing, 2011; Stahl et al., 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Yet some researchers also find that repatriates are usually in a “holding pattern” with a low level of authority, no sufficiently challenging job, and few occasions for using their developed competencies (Stahl et al., 2002; Stroh et al., 1998). Such inconsistent findings call for more empirical evidence to be obtained in future research, especially in view of the observation that “relatively little is known about the long-term impact of international assignments on managers’ careers” (Stahl et al., 2002: 216). Likewise, while the phenomenon of expatriate entrepreneurs is not new, research on their career development continues to be of great interest (Befus, Mescon, Mescon, & Vozikis, 1988). Additionally, managing the careers of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), migrants and refugees are further areas in which exploration is warranted (Hajro, Stahl, Clegg, & Lazarova, 2019; Vaiman, Haslberger, & Vance, 2015).

At the organizational level, Feldman and Thomas (1992) propose a comprehensive framework to understand how MNEs can facilitate employees’ career development through building up corresponding organization-level and individual-level HRM programs. Performance management and compensation management are critical contributors to the development of global talents (Fu, Hsu, Shaffer, & Ren, 2017; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Through effective coordination of individual objectives and corporate strategy, as well as clearer communication and appropriate incentives, performance management can help expatriates to grow and develop the competencies needed in completing assigned tasks (Shih, Chiang, & Kim, 2005). In contrast with other expatriate research contributions, research on expatriate compensation management strategies is scattered and the related concepts are poorly understood (López-Duarte, Vidal-Suárez, & González-Díaz, 2020; Maley, Moeller, & Ting, 2020). Defined as a collection of interrelated valued rewards (Suutari & Tornikoski, 2001), expatriate compensation not only serves as an effective incentive to motivate expatriates and boost their performance, but is also a good method for maintaining the global talents working in the company (Maley et al., 2020). The function of performance management and compensation management continues to be of strategic importance in managing global talents since it is used by MNEs to attract, motivate and retain valuable expatriates and it helps the organization consider both the internal and external operating environments in deciding how to evaluate the performance of its global assignees and compensate them accordingly (Maley et al., 2020; Suutari & Tornikoski, 2001).

However, in relation to repatriation, a high turnover rate of repatriates hinders MNEs’ process of internationalization, because competent global talents are one of the major sources of their competitive advantage (Buckley & Casson, 1976). MNEs should therefore pay more attention to managing expatriation moves and tracking employees’ global career development within organizations. Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) and Bolino (2007) investigate antecedents of repatriate career success and proposes a three-dimension framework incorporating the expatriate experience, the parent-organization context and career development practice. Yet one research gap at the organizational level needing to be addressed in the future is the extent to which such career development can be linked to organizational performance, which has not been well explored (cf. Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019). Thus, conceptualizing global careers as an intersection of multiple-level factors is worth investigating (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010). Moreover, while global career research has been heavily influenced by some well-established theories in the field overall, such as human capital theory (e.g., Chadwick, 2017; Coff, 1997), social exchange theory (e.g., Chen, Paik, & Park, 2010; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), and resource dependence theory (e.g., Daily, Certo, & Dalton, 2000), the sub-field itself generally lacks its own theoretical development.

4.1.3. Expatriate roles and characteristics

With the launch of JWB in 1965 and JIBS in 1970, research on expatriates has since come to be propelled by a broad interest in the topic among scholars in IB (Buckley & Casson, 1976). An excellent review of expatriate roles and characteristics is carried out by McNulty and Brewster (2017), in which the early stage of IHRM research development from 1960s to 1970s is seen to reflect concentration on a wide range of expatriate studies, including, e.g. selection, self-decision process, compensation, engaging in local communities, and satisfaction (cf. De Cieri et al., 2007). Nevertheless, this theme of the research in the field is overly phenomenon driven, and generally lacks theoretical development though some attempts are evident (e.g. Harzing, 2001). Few studies even attempt to identify the exact meaning of the term “expatriate”. Most simply use the term in a broad sense, conceived as involving an employee being sent by an organization (“organizationally assigned”) to work abroad for a defined period of time (“temporarily”) (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). By contrast, the concept of an “expatriate” has been examined in greater detail in recent decades, including clarifying differences between various groups of the globally mobile, so distinguishing the traditional expatriate from a range of other types of international travelers (Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin, & Suutari, 2014; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). One type that has thus gained significant attention in the literature involves individuals who relocate on their own initiative and motivation to work abroad, known as SIEs (Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001; Cerdin & Brewster, 2014). Since the initial proposal of the category of SIEs by Inkson et al. (1997) in their qualitative study of New Zealand expatriates, research has shown notable differences between traditional organizational assigned expatriates (OAEs) and SIEs in terms of their motivations (e.g., Inkson et al., 1997) and risks faced (Richardson & Mallon, 2005). Compared with OAEs who are dispatched by their home companies to overseas subsidiaries (Inkson et al., 1997), SIEs are affected more severely by a series of pull factors (e.g., interest in internationalism, family issues, and poor employment situations at home) (McNulty & Vance, 2017; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), and push factors (e.g., socioeconomic environments in host countries) (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011). McNulty and Vance (2017) further propose an OAE-SIE career continuum, with the category of OAE at one end characterized by complete control by MNEs and the category of SIE at the other end featuring complete control by employees. Yet most studies on SIEs so far have been undertaken in a single-country context. As the motivations of SIEs may vary from one geographical location to another, there is a need for more data about the potentially diverse drivers motivating them towards global careers (Doherty et al., 2011).

Research has also examined specific issues that relate to gender, with a focus on female expatriates (e.g., Adler, 1984; Caligiuri & Tung, 1999). Adler (1984) has identified three “myths” to explain why so few women hold international positions: (1) women do not want to be international managers because of the gender barrier; (2) companies refuse to assign female expatriates abroad due to the hierarchy; and (3) foreigners’ prejudices against women render them ineffective on account of culture-bound stereotypes. This framework has profoundly influenced studies on female expatriates, directing researchers to further investigate the difficulties and barriers that females face in their international assignments (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Mayrhofer & Scullion, 2002). However, with more females appearing and achieving success in international positions, a greater level of research interest has come to be shown into how female expatriates can achieve professional success. Janssens, Cappellen, and Zanoni (2006), for example, take Adler’s (1984) structural approach and employ in-depth interviews to reveal how females strategically position themselves and achieve success through a more empowering identity. While some female expatriates are

active (Adler, 2002), most existing literature portrays females as powerless (Adler, 2002; Caligiuri & Tung, 1999; Taylor & Napier, 1996), and thus more studies investigating the positive aspects of female expatriates are expected in the future.

