

**CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE:
CENTRAL CONCEPTS IN STRATEGIC
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
AND MARKETING IN AN
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

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Abstract

Competing pressures for global integration and local differentiation present many challenges and opportunities for international management. This paper explores the implications of global-local tensions for multinational enterprises (MNEs). The convergence-divergence debate in the international management literature is reviewed, with particular attention to the emic-etic distinction. We suggest that complex forces for convergence and divergence are influential across multiple levels and have implications for several areas of international management, including international marketing and strategic human resource management (SHRM). We review the development of theory and research related to SHRM, and suggest that the convergence-divergence influences on SHRM are also applicable to international marketing.

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE: CENTRAL CONCEPTS IN STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we explore the implications of global-local tensions for multinational enterprises. We focus on the convergence-divergence debate, which is of significance for academics and practitioners working across diverse fields of international management, including strategic human resource management (SHRM) and international marketing. Practitioners and CEOs may use terms such as "scale versus sensitivity" instead of convergence and divergence, but the recognition and application of the latter terms has become well recognised as a challenge in international management. We suggest that the convergence-divergence debate has raised challenges and opportunities relevant to both SHRM and international marketing. We suggest that developments in theory and research in SHRM can inform developments in international marketing. Conversely, recent developments in international marketing are likely to be informative for SHRM.

Acknowledging the increasing complexities of global markets, we suggest that the notion of dichotomous tensions of global integration and local differentiation (Doz & Prahalad, 1991) requires further investigation. Organizations and managers face numerous challenges related to pressures emerging across multiple levels.

STRATEGIC HRM IN MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES

The complexities of global markets have accelerated the need to develop human resources as a source of competitive advantage in MNEs (De Cieri & Dowling, 1999; Schuler, Dowling & De Cieri, 1993; Stroh & Caligiuri, 1998; Taylor, Beechler & Napier, 1996; Taylor, Beechler, Najjar & Ghosh, 1998). The concept of SHRM in MNEs has developed from research on international human resource management, which has been characterized by three broad approaches (Dowling, 1999). Early work in this field (for example, Laurent, 1986) emphasized cross-cultural management issues. A second area of research developed in comparative HRM research (Brewster, Tregaskis, Hegewisch & Mayne, 1996). Third, much of the research in international HRM has focused on aspects of HRM in multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Dowling, Welch & Schuler, 1999). This area is most widely recognized as international HRM, involving the same elements as HRM within a single country, with added complexity due to diversity of national contexts and inclusion of different national categories of workers (Dowling et al., 1999). Much of this research has focused on micro-level variables and issues related to the cross-national transfer of employees and management practices.

Parallel to the development of research on strategic HRM issues, international HRM researchers and practitioners have paid increasing attention to more macro-level issues, such as the strategic nature of international HRM and implications for organizational performance (Stroh & Caligiuri, 1998). De Cieri and Dowling (1999) have recently suggested that the resultant area of research and practice is best described as 'SHRM in MNEs'. In adopting this approach, we take a broad view, beyond the 'traditional' focus on MNEs, to develop an understanding of human resource issues that are of relevance to a broad spectrum of organizational forms in a global context and to a variety of stakeholders (such as employees, customers, communities, and trade unions).

GLOBAL – LOCAL TENSIONS

The globalization of business increases the requirement for understanding ways in which MNEs may operate. We suggest that the tensions between global integration and local differentiation are increasingly complicated, due to the network of pressures and drivers for international management. Overall, as suggested in Figure 1, the globalization of business brings an array of complex new challenges for MNE strategy, as it relates to functional areas such as international marketing and SHRM. These challenges have been noted in the international marketing literature, with some writers suggesting that solutions are emerging to address the conflicting demands of global integration and local differentiation. For example, Berthon, Pitt, Katsikeas & Berthon (1999) have recently argued that the Internet provides an example of technology that balances mass production and customization, to achieve mass customization. However, we suggest that to consider the competing pressures only in terms of 'global' and 'local' risks the failure to recognise and deal with the more complex underlying layers of pressures and demands. We argue that, at each of the identified levels, there are conflicts caused by competing pressures for global integration (convergence) and local differentiation (divergence). These levels are outlined briefly below, then issues of convergence and divergence are explored in more depth in the following sections.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

