

Does Labour Relations Perspective Condition Human Resource Management?: a Comparative Analysis in three European Countries

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ABSTRACT: Human resource management (HRM) from a societal perspective is a popular and important topic among management practitioners and academicians. Past research focused on dependency relationship between employer and employee, and top management and trade union, also between reward systems and retention of talented people. However, in spite of the growing popularity of the relevancy between labour relations and HRM, very few studies (almost none) have examined how labour relations issues are related to human resources functions. This literature gap calls for a new research. In order to contribute to the literature gap, this study explores about what the labour relations components do condition human resource management (HRM) practices on an organizational level from a country comparison perspective. This wider question specifically entails the following research questions: what similarities and differences the labor market, industrial relations issues would outline country comparison? what HRM aspects are connected to employment relations and strategies? and what are the implications of industrial relations (IR) & employment relations (ER) issues on human resource management (HRM) on an organizational level? This study mainly uses existing theoretical data as the research material which have been collected from secondary sources. Thus, this study is a descriptive and comparative analysis in nature. Therefore, this study selects six case organizations (such as TOTAL, Sanofi, The Central Bank of Ireland, Johnson Controls, Volvo, IKEA) from three European countries (such as France, Ireland, and Sweden) respectively. This study uses convenience sampling technique for selecting these case organizations. In order to theorize and explore the context of the study, this study uses a number of relevant themes, such as dualization and polarization in the labour market, industrial relations system and

its actors, employment actors, employment institutions, and varieties of capitalism (VoC). The findings of the study indicate that labour relations perspective does condition the design of work and workplace situation for the employees and for the effective HRM practices. The European country comparison using the issues such as collective bargaining, trade union, varieties of capitalism (VoC) & country's economic system, employer branding, attractive work, job quality, CSR & equal opportunities advocates this relevancy. Academicians and practitioners, e.g. HR professionals would directly be benefited by the implications of the findings of the study.

KEYWORDS: HRM, Societal Perspective, Labour Relations, Labour Market, Industrial Relations, Employment Relations, Country Comparison.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the study: In recent years, addressing human resource management (HRM) issues from a societal perspective has become a popular topic in business society all over the world. Practitioners and academicians have realized that the issues of labour relations covering industrial relations (IR) and employment relations (ER) are required to perform some HRM functions, such as wage setting, pay and benefits setting, working hour scheduling, health and safety policy setting, employment protection rules setting, paternal and other leave rules setting. If organizational practitioners in different countries want to attract and retain talented people, they must have to ensure a balance between employment policy and practice. This is possible if the organizations comply with the labor laws in the form of labor code, collective bargaining agreements, trade union laws, employment protection act. This issue has been addressed by past researchers in their literature. Two authors investigated the two electronics companies

in Korea and found that the adoption of high-performance work organizations is highly dependent on their top management and union and/or employee representatives [1]. Another two authors studied the relationship between employment relations and human resource management (HRM) and economic performance and found a positive relationship [2]. A researcher developed a central theorem of industrial relations that demonstrate that optimal economic performance occurs in a mixed economy of imperfect labor markets and organization where human resources get economic efficiency for human welfare [3]. Eurofound reported that pay indicates the foundation of the relationship between employer and employee [4]. A research group argued that supplementary reward systems enable employers to attract and retain the best talent [5]. Another research organization argued that six components, such as compensation, benefits, work-life effectiveness, recognition, performance management, and talent development-that collectively define an organization's strategy to attract, motivate, retain and engage employees [6]. So, it is clear that past research focused on dependency relationship between employer and employee, and top management and trade union, also between reward systems and retention of talented people. However, in spite of the growing popularity of the relevancy between labour relations and HRM, very few studies (almost none) have examined how labour relations issues are related to human resources functions. This literature gap calls for a new research.

Aim and research questions: In order to contribute to the literature gap, this study explores about what the labour relations components condition human resource management (HRM) practices on an organizational level from a country comparison perspective. This wider question specifically entails the following research questions:

- What similarities and differences the labor market, industrial relations issues would outline country comparison?
- What HRM aspects are connected to employment relations and strategies? and
- What are the implications of industrial relations (IR) & employment relations (ER) issues on human resource management (HRM) on an organizational level?