4.1.4. Interactions and support

The attention given to organizational support, especially training and preparation, is often associated with the studies on cross-cultural adjustment mentioned above (Harris & Brewster, 1999), and, in that context, a wide range of relevant preparation and training activities is proposed in the literature. Various theoretical lenses have been adopted for investigating the role of organizational support for expatriates. A major strand in the research is based on organizational support theory (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, & Yao, 2009), which suggests that expatriates will reciprocate elements of organizational support with superior performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Yan, Zhu, & Hall, 2002). Drawing on such theory, support practices have been classified into perceived financial, career and adjustment support categories (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Research, based on this organizational support theory and a social exchange perspective, has shown evidence that expatriates' perceived support from organizations is positively linked to their performance in overseas subsidiaries (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Takeuchi et al., 2009), achievement of goals (Chen et al., 2010), willingness to stay (van der Heijden et al., 2009), and knowledge-sharing (Reiche, 2012).

In general, support in the form of training can be provided at the pre-departure stage for the purpose of preparation or during assignments as an accompanying tool (Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 2006). On the basis of expectancy theory (Fey, Morgulis-Yakushev, Park, & Björkman, 2009), most researchers suggest that pre-departure training is more effective than post-arrival training (Littrell et al., 2006). The former can help assignees to establish appropriate expectations toward expatriation *before* that expatriation takes place, which is beneficial to the cross-cultural adjustment process and expatriates' satisfaction after arrival (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Burgi, 2001). The evidence also shows that pre-departure training, such as language training (e.g., Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014), cross-cultural adjustment training (e.g., Brandl & Neyer, 2009; Littrell et al., 2006), job-related training (e.g., Zhang & Fan, 2014) and other informal forms of preparation (e.g., Derr & Oddou, 1991), are effective in supporting expatriates in adapting to an overseas environment. Research further argues that high cost and strict requirements on managers are the main factors deterring post-arrival training from being prevalent in MNEs (Zhang & Fan, 2014).

Although pre-departure training is crucial, it nevertheless cannot be concluded that pre-departure training is more important than post-arrival training in all circumstances. Given that the expectations of expatriates may vary at different stages of international assignments, it is inappropriate to treat cross-cultural training as a one-off process before expatriation. Indeed, in line with social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 2002) and the social theory of learning (STL) (Wenger, 1998), learning is a contentious process of interacting with the outside environment (Wenger, 1998). Compared with the view that only focuses on pre-departure training, SLT and STL are more powerful in reflecting the actual adjustment cycle of international assignees, since their adjustment does not occur overnight and cannot be completed in one action (Zhang & Fan, 2014). As expatriates have different experiences and will meet different difficulties at different stages of expatriation, training before departure cannot prepare expatriates well for every possible situation they may encounter in international assignments. Therefore, post-arrival training is required in supporting assignees, and the timing and training contents should be corresponded to the adjustment phases

(Littrell et al., 2006; Shim & Paprock, 2002).

Despite ample knowledge relating to the critical role of organizational support, there remains substantial scope in the subfield to further deepen our understanding of how expatriates interact with their environments and can most effectively be trained. Future research should capture new understandings and approaches to training that have not yet been explored by scholars, but are being developed in practice by industries themselves. For instance, along with digital technology transformation, the field should further explore how MNEs interact with and support their expatriates more efficiently via new technology, and what the effects are of such instantaneous and remote interactions on expatriates' task performance and subjective wellbeing (cf. Nardon, Aten, & Gulanowski, 2015). Furthermore, scholars (e.g. Zhang, Lu, Zhu, & Zhou, 2020) have criticized the overemphasis in the literature on cross-cultural and formal institutional training, and future research should therefore pay greater attention to expatriates' perceptions of other important aspects of informal institutions (e.g., local norms and customs) that can shape expectations of local stakeholders, but through processes that also are not yet fully understood.

4.2. Cluster 2: global human capital

4.2.1. Knowledge transfer

The knowledge-based view of the firm considers knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of the firm and emphasizes the importance of the ability of the firm to integrate knowledge (Buckley & Casson, 1976; Song, 2014). This is particularly relevant to MNEs, where the ability to create and transfer knowledge intra-organizationally has been defined as one of the main competitive advantages available to such firms (Edwards, Sánchez-Mangas, Jalette, Lavelle, & Minbaeva, 2016; Minbaeva et al., 2003; Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey, & Park, 2014; Reiche, Harzing, & Pudelko, 2015). Berry (2015) and Harzing, Pudelko, and Sebastian Reiche (2016) also provide evidence that knowledge transfers can leverage internal knowledge that enables MNEs to take advantage of global access to information, learning and creativity to sustain competitive advantages, which boost the performance of foreign operations.

Scholars have noted that, although facing fewer confidentiality and legal obstacles than external transfer, internal knowledge transfers are not always smooth and successful (e.g., Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1988; Zander & Kogut, 1995). The barriers to transferring knowledge within organizations are collectively termed internal stickiness (Szulanski, 1996), which can be caused by various factors (Minbaeva et al., 2003), such as the source, the recipient and the context where the knowledge transfer takes place (Szulanski, 1996). However, evidence has shown that an organizational human capacity contributes to the process of knowledge flows (e.g., Lado & Wilson, 1994; Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2014). From different perspectives, researchers have developed various frameworks to explain the human-side determinants of organizations' knowledge transference. Drawing on agency theory (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989) and socialization theory (e.g., Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), Björkman et al. (2004) find that setting up specific HRM policies and practices (i.e., performance evaluation criteria, and corporate socialization mechanisms) can facilitate inter-unit knowledge flows in MNEs. Minbaeva et al. (2003), from the perspective of absorptive ability, propose that both employees' ability and motivation are necessary to the process of knowledge transfer from headquarters to subsidiaries. Such an idea is corroborated and further developed by Chang et al. (2012) who identify the expatriate's ability, motivation and opportunity seeking (AMO) as three key dimensions of expatriate competencies for knowledge transfer.

As suggested above, there is considerable scope for advancement of

the studies on knowledge transfer in the field of IHRM. As a key resource in promoting knowledge flows, expatriates appear to be crucial when deciding which types of knowledge should be transferred and how it is carried out (Hetrick, 2002). Yet, an integrative framework of how expatriates' characteristics can affect the transfer has been lacking to date. Furthermore, the knowledge flows from subsidiaries to headquarters involved in transfers of HR deserve future attention, especially for emerging market multinationals.

4.2.2. Capability building

As an outcome of adaptation of global strategies, the urgent need to develop leaders with global competencies and mindsets has been widely recognized in the literature (Conner, 2000; Oddou, Mendenhall, & Ritchie, 2000; Rhinesmith, 1996). As early as the 1990s, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1992) commented that the shortage of human capital becomes the biggest constraint in most globalization efforts. Since then, many researchers have attempted to address this call for research extending over a period of almost 30 years, with two impactful studies conducted by Foss (2007) and Yiu et al. (2007) representing two typical sub-streams of this field of research. The two streams identified are: (1) aiming to develop global leader competency profiles; and (2) aiming to identify HR policies and practices that can be utilized in developing such competencies.