First, to consider pressures at the global level, we suggest that it should be recognised that the globalization of management includes contextual layers such as industry, nation and region (Sundaram & Black, 1992); these layers are worthy of further exploration. Several authors have suggested that factors such as increased 'global interconnectivity' and consumerism (Ger, 1999), and international trade and travel are forces for convergence (Craig, Douglas & Grein, 1992). However, national divergence remains evident. Second, at the regional level, developments such as the removal of internal trade barriers and integration of national markets in the European Union and the introduction of the European Monetary Union from January 1999 have brought a new range of inter-organizational relationships that hold significant implications for organizations, management and marketing (Ganesh, 1998; Latta, 1999), although there is evidence of resistance to supra-national arrangements. One example of this is seen in the variable progress of numerous European Union directives (Golub, 1999). At a third level, economic difficulties in several countries in the Asia Pacific region since 1997 provide further examples of the influence of exogenous factors on various aspects of management, at national and global levels (Reid, 1999).

To tighten the focus further, a fourth area, that of intra-national pressures, may be seen in the calls by writers such as Cavusgil and Das (1997) to highlight the need to address *within*-country cross-cultural differences in the conduct of international research. Fifth, pressures at the industry level are evident in many cases of industry deregulation and industry structural change (Baldry, 1994; Doyle & O'Leary, 1999). The Australian economy provides several examples of such pressures (Fisher & Dowling, 1999).

Moving closer to the organizational level of analysis, a sixth type or level of pressure, is evident in inter-organizational pressures. An example of inter-organizational pressures can be seen in international inter-organizational networks and alliances that present an array of concomitant challenges for MNEs (Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1997; Thorelli, 1986). At a seventh level, examples of intra-organizational tensions may be seen in the increasing involvement in international business by a wide range of organizational types and forms. For example, research conducted by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) shows that many small and new ventures can compete successfully in international markets, despite the evidence of risks and failure amongst international small firms (Buckley, 1997).

Finally, the issue of diversity management shows an example of conflicting demands at the individual level. Workforce diversity, or demographic heterogeneity, provides several benefits, such as broadening of the experience and knowledge base of an organization, thus enhancing competitive advantage (Kamoche, 1996;

Wiersema & Bantel, 1992). However, workforce diversity also entails a range of management challenges, such as communication difficulties and misunderstandings (Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Tung, 1993). Wilkinson and Cheung (1999) show that issues of cultural diversity extend beyond the workforce to the marketplace. They provide a framework for marketing to multicultural societies such as the U.S. or Australia. They argue that the divergent forces present in a multicultural national market provide guidance for firms seeking to operate in the international marketplace.

THE CONVERGENCE-DIVERGENCE DEBATE

In order to examine the challenges facing SHRM in multinational enterprises, we focus this paper on the convergence-divergence debate, in order to explore better understand the concepts of global integration and local differentiation (Adler, Doktor & Redding, 1986). The convergence-divergence debate is one of the most contested issues in the international and cross-cultural management literature.

Convergence refers to the observation that demands of industrialization and worldwide coordination and competition lead to increasing similarities, aided by factors such as technology, education, and improved standard of living (Dunphy, 1987; Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison & Myers, 1960). In contrast, the *divergence* hypothesis postulates that the *form* and *content* of functional specialization that develops with growth would vary according to culture (Adler et al., 1986; Hofstede, 1994).

The dynamics of convergence and divergence in organizations and managerial practices worldwide have attracted attention in a range of management disciplines, including marketing management, human resource management, and organizational design/theory (e.g. Adler et al., 1986; De Cieri, McGaughey & Dowling, 1997; Levitt, 1983; Sparrow, Schuler & Jackson, 1994). The central question addressed in this debate is whether organizations and managerial practices worldwide are becoming more similar (convergence) - or whether they are maintaining their culturally-based dissimilarities (divergence) (Adler et al., 1986).

