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Juxtaposition of Organizational Competitive Factors and Performance Evaluation in Conjunction with Their Implications for HRM in MNCs: Part One, Contextual Review and Comparison of Central European and Polish Findings

Abstract: Objective – The main goal of the paper is to determine whether there are any identifiable patterns of HRM perceptions and practices when the factors recognized as the companies' competitive advantages and results of their performance outcomes are juxtaposed in conjunction with their implications for HRM.

Methodology – The research was conducted in five Central European (CE) countries. The data collected from this region is used to assess the comparative context (descriptive statistics) for more detail correlational analyses conducted on the data coming exclusively from local subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Poland. This Polish data analysis is presented in a second article published in this volume.

Findings - The average values of performance evaluations gain slightly better scores in Poland than in CE. The HQ of MNCs exert less influence on HRM practices at the local level in Poland than an average of the overall CE region.

Value added – The research has theoretical significance because its results provide new evidence about the specificity of HRM in local subsidiaries of MNCs operating in the CE region. Furthermore, it identifies some patterns of HRM perceptions and practices at the local level of MNCs both in CE and Poland, and especially when the factors recognized as competitive advantages of local subsidiaries. The results of performance evaluations of these subsidiaries are juxtaposed in conjunction with their implications for HRM. All this makes a real and specific contribution to knowledge about strategic international HRM in MNCs.

Key words: human resources management; competitive advantage; business strategy; multi-nationals; Central Europe; HR patterns of practice – national and regional.

1. Concise Introduction

The main goal of the paper is to fill in a research gap that has been found in the management literature. Namely, the following literature review leads to the conclusion that although much research on HRM was conducted in multinational companies (MNCs) and their local subsidiaries in different countries, the contemporary characteristics of HRM as well as their potential regularities in MNCs operating in Central Europe (CE) are not well documented. In this context we do not know if there are any identifiable patterns of HRM perceptions and practices when the factors recognized as competitive advantages of companies and the results of the companies' performance evaluations are juxtaposed in conjunction with their implications for HRM. Hence, to fill in this research gap the authors identify those patterns. For that

reason, some intentionally selected problems are in the focus of interested in the empirical research. The research was conducted in five CE countries (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia). The data collected from this region are used in the paper to provide a macro level regional comparative context (descriptive statistics) for more detail analysis (correlation statistics) conducted on the data coming from local subsidiaries of MNCs companies operating in Poland. This second, more micro detailed Polish analysis is part of the second article that follows in this volume.

Because the research is placed in the strategic international human resource (SIHRM) research track of HRM in MNCs and on the overlap of the universalistic and contingency perspectives the article is structured as follows. After this short introduction the authors conduct a brief literature review to provide a theoretical background and explanation for the empirical study. It covers two basic research tracks of HRM in MNCs, three theoretical and research streams in international human resources management (IHRM), four scientific perspectives on strategic human resources management (SHRM), and four approaches to the measurable role of HRM in the company's success. The literature review is of a descriptive character and ends in formulating the research gap on HRM in MNCs in Central Europe. The empirical research methodology and findings make two other major sections. In the section about the research methodology the authors provide the general outline of the international research project, describe the research sample, explaining the assumptions, measures and statistical analytics applied in the study, and present the main research problem and questions. The section devoted to the empirical research findings consists of a general comparative analysis of HRM practices in the sample of CE nations vis a vis The article ends with a research summary and final conclusions.

2. The Theoretical Background of the Study

2.1. Two basic research tracks of HRM in MNCs

Over the last two decades we have observed a significant intensification of theoretical and empirical research devoted to human resources management (HRM) in *multinational companies* (MNCs), usually defined as economic entities whose particular components (elements of organizational structure) are localized in more than one country (Stor, 2010, p. 701). In consequence there are more and more scientific papers in which the main object of interest covers IHRM (see: Briscoe et al., 2008; Harzing, 2010; Brewster et al., 2011; Pocztowski, 2012; Schroeder, 2010; Pocztowski, 2015; Tarique et al., 2016) or *strategic international human resources management* (SIHRM) (see: Perkins, Shortland, 2006; Brewster et al., 2011; Stor, 2011), and the latter one being even considered not only as a consecutive stage of personnel function evolutionary development but as a certain kind of scientific subdiscipline of HRM as well (see: Stor, 2011). These two basic research tracks of HRM in MNCs assume somewhat different perspective on what and how to study.

2.2. Tripartition of theoretical and research streams in IHRM

International human resources management (IHRM), as one of the aforementioned HRM research tracks in MNCs, dates back to the end of the 1970s of the previous century (De Cieri et al., 2003). Initially, the IHRM literature focused mainly on managing expatriates (see: Perlmutter, 1969; Tung, 1981; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Simultaneously, one could differentiate publications entirely devoted to the research on cross-cultural problems (see Hofstede, 1980 and next; Laurent, 1986; Minkov et al., 2017) or mostly interested in comparative HRM (see: Brewster et al., 1996). As with time new publications on international business strategies appeared (see: Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989 and next; Porter, 1986; Prahalad and Doz, 1987), HRM in

MNCs aroused more interest as well. All this resulted in three theoretical and research streams that set apart within IHRM. These streams are (cf. Boxall, 1995, p. 9; Schuler, 2000, p. 240; Clark et al., 2000, p. 8; Sparrow et al., 2003, p. 3; Keating and Thompson, 2003, p. 2, Stor, 2014):

- corporate-international HRM – refers to HRM practices in different types of MNCs; the authors are generally interested in identifying the differences in HRM between particular MNCs; the research projects cover differences at various organizational levels (e.g. HQs, local subsidiary) and with regard to different subfunctions of HRM;
- cross-cultural HRM – deals with the influence of cultural differences on HRM practices; the authors are mostly interested in different characteristics of HRM resulting from national culture; these characteristics include not only personnel systems, functions, programs or policies, but interpersonal and social relations as well;
- comparative HRM – covers comparison of HRM systems and practices both at the organizational and national level in different countries; the authors' intention is to identify the differences in HRM practices between particular countries; such comparison may include some comprehensive approach to HRM or may just focus on some of its subfunctions.