In the first sub-stream, several authors in the mid-1990s proposed conceptual frameworks in terms of global competency (e.g., Moran & Riesenberger, 1994; Rhinesmith, 1996). At that point, most related research remained at the conceptual level; there were few empirical studies to support those frameworks. Therefore, more empirical research frameworks and methods have been called for (e.g., Conner, 2000; Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998). Despite the empirical evidence which has since been yielded by research, the existing competency frameworks continue to require further empirical verification. As the definitions and understandings of leadership vary across regions and countries (e.g., Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992), a generic global management competence profile is difficult to identify, and therefore research on context-specific competencies rather than general global competencies can be extended (Gregersen et al., 1998). Moreover, Foss (2007) introduces his micro-foundations thinking and suggests that managers should consider how knowledge processes (e.g., sharing, retaining and creating knowledge) can be governed. This point is particularly relevant to coordinate cross-border business activities. In line with this reasoning, Su, Fan, and Rao-Nicholson (2019) analyze how leader-top management team (TMT) members can form a well-functioning TMT to effectively achieve the desired internationalization goal.

In the second sub-stream, Yiu et al. (2007) show that the effectiveness of managing human resources (in their term, "management capabilities"), as a particular firm-specific advantage, lead to creation of international entrepreneurship. Useche, Miguez, and Lissoni (2020) suggest that firms can utilize highly skilled and well connected migrant workforce to recognize or promote international opportunities (e.g. M&As deals). Similarly, several development approaches are observed to build managerial capabilities, including international assignments (Oddou et al., 2000; Seibert, Hall, & Kram, 1995), expatriate entrepreneurs (Befus et al., 1988), short-term development assignments (e.g., Roberts, Kossek, & Ozeki, 1998), international teams action learning groups/projects (e.g., Roberts et al., 1998; Seibert et al., 1995), international training and development programs (e.g., Gregersen et al., 1998), international meetings and forums (e.g., De Cieri & Dowling, 1999; Roberts et al., 1998), and international travel (Lobel, 1990; Oddou et al., 2000).

Although several processes and approaches for developing global management capabilities have been identified, further attention is still required (Cooke et al., 2019). Lobel (1990) claims that rigorous and longitudinal design, more comprehensive control variables, portfolios and re-evaluation after training and international assignment should be applied to examine the effectiveness of various development practices.

For example, what expatriates actually learn from their international assignment experiences and how individuals and organizations facilitate this learning are worthy of investigation (Bonache et al., 2001). To date little evidence has been offered, and more empirical evidence is called for, to prove the strengths and weaknesses of each method (Brewster & Suutari, 2005). Finally, researchers have concluded that developing managers with global mindsets is the most important HR goal for global business success (Meyer & Xin, 2018). Yet, given the rise of nationalism (or anti-globalization sentiments) in recent years, there is a question as to how such a global (or regional) climate can impact upon the overall scarce resources of globally competent managers or affect the education of domestic managers to embrace global mindsets.

4.3. Cluster 3: transfer of IHRM policies and practices

4.3.1. The debate of divergence-crossvergence-convergence

The extent to which HRM policies and practices should be convergent or divergent across countries has been debated in the international comparative HRM field (Fardale, Brewster, Lighthart, & Poutsma, 2017; Tregaskis & Brewster, 2006). The convergence perspective argues that HRM policies and practices tend to be homogeneous across countries, because of increasing globalization, the spread of technology and "best practices" (Rowley & Benson, 2002). For example, Coffee (1998) claims that corporate management models worldwide will ultimately become identical to the American management model, which has been considered as the most effective. The cross-country transferability and compatibility of a US-based HRM model have further been demonstrated by empirical studies focused on different management contexts in different regions (e.g., Japan, Korea, European countries, and New Zealand) (Su & Wright, 2012). In the context of MNEs, researchers assert that "best practices" refer to policies and practices that MNEs are most familiar with and can boost firms' performance, without the constraint of location (Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2003). Although the convergence perspective has gained prevalence, it continues to be criticized for its validity. For example, the effectiveness of the US-based HRM model has been questioned, because HRM practices are strongly influenced by their institutional environment and cultural contexts (Fenton-O'Creedy, Gooderham, & Nordhaug, 2008; Gooderham, Nordhaug, & Ringdal, 1999).

Based on contingency theory, which emphasizes the importance of synchronizing management practices with environments and thus reflects doubts about the "best practice" argument (Luo & Shenkar, 2006), the divergence perspective argues that organizational policies and practices are strongly influenced by boundary conditions, such as institutions, cultures, economic situations and organizational strategies (Edwards et al., 2016; Laurent, 1986). The results of a longitudinal set of Cranet studies carried out in European countries, for example, illustrate that the perceptions and major functions of HRM differ from country to country (Brewster, Mayrhofer, & Morley, 2004), and hence it is inappropriate to examine an HRM system without considering the uniqueness of social context.

Responding to this debate, some HRM scholars hold a compromise opinion, which emphasizes "best practice" but recognizes the impacts of environments (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). Others take an "ambidextrous" view to solve the convergence-divergence argument (Chan, Luk, & Wang, 2005; Fombrun, 1986; Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, & Terpstra, 1993). The essential notion of this argument is that convergence and divergence are contradictory but integrated dimensions of an emerging new HRM configuration (Fombrun, 1986). Ralston et al. (1993) developed a "crossvergence" value system to balance the influence and interaction between social contexts and organizational ideology. Such a "crossvergence" perspective, simultaneously emphasizing convergence and divergence, leads to a "hybrid" or "mixed" HRM model that combines the merits of managerial models from diverse societies (Chan et al., 2005: 467). A similar concept, "bounded convergence", is also proposed to describe a field of hybrid models which are being explored

