

# IHRM WEBINAR SERIES

## Questioning Elitism in International Human Resource Management Studies



Sept 15, 2022

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# Questioning elitism in International Human Resource Management

**Chris Brewster**

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the **18th in the INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT** webinar series

**15 September 2022**

# Apologies

- **Not original; others have ploughed this field before ...**
- **Appalling generalisations**
- **Very rude to friends and colleagues (*mea culpa*)**
- **No serious research base (final slides)**
- **(boring slides)**
  
- **Because I can...**

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- **(boring slides)**
  
- **Because I can; and because, I think, it matters**

# Outline

- **Definitions**
- **Outcomes**
- **Causes and mechanisms**
- **Potential ways forward (for us ... )**
- **Discussion**

# Definitions

- **The importance of construct clarity**
- **Not clear what HRM is:**
  - a subject of study
  - a programme of work
- **Lots of assumptions**
- **Not clear what IHRM is:**
  - international HRM strategies [MNEs];
    - management of international mobility;
  - comparative HRM

# Outcomes

- **Growing inequality of wealth and income between individuals in businesses (HRM), in societies and between societies**
- **Increasing poverty**
- **Increasing corruption**
- **Increasing failures of democracy**
- **etc**

## UN Sustainable Development Goals

# Tackling Grand Societal Challenges: The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD





# Causes

**Elitism found in the IHRM concentration on business and management (!) and especially on:**

- **the owners of businesses**
- **large businesses and MNEs**
- **management (talent management)**
  - **privileged international workers**
- **employment**
- **WEIRD countries**

**“the professoriate is, and has remained, accessible disproportionately to the socioeconomically privileged, which is likely to deeply shape their scholarship and their reproduction.” (Morgan, LaBerge, Larremore, Galesic, Brand & Clauset 2022)**

# The owners of businesses

- **key topic in HRM is the relationship between HRM and ‘firm performance’**
- **journals ask authors to explain how their research relates to ‘practice’**
- **a (usually undeclared) basic assumption in most IHRM texts**

**Is our objective to make big, rich MNEs larger and richer (at the expense of the rest of us)?**

# Large businesses and MNEs

- we research large businesses and MNEs (built in to IB)
- we rarely research SMEs, public or third sector organisations
- in MNEs systems are established and clear; managers and employees are educated; and they understand research
- and they have IHRM policies ...

Is our objective to ignore the 99% of businesses and 95% of employees in SMEs?  
What about the public and third sectors?  
What about GVCs?

# Management (talent management)

- **Built in ...**
- **In HRM we have narrowed our focus:**
  - **personnel; human resource management; human capital**
  - **talent management (global talent management)**

**Is it our objective to look after the 3% of people in the company that 'make the difference'? Does it even work? What about the rest ...**

# In international mobility: privileged populations

- **assigned expatriates**
- **self-initiated expatriates**
- **low status expatriates**
- **migrants**
  - refugees
- **others**

**Assigned expatriates are a tiny proportion of the internationally mobile workforce: what about the others? Are we comfortable ignoring the majority or the poorest and most vulnerable?**

# Employment

- we study employment (most workers across the world, especially women, are not employed)
- we study long-term, full-time employment (most employees are not that)
- but huge growth in flexible working, in gig work and other ways of working without a contract

Shouldn't we be studying 'work'? All kinds of work? However it is done?

# WEIRD countries

- **We do our research in businesses in (or from) Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic countries**

**But that is a minority of countries, and a minority of the world's population ...**

# Suggestions: focus on

- **GVCs, SMEs, public sector, third sector**
- **developing the talent of everyone**
- **the majority of countries and people**
- **‘work’ not ‘employment’**
- **UN Sustainable Development Goals**



if you have been listening:

Thank you!

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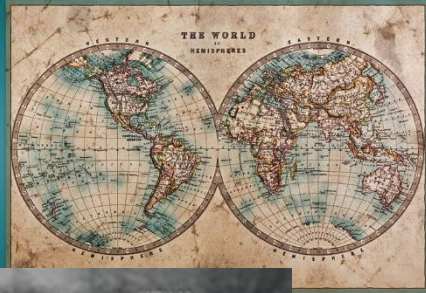
<https://www.henley.ac.uk/people/professor-chris-brewster>

HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON  
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Edited by  
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Elaine Farndale



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Yvonne McNulty and Chris Brewster



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Edited by  
Peter Holland and Chris Brewster



# Recent(ish), relevant(ish) publications

- Hajro, A., Brewster, C., Haak-Saheem, W., Morley, M. (2023 forthcoming) Global migration: implications for international business scholarship *Journal of International Business Studies*
- Haak-Saheem, W., Holland, P., Brewster, C. and Liang, X. (2022) The family-oriented view on well-being amongst low-status expatriates in an international workplace *Employee Relations* 44 (5): 1064-1076
- Harjo, A., Žilinskaitė, M., Gibson, C., Baldassari, P., Mayrhofer, W., Brewster, C. & Yoko Brannen, M. (2022 forthcoming). Movement of people across borders: Transdisciplinary research to meet the challenges in migration, business, and society *Academy of Management Discoveries: Insights*
- Haak-Saheem, W., Hutchings, K. and Brewster, C. (2022) Swimming ahead or treading water? disaggregating the career choices and trajectories of women self-initiated expatriates *British Journal of Management* 33 (2): 864-889
- Chung, C., Brewster, C. and Bozkurt Ö. (2020). The liability of mimicry: Implementing 'global HRM standards' in US and Indian subsidiaries of a South Korean MNE *Human Resource Management* 59, (6), 537-553
- McNulty, Y. and Brewster, C (2020) From 'elites' to 'everyone': re-framing international mobility scholarship to be all-encompassing, *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 50:4, 334-356
- Goergen, M., Chahine, S., Wood, G.T. and Brewster, C. (2021) Context, governance, associational trust and HRM: diversity and commonalities *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 32 (17): 3696-3720
- Guo, C., Al-Ariss, A. and Brewster, C. (2021). Understanding the global refugee crisis: Managerial consequences and policy implications. *Academy of Management Perspectives*. 26:10, 1287-1297
- Mayrhofer, W., Gooderham, P.N. and Brewster, C. (2019) Context and human resource management: theory, evidence and proposals *International Studies in Management and Organization* 49, 4: 355-371
- Farndale, E., Ligthart, P., Brewster, C. and Poutsma, E. (2017) Institutional frameworks and HRM practices in Europe: The market economy effect over time *Journal of International Business Studies* 48 (9), 1065-1086.
- Haak-Saheem, W. & Brewster, C. (2017) 'Hidden' expatriates: international mobility in the United Arab Emirates as a challenge to current understanding of expatriation *Human Resource Management Journal* 27 (3): 423-439