For years some kind of convergence in these three fields has been observable (cf. Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002) and in consequence the mixed type of research appears, meaning the one that operates on the overlap of those three streams often perceived as disjunctive.

2.3. Extension of four scientific perspectives on SHRM to the study of SIHRM

Strategic international human resources management (SIHRM), as the second of the HRM research tracks in MNCs, it is considered as a field that has developed simultaneously with international human resources management (IHRM) and strategic human resources management (SHRM).

Like IHRM, the interest in a strategic dimension of HRM also appeared at the end of the 1970s of the previous century and was concurrent with two other phenomena in HRM, that is a progressive departure from a more passive and reactive role for personnel administration and an ongoing reorientation of strategic management models toward internal aspects of organizations (Alcázar et al., 2003, p. 1). We must recall that SHRM is a relatively young discipline area which precariously perches on the fringe of strategic management and human resources management (Boxall, 1998, p. 265; Lundy and Bowling, 2000, pp. 57–95; Allen and Wright, 2006, p. 4). However, an analysis of the literature suggests that from the very beginning SHRM has centered on human resources as resources of the fundamental importance to business success and its ability to gain competitive advantage. And that is why, since then, the major focus of SHRM field has been on external and internal alignment of HRM activities with strategies and activities in other spheres of organization (Wright, 1998, pp. 187–188). So far four scientific perspectives within SHRM have been defined (Jackson et al., 1989; Brewster, 1995; Delery, Doty, 1996; Clegg et al., 1999; Alcázar et al., 2003, p. 1; Koen, 2005, pp. 5–15; Stor, 2014) which have been adopted into SIHRM (Stor, 2011, p. 90):

- the universalistic perspective – linear relationship between organizational performance (i.e. a dependent variable) and certain HRM practices in the organization (i.e. independent variables); identification of such HRM solutions that can be implemented successfully in different organizations to improve their performance; defining the best HRM practices in order to determine the implementable HRM strategies to be applied in different organizations;
- the contingency perspective – there is no stable and linear relationship between such variables as the results gained within HRM and company performance; there are many situational variables which may become more or less important (or even unimportant) in various circumstances; the thesis of the best implementable HRM practices is rejected; only high coherence between HRM strategies and business strategies really matters;
- the configurational perspective – HRM is a dynamic and multidimensional

set of various elements that can form an infinite number of possible patterns or configurations influencing on company performance; there is no linearity between HRM practices and company performance; sometimes a particular configuration of HRM practices may enhance the company performance but sometimes it may diminish it; the same business goals may be reached through different HRM practices;

- the contextual perspective – the HRM system is integrated in and with the environment in which it is developed; the context both conditions and is conditioned by the HRM strategies; a multiple stakeholder framework is involved in these considerations while formulating and implementing strategies; strategies must be explained both through their contributions to organization performance and through their effects on the internal and external business environment.

Summarizing, we can say that the field of SIHRM has developed through the extension of HRM to SHRM and inclusion of IHRM into theoretical considerations and empirical studies. What SIHRM has in common with IHRM is, for sure, a necessity to operate on the overlap of the same three theoretical and research streams set apart within IHRM, that is corporate-international HRM, cross-cultural HRM, and comparative HRM. And what connects SIHRM with SHRM is the application of the same four scientific perspectives that were defined within SHRM, namely the universalistic, contingency, configurational, and contextual perspectives.

2.4. The measureable role of HRM in company's success

The literature review on strategic aspects of HRM and IHRM brings also to the conclusion that since the 1980s there have been two predominant business-grounded streams of research on the role that HRM plays in a company's success, meaning the reciprocal interdependences between business strategies and HRM activities or practices as well as the relationships between

company's performance and HRM solutions. So far, we can identify four general categories of company's performance results which the researchers tried to correlate with HRM practices, i.e.:

- financial results – e.g. profits, sales, market share, financial liquidity, company's goodwill (Pfeffer, 1998; Arthur, 1994; MacDuffie, 1995; Huselid, 1995; Beatty et al., 2003; Combs et al., 2006; Bedő and Ács, 2007; Boudreau and Cascio, 2013; Dikova et al., 2017),
- organizational results – e.g. productivity, quality, efficiency (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; Ostroff and Bowen, 2000; Guest et al., 2000; Birdi et al., 2008; Farr and Tran, 2008; Molek-Winiarska, 2009; Ferguson and Reio, 2010; Haromszeki, 2013; Sparrow et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2017),
- managerial results – e.g. research on interrelations and levels of coherence between business strategies and particular subfunctions of HRM with company's performance results (Beer et al., 1984; Schuler and Jackson, 1987; Wright and Snell, 1991; Guest, 1997; Chanda and Shen, 2009; Guest et al., 2011; Stor, 2011), and
- behavioral results – e.g. employee attitudes, employee engagement and satisfaction, employee and/ or managerial interpersonal relations (Wright et al., 1994; Nagy, 2002; Schneider, 2003; Farr and Tran, 2008; Rich et al., 2010; Juchnowicz, 2010; Ferguson and Reio, 2010; Suchodolski, 2014; Juchnowicz, 2014; Sparrow et al., 2016).