Research methods and material: This study mainly uses existing theoretical data as the research material which have been collected from secondary sources. The research is based on the empirical data, which are published in the journalized research

papers, reports published by global organizations (e.g. OECD, Eurofound) on the on the topic to explore and describe the phenomena. Another set of secondary data have collected from textbooks in the area of labour relations and HRM, e-resources at Gothenburg University Library (<https://www.ub.gu.se/en>), and websites of case organizations of this study. Therefore, the context of the study is the interdependency of human resource management practices on the labour relations perspective on an organizational level from a country comparison perspective. Thus, this study is a descriptive and comparative analysis in nature. Therefore, this study selects six case organizations (such as TOTAL, Sanofi, The Central Bank of Ireland, Johnson Controls, Volvo, IKEA), every two case organizations from each of the three European countries (such as France, Ireland, and Sweden) respectively. This study uses convenience sampling technique for selecting these case organizations. This study does the country comparison in some selected issues of labor market, industrial relations, and employment relations, such as collective bargaining, trade union, varieties of capitalism (VoC) & country's economic system, employer branding, attractive work, job quality, CSR & equal opportunities. Thus, this study deals with literature and secondary data analysis approach. By using computer software like Microsoft Office package, some of the theoretical data in the form of qualitative and quantitative secondary data have been presented in bar chart/figure to make the analysis understandable and to reduce the descriptive statements. This study also uses cognitive ability of the researchers to analyze the data in order to answer the research questions. This paper has been organized by dividing it into three sections as follows. The theoretical perspective of the study is explained in section II. The study results that consist of a) Country Comparison on Labour Relations Issues b) Country Comparison on Employment Relations Strategies connected with HRM on Inter-Organizational Level, and c) Implications of IR & ER issues on HRM are presented in section III. Concluding remarks are given in section IV.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In order to theorize and explore the context of the study, this study uses a number of relevant themes covering industrial relations and employment relations, such as dualization and polarization in the labour market, industrial relations system and its actors, employment actors, employment institutions, and varieties of capitalism

(VoC). These relevant themes together form the theoretical perspective. As this study is not an empirical study, so it does not use a single theory as a research approach. However, it is true that this theoretical perspective directly contributes the data analysis of the study that are visible in the results and discussion section of the study.

2.1 Dualization and polarization in the labor market: In respect of dualization, labor markets might be segmented into primary (e.g. core, secure jobs, permanent employment) and secondary (e.g. periphery, insecure jobs, temporary and part-time employment) [7]. The advancement of new technology (e.g. computerization, robotization, digitalization, platform economy, artificial intelligence) has changed occupational structure through displacement and productivity effects. The outcomes of the productivity effect are increased demand for higher education and skills for the increased new and better jobs in the job market. However, the outcomes of the displacement effect indicate that low paid jobs are replaced by technology. In the context of job polarization, the new technology could mainly replace jobs with a routine-component, and in respect of growth of employment, the number of both high and low-paid jobs grow, while middle-paid jobs are stagnating or declining in numbers [8-10].

2.2 Industrial relations systems: interactions and relations between institutions, associations, actors, are affected by various factors, such as trade union density, employer density, collective bargaining coverage, and mode of collective bargaining [11].

2.3 Actors of Industrial Relations Systems: The trade union organizations, employers' organizations, like a confederation of professional enterprises and the government of the nation would constitute as actors of industrial relations systems of a country [12].

2.4 Employment actors and their power resources: Employment actors should constitute the interactions of traditional agents, e.g. employers, workers, government and non-traditional agents, e.g. worker centres, non-government organizations. In employment relations, the dynamic power resources of employment actors are affected by market forces, e.g. economy of the nation, by political forces, e.g. policies, political parties, by the extent of centralization of unions and employers' organizations, and by the technology effect [13].