The convergence hypothesis focuses on contextual contingencies and revolves around the argument that the common requirements of management - or a common industrial logic - diminish the importance of cultural differences. The homogenization of world markets, growth in worldwide communications, transport and travel (Levitt, 1983), and greater interdependence and collaboration between organizations (Doz & Prahalad, 1991; Kobrin, 1991; Porter, 1986) and nations (Ghoshal & Nohria, 1993; Rosenzweig & Singh, 1991) are seen to be factors eroding differences between organizations, management practices, and consumer preferences worldwide.

This hypothesis was prominent in the business management literature of the 1950s and 1960s, and was based on two key assumptions (see Dowling et al., 1999; Hofstede, 1994). The first assumption was that there are principles of sound management that hold regardless of national environments. Thus, the existence of local or national practices that deviate from these principles simply dictates a need to change these local practices rather than be locally sensitive. The second assumption was that the universality of sound management practices will lead to societies becoming more alike (or convergent) in the future. Given the dominance of the U.S. in the post-WW2 period, it was assumed that this meant convergence towards the U.S. economic system (Harbison, 1959; Dunphy, 1987).

While there has been a plethora of highly technical discussion in the SHRM literature regarding performance appraisal requirements and techniques, the failure of much of the literature to recognise the implications of cross-cultural differences has led to weakness in application and practice in MNEs. Randall (1993) has raised the point that a great deal of management research and practice has been influenced by evidence from the United States. The assumption that what works in the U.S. will apply equally well in other cultures and countries has been increasingly questioned over recent years.

Indeed, researchers have realized "that they have underestimated the extent to which culture profoundly influences management thought and practice" (Randall, 1993: 91). Child and Kieser (1979: 251) concluded

that the culture-free argument is of "limited significance and based on unproven causality". Dunphy (1987) suggests that the early 1970s provided new theoretical hypotheses regarding convergence, as researchers argued over the influences of culture and history on economic development (which may include factors such as organizational structure and employment patterns, and aspects of individual behavior in organizations). To summarize the literature of this period, the culture-free hypothesis was overwhelmingly rejected (Hickson & Pugh, 1995; McGaughey & De Cieri, 1999).

In contrast to the argument for convergence, the *divergence* hypothesis - whereby culturally based dissimilarities are maintained - postulates that the *form* and *content* of practices that develop worldwide in response to changes in the environment will be dependent on cultural differences. Hofstede's (1980; 1994) assessment of coordinating mechanisms in organizations of different countries (different national administrative heritages (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992) lends support to the divergence hypothesis. For example, Hofstede (1994) suggested that *standardization of skills* suits the traditional emphasis in countries such as Germany and Switzerland on the professional qualifications of workers. In contrast, *standardization of work processes* matches with the French emphasis on bureaucracy or a "pyramid of people", which Hofstede suggested is aligned with the findings of a larger power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance in his French sample.

Child's (1981) review of the literature on cross-national organizations has proven significant in clarifying the convergence-divergence debate. Child observed that implicit in the contingency (convergence) and culture-bound (divergence) theories are views of organizational behavior which are "diametrically opposed" (Child, 1981: 348-9). According to Child, the types of measurement used by contingency theorists focussed upon highly formalistic and broad features of organizations. These are often termed macro-level variables. This focus "screens out" culture-related variation which is found in the way these formalistic and broad features are operationalized on a day-to-day basis. That is, the more informal aspects of organizations, "relationships, modes of behavior, processes of mutual adjustment and accommodation" (Child, 1981: 319) are ignored. Contingency theorists therefore tend to view organizational behavior as being externally constrained and influenced by factors such as structure or technology. A similar argument can be applied in such fields as international marketing. Levitt (1983: 307) states that "a powerful force drives the world towards a converging commonality, and that force is technology".

In contrast, theorists emphasising cultural influences "tend to regard the form of organization as consequent upon human preferences and decisions" (Child, 1981: 349). That is, cultural characteristics - or micro-level variables - dictate the preferred modes of action or behavior, and the organizational structure and technology chosen is consistent with these preferred modes. This observation is significant as it raises the question of whether contrasting findings in the management literature are emerging not only because of the variables studied but, at a more fundamental level, because of the differing theoretical perspectives (and the associated potential biases) of the researchers. The theoretical perspective of the researcher could, of course, also be likely to impinge on the variables initially chosen for study. Indeed, a major challenge for theory development and research related to SHRM in MNEs is to overcome the ethnocentrism of one's own perspective and experience (Perlmutter, 1969).