In this context some other theoretical and empirical research developments consider human resources as a company's competitive factor (see: Dyer, 1993; Becker et al., 2001; Huselid and Barnes, 2003; Becker et al., 2009; Huselid and Becker, 2011; Campbell, 2012; Nyberg et al., 2017; Boon et al., 2017). The main object of interest in these projects is usually a measurable input that is made by HRM to a company (see: Boudreau and Cascio, 2013) as well as correlations between various external and internal HRM configurations that determine value added. All this bases on the assumption that HRM function is unique and viable. It is because both the outputs (the employee and managerial behaviors) of the system and the system itself are potential

sources of competence (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 963; Amit and Belcourt, 1999, pp. 175–176; Stor, 2014). In this sense, it is not only technology or financial resources that can make competitive advantage of the company but the competencies of employees and managerial staff, including HR executives (cf. Pablos and Miltiadis, 2008; Kohont and Brewster, 2014; Kupczyk and Stor, 2017), together with the quality of management practices as well (Vivares-Vergara et al., 2016). This goes in line with a broader discussion of the centralization and decentralization practices within management at different organizational levels and in different management areas and how these patterns may support or hamper the success of a company. That is also why even the direction of knowledge flows, whether it is from the headquarters of MNC to its local subsidiary or in the opposite direction, may play a significant role in business competitive advantage (see e.g. Briscoe et al., 2008; Harzing and Ruysseveldt, 2010).

2.5. Research gap on HRM in MNCs in Central Europe

Significant progress has been made in the research on variations in HRM across national boundaries, in both the quantity of studies and theoretical advancements since the mid-1980s (Cooke et al., 2017, p. 196). Unfortunately, even though much research on HRM has been conducted in MNCs and their local subsidiaries worldwide, we know very little about the contemporary characteristics of HRM as well as their potential regularities in MNCs operating in Central Europe.

The Central and Eastern European region provides a unique and compelling focus of research in various scientific disciplines, including management (see: Hyder and Abraha, 2008; Brewster et al., 2010; Brunet-Thornton, 2017). The argument to focus attention of the region is compelling; there are significant historical, structural, institutional and configurational differences, along with significant practice differences, in HRM in Central and

Eastern Europe (CEE) in contrast to Western Europe (Nikandrou et al., 2005; Karoliny et al., 2009; Sahadev and Demirbag, 2010; Kshetri, 2010; Chen, 2016; Poór et al., 2017). The CEE countries represent a case of a relatively compact, parallel dual transition from centrally planned to market economy and democracy that started with the collapse of the state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Together with many other macro factors this dual transition process has provided both locally-based and entering international companies with very specific external and internal conditions for HRM practices (Melnikas et al., 2006; Listwan et al., 2009; Koster and Wittek, 2016; Wilkinson and Wood, 2017).

However, while there has been a growing interest in the transition economies as distinct capitalist archetype in the past number of years (*c.f.* Hancké et al., 2007, pp. 3–38), including the national profile of HRM practices in home companies (see: Brewster et al., 2007; Morley et al., 2009; Stavrou et al., 2010; Brewster et al., 2010; Mayrhofer et al., 2011; Festing and Sahakiant, 2013; Stahl et al., 2017), the contemporary nature of HRM in multinational companies in these societies is not well documented. This part of Europe is now characterized by a rising economic heterogeneity and a rapidly changing socio-cultural context, underscored by waves of restructuring, privatization and reprivatization, increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) and emerging individualism as a societal and cultural dimension (Stor and Kupczyk, 2015; Stor, 2016). These patterns and trends can be seen to justify distinguishing between Central European HRM practices as distinct from Eastern European ones.

Thus, it is justified to conclude that what we encounter here is so-called research gap. On the one hand we don't know much about the specificity of HRM in MNCs and their subsidiaries operating in Central Europe. On the other hand we do not know if there are any identifiable patterns of HRM perceptions and practices at the local level of MNCs in Central Europe, and especially when the factors recognized as competitive advantages of local subsidiaries and the results of performance evaluations of these subsidiaries

are juxtaposed in conjunction with their implications for HRM. This study, therefore, is intended to represent an original effort at examining this problem.

3. The Empirical Research Methodics

3.1. The general outline of the international research project

The research findings presented in this article make a part of some bigger international research project performed by the CEEIRT. CEEIRT is an abbreviation that stands for the Central and Eastern European International Research Team – a team that was organized during late 2008 and early 2009 to study HRM in MNCs in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the members of this consortium consist of researchers from 14 CEE universities and two cooperative advisors from Great Britain and the United States.

The general title of that international research project is *HRM in Transition Practices of MNC-Subsidiaries in Central & Eastern Europe* and its main goal is to identify the trends and tendencies within HRM in MNCs in this geographic region. So far three series of studies have been conducted by the CEEIRT in the following years: 2010, 2013 and 2016. In each of these years the respondents from MNCs were asked about their companies' HRM practices in a previous year in the context of the worldwide economic standing, business strategies, business performance etc.

3.2. The empirical data and research in the present paper

The data presented in this article are the result of the 2016 research series and because of the main goal of the article are narrowed down to five Central European countries. The population of the subject under research made 322 companies (all subsidiaries of MNCs) coming from: Hungary (97), Poland (102), Romania (47), Serbia (59), and Slovakia (17). The companies were

of different sizes and varying business profiles according to the European Classification of Business Activity. The research was conducted with the aid of paper and electronic survey questionnaires. The data collected from the CE region are used in this paper to delineate a comparative context for Poland and the other four regional countries. This overview will provide context for a more detail analysis conducted on the data coming from local subsidiaries of MNCs located in Poland that will be presented in the second part of this two article series.