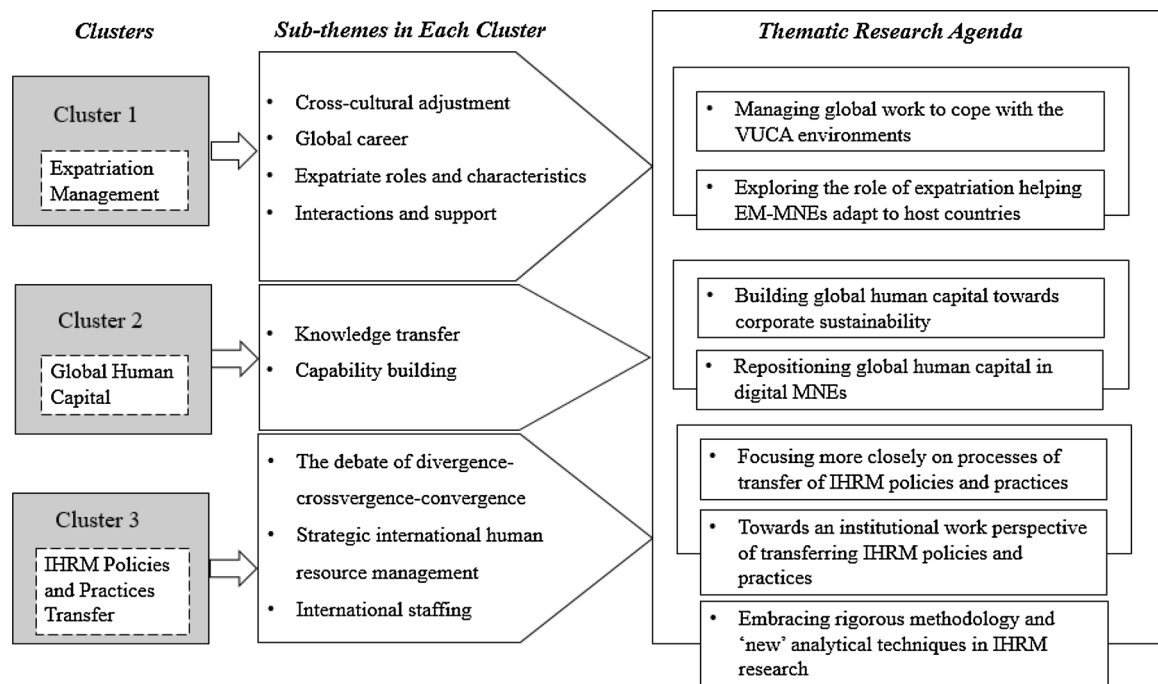


Fig. 4. A Retrospective and Prospective Summary of International Human Resource Management Research.

in relation to HRM practices (Zhang, 2012). In addition, Fan, Xia, Zhang, Zhu, and Li (2016) conceptualize that emerging market multinationals can reconcile the various needs involved in being highly localized (a strategic goal) and allowing subsidiaries to have autonomy (a control means) to determine which particular HRM policy and practice transfer strategy (e.g. convergence, crossvergence, or divergence) is most relevant in a given case. As observed, the debate has attracted much attention, but in overall terms scholars have also deepened and enriched the understanding of the nature and implications of HRM policies and practices adopted across countries.

4.3.2. International staffing

International staffing is defined as “the critical issues faced by multinational corporations with regard to the employment of home, host and third country nationals [PCNs, HCNs, and TCNs] to fill key positions in their headquarters and subsidiary operations” (Scullion & Collings, 2006: 3). This theme does not overlap with Theme 2-global career or Theme 5-knowledge transfer (see Fig. 3), because this theme represents a longstanding IHRM debate as to the appropriate mixture of PCNs, HCNs and TCNs in an employee workforce. An appropriate mixture can effectively improve MNE learning capability, innovation ability and corporate integration (Belderbos & Heijltjes, 2005; Collings & Isichei, 2018; Schuler et al., 1993), which is in turn considered to be the objectives of SIHRM (Fan et al., 2016; Gong, 2003; Schuler et al., 1993).

In a globalized environment, employees of different nationalities have different knowledge bases and access to knowledge flows (Downes & Thomas, 2000). Thus, the ability to learn and transfer knowledge from international experience has been asserted as a key factor in the capacity of MNEs to build up competitive advantage and compete against their rivals (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1991; Schuler et al., 1993; Taylor et al., 1996). Gong (2003), for example, emphasizes the importance of a heterogeneous staffing composition, as a well-functioning mixture of international HR workforce can improve organizational performance of both information interpretation and integrated learning by increasing awareness of knowledge transfer, as well as facilitating access to diverse knowledge sources.

From a social capital perspective, researchers argue that different nationalities of employees enrich social capital within MNEs, which then can facilitate the process of knowledge acquisition and exploitation

(Collings et al., 2009; Manev & Stevenson, 2001). From a strategic design perspective, international staffing is a crucial means to achieve synchronization between strategy and IHRM (De Cieri & Dowling, 1999; Fan et al., 2016; Schuler et al., 1993). Balancing the tension between global integration and local responsiveness is a key managerial challenge for top managers (Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994), while recent studies suggest that the design of MNEs' IHRM should reflect corporate-level strategies (Collings & Isichei, 2018). For example, an MNE emphasizing global integration is more likely to be a greater user of PCNs, while MNEs governed by a multi-domestic strategy would employ more HCNs and TCNs (Fan et al., 2016).

While acknowledging recent studies that have deepened our insights into international staffing composition in subsidiaries, the link between corporate strategy and subsidiary staffing decisions still needs further exploration (Scullion & Collings, 2006; Singh, Pattnaik, Lee, & Gaur, 2019). Most of the studies to date are empirical ones reporting findings on a quantitative basis. Even though these quantitative studies provide a comprehensive picture of key elements in international staffing, in-depth qualitative research is called for to verify existing frameworks and further uncover underlying factors behind international staffing issues (Collings et al., 2009; Zhu, De Cieri, Fan, & Zhang, 2018). Similarly, the exogenous impacts, such as the changing political, cultural and economic environments (e.g., the rise of nationalism in some regions and countries), on international staffing should be given more attention in future research (Collings & Isichei, 2018; Horak et al., 2019).

4.3.3. Strategic international human resource management (SIHRM)

MNEs must identify suitable international strategies and IHRM in order to survive in the global arena. International strategy often refers to MNE approaches in increasing involvement in global markets (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004). The explicit link between IHRM and international strategy has been termed strategic international human resource management (SIHRM) (Taylor et al., 1996). Integrating HRM and strategic management in the course of internationalization, SIHRM accentuates coordination and synchronization between various HRM activities (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Morris, Snell, & Björkman, 2016; Schuler et al., 1993). At the firm level of SIHRM, IHRM practitioners often face the dilemma of choosing between unifying parent company practices and adapting its HRM to the host social context (Björkman, Fey, & Park,

2007; Chung, Park, Lee, & Kim, 2015; Schuler et al., 1993). Although some studies have explored the tension between global integration and local responsiveness, few have reached conclusions on the determinants of a globalized or a localized IHRM orientation (Shen, 2005).

Pioneering studies on IHRM in the 1990s displayed a tendency to adopt multiple theoretical perspectives and multilevel research design to explain the links between HRM policies and practices and MNEs' strategies (e.g., De Cieri & Dowling, 1999; Schuler et al., 1993; Taylor et al., 1996). A number of integrative SIHRM frameworks have been proposed, including a "two-dimension" framework encompassing the product, market and technology dimensions and the social, cultural and legal dimensions (Paauwe & Dewe, 1995). Comprehensive SIHRM frameworks proposed by Schuler et al. (1993), Taylor et al. (1996) and Thite, Wilkinson, and Shah (2012) simultaneously examine industrial conditions, socioeconomic factors, country impacts, and internal and external determinants of firms. Although these models are useful in explaining the relationships between international strategies and IHRM, they have not escaped criticism for the absence of an integrative perspective on SIHRM. Briscoe and Schuler (2004: 60), for example, question whether SIHRM "needs to develop its own strategies to hire, manage, and retain the best employees throughout the organization's IB activities, as well as contribute to the firm's overall international strategic planning". While Briscoe and Schuler's (2004) call for strategic level IHRM research is a standing one, surprisingly the last fifteen years have not seen influential work on this topic.