2.5 Employment institutions: rules, norms that both facilitate and restraint markets. Employment regimes are affected by the institutions which

include labor laws, free trade agreements, political government institutions with their path dependencies [13]. A prominent writer argued that institutions comprise of three pillars, such as regulative (e.g. rules, laws), normative (e.g. norms, morality), and cultural-cognitive (e.g. common beliefs, shared values) pillars which together stipulate strength and sense of social life connecting the activities and resources [14].

2.6 Varieties of Capitalism (VoC): LMEs and CMEs: Firms and financial markets are major actors in comparative political economy which comprises of liberal market economies (LMEs)- where firms coordinate their activities and build core competencies through competitive market relationships (e.g. conditions for supply & demand of goods or services)-, and coordinated market economies (CMEs)- where firms use non-market relationships (e.g. networking and collaborative, strategic interactions among firms and other actors) to coordinate activities and to build core competencies of the firm [15].

2.7 The relevant themes of HRM functional systems: A couple of researchers address HRM practices in an organization as three components, first, a work organization component (e.g. attractive work content, opportunities for employee involvement and participation), second, a training & development component (e.g. opportunities for skills acquisition and career development, job security), third, a motivation component (e.g. financial and non-financial benefits, and many more) [13].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study finds an interesting country comparison among three European countries (France, Ireland, and Sweden) in the issues related to a) labor market conditions, such as standard & non-standard employment, regular & temporary employment, and job polarization & upgrading b) industrial relations systems, such as trade union membership, trade union density, collective bargaining coverage, and employers' organization density, and c) definitions of countries in IR regimes and in VoC. This study also finds d) country comparative analysis on organizations' values and employer branding: sample organizations from France, Ireland, and Sweden, and e) finally this study explains about the relevancy of some HRM concepts with employment relations and strategies.

3(a) Country Comparison on Labour Markets issues in France, Ireland, and in Sweden

Standard and non-standard employment in the

lowest wage quintile, 1995-2007: As explained in the article of a prominent researcher, Ireland reported the highest proportion of standard jobs, (around 60%), while Sweden experienced a negative figure (-12%), but France moderate (12%). In the case of non-standard employment, such as temporary and part-time in nature, France reported the highest proportion (around 40%), while Sweden (just above -1%), and Ireland moderate (20%) [8].

Regulation on regular and tempo employees: In the report of OECD, it has been reported that France experienced the highest strictness by EPL in temporary employment with OECD' index of 3.63 in both years of 2000 and 2013, outracing Ireland's and Sweden's rates in both the years. However, Sweden experienced the highest strictness by EPL in permanent employment, the figure was 2.65 in 2000, and 2.61 in 2013, outracing France's and Ireland's rates [16].

Job polarization and upgrading: In respect of relative change in employment by wage and by education quintiles, 1995-2007, France experienced a perfect polarization, tending toward high paid jobs, while Ireland experienced slight polarization with a very strong upgrading with higher employment growth. However, Sweden experienced upgrading with a bit hike in the central quintile [8].

3(b) Country Comparison on Industrial Relations Systems among France, Ireland, and Sweden

Trade union membership: According to Cranet survey report 2014/2017, around 50% of organizations in France experienced the lowest level of trade union representation (1% to 10% unionization level category), whereas, around 42% of organizations in Sweden experienced the highest trade union membership (76% to 100% unionization level category). Regarding the level of unionization, data for Ireland is missing at Cranet report, 2017 and 2011 [17].

Trade union density: As explained in the report of

3(d) Country comparative analysis on organizations' values and employer branding: sample organizations from France, Ireland, and Sweden: The table-3.1 below shows the frequency of the factors related to ethical & organizational values circulated via websites of six organizations in France, Ireland, & Sweden. The organizations are: 1. TOTAL, French energy, 2. Sanofi, French healthcare, 3. The Central Bank of Ireland, 4.

a prominent writer, though Sweden experienced a downward trend, the union density is high in Sweden, moderate in Ireland, and low in France. Sweden's density rates were in 2001 (78%), in 2007 (71%), in 2013 (68%), which were almost double compared to Ireland's rate and around 9 times higher than France's rates [11].