3.3. The assumptions and measures applied in the study

Our primary assumption in the research was that a business strategy is just one of the most crucial internal factors that affects human resources management (Schuler, 1992, pp. 30–31; Pocztowski, 2007, p. 52; Stor, 2011, p. 77). Of course, the qualitative features of human resources, alongside their qualitative ones, need to be taken into account when selecting a proper business strategy (Anthony et al., 1993, p. 20) because there is a reciprocal interdependence between a company's business strategy and HRM strategies, policies, programs or practices (see also: Listwan, 2002, p. 42; Stor, 2008, p. 26; Janowska, 2010, pp. 24–25). There are three types of generic business strategies considered in the research: growth, stability, and re-trenchment. This presents – among many others – a longstanding descriptive classification schema, well-known in the literature (see: Hunger and Wheelen, 1984; Hunger and Wheelen, 2011). All this places our research in the SIHRM research track of HRM in MNCs. Our research perspective also goes beyond the standard classification presented previously. We assume it is possible to identify more or less stable and linear relationships between organizational performance and certain HRM practices (the universalistic perspective) although there are many situational variables which may mediate the results (the contingency perspective). This observation means it may appear to be

impossible to transfer the best practices from one organization to another and hence the focus should be on high coherence between HRM strategies and practices and business strategies which are adjusted to the particular organizational conditions.

The CEEIRT project covers a broad array of issues, but this paper is limited in its content only to a few selected elements. The mainstream of interest is settled on such topics and measures as:

- generic business strategies – the respondents were provided with a selection of growth, stability, and retrenchment strategies,
- competitive factors – the choice covered such factors as quality of workforce, optimal size of company, production technology, quality of management, and financial resources,
- performance evaluation of the company – here we asked the respondents to evaluate the performance of their company by comparison to other companies in the same sector; four areas of performance were rated, that is profitability, quality of service, innovation rate, and environmental issues; as shown in graphs 4 and 5 we applied a five-degree descriptive scale: from weak to outstanding,
- the influence of HRM formulated at the MNC's HQ (headquarters) on local subsidiary's HRM practices – here we developed a four-degree descriptive scale: from centralization (detailed guidelines from the HQ) to decentralization (autonomy at the local subsidiary level) as presented in Graph 6,
- responsibility for major policy decisions in selected HRM subfunctions – the choice of provided responses resembled the four-degree descriptive scale used to evaluate centralization-decentralization practices mentioned above, but this time we focused on the division of responsibility between (see Graph 11): the local line management (decentralization) and the local HRM department (centralization).
- critical issues within HRM the subsidiaries had to cope with – the respondents used a five-degree scale (from 1 to 5) to measure the intensity of the issues selected from the multiple choice answers, where 5 meant

the highest intensity of a given issues (utmost or critical importance) and 1 meant an absence or very low intensity (little or no importance),

- key competencies of HRM managers for success - multiple answers were allowed and the following competencies made the palette of choices: personal credibility (effectiveness, efficient connections, communication skills), strategic contribution (culture management, quick changes, strategic decision making), use of HRMIS (human resources management information system) (IT), business knowledge (value chain, values creation), HR services (recruitment & selection, training, performance evaluation, HR measurement), communication in foreign languages, and as exhibited in Graph 10 we applied a four-degree descriptive scale was used: from not important to highly important,
- the importance of HRM knowledge flows – using the scale from 1 – unimportant to 5 – very important the respondents evaluate the following directions of knowledge flows: within the subsidiary (between HRM department and other units), from the HQ, between subsidiaries, and to the HQ.

3.4. The research problem and questions

The main research problem was formulated in the following way: What patterns of HRM perceptions and practices coexist with the factors recognized as competitive advantages of companies and with the performance self-evaluation results of these companies?

The main research problem was disaggregated into the following research problems and questions of more detail character:

- 1) What are the generic business strategies of MNCs?
- 2) What do they consider to be their competitive factors (competitive advantage)?
- 3) Do they value their competitive factors differently within their business strategies?
- 4) How do the companies evaluate their performance?

- 5) When the factors recognized as competitive advantages of companies and the results of the companies' performance evaluations are juxtaposed, are there any identifiable patterns?
- 6) What, if any, are the centralization and decentralization patterns of HRM at the corporate and local level?
- 7) Do they go in line with the factors recognized as the competitive advantages of companies or with the results of the companies' performance evaluations?
- 8) What do the companies identify as their critical areas (subfunctions) of HRM in the context of their competitive advantages and organizational performance results?
- 9) What are the competencies of HR manager for success with regard to the factors recognized as the competitive advantages of companies and in the context of their performance evaluation?
- 10) How do the companies value the directions of HRM knowledge flows for the sake of their competitive advantages and performance evaluation?

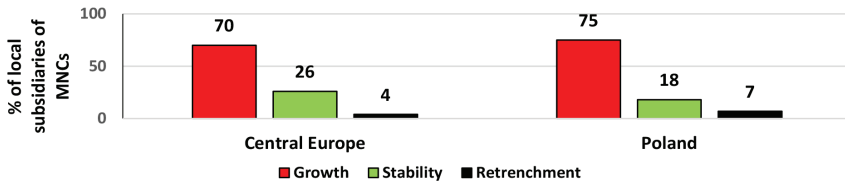
3.5. Statistical data analysis

In the consecutive section the empirical research findings are discussed with reference to the data collected from the local subsidiaries of MNCs located in the CE region, including Poland. The data analysis is based on descriptive statistics as the main goal is to conduct a general comparison within the scope of HRM between average practices and perceptions in CE countries and Poland.