5. Thematic research agenda

The past fifty years of IHRM research suggests that it is important to understand the impact of the human functions on the motivation and learning processes of firms in the wealth creation process. By reviewing the current state of knowledge of IHRM research, we have identified some major theories which have been adopted, along with a number of key findings or debates, and potential research gaps of each theme. In this section, we further this effort, and elaborate seven directional areas that can potentially extend the growing body of IHRM research. The overall development logic and linkage with research themes discussed in the previous section is presented in Fig. 4.

5.1. Managing global work to cope with the VUCA environments

In recent years, the rise of trade wars (e.g., between the US and China), global pandemics (e.g., COVID-19), and terrorism (e.g., 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings) have threatened international business in practice. Global workers, including OAEs, SIEs, flexpatriates, inpatriates, secondees overseas, global shared workers, globetrotters, short-term assignees, migrants, refugees, international students and business travelers (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013), must face great challenges in such a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Van Tulder et al., 2019). Although VUCA environments do induce exogenous challenges for multinational organizations and their global workforces worldwide, we argue that the opportunities embedded in crisis nevertheless should not be neglected by IHRM scholars, who can reflect and re-design new ways of managing global work accordingly.

In addition to the above considerations, we suggest that future IHRM research can explore how global work, at the societal, organizational and individual levels, can be planned or managed in more flexible and resilient ways to cope with sudden and unexpected changes. For example, at the societal level, researchers should explore how multi-stakeholders (i.e., governments, non-governmental organizations, MNEs and individuals) can form collaborative mechanisms to support various types of global workers, who might suddenly become unemployed, or become trapped in international transition (cf. Cooke et al., 2020). At the organizational level, Caligiuri et al. (2020) call for IHRM insights for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic by proposing

twenty-nine global work-related research questions. Echoing these meaningful questions, we suggest that future IHRM research should also enrich the understanding as to the strategic mindset of top managers of MNEs regarding their preferred alternative forms of global work arrangements, and how these global work arrangements can be linked with their international business strategies. For instance, it is worth exploring the extent to which firms must reassess their strategic goals of seeking to achieve high level global integration via OAEs, and place greater emphasis on local responsiveness by hiring a more localized workforce to provide for certain types of unforeseen disruptions (cf. Fan et al., 2016). At the individual level, we argue that both the physical and psychological wellbeing of global workers under VUCA environments has now become more critical than ever before. Likewise, a deeper understanding is needed of "new" forms of global work, such as virtual workforces, shared workers, and other flexible work arrangements (FWAs) because they are likely to become the "new normal" during times of economic and social adversity (cf. Caligiuri et al., 2020; Cooke et al., 2019, 2020).

5.2. Exploring the role of expatriation helping EM-MNEs adapt to host countries

The role of HRM in helping certain phases of firms' internationalization has been well-documented in the literature — at the commencement of international expansion stage, studies in the advanced market MNEs context have been carried out by Black (1988); Boyacigiller (1990), and Rosenzweig and Nohria (1994), and research in the emerging market MNE context has been conducted by Meyer and Xin (2018) and Wang et al. (2014). However, the other major internationalization phase focuses on post-entry to market activities in host countries, which refers to the integration and learning process that forms the critical linkage between MNEs' learning objectives and performance outcomes. The localized learning process is crucial for MNEs, especially EM-MNEs, to survive and achieve long-term success in host countries but there is a paucity of research exploring this post-entry process for EM-MNEs (Fan et al., 2016; Meyer & Xin, 2018; Zhu et al., 2018) more importantly, the role that IHRM plays during this process. We highlight two potential research directions for future studies: first, how EM-MNEs utilize their IHRM functions to build trust with host communities and stakeholders; second, the extent to which EM-MNEs can rely on their IHRM functions to gain legitimacy or reduce the liability of foreignness in host countries. It is essential for MNEs to establish legitimacy and acceptance in host countries (Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008).

Given the current trend of anti-globalization and the rise of nationalism in many countries, citizens in these countries have gradually redeveloped an attitude associated with confidence in national superiority (such as the slogan — "my country first") and hostility to foreign investors, such as Huawei and ByteDance (TikTok) in the US (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Johnston, 2017; Schaefer, 2020). We argue that trust-building and the gaining of legitimacy should not be fundamentally assumed in the IB literature; rather these attributes need a "micro-foundation" — human interactions between employees of EM-MNEs and local communities in host countries. All MNEs, especially EM-MNEs, must identify ways to build trust with host-country stakeholders, so as to offset the dual liabilities of being foreign (due to geographic and institutional distance), and outsiders (i.e., being relatively new to the existing social network and market structure).

5.3. Building global human capital towards corporate sustainability

MNEs have a unique feature of possessing a workforce that is both geographically dispersed and culturally diverse and, as a result, aligning global human capital with MNE strategies and performance has always been the central topic of SIHRM research (cf. Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Chang et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 1996). Since global human capital is a key foundation of knowledge-based assets, in keeping with Morris et al.

(2016) we suggest that future research needs to detail the dynamic portfolio of human capital within an MNE, and/or partnering with external stakeholders (e.g., business clusters and ecosystems) where individuals who create value for firms are no longer solely employed within the MNE (that is, they are not core employees in the traditional sense). Another research question that future research should turn its attention to is how global human capital, at different levels (e.g., individual *versus* team *versus* firm, or subsidiary *versus* headquarters), or of different types (e.g., firm-specific *versus* general human capital), can interact to form corporate-wide knowledge-based advantages. For instance, Lorenz, Ramsey, and Richey (2018) argue that assigning capable employees overseas can be a resource for recognizing international opportunities and driving innovation.

Moreover, the importance of global human capital is also highlighted by research measuring its present value and identifying that it is expected to gain greater future value through corporate investment in human resources as assets (cf. Coff, 1997). Although the value of human capital is generally associated with corporate financial performance (cf. Chang et al., 2012; Gaur, Delios, & Singh, 2007), such research results are contested due to mixed empirical findings (see Chang et al., 2012; Gaur et al., 2007; Gong, 2003). The main challenge here is how to measure corporate efforts in corporate sustainability (CS) or corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and the benefits of performing these, such as dealing with grand societal challenges (e.g., climate change, poverty alleviation, and limited access to education), carrying out ethical actions to meet the concerns of multi-stakeholders, and promoting human rights and performing community-related service (cf. Hajro et al., 2019; Stahl, Brewster, Collings, & Hajro, 2020). Stahl et al. (2020) propose a multidimensional and multi-stakeholder approach, which emphasizes that future HRM studies should consider corporate actions towards benefiting multi-stakeholder and integrating economic, environmental and social performance as a whole. In line with these considerations and our review overall, we also call for more rigorous empirical research to investigate the link between global human capital and its value in relation to economic, environmental, social and employee performance (e.g., employees' subjective well-being).