As noted with regard to Figure 1, convergence of regional trading blocs, such as in the European Union (EU) provides an example of regional integration, or convergence at the macro-level, as it expressly aimed to develop a single market (Wistrich, 1994). Contemporary SHRM and industrial relations literature, particularly in the EU, has been vocal on issues of convergence-divergence (see, for example, Jensen, Madsen, & Due, 1995). However, in much of this literature, the concepts of convergence and divergence, appear to be treated as given, with scant questioning. Despite this, it is apparent that *national* industrial relations systems continue to operate, in Europe and elsewhere. National systems "which are already divergent, will continue to be so, probably even more, due to over and above pronounced nationalisms, added decentralization (federalism), more overseas management operating locally and company culture, being of importance" (Blanpain, 1992: 20). Moreover, with enlargement of the EU, there is evidence of difficulty in obtaining convergence amongst diverse national labour laws and industrial relations systems (Streeck, 1993), recognising that a national industrial relations system forms an integral part of the national

cultural identity (Clarke & Bamber, 1994). Some degree of 'Europeanization' of industrial relations is evident, through convergence in terms and conditions of employment (Valkenburg & Zoll, 1995).

Baldry (1994) questions whether it is possible to have the increasing societal convergence that other writers seem to be predicting, in the face of trends towards industry deregulation (which would presumably lead to greater divergence). Baldry also notes that: "different systems can appear to be experiencing the same influences or shared experiences but are not necessarily converging" (1994: 107). For example, the EU member states are experiencing pressures towards regional integration yet their internal infrastructure leads to different implementation of laws and regulations promulgated at European level.

Convergence would be expected to facilitate international transferability of management style and practices, and MNEs are justifiably viewed as a considerable force for convergence. The amount and pace of convergence will, however, vary according to the relative power of the opposing forces for *divergence*. Micro-level factors, such as beliefs, norms, culture, and values, are often cited as forces for divergence (McGaughey & De Cieri, 1999). As noted with reference to Figure 1, however, there are examples of converging micro-level factors, such as increasing cross-national similarity in values, concurrent with industrialization (McGaughey, Iverson & De Cieri, 1997; Tung 1993). There is also evidence to suggest that there are both converging and diverging macro-level factors. For example, some national laws create greater similarity between nations, others greater dissimilarity (Van Peijpe, 1995).

Fombrun (1986) has criticised the extant organizational literature for focusing on processes of convergence while tending to ignore contradiction, or divergence. He suggests that convergence and divergence are temporally separate aspects of the same process, and

Any convergence of the levels of structure itself builds up social tensions through contradiction that destabilize or negate the convergence, leading to periodic revolutions and a forced shift to a new configuration (Fombrun, 1986: 414).

While the convergence/divergence "dichotomy" (Adler et al., 1986) is founded in two opposing standpoints in organizational analysis (Child, 1981), the co-existence of the two "poles" has been recognized. Dunlop, Harbison, Kerr and Myers (1975: 35) asserted that "there will never be total convergence because of the clash between 'uniformities' growing out of the logic of industrialism and the 'diversities' springing from political, social and cultural differences". Recognizing this complexity, the comparative management literature has reformulated the convergence-divergence debate to focus on the emic-etic distinction.

THE EMIC-ETIC DISTINCTION

The terms *emic* and *etic* provide a classic distinction in cross-cultural research, although they were originally derived from linguistics: a *phonemic* system documents meaningful sounds specific to a given language, and a *phonetic* system organizes all sounds that have meaning in any language. In cross-cultural research, an emic approach assumes that attitudinal or behavioral phenomena are culturally unique. In contrast, an etic approach aims to identify universal attitudinal or behavioral phenomena (Usunier, 1996). The emic-etic distinction enables researchers and practitioners to examine which concepts and practices are culture-common (etic) and which are culture-specific (emic).