4. The Empirical Research Findings: The General Comparative Analysis of Hrm Implications in the CE Region and Poland

In the total sample of CE countries 70% of the respondents indicated that they were seeking growth and nearly 30 % indicated that their companies followed stabilization strategies, whereas only 4% of companies implemented a retrenchment strategy. For Poland it looks pretty similar: 75% growth strategies, 18% stabilization strategies and 7% redundancies (see Graph 1).

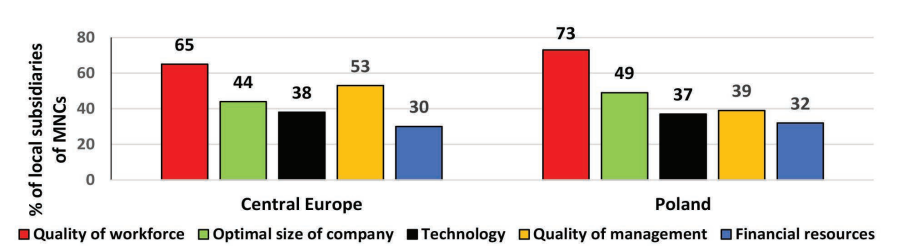
Graph 1. Generic business strategies in MNCs in Central Europe and Poland by countries (multiple answers possible)



Source: own research data.

As for the competitive factors, it is the quality of workforce that is deemed to be most critical both in the whole CE sample (65%) and the Polish sample as well (73%). In CE it is quality of management that on the second position with more than 50 % of indications, and the optimal size of company that comes third with 44%. In Poland these two factors are in reverse order - optimal size of company has 6 percentage points of indications more than quality of management. What appears to be less important both in the CE region and Poland is production technology and financial resources (see Graph 2).

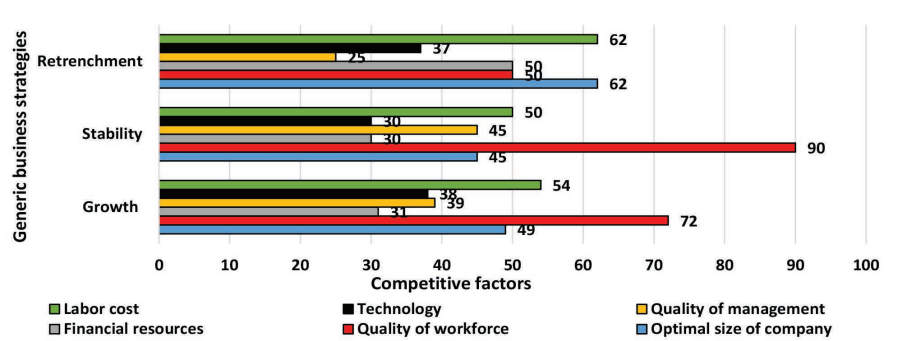
Graph 2. Self-evaluation of competitive advantages of MNCs in Central Europe and Poland



Source: own research data.

When the competitive factors are analyzed by the generic business strategies in Poland (see Graph 3) then it is visible that in MNCs realizing their growth strategies the quality of HR (workforce) is recognized as the most valuable competitive factor and the quality of management is placed on the third position. In those MNCs that follow stabilization strategies it is again the quality of HR that is competitive factor number one but the quality of management is on the second place. None of these factors takes the leading position when retrenchment strategies are implemented. Instead, it is labor cost and optimal size of company that most organizations considered to be their competitive advantage.

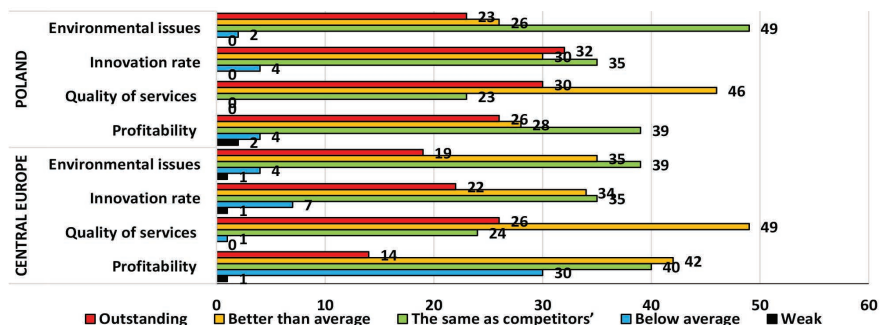
Graph 3. The competitive factors by generic business strategies in Poland (in %)



Source: own research data.

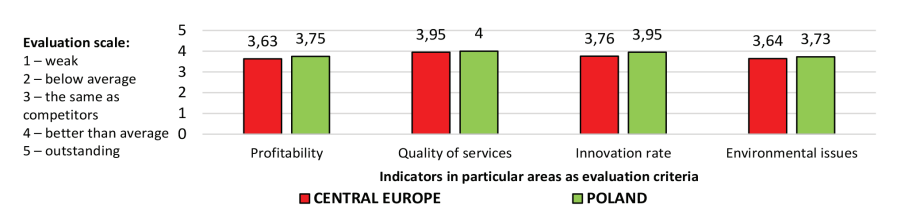
Furthermore, we asked the respondents to evaluate the performance of their company in four areas by comparison to other companies in the same sector (see Graph 4). It seems that in CE the quality of service is the area of business performance that gains the highest scores. And even more – it is the only one with no “weak” scores. Innovation rate looks promising as well, although 7% of subsidiaries evaluated their results in this field as below average and 1% as weak. Similarly, not too many companies think that their results for environmental issues are either weak or below average. Generally, these three areas are mostly perceived as the same as competitors’, better than average or even as outstanding. In this context the evaluation of profitability of companies is more heterogeneous. The main reason is the highest percentage of indications is split up not only into these three evaluation grades but four – it covers below average grade as well. Juxtaposing these CE data with the Polish data brings to the conclusion that in Poland more companies appraise their profitability as outstanding and less companies as below average. Furthermore, the quality of services receives comparable evaluation, and the innovation rate and environmental issues slightly better (see also Graph 5).