5.4. Repositioning global human capital in digital MNEs

The rapid digitalization process has not only significantly challenged the foundations of the IB field, but also the major assumptions in the field of IHRM of the last ten years (cf. Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Monaghan, Tippmann, & Coviello, 2020). Conventionally, IHRM scholars suggest that developing global human capital is an effective way of enabling MNEs to capture the opportunities that emerge in the course of internationalization (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Thite et al., 2012; Useche et al., 2020). However, the rise of digital MNEs (e.g., Alphabet, Facebook, eBay, & PayPal) features two characteristics, that is, creating new "space-place" relationships, and relying on digital infrastructure (Monaghan et al., 2020). Digital MNEs create a new "space" of presenting products and services (e.g., online presence), and break physical boundaries of "place" (e.g., digital offices and warehousing) (Nambisan, 2017). Furthermore, digital MNEs rely on digital infrastructure to facilitate communication, foster collaboration, and form computing capabilities (Monaghan et al., 2020). Thus, the transformation process towards digitalization creates a climate of reciprocal social exchange involving valuable forms of global human capital and necessitates a rethinking by IHRM scholars of the role of global human capital in digital MNEs.

Specifically, IHRM scholars (e.g., Donnelly & Johns, 2020; Zhu et al., 2018) point out that digital technology can significantly transform the landscape of global mobility in terms of various aspects of HRM

functions, such as hiring, training, communication, long-distance support, decision-making efficiency, and so on. However, embracing the use of innovative technologies as a means to build capable global human capital requires more in-depth research. For example, there is as yet insufficient knowledge about how digital MNEs utilize technological updates to create and secure human capital rents, via enhancing value in use or reducing firms' cost of human capital (Chadwick, 2017). Moreover, there is a deficit in relation to exposition of lessons or cases about the use of technology in management of global talents because of the process of transformation involving multidimensional fragmentation of work practices, such as, altering any particular skill sets of global human capital, embracing relatively new types of employment (e.g., shared workers), understanding complex employment relationships, and even diagnosing mental health issues raised by job isolation (cf. Donnelly & Johns, 2020). Furthermore, it would be interesting to learn the extent to which any specific boundary conditions that are yielded from either home- or host-country contextual environments can change the role of global human capital at different stages of the internationalization of digital firms. For example, Monaghan et al. (2020) call for research on what type of human capital is necessary for a domestic digital start-up to scale internationally.

5.5. Focusing more closely on processes of transfer of IHRM policies and practices

In the last four decades, processes of transfer of IHRM policies and practices have attracted many researchers (e.g., Rowley & Benson, 2002; Tregaskis & Brewster, 2006). The analytical approaches have been mainly targeted at either between-country or within MNE levels. Of these studies, the majority have treated HRM policies and practices as "a whole system" or "various bundles". However, some recent studies have identified significant differences in various stages of awareness, implementation and perceived effectiveness between managers and employees when they are involved in the transfer of IHRM policies and practices within an MNE (Zhu, Cooper, Fan, & De Cieri, 2013). Fardale et al. (2017) also suggest that future research should maintain the focus on individual HRM practices (rather than HRM systems or bundles), because their findings indicate clear variability in practice adoption by MNEs. Likewise, by criticizing the traditional way in which SHRM treats HRM as a set of levers to gain competitive advantage, Delery and Roumpi (2017) suggest that future studies should specify the HRM practices and the interactions of these particular practices that are associated with higher levels of organizational effectiveness.

Further, the more important point inspired by Delery and Roumpi (2017) is that MNEs should not simply focus on transfer of policies and practices, but also should pay more attention to both supply-side (e.g., headquarters) and demand-side (e.g., subsidiaries and their host countries) constraints. For example, transferring an employee engagement policy from headquarters to subsidiaries is not simply a policy *per se*; rather the policy has both on-the job and off-the-job constraints, and home- and host-country constraints as well (cf. Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Along this line, we encourage future research to focus on detailed differences in the context of transfer of IHRM policies and practices, and to explore the issues of why and how such differences appear.

5.6. Towards an institutional work perspective of transferring IHRM policies and practices

One of key arguments underlying the long-lasting debate — divergence-crossvergence-convergence — is the extent to which social and economic institutional influence should be taken into account in terms of transfer of IHRM policies and practices (Edwards et al., 2016;

Fan et al., 2016). In contrast to the conventional view that HRM practices are significantly influenced by contextual factors, such as formal or informal institutions (Edwards et al., 2016), Lawrence and Suddaby (2006: 215) contend that institutions are the product of purposive actions — institutional work, comprising “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions”. These institutional work efforts provide a source for MNEs to obtain additional competitive advantage under the institutional pressure prevailing in host countries (Regnér & Edman, 2014). While exploring how institutions effect transfer of a variety of IHRM policies and practices is a worthwhile endeavor, we encourage future research toward an institutional work perspective, that is, *how* and *why* a purposive action of transferring certain IHRM policies and practices from home to host countries, or *vice versa*, can also affect the MNEs’ institutional environment (Wu & Salomon, 2017; Yan, Zhu, Fan, & Kalfadellis, 2018). In so doing, a better understanding can be obtained as to how IHRM functions in the internationalization process, such as arbitrating a variety of institutional differences, navigating institutional voids, making institutional changes and increasing firms’ institutional capabilities (e.g., the skills and routines for efficient foreign operations) in host countries (cf. Carney, Dieleman, & Taussig, 2016).

5.7. Embracing rigorous methodology and “new” analytical techniques in IHRM research

Finally, we reflect on our readings on the research design of all IHRM papers reviewed. Although many IHRM articles show intriguing findings, the accuracy (validity) of these findings is subject to future examination. One major criticism is cross-sectional design, self-reported data and a single-respondent approach in these existing studies (Edwards et al., 2016; Farndale et al., 2017; Shaffer, Sebastian Reiche, Dimitrova, Lazarova, & Chen, 2016). We suggest, in order to widen the field of IHRM research, that future research design should embrace more multi-source, multi-wave, multiple countries, and longitudinal data collection methods. While some IHRM studies do have a rigorous and sophisticated research design, research methodology in the field is still largely influenced by variation-based analytical mindsets (e.g., regression methods). While there is no doubt about the value of using regression methods, we call for future research to adopt a wider range of research designs and analytical mindsets.

Some scholars (e.g., Zhu et al., 2018) suggest adopting a set-theoretic approach and using the technique of fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) in IHRM research. An application example can be seen in the work of Su et al. (2019). Rooted in set theory, fsQCA features “configurational classifications and judgements based on the simultaneous consideration of multiple interdependent factors, in line with our knowledge of how humans process information” (Campbell, Sirmon, & Schijven, 2016: 169). fsQCA models conjunctural causation, i.e., the idea that configurations of various conditions collectively, rather than one condition alone, relate to the outcome in question. This method overcomes some inherent limitations of conventional regression-based analysis which has statistical power limitations for analyzing up to three-way interactions and difficulties in interpreting results (Ragin, 2008). Also, fsQCA can detect multiple causal paths leading to the same outcome, and this can enrich theoretical typology development in the field (Fiss, 2011). Therefore, complemented with traditional statistical techniques (i.e., regression and SEM), embracing new methods can help better understand how IHRM functions in the internationalization process of firms.