For example, in a study of human resource management (HRM) practices in twelve countries, Sparrow et al., (1994) found that there was indeed convergence in the use of HRM for competitive advantage. The commonality of this strategy across the twelve samples suggests that it is fast becoming an etic practice. However, despite this commonality, the authors found some clear divergences in the areas of HRM which are perceived to be of greatest importance, and in the way in which specific aspects such as culture, work structuring, performance management and resourcing will be utilized.

In the case of management development programs it is relevant to note that North America is the major source of management theory and research. This may suggest a convergence approach and, indeed, broad concepts related to management development may in fact be etic. Providers of management development programs which attempt to transfer North American theories and cases studies to a highly diversified cultural region such as the Asia Pacific region need to be aware, however, that some degree of adjustment may have to be made. For example, U.S.-influenced educational techniques such as experiential learning and participative classes dominate management education, yet these techniques may be less effective across different cultural groups (Vance & Ring, 1994). Both historical factors and core cultural values have to be taken into account when expatriate managers try to transfer their knowledge in areas such as leadership, motivation, human resource development, marketing, labour relations and legal dispute resolution.

Given the distinction between emic and etic, it becomes impossible to advocate globally standardized marketing or management practices. Emic elements will always necessitate some degree of local adaptation. Indeed, inappropriate adoption of an etic approach has led to some rather poor predictions of future performance. For example, writing in the 1950s, the U.S. economist Harbison concluded with regard to the Japanese management system that:

Unless basic rather than trivial or technical changes in the broad philosophy of organisation building are forthcoming, Japan is destined to fall behind the ranks of modern industrialised nations (Harbison, 1959: 254).

Perhaps it is with this in mind that Levitt (1983: 318) qualifies his argument for globally standardized products, stating that MNEs will "Seek *sensibly* to force *suitably* standardised products and practices on the entire globe". Reflecting this point, Ricks' (1993) book, *Blunders in international business*, provides abundant examples across a range of functional areas of management (marketing, human resources and finance) which illustrate the dangers of assuming that 'the way we do things back home' (i.e. emic behavior) will work in other situations (i.e. that the behavior or process is etic). It is not only business practitioners who make such mistakes -- academics are just as prone to demonstrate emic behavior.

It is important to recognize, however, that we cannot limit ourselves to national borders. Economic integration and the growth of regionalism leads us to look beyond national borders and to consider the development of regional strategies. At the same time, we need to recognize intra-national, and even intra-organizational, diversity (Tung, 1993). Cultural space is increasingly synonymous with areas that are smaller than nation-states. The protracted conflict in the former state of Yugoslavia and the more recent threat of Balkanisation in Indonesia may provide contemporary examples of this phenomenon. The ability to effectively manage this intra-national cultural diversity is, more and more, seen as a source of competitive advantage (Cox & Blake, 1991; Tung, 1993). For example, Cavusgil and Das (1997) note the need to address *within*-country cross-cultural differences, noting, for example, that India has more than a dozen official languages in addition to numerous dialects. As Wolfram Cox et al. (1998) have argued, too often attention in international management research has been drawn at the inter-national level, ignoring the subtleties and shifts of the intra-national terrain.

Another example of increasing complexity related to the management of cultural diversity as part of SHRM in MNEs is evident in the shift in many MNEs towards operating on a regiocentric or geocentric network basis. One implication of this trend is that multicultural teams have become more common across workplaces. Several authors have advocated further research to investigate such developments in the transnational context (Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997; Snow, Snell, Davison, & Hambrick, 1996).

The emic-etic distinction also applies to a major methodological issue in international management research. An *emic* approach to research attempts to describe a particular culture by investigating culture-specific aspects of concepts or behaviors, based on historical and social developments that have influenced people. In contrast, an *etic* approach attempts to use variables which are generalizable across cultures to study social phenomena in relatively culture-free (culture-common), universal terms (Bhagat & McQuaid, 1982).