Graph 4. Performance evaluation of subsidiaries of MNCs in CE countries and Poland (in %)



Source: own research data.

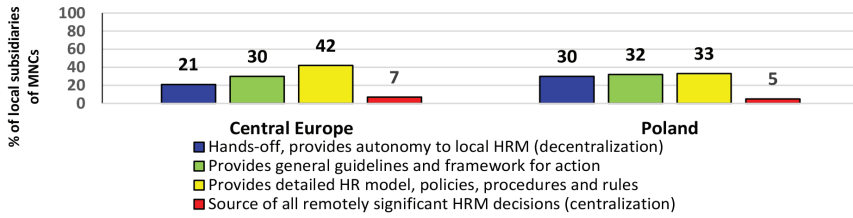
Graph 5. The average values of performance evaluations of subsidiaries of MNCS in CE countries and Poland



Source: own research data.

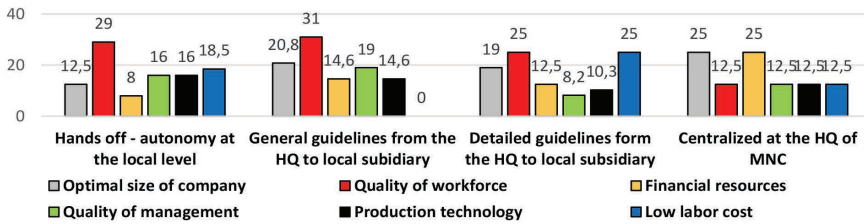
In the research process an attempt was also made to determine the influence of HRM policies formulated at the MNC's HQ (headquarters) on local subsidiary's HRM practices. What we've found is that a prevailing approach in the whole CE sample is the one in which HQ provides detailed HR models, policies, procedures and rules for action. This appeared in 42% of CE subsidiaries of MNCs. The second preferable approach (30%) relies on providing general guidelines. And rather full decentralization with nearly total autonomy is practiced in 21% of companies, whereas centralization in which all significant decisions are made by the HQ are experienced by around 7%. This emerging pattern looks different in Poland. Although centralization is experienced by a similar percentage of subsidiaries (5%), the three other types of practices are split into a somewhat similar percentage, rated somewhere around 30 per cent. It suggests that in general HRM polices are granted more autonomy at the local level of subsidiaries in Poland than, on average, in the other CE countries (Graph 6). Furthermore, the higher the appraisal of the quality of workforce and the quality of the management as competitive factors at the same, the higher the level of decentralization, meaning the HQ HRM department provides more autonomy to local HRM department (see Graph 7).

Graph 6. The influence of HQ HRM on local subsidiary's HRM practices in CE and Poland



Source: own research data.

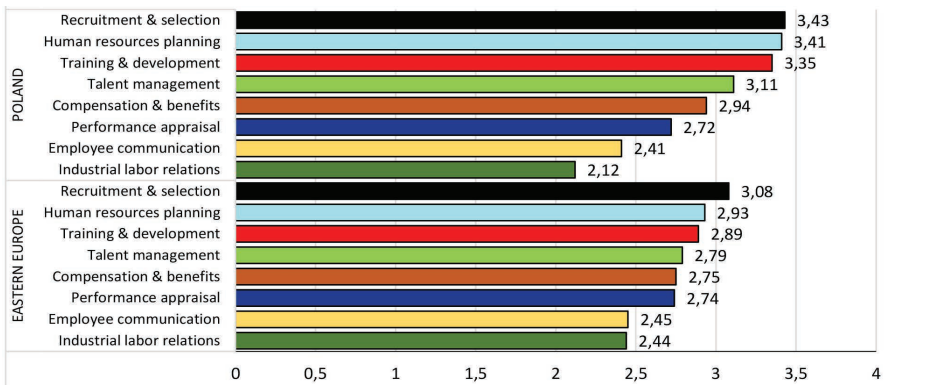
Graph 7. Factors recognized as competitive advantage by HRM centralization-decentralization at the HQ or local level of MNCs in Poland (in %)



Source: own research data.

In the research process another attempt was also made to determine what kind of critical issues (subfunctions) within HRM the subsidiaries had to cope with in the context of their business strategies and performance results. The collected data in this scope are presented in Graph 8. Making some synthesis we can say that both in the whole CE research sample and Poland the ranking order of subfunctional areas of HRM is the same. The only significant difference is that in CE subsidiaries there is only one subfunction of HRM that is evaluated higher than 3.0, i.e. recruitment & selection (3,08) whereas in Poland apart from that subfunction (with the score of 3,43) there are three others, i.e. human resources planning (3,41), training & development (3,35), and talent management (3,11).

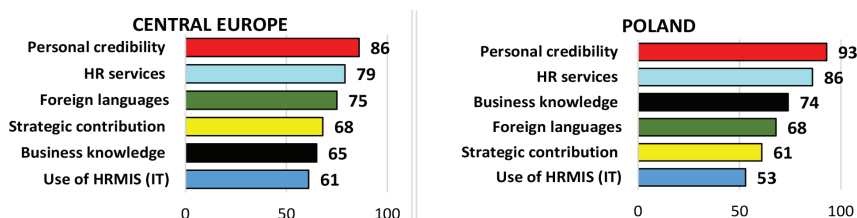
Graph 8. The average values of critical areas of HRM in MNCs in Central Europe and Poland (multiple choice; scale: 1–5; 5 – critical, 1 – not at all critical)



Source: own research data.