6. Final remarks

Our IHRM review provides a timely answer to two research questions—what the current state of knowledge of IHRM research is, and

how this growing body of IHRM knowledge can be fruitfully extended. Having claimed so, we must acknowledge several research and method limitations. First, this review focuses on research articles in the field of IHRM, and excludes books (and book chapters) and major conferences in the IB and management fields (e.g., academy of international business (AIB) and academy of management (AOM) annual conference papers). The reasons are twofold. A search was indeed performed on books and major conference papers, but WOS did not generate an overall impactful list of these archives. For example, in the book list generated by WOS, only five impactful books had greater than an average 1.0 annual citation. Such a record is not comparable to the highly influential journal articles presented in Table 2. Also, many books or book chapters replicate knowledge presented in journal articles by the same author(s), or serve for educational or other practical purposes. Although conference papers do generate novel ideas, access to full papers, especially the ones presented in early years, is generally limited.

Second, although we intended to map the entire timeline of milestones in the field of IHRM (see, Fig. 2), we found that most influential articles in the field were mainly published in the second stage of IHRM research (from 1996 to date). While some researchers only focus on the recent timeframe for conducting an IHRM review (e.g., Cooke et al., 2019; Schuler & Tarique, 2007) so as to avoid similar problems, we must acknowledge in this context that the early contributions to IHRM that are not well mapped in this review due to the limitation of searching and mapping techniques. As stated earlier, there are many impactful studies in the first stage (from 1960s to the mid-1990s) that have triggered or inspired subsequent research. However, in the course of the evolutionary process of the literature, these earlier contributions have been gradually digested by more recent research, and thus are less likely to have been highly cited directly.

Third, although this review captures the total number of 1,924 relevant IHRM articles via the WOS database, we are certain that some important articles in languages other than English are not included in this review. Similarly, it is possible that our review missed some earlier publications that have not been indexed or fully digitalized (e.g., lack of abstracts or full paper records of these publications) in the WOS. Further, the review cannot capture some publications included in other equally excellent databases apart from the WOS (cf. Gaviria-Marin, Merigó, & Baier-Fuentes, 2019).

As a final remark, IHRM is one of the most important functional fields in IB. It has attracted academic attention since the 1960s, and has been examined to an impressive extent. The purpose of our study is to map the terrain of IHRM research over the past five decades, and highlight the areas where future research could be undertaken. Through a bibliographic analysis, we identify three main research trends that researchers have explored over the past decades (i.e., expatriation management, global human capital, and IHRM practices and policies). A valuable roadmap for future research has been drawn for researchers to follow.

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Appendix A. Analytical procedures

To address our research questions and avoid a typical problem of traditional literature review—“the endless attention to trees at the expense of forests”, we employed the bibliographic analytical approach in this study. The bibliographic analysis is one stream of computer-aided text analysis (CATA) approaches, which prevent researcher bias and

enables researchers to increase the efficiency and accuracy of content analysis (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). Powered by statistical methods, the bibliographic analysis, as a part of bibliometric, can trace relationships amongst academic publications and determine the popularity and impact of specific publications and authors (de Solla Price, 1965). The method has been applied in the main stream management research in recent years (e.g. Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Coudounaris, 2010; Parker et al., 2017; Wilden et al., 2016). Thus, a comprehensive bibliographic analysis of IHRM research can be beneficial to various interested parties, namely researchers, educators, and global business practitioners (cf. Leonidou et al., 2010). Guided by the best practices and the logical sequence in Gaur and Kumar (2018), the bibliographic analysis consisted of five steps:

Step 1: Pilot Search and Keywords development. To identify and refine the keywords for searching articles, we first focused on IHRM-related research on seven leading journals in the field of business and management over a ten-year time frame (from 2010 to 2020), namely: *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of World Business*, *Human Resource Management*, *The International Human Resource Management*. Through screening the identified studies, we developed a series of keywords for identifying journal articles on the topic of IHRM within all journals within the field of business and management.

Then, we applied those keywords that combine at least one word from the aspect of human resource management (i.e., “human capital” or “expatriat*” or “human resource management” or “international human resource management” or “HRM” or “IHRM” or “personnel management”) and at least one word from the aspect of international management (i.e., “international business” or “IB” or “MNEs” or “multinational” or “international*”) to identify articles via Web of Science (WOS). We limited the results in types of journal article that are presented in English, listed on the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), categorized in the fields of Management and Business and published within the timespan from 1965 to 2020. As a result, 1924 records were identified by the end of Feb 2020.

Step 2: Descriptive Analysis. To obtain an overall picture of the vast IHRM literature, we conducted three descriptive analyses among the collected 1924 articles, which listed the top sources of identified articles (see Table 1), top ten countries and top ten organizations that produce IHRM research (see Appendix A). Among the top ten countries of origin, apart from China (including Taiwan), the majority of countries are well developed ones, which implies call for IHRM research from other emerging economies or developing countries (e.g. India and Brazil). By observing the top ten research institutions that generate IHRM knowledge (in English), eight of ten research institutions are within Anglo-Saxon culture dominated societies (e.g., Australia, the UK and the US), and the additional two institutions are from the Nordic societies (e.g. Denmark and Finland). This feature, to large extent, corresponds with the countries of origin and research institution distribution of the IB research.

Step 3: Visualize Similarities in the Social Sciences. Then we conducted a bibliographic analysis on the 1924 articles within the field of Management and Business. We adopted VOS (visualization of similarities), a well-established technique of scientific mapping, to reveal the representative themes of existing research on IHRM and analyze the relationships between themes. VOS-generated scientific maps “have the capability to zoom out further [than meta-analyses] and empirically capture the relationships between multiple topic areas” (Lee, Felps, & Baruch, 2014: 340). Through extracting the key terms and phrases, VOS calculates the relationships between terms and phrases and then captures the occurrence of related terms.

From the result of scientific mapping analysis, we concluded three clusters of IHRM research, with each cluster containing strongly associated terms (Fig. 1). Each cluster fits a representative theme on IHRM. Thus the largest cluster (red, N = 143 terms/key words), labelled

Expatriation Management, covered research topics on expatriation and expatriation management (i.e., cross-cultural adjustment, global career, expatriate roles and characteristics, interactions and support). The second largest cluster (green, N = 126 terms/key words), *human capital*, maps on to the highly influential human resource factors for a firm’s behavior and performance (i.e., knowledge transfer, capability building). The third cluster (blue, N = 83 terms/key words), labelled *IHRM Policies and Practices*, includes research on the debate of divergence-convergence-convergence, strategic international human resource management (SIHRM), and international staffing. Next, we elaborated each of the three IHRM themes that are reflected in distinctive clusters in the scientific map.

Step 4: Identify the most influential articles and develop the timeline of the development of each theme under three clusters. To identify the most critical IHRM articles, we ranked the collected 1924 articles by the average citations (on WOS) per year. 65 articles with the average citations above 10 were considered as highly influential IHRM articles and were listed in Table 2.

Three clusters of IHRM research can be identified in the scientific map produced at Step 3, with each of these clusters clearly reflecting historical development. To reveal how each cluster has developed over time, we analyzed the contents of these 65 IHRM articles to mark them to each sub-theme among three identified clusters. Fig. 3 synthesizes the most influential work along the development of nine themes.

