

Riding the Rapids of International HR Management

The director of human resources in the 21st century has a tall order: Not only internal people management, but understanding the nuances of staffing in international contexts. IESE's B. Sebastian Reiche joins the editorial team of a classic text offering readings and case studies to illuminate key HR issues amid rapid globalization.



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Being the director of human resources at a semiconductor company is never easy. But having that job on the brink of an expansion overseas drastically increases the variables at hand — and the stakes.

Take the case of Robin Earl, HR director at a semiconductor manufacturer called BCN, based in the United States. Following recent success, the company is considering adding manufacturing and distribution capabilities in South America and Asia — and possibly even in Europe. So, how might Earl best decide whether to reassign current executives abroad or hire new talent locally? How might she get internal management educated on key international issues? And how might she support staff with overseas assignments in transitioning to a new culture? And if she uses local staff, how will she evaluate their talents and retain them?

The question-filled case opens the sixth edition of [*Readings and Cases in International Human Resource Management*](#), edited by IESE's [**B. Sebastian Reiche**](#), Günter K. Stahl, Mark E. Mendenhall, and Gary R. Oddou. It sets the stage to tie international HR management to many other key aspects of business.

Choppy waters

Peter Vaill, professor and influential writer about organizational change, uses the metaphor of "permanent white water" to describe the unpredictable, dynamic realm of international business today. As experienced rafters know, maintaining total control on white water rapids isn't possible. Likewise, the modern manager has to learn to navigate amid nearly constant change.

In the opening case, Earl understands that her approach to staffing must be closely aligned with larger plans for the firm. She begins by asking to be included in both strategic and financial planning for the expansion, to ensure that human resources remain a central focus — and that adequate funds are allocated to hiring and retaining high-caliber personnel.

Earl is to prepare a report for the CEO on the HR impact of the overseas plans. This is an analytical exercise taking into account new training and education needs, hiring practices, methods of evaluation and retention, as well as cultural fits with the new locations.

Real dilemmas to learn from

In the 15 readings and 15 case studies that follow the introduction, the textbook highlights issues in diversity management, global teamwork and responsible leadership in a cross-

cultural context — to name a few topics.

One **case on multiculturalism**, written by co-editor Reiche with [Yih-teen Lee](#), traces the career of Uwa Ode. Ode was born in Nigeria, but left at age 16. For the next 17 years, she studied, lived and worked in the United Kingdom and the United States. The case opens as the 33-year-old has just completed an executive MBA and is wondering where best to continue her career: with the U.S. oilfield services company she worked for before, or is there something in Africa that might put her multicultural perspective and insights to better use?

Another case that is new to this sixth edition is on **the Chinese appliance company Haier's experience in Japan**. As Haier tries to implement its hierarchy-flattening management system in a newly acquired Japanese subsidiary, employees struggle to work with a system at odds with some Japanese cultural traditions. How might this cross-cultural merger work?

For the white-water rafters who are able to hang on, the ride may be bumpy and full of surprises, but it's rarely dull.

Methodology, very briefly

The sixth edition of the textbook *Readings and Cases in International Human Resource Management* brings aboard IESE's B. Sebastian Reiche as co-editor. This update includes several new case studies and readings in order to illustrate key cross-cultural HR questions. Note that the opening dilemma faced by Robin Earl is hypothetical, meant to highlight the most salient issues for an HR director in an international expansion.

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