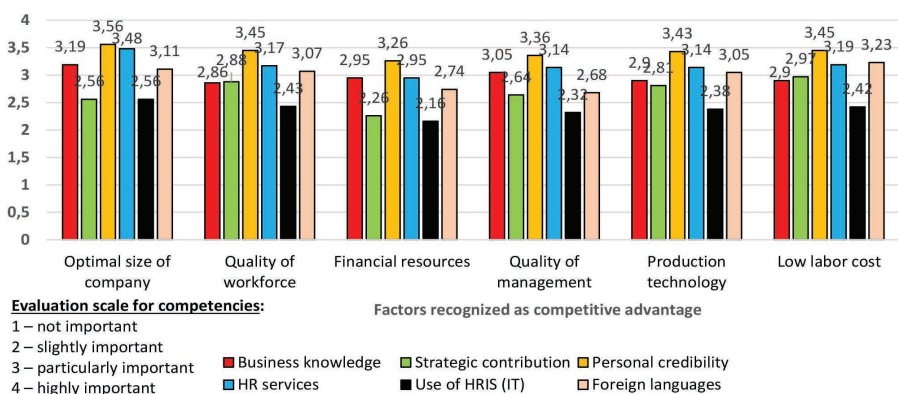
Another problem that we were interested in related to the competencies of HR manager for success. The respondents were asked to consider these competencies in their business context. Graph 9 presents the data gathered in this scope and arranged in a descending order. Both in the CE and Polish sample it is personal credibility that appears to be the most important. Nearly 90% of the foreign subsidiaries chose this competency. The second most important competency is connected with providing HR services (in CE – 79%; in Poland – 86%). Comparing these two samples the other similarity lies in the use of human resource management information systems (HRMIS) which was indicated by the lowest percentage of respondents. As about the differences, business knowledge seems to be more important in Poland while strategic contribution in CE. What is more interesting, when the companies in Poland bet on financial resources as their competitive factor the competencies of HR manager for success that are equally important are business knowledge and HR services that come second just after personal credibility (see Graph 10).

Graph 9. The key competencies of HR managers for success (multiple answers; in %)



Source: own research data.

Graph 10. The average values of the key competencies of HR managers for success by competitive factors in local subsidiaries of MNCs in Poland

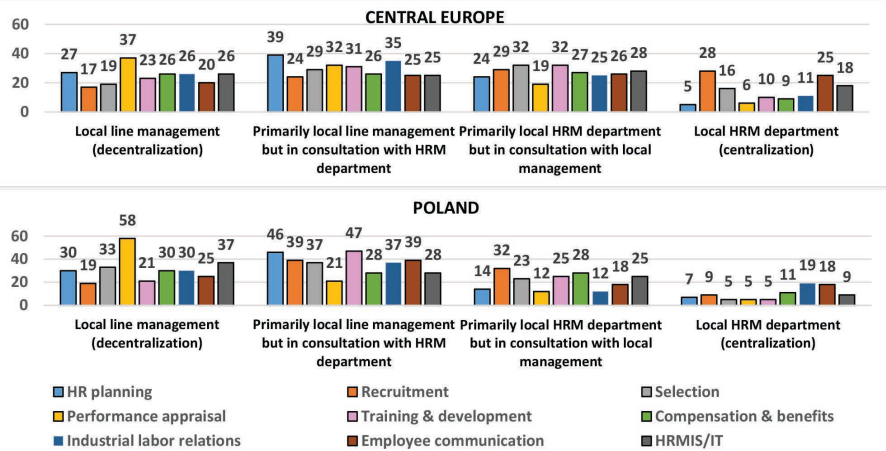


Source: own research data.

In contemporary companies HRM is not exclusive to managers or specialists working in personnel departments. It is also line management that needs to be trusted more responsibility of decisions in key function of HRM. That's why in our questionnaire survey we asked respondents who had primary responsibility for major policy decisions in selected HRM subfunctions. The centralization-decentralization continuum was evaluated at the organizational level of local subsidiary of a MNC. As shown in Graph 11, in the whole sample of CE subsidiaries of MNCs local line management is mostly and exclusively

responsible for performance appraisal (37%) and primarily responsible with an obligation to consult decisions with HRM department for HR planning (39%). At the same time HRM department is primarily responsible with an obligation to consult decisions with the line management for selection and training & development (both indicated by 32% of respondents), and mostly and exclusively responsible for recruitment (28%). In general, responsibility of decisions in key functions of HRM in all CE MNCs is not centralized, it is rather equally distributed between the first three categories of responses. In practice this means that most of the decisions is delegated to line management or relies on cooperation between line management and local HRM department. In Poland the preferable practices are divided between the following categories of responses: local line management and primary local line management but in consultation with HRM department. Hence, the centralization of practices in Poland is less common than for the CE.

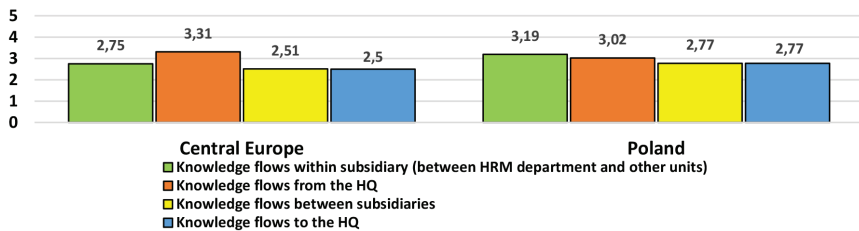
Graph 11. Responsibility of decisions in key functions of HRM in MNCs in Central Europe and Poland



Source: own research data.

