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# GERMAN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION?

by  
Markus Pudelko

## ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates that American and Japanese HR managers hardly perceive German human resource management (HRM) as a role model from which they might wish to learn. As will be shown, the reason for this attitude is that American and Japanese HR managers have barely any knowledge about German HRM. It is argued here that this lack of knowledge results from the rather 'balanced', 'moderate' and 'equilibrated' character of German HRM, making it very difficult to define and grasp the essence of German HRM. Paradoxically, however, the data suggest that it is exactly this 'balanced' approach for which HR managers from the USA, Japan and Germany are striving.

## INTRODUCTION

Interest in foreign management practices in general and human resource management (HRM) practices in particular frequently follows the economic growth rates of various countries quite closely, even though the connection between (HR) management practices and macro-economic growth is often only very loose. This phenomenon can be quite clearly observed with the changing interest in Japanese and US American (HR) management. Up to the 1980s American (HR) management undoubtedly set the standards, very much in line with its undisputed economic dominance. In the 1980s and early 1990s interest in Japanese (HR) management soared, the period of high growth rates in Japan. During the same time the US economy was faced with serious problems. American (HR) management, which had certainly since the 1950s been perceived to set the benchmark, if not the global standard of management per se, clearly lost much of its formerly undisputed appeal. Only one decade later, however, Japan went into a recession from which it now finally appears to be slowly recovering. Paradoxically, those same (HR) management practices, which were regarded in the 1980s as important ingredients for the Japanese success story (see for example Vogel, 1979; Ouchi, 1981), are now increasingly perceived as outmoded and necessitating substantial reform (Dalton and Benson, 2002; Matanle, 2003). In contrast, and once more in accordance with growth rates, American HRM practices are again setting the standard against which the performance of other models has to be measured (Smith and Meiksins, 1995).

While interest in Japan is declining dramatically, attention to China is increasing (again following the economic growth patterns). Within the West, while there was always some attention paid to German HRM, particularly in other European countries but also to some degree in the USA, this interest appears to be on the decline, again in concordance with the weak performance of the German economy over the last decade. It is debatable, however, whether a decline in a country's economic growth necessarily means that its HRM model is incapable of providing inspirations to other national systems. After all, many factors besides HRM influence economic growth rates.

## SETTING THE STAGE

### EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT MODELS BY MANAGERS

This study empirically investigates what foreign (non-European) HR managers think of the German HRM model and which inspirations they might receive from it. By explicitly focussing on the highly practice relevant issue of cross-national inspiration seeking and adoption of management practices, this study distinguishes itself significantly from other cross-national management research: authors of comparative management studies usually describe foreign management practices on the basis of empirical surveys of *local* managers, whereas the issue of learning from each other is mostly left to the judgment of the respective authors themselves (see e.g. Peters & Waterman, 1982; Womack et al., 1990). However, as managers and not scholars ultimately put learning and adoption processes into practice, a better understanding of the perception of various management models by *managers* from *other* countries appears to be highly significant.<sup>1</sup> In order to deliver a prognosis on successful mutual learning, it is important to understand 1. to what degree various HRM systems are known among managers; 2. how managers evaluate those systems and 3. how they assess future developments with regard to possible convergence tendencies towards one or the other system. It is astonishing that despite the importance of these questions, hardly any research has been done on the perception of management models by foreign managers. Because of this research gap, it appears highly relevant to address this issue.

### COUNTRY CHOICE OF THIS STUDY

According to Wächter & Muller-Camen (2002), Germany provides a good example of a national management model as, in the phase of its industrialization, it had followed a very specific path which is clearly different from that of other countries. This statement is particularly valid for German HRM (Müller, 1999). Only the American and the Japanese HRM models received more attention (Warner & Campbell, 1993). As already stated, the American model currently sets the standards in the debate on global best HRM practices, while the attractiveness in particular of the Japanese model has declined significantly over the last decade. Given the attention which has been paid to these three country systems at

one point or another, it is of interest whether the model which has been given the least attention, the German one, might still be worthwhile in providing some inspiration for HR managers from the other two countries. Thus, this study is based on surveys of HR managers from the USA, Japan and Germany, the three economically leading countries in the world, which are also the main economic forces of the triad North America, Asia and Europe.

## OVERVIEW ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GERMAN HRM ABROAD

Within Europe, German (HR) management was frequently described as a role model (Albert 1991; Lawrence 1993). Interest in German HRM has been particularly strong among those European scholars who reject the applicability of US American HR practices in the European context. They argue that the modern concept of HRM is based to a considerable extent on the American individualist and market driven value set and that a transfer of the HRM-concept into the more collectivist and regulated European context is therefore by no means unproblematic (e.g.: Guest, 1994; Kirkbride, 1994; Brewster, 1995; and more specifically for Germany: Müller, 1999; Streeck, 2001; Wächter & Muller-Camen, 2002). Within the western world, it is German management which has, according to Warner and Campbell, the symbolic status “as antithesis to the Anglo-American approach” (1993: 92; see also Lawrence, 1993). However, Germany’s highly regulated institutional framework, its less convincing economic performance and the resurgence of Anglo-American capitalism over the last decade clearly has led to a decline in its overall appreciation (Dore, 2000).

Also in the USA some authors have intensively studied the German model. However, the discussion has mainly been limited to aspects of co-determination and vocational training. Consequently, the debate has been more focused on industrial relations than on strategic HRM issues (Warner and Campbell, 1993). Smith (1991), Pfeffer (1994) and Wever (1995) proposed for the USA the introduction of a co-determination model, referring specifically to the German experience. In their rejection of an industrial relations system, which is almost exclusively governed by market forces, and their support for more government regulations, they represent, however, in research and certainly in the business world, a minority voice in the USA (Wever, *ibid*). Furthermore, the first Clinton administration deliberated for a short time about taking the German vocational training as a role model for the USA. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labour in Clinton’s first term, met, however, strong opposition from the business sector and the plan was dropped. With the recovery of the American economy and the stagnation of the German economy in the 1990s, the – from the start already very partial – interest in German HRM methods declined