Step 5: Visualize Similarities in segmental time periods. This step aims to investigate the evolution of research topics in the field of IHRM during the past 20 years. Thus, we managed to map out heated research themes in four 5-year periods. Using the same analytical procedures in step 2, we first identify 180 articles in the period from 2000 to 2004, 332 articles in the period from 2005 to 2009, 614 articles in the period from 2010 to 2014, and 692 articles in the period from 2015 to the February of 2020. Then, based on the segmental data, 4 cluster maps were generated by VOS (see Fig. 2).

Appendix B. Regions and Institutions in Generating IHRM Research (in English)

Tables B1 and B2

Table B1
Top Ten Countries/Regions of Origin for Producing IHRM Research.

Rank	Countries/Regions	Records	% of 1924
1	USA	497	25.83
2	ENGLAND	449	23.34
3	AUSTRALIA	252	13.10
4	P.R. CHINA	176	9.15
5	GERMANY	131	6.81
6	CANADA	109	5.67
7	SPAIN	103	5.35
8	FINLAND	96	4.99
9	FRANCE	95	4.94
10	TAIWAN (REPUBLIC OF CHINA)	80	4.16

Table B2
Top Ten Institutions in Generating IHRM Knowledge.

Rank	Research Organizations	Records	% of 1924
1	MONASH UNIVERSITY	55	2.86
2	UNIVERSITY OF LONDON	54	2.81
3	UNIVERSITY OF VAASA	46	2.39
4	UNIVERSITY OF READING	40	2.08
5	CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM	33	1.72
6	MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY	32	1.66
7	UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK	32	1.66
8	AARHUS UNIVERSITY	31	1.61
9	CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY	30	1.56
10	UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM	30	1.56

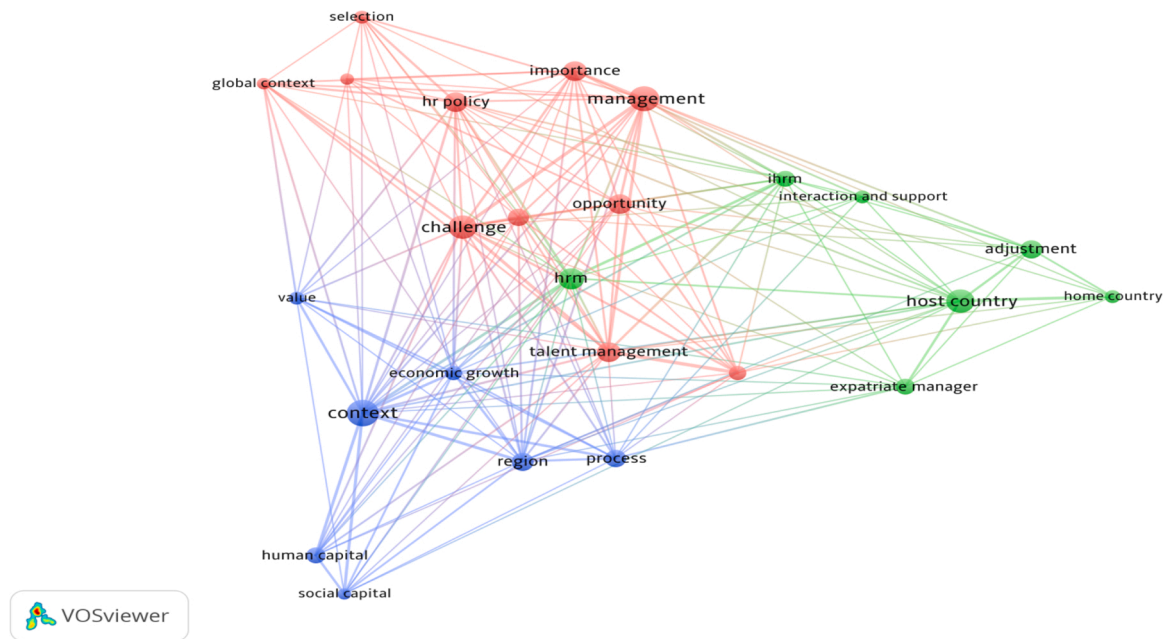


Fig. C1. The cluster map of human resource management in JWB.
 Note: Cluster 1(red) = IHRM Policies and Practices; Cluster 2(green) = Expatriation Management; Cluster 3(blue) = Human Capital.

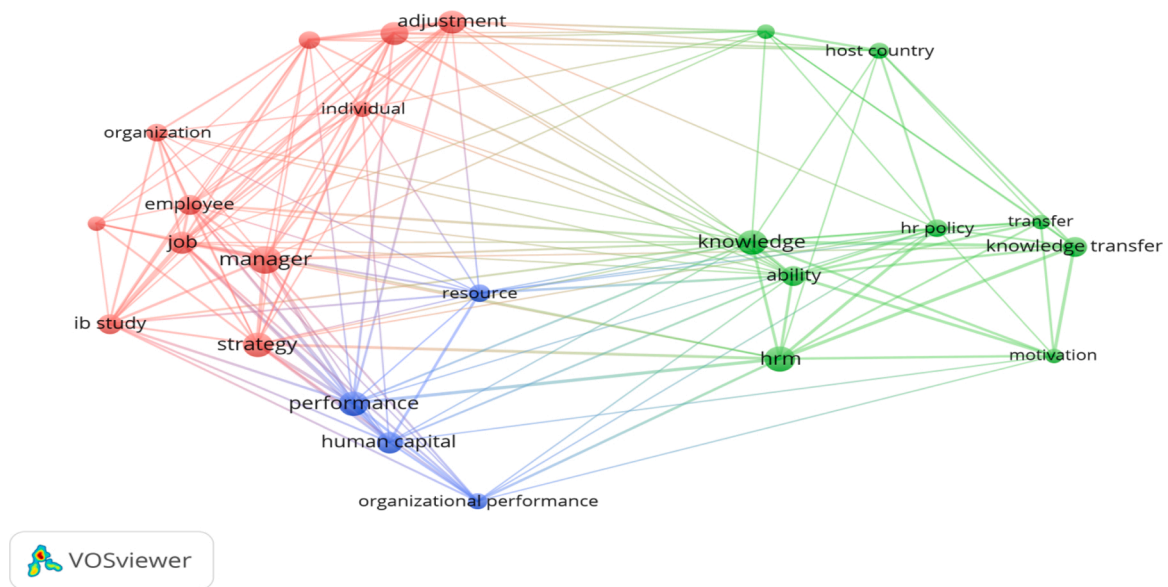


Fig. C2. The cluster map of human resource management in JIBS.
 Note: Cluster 1(red) = Expatriation Management; Cluster 2(green) = IHRM Policies and Practices; Cluster 3(blue) = Human Capital.

Appendix C. The Robust Bibliographic Analysis of IHRM Clusters in JWB and JIBS

Appendix D. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101185>.

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