Collective bargaining coverage: As discussed in the report of a writer, it has reported that France experienced the high collective bargaining coverage (96% in 2002, 98% in 2008, 96% in 2013) while Ireland's level is low (41% in 2002, 39% in 2008, 32% in 2013), but Sweden's level is moderate (93% in 2002, 91% in 2008, 89% in 2013) [11].

Employers' organizations' density: As explained in a recent report of a researcher, it has reported that employer density is high in Sweden, moderate in France, and low in Ireland. Sweden's density rates were 83% in 2002, 84% in 2008, 82% in 2012. France's rates were 74% in 2002, 75% in 2008, and the same in 2012. Ireland's rates were 60% in 2002 and in 2008, the figure is missing, and also 60% in 2012 [11].

3(c) Definitions of countries in IR regimes and in VoC

In terms of industrial relations (IR) regimes, France has been defined as polarized or state-centred with frequent state intervention whereas, Ireland has been defined as liberal pluralism with no state intervention, and Sweden as organized corporatism with limited state intervention to govern institutional framework of IR systems [18].

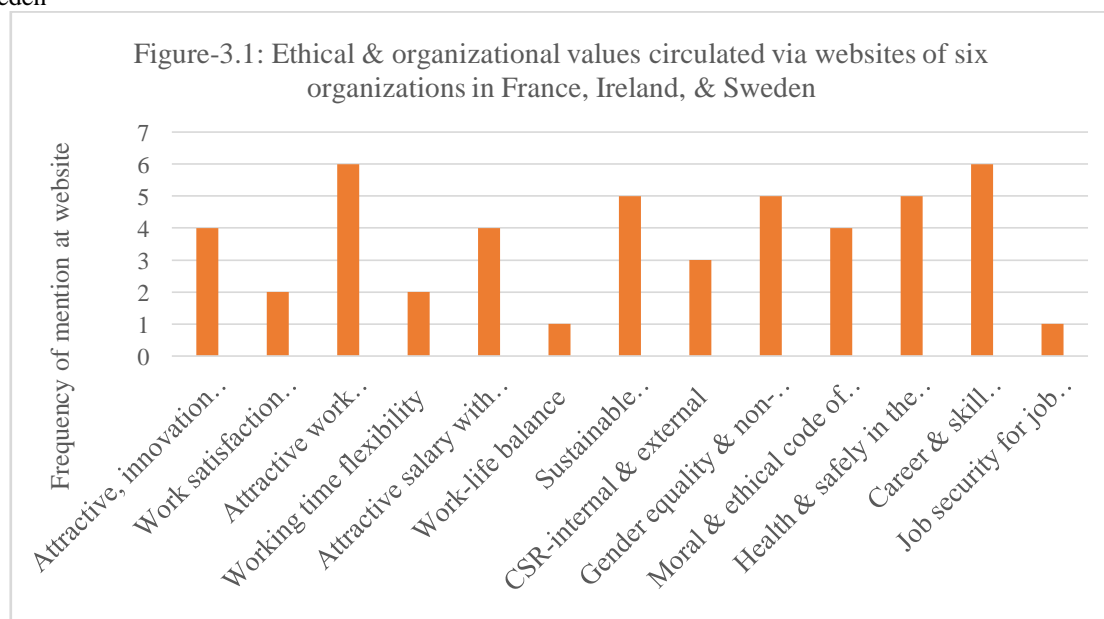
Based on the theory of 'varieties of capitalism' (VoC) to the comparative political economy during the production regimes, France experienced a statist market economy with the Mediterranean in nature, whereas, Ireland could be defined as a liberal market economy, meanwhile Sweden as coordinated market economy [15 & 18].

Johnson Controls, Irish building materials, 5. Volvo, Swedish automobile, and 6. IKEA, Swedish furniture.