Both emic and etic approaches to cross-cultural research may be legitimate, but methodological difficulties may be encountered if the distinction between the two approaches is ignored. Hence, a major issue for cross-cultural management researchers is to ensure that an etic approach is not inappropriately assumed and imposed (Dowling et al., 1999). This is an important point because a true etic is "one that emerges from the given phenomena" (Ronen, 1986: 48). This issue has been one of the most frequently examined in cross-cultural research (e.g. Morey & Luthans, 1984; Triandis & Marin, 1983). Various suggestions for overcoming the difficulties inherent in this area of research have been offered (cf. Bhagat & McQuaid, 1982; Morey & Luthans, 1984). There are many implications of this emic-etic distinction for practical issues related to SHRM in MNEs. For example, the development of a performance management system would need to consider that what is viewed as commendable behavior in one culture may be viewed quite differently in another culture.

DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SHRM IN MNEs AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

In this paper, we have argued for greater awareness of the complexities for SHRM in MNEs, in managing the tensions related to global integration and local differentiation. We suggest that the convergence-divergence influences on SHRM in MNEs also are applicable to international marketing. Developments in theory, research, teaching and practice for international management and SHRM in MNEs appear to hold several important implications for international marketing.

Implications for Theory and Research Development

Several reviews of cross-cultural and comparative management have been conducted over the past three decades (e.g. Bhagat & McQuaid, 1982; Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Cavusgil & Das, 1997). Each has been critical of the paucity of theoretical development and the limitations of empirical research.

Bhagat and McQuaid (1982) presented several proposals based on their appraisal of cross-cultural research. As well as reviewing methodological difficulties and recommending specific techniques such as decentering (to overcome inappropriate imposition of an etic approach), they recommended use of the typology identified by Sechrest (1977, cited in Bhagat & McQuaid, 1982) to develop a three-phase approach to cross-cultural research. First, researchers should study specific organizational phenomena in order to improve the emic content of instruments employed. This should be followed by ethnographic research to trace specific features of the culture relating to the dependent variable, to enable theoretical refinement and concrete operational terms. Third, cross-cultural researchers should conduct studies of specific cultural variations in organizational phenomena to show the importance of these influences on the dependent variables. Bhagat and McQuaid (1982) strongly recommended attempts for theoretical development by cross-cultural researchers and called for improved methodological rigour in cross-cultural research.

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) identified a major problem, at least in U.S. research, of parochialism, or a lack of awareness of alternative approaches. To address this and other problems, they presented 13 recommendations for progress in cross-cultural research. Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi and Thibodeaux (1991) and Cavusgil and Das (1997) have also provided recommendations similar to those offered by Bhagat and McQuaid (1982). While it is somewhat depressing to note that several authors have found that the persistence of limitations in empirical research have made it necessary to reiterate recommendations in the literature, there is some evidence of progress claimed towards a rigorous approach to cross-cultural research (Tayeb, 1994).

Bhagat and McQuaid (1982) also advocated pooling of research resources into multicultural research teams with equal participation rather than imposition of a unicultural perspective. Studies by multicultural research teams are becoming more prevalent. Research such as that by Teagarden et al. (1995) are excellent examples of progress - and difficulties experienced - by multicultural research teams.

Rousseau and House (1994) argue that research based on assumptions that micro and macro are distinct and separate levels would be an oversimplification. In the international context, the increasing complexity of business has created an imperative for an integrative approach. It is well recognised that MNEs are often so complex as to make it extremely difficult to identify an appropriate organizational level at which to direct study. Such complexity may make the activities rather than organizational units the better target of study. This shift in attention from "traditional organizational units to organizational activities creates the need to integrate micro and macro processes in the study of organizations" (Rousseau & House, 1994: 17).

Cross-cultural management research has focused to some extent on stand-alone (and large) MNEs. More recently, increasing pressures of international competition have involved many organizations in restructuring to develop more flexible forms. This includes development of networked MNEs and inter-organizational alliances (Jarillo, 1995). Such organizations require and reinforce integration of macro and micro elements (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992). Distinguishing between macro and micro elements is not sustainable in a competitive international context. Likewise, research which has treated macro and micro as separate elements would fail to address the need for recognition of emerging integrative capacities in MNEs.

