

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

SPECIAL ISSUE

HRM IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Guest Editors: Greg Bamber and Chris Leggett

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ASIA-PACIFIC TIERS OF CHANGE

This article starts by outlining five explanations of economic growth and four stages of economic development in the Asia-Pacific region. The developed countries there include Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The 'Asian tigers' of Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan form a top tier of post-Japan industrialisers. A second generation of 'tigers' includes Malaysia in the vanguard, with Thailand and the PRC following. A third tier of industrialisers may include countries as diverse as Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia and, perhaps, the countries of the Indian sub-continent. Such a classification provides a context for discussing various approaches to human resources and industrial relations issues in this article and the ones that follow.

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THE EXTENT OF DIVERGENCE IN HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICE ACROSS THREE CHINESE NATIONAL CULTURES: HONG KONG, TAIWAN AND SINGAPORE

This study examines the extent of divergence versus convergence impact on the design of performance appraisal schemes across three Chinese culture-based newly industrialised countries: Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. This survey research, which assessed respondents' perceptions of their country's predominant behavioural characteristics of management practice pertinent to performance appraisals, demonstrated significant differences among the countries under study. The results suggest that, contrary to past cross-cultural cluster research, homogeneity should not automatically be assumed in guiding important management practices such as performance appraisal.

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HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: THE 'THREE SYSTEMS' REFORMS

This article discusses the human resources implications of the comprehensive 'three-systems' reforms in state-owned enterprises introduced in the early 1990s in Northeast China in terms of labour contracts, rewards systems and social insurance. It critically examines current developments in industrial relations vis-a-vis each of these categories. The upshot of these changes is a move away from the old 'iron-rice-bowl' employment system towards a labour-market 'with Chinese characteristics'. Such a strategy is not without its political risks, particularly if it leads to greater joblessness without a nationwide welfare 'safety-net' being fully put in place. If the 'three systems' reforms were first piloted in 1992, it was not until 1995 that they began to be extended nationally. Such changes may be of considerable potential importance to HRM managers in multinational companies interested in forming strategic alliances and joint ventures with Chinese state-owned enterprises.

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MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND LABOUR FLEXIBILITY IN JAPANESE MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES

Since the 1970s Japanese labour relations and management practices have been scrutinised as Western firms search for ways to improve their productivity and international competitiveness. Pervading this literature is the view that the Japanese labour market is flexible and adaptable. The purpose of this article is to ascertain if flexibility is a key strategic objective of management and if Japanese firms adopt a core-peripheral approach to employment. The research is based on a survey of Japanese enterprises conducted and detailed interviews with senior managers. The major finding is that Japanese labour practices have a strategic component and that the use of casual and contract workers is consistent with a core-peripheral labour strategy.

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WORKPLACE PRACTICES OF JAPANESE AND AUSTRALIAN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS OPERATING IN SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA

This article addresses occupational health and safety and equal employment opportunity in Australian and Japanese multinational corporations (MNCs) in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. The author is concerned with how practices in these MNCs are affected by local conditions in the countries and examines the practices which occur, why different practices occur between countries and how practices interact with local political, cultural and social constraints. The article examines how MNCs adjust to prevailing workplace practices in Southeast Asia. It concludes that MNCs use some workplace practices employed in Australia as well as adapting their workplace practices to those which they either perceive to exist on a cultural and social level or are regulated by legislation in the host country.

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FRONT LINE WORK IN THE 'NEW MODEL SERVICE FIRM': AUSTRALIAN AND JAPANESE COMPARISONS

This article assesses the claims of the management literature regarding two important aspects of front line service work; job content and relations with the immediate supervisor. It does this, firstly, by examining the relevant research literatures and, secondly, by presenting evidence from two firms based in Australia and from one based in Japan. These firms were chosen as approximating to the ideal type of the 'new model service firm'. Evidence on knowledge, skills and creativity in the three sites suggests important commonalities with, and differences from, the 'routine worker' ideal type. The major difference lay in the considerable amount of internal contextual knowledge that was required in the role. Relations with the immediate supervisor were examined by focusing on the social relations of control and learning. The evidence on control and learning, cumulatively, indicated a tendency towards the supervisor adopting less of a direct control role and adopting more of a hierarchical teaching role.

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**WORKFORCE REDUCTION IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND:
A RESEARCH NOTE**

Relatively few studies have examined the incidence of permanent workforce reduction and factors related to workforce reduction behaviour. In this study, such issues are addressed using data from more than 1,450 organisations in Australia and New Zealand. On average, about 36 per cent of respondents reported a permanent reduction of the workforce over the past three years (with an average reduction of almost 19 per cent of the workforce). Several factors, including product or service demand, pressure to focus on short-term profits or budget goals, a major change in organisational strategy, the quality of the relationship between the employer and employees, the organisation's expressed commitment to job security and the age of the organisation, distinguished organisations that had or had not engaged in a permanent employee retrenchment.

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