Ethical & organizational Values	TOTAL	Sanofi	Central Bank	Johnson	Volvo	IKEA	Frequency
Attractive, innovation and digital work content		1	1	1	1		4
Work satisfaction among employees	1			1			2
Attractive work conditions	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Working time flexibility			1		1		2
Attractive salary with respect & dignity	1		1	1		1	4
Work-life balance	1						1
Sustainable relationships with stakeholders	1	1	1		1	1	5
CSR-internal & external			1	1	1		3
Gender equality & non-discrimination	1	1	1	1		1	5
Moral & ethical code of conduct	1	1		1	1	1	5
Health & safety in the workplace	1	1	1		1	1	5
Career & skill development opportunities	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Job security for job quality			1				1
Total	9	7	10	8	8	7	

Source: Authors’ data tabulation through visiting the websites of six organizations in France, Ireland, Sweden [19]

Table-3.1: Ethical & organizational values circulated via websites of six organizations in France, Ireland, & Sweden



Source: Authors’ data interpretation (graphical presentation) from websites of six organizations in France, Ireland, Sweden [19]

Analysis the data at the above figure and table: it is concluded that the Central Bank of Ireland is only the state organization and this organization’s employer branding image would be highest as it circulates almost all ethical & organizational values (10 out of 13) via website among six organizations in three different countries. The four most important

values, such as attractive work conditions, career & skill development opportunities, sustainable relationships with stakeholders, gender equality & non-discrimination, and moral & ethical code of conduct have mostly been communicated via website outracing the other organizational values (total 13) presented in figure-3.1 and table-3.1. We

think that such type of communication would act as employer branding for these organizations which would be done through three steps of employer branding as researched by [20]. First step is to develop employer value proposition (EVP) which consists of, firstly, interest value and social value both correspond to psychological attributes, e.g. attractive work content, sustainable relationships with stakeholders, gender equality, secondly, developmental values and application values both correspond to functional attributes, e.g. attractive work content, career & skill development opportunities and thirdly, economic value corresponds economic attributes, e.g. attractive salary; 2. The second step is to do external employer branding by communicating the external stakeholders, like potential employees, recruiting agencies with value proposition via the website and social media; 3. The third step is to do internal employer branding by educating or making awareness among the internal employees to deliver the message of brand promise to the external stakeholders.

3(e) Discussion on concepts relating to employment relations and strategies

Attractive work: Attractive work is a kind of work that could fascinate, persuade and satisfy the needs and wants of employees including potential employees (e.g. students) who want to apply for and to continue that work [20]. The dimensions of attractive work, e.g. attractive work content, work satisfaction, and attractive work conditions [20] which are analysed in this study along with other ethical and organizational values.

Job quality: According to the European Commission, job quality could be understood by various factors, such as skills development, sustainable learning, gender equality & non-discrimination, health and safety at work, work-life balance, flexibility, and job security. which are analysed in this study along with other ethical and organizational values. Job quality is also the outcome of employment security or employability and work quality or decent work [21].

Flexibility: Flexibility refers to the situation with some variability or changes, and when this variability is expected or desired by the actors or systems, then it is called flexibility, otherwise it denotes inflexibility [22].

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and equal opportunities for men and women (EO): These attractive organizational values (CSR &EO) would

influence the attitudes of employees towards the organization, e.g. increased commitment, retention of employees, and as part of an organization's employer brand, these ethical values would create sustainable for both internal and external stakeholders [20].

Comparison of findings relating to work-life balance from Cranet Survey 2017: In recent times, work-life balance is a hot topic for all employees (although traditionally it has focused on female employees) those who play multiple roles in-home and at the workplace. Work-life balance could be understood by the happiness and well-functioning at work and at home with a zero or little ole conflict [17]. As per Cranet survey report 2017, peripheral or fringe benefits for work-life balance: Besides action programs, organizations provide various peripheral benefits to make sure balance between work and family life [20].

As presented in the Cranet survey report, it has reported that in France, the fringe benefits, such as maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental leave scored higher (around 50% for three) than other benefits, whereas, in Sweden, maternity leave, paternity leave also scored higher (about 60%) than other benefits, even higher than France. Unfortunately, data related to the use of fringe benefits for work-life balance for Ireland are missing in Cranet-report 2017 and 2011, and we did not find similar data from Eurofound and OECD, but according to the website of Eurofound, accessed on 26 OCT 2019, more Irish women (64%) reported in 2016 that they have to do homework after returning from work than men (50%) in Ireland [10]. So, we think that for Irish women organizations should offer facilities, like workplace childcare or childcare allowances, career break schemes [20].

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, the European country comparison advocates the relevancy of labour relations perspective with HRM issues. Therefore, this study concludes that in respect to labor market conditions, Ireland reported more standard jobs as fixed in nature, while France experienced non-standard as temporary jobs in nature. However, Sweden experienced the highest proportion of temporary employment among the three countries. France was in a good position for employment protection legislation for temporary jobs, while Sweden for permanent jobs and France experienced a perfect polarization, tending toward high paid jobs, while Ireland experienced slight polarization with a very strong upgrading with higher

employment growth. However, Sweden experienced upgrading with a bit hike in the central quintile. The paper also concludes on industrial relations aspects, for example, the trade union density was high in Sweden, moderate in Ireland, and low in France. But, France had high collective bargaining coverage, while Ireland low, but Sweden moderate. However, Sweden's employer density was high, moderate in France, and low in Ireland. Moreover, France has been defined as polarized or state-centered whereas, Ireland as liberal pluralism, and Sweden as organized corporatism with limited state intervention to govern the institutional framework of IR systems. During the production regimes, France experienced a statist market economy with the Mediterranean in nature, whereas, Ireland could be defined as a liberal market economy, meanwhile Sweden has been defined as a coordinated market economy. Finally, this study explains the implications of industrial relations and employment relations issues on human resource management (HRM) on an organizational level and from a country comparison perspective. European countries, like France, Ireland, and Sweden experienced a lot of trajectories during political economy, capitalist economy, production regimes, industrial relations regimes, and employment relations regimes.

Based on the discussion and European country comparative analysis, we can argue that some selected issues of labor relations do condition in the design of work and workplace situation for the employees and for the effective HRM practices. There are implications of labour relations issues on HR and HRM on an organizational level, which this study finds covering the relevant themes of HRM functional systems in general. To do HRM practices perfectly, organizations need institutions [15], associations or power resources, and interactions which all together could create an institutional framework for HRM and also could condition or help HR managers in different ways as explained below:

1. For the work organization component of HRM, industrial relations issues, such as labor laws relating to working hours, working time flexibility, health & safety at work, maternity, paternity, parental leaves, vacations, and many more would ensure opportunities for employee involvement and participation. For example, due to high trade union density and employer density, Swedish employees are strong in respect of enjoying rights and as a result, work organization is supportive of employee participation.

2. In respect of training and development component of HRM, industrial relations issues, such as job

security by ensuring skills development, employment security or employability, employment protection act, and more would make sure learning culture where employees could continuously apply the lessons learned from working experiences and in this way, they perceive their jobs are secure.

3. For the motivation component of HRM practices, industrial relations issues, such as procedures of wage setting, rules for setting varieties of pay and benefits for workers or employees, and more which are associated with the reward systems or compensation management systems of the HRM process. This is the vital component for HR managers for motivating employees and for retaining them in the organization for a long time.

In fact, having contributions from the industrial relations (IR) field (academically and practically), the HRM would be able to offer attractive work to the employees from attractive work content, work satisfaction, attractive work conditions, and also from the multilevel perspective (macro-level, e.g. national, industry and sectoral cultures contexts, meso-level, e.g. organizational culture and values, micro-level, e.g. fascinating communication systems in the organization, individual level, e.g. employee commitment [20]. Consequently, organizations would experience an attractive workplace that produces employer brand promise to existing and potential employees for employer branding successful. Academicians and practitioners, e.g. HR professionals would directly be benefited by the implications of the findings of the study.

This report suffers from a lack of empirical data from primary sources, a lower sample of organizations, and fewer number of countries for country comparison. This study used data from 2007 and from 2010 to 2016 which have been published in the reports, such as OECD, Eurofound, Cranet report up to 2017, we did not get the most updated data like 2018, 2019, and 2020 where future researchers might work. Finally, this study was unable to explore empirically the question of how the institutional framework would shape the human resource management systems from an employer branding perspective? Therefore, future researchers might have a chance to explore this query in the field of HRM from another avenue of the societal perspective.

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