Rousseau and House (1994) argue that an integrative approach overcomes the biases of pure micro or macro paradigms. First, over-generalisation and isomorphism have been major difficulties in cross-cultural research focusing solely on micro or macro levels. The ambiguity, uncertainty and difficulty of controlling for variables in cross-cultural research has constrained the ability of researchers to investigate individual and organizational processes (Rousseau & House, 1994). Such overgeneralization may take several forms; for example, researchers may use heuristics when endeavoring to understand foreign cultures (Kahneman & Tversky, 1980). Second, underestimation of cross-level effects has been a characteristic evident in both micro and macro research. There is increasing recognition of the inter-dependencies and influences across organizational levels, and the need for linkages between organizational parts. With regard to cross-cultural research, Nasif et al. (1991: 88) have noted the guidelines offered by authors such as Rousseau for multi-level and cross-level research to achieve a "more comprehensive and integrative perspective of organizational phenomena". Third, integrative research, examining phenomena across multiple organizational levels, networks, routines or relationships, would provide progress beyond the traditional units of analysis. This approach would appear to be most suitable to the international context, with new organizational forms presenting challenges to traditional notions of organizational boundaries (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992; Wolf, 1997).

Although research on SHRM in MNEs has made several important steps forward, inadequacies remain. It is arguable that the criticisms that have been leveled at research in SHRM in MNEs are also relevant to research in international marketing. We suggest that examination of recent developments and recommendations that have been made for SHRM in MNEs will be useful and instructive for international marketing researchers, as trends in international marketing research appear to parallel recent developments in SHRM in MNEs. Each of the points made below is, we suggest, just as relevant to international marketing as they are to SHRM in MNEs.

First, a common criticism of research on SHRM in MNEs is that much of the research has been atheoretical or mono-theoretical. Overall, the first generation of research related to SHRM in MNEs has been atheoretical or mono-theoretical. While this has been an important phase in the development of the research area, it is necessary to move on to the next iteration. The second generation of research is emerging as more theory-driven, often with multi-theoretical approaches.

Second, and supporting the emphasis on strong theoretical bases, research on SHRM in MNEs is utilising more rigorous research designs. A key requirement for research on SHRM in MNEs is to develop psychometrically sound measures for relevant constructs and methods for testing research propositions or hypotheses (Schuler & Florkowski, 1996). Much of the past research has been restricted to quantitative analysis, often using proxy measures. More recent research approaches include qualitative methodologies, multi-method approaches and longitudinal research design.

Third, there is a need to raise the focus of SHRM research from the micro-level of expatriation and other practices, to investigate variables at multiple levels, and explore relationships between these variables. Fourth, a large proportion of research on SHRM in MNEs uses one HR manager as the sole respondent for each MNE represented in their sample. Use of multiple sources of information would serve to validate the reports of sole managers, particularly with respect to the perceived effectiveness of SHRM strategy and practices.

Given the issues raised above, we suggest that research in areas such as SHRM in MNEs and international marketing may require multidisciplinary and multicultural collaborations in order to understand and explore complex phenomena. While certain theories, research methods, and practices may be applicable and effective in one cultural setting, changes to suit local requirements are inevitable for transfer across cultures. Sundaram and Black (1992) have suggested that the multi-disciplinary nature of MNEs has implications for the manner in which scholars are trained, as it may be necessary to train scholars who are willing and able to assimilate views outside a particular discipline. An alternative approach is to build research teams incorporating various specializations, to overcome the limitations of any individual's area of knowledge or expertise (e.g., Teagarden et al., 1995).

Implications for Practice

We also note that issues related to the pressures of convergence and divergence on international management have implications for the practice of both SHRM in MNEs and international marketing, as these are parallel functional areas of international management. Our main concern here is the relationship between research and practice.

On one hand, for some issues in international management, it is evident that a research-practice gap exists, with research lagging behind the current needs of practitioners and managers. For example, even though internationalization is a phenomenon that affects both large and small firms, most of the international research conducted to date has addressed issues involving larger and older corporations (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1992; Cavusgil & Das, 1997). The gap may not be easy to fill, as there are complex issues to define, measure and address.

On the other hand, there is a practice-research gap, with practice in some aspects lagging behind research. With regard to some aspects of SHRM, it has been said that the state of practice in many organizations lags behind the state of knowledge (Dowling, 1999; Fisher, 1989). One example of this gap is evident in recent efforts to develop a strategic partnership role for HRM. Becker and Huselid (1998: 94) pose the following: "(t)he conceptual literature strongly argues for the importance of developing such a role for HRM, and the empirical results point to significant economic returns to the organization for doing so. So, why is it so difficult to implement these ideas in practice?"

Similar questions are raised with regard to aspects of international marketing, and no doubt for various other areas. We suggest that the search for answers to such questions will be facilitated by knowledge sharing and learning between functional areas such as international marketing and SHRM in MNEs.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have engaged in a dialectic journey to explore the intellectual terrain of the field of strategic human resource management in multinational enterprises, to raise awareness of parallel implications for international marketing. We have sought to build awareness of the complexities and challenges of the international management context and to encourage the development of research, teaching and practice in SHRM and international marketing.

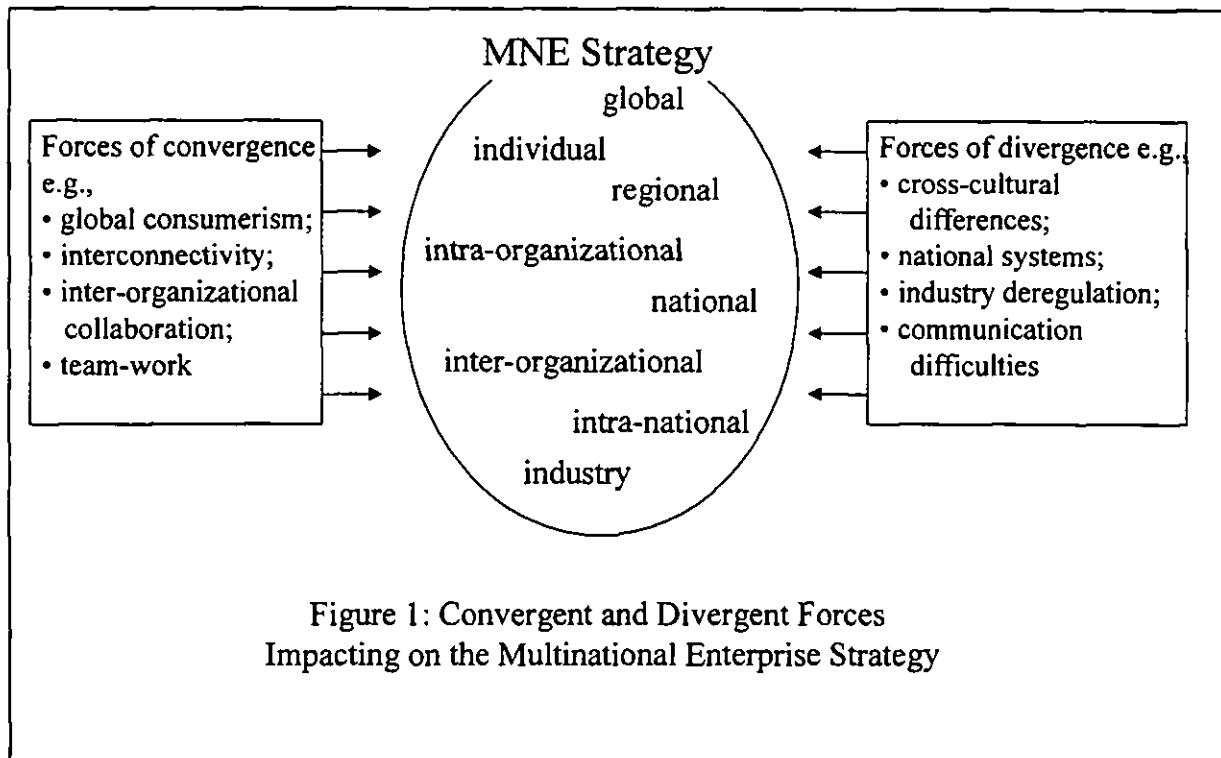
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