The last issue refers to how the companies under study value the directions of HRM knowledge flows. The analysis of data presented in Graph 12 suggests that taken on average in the whole CE sample the most important flow of HRM knowledge runs from the HQ to the local subsidiary. This direction of flow reached the highest value of 3,31. Knowledge flows within subsidiary with the value of 2,75 occupy the second position. Knowledge flows between subsidiaries come third with the score of 2,51, and knowledge flows from the local subsidiary to the HQ fourth with a very similar result, meaning 2,50. In Poland knowledge flows within subsidiary (3,19) appear on the first positions and are more important than knowledge flows from the HQ to local subsidiary (3,02), whereas knowledge flows between subsidiaries (2,77) and from the local subsidiary to the HQ (2,77) are simultaneously placed on the third position.

Graph 12. The importance of HRM knowledge flows in CE countries and Poland (scale: 1-5; 1 – unimportant, 5 – very important)



Source: own research data.

5. Research Summary

To address the research problem posed in the paper it is necessary to determine what patterns of HRM perceptions and practices coexist with the factors recognized as competitive advantages of companies and with the performance self-evaluation results of these companies. Hence, referring to the accompanying research questions of more detail character seems to be useful.

The distribution of the business strategies in the CE and Polish samples is very similar: the overwhelming majority of local subsidiaries of MNCs apply growth strategies (approx. 70 %) and about one fourth of them stability strategies. In both samples most of the organizations assume that the quality of workforce makes their competitive advantage (approx. 70%). But at the same time the quality of management seems to be a little more important in CE (approx. 50%) than in Poland (approx. 40%) and optimal size of company is more important in Poland (49%) than in CE (44%). As about the average values of performance evaluations they gain slightly better score in all performance areas (profitability, quality of services, innovation rate, and environmental issues) in Poland than in CE. The between-group analysis over the Polish sample reveals that the business strategies had a significant effect on the performance of the organization in the field of profitability.

Moreover, the data suggests that the HQ of MNCs exert less influence on HRM practices at the local level in Poland than in CE, meaning the local subsidiaries in Poland are granted more autonomy and decentralization. What is more, in Poland the higher the appraisal of the quality of workforce and the quality of management as the competitive factors at the same time, the higher the level of decentralization. Similarly, when the centralization-decentralization patterns are studied with reference to the responsibility of decisions in key HRM subfunctions delegated to the local line management vs centralized at the local HR department, then it appears that centralization practices in Poland are less common in Poland than in CE. All this goes in line with the patterns of knowledge flows. Namely, in CE the most important flow runs from the HQ to the local subsidiary, while in Poland within the subsidiary.

Both in CE and Poland it is not only personal credibility but competencies connected with HR services in general that are ranked the highest as key competencies of HR manager for success. Anyway, in Poland the respondents' experience suggests that business knowledge is another competency that is strongly associated with success, whereas in CE the respondents value strategic contribution more. But more detail statistical analysis of the Polish

sample leads to the conclusion that business knowledge, strategic contribution, and HR services are prevailing competencies with comparable rank in the subsidiaries applying growth strategies. Moreover, with connection to performance evaluation the following patterns appear:

- The higher the rate of:
 - business knowledge the higher the rate of profitability.
 - strategic contribution the higher the rate of environmental issues.
 - personal credibility the higher the rate of innovation and overall performance.
 - use of HRIS the higher the rate of environmental issues and overall performance.
- The lower the rate of communication in foreign languages the lower the rate of profitability.

The last identified patterns refer to performance evaluation and competitive factors. The correlation analysis results in no significant correlations between two of competitive factors, i.e. quality of workforce and quality of management, and none of the areas of performance.

6. Final Conclusions

The research has certain theoretical significance because its results provide some knowledge about the specificity of HRM in local subsidiaries of MNCs operating CE, and particularly exemplifying some regularities within HRM appearing in Poland. Furthermore, it identifies some patterns of HRM perceptions and practices at the local level of MNCs both in Central Europe and Poland, and especially when the factors recognized as competitive advantages of local subsidiaries and the results of performance evaluations of these subsidiaries are juxtaposed in conjunction with their implications for HRM. All this makes a real contribution to knowledge about SIHRM in MNCs. As for the practical significance of the research results it mostly relies on an attempt to identify some similarities and differences between local

subsidiaries of MNCs located in CE and Poland that may have an impact on managerial interpretation on what HRM practices should be considered as effective and which as possibly ineffective because of the local employees' perceptions and expectations. But those differences should be approached very carefully since the number of companies from each country was rather small and all in all does not comprise a representative sample. What is more, expanding the formulated conclusions on the whole population of local subsidiaries of MNCs operating in CE or exclusively in Poland wouldn't be justified because of the selection, structure and size of the research sample. The primary limitations of this study are mostly connected with the last feature characterizing both research samples. Hence, some further research on much bigger and comparable samples is necessary.

Having presented and discussed the more general regional patterns of HR practices as compared to Polish patterns of operations, we will present, in the accompanying second part of our two-part research, an in-depth and more nuanced analysis of patterns of Polish MNC subsidiary performance results as they correlate with strategic and institutional MNC factors. By tightening the lens to only Poland and zeroing in on macro contextual MNC states of being we may see in more fine grained detail the "fit" between the strategic intent and role of the local subsidiary and the nature of the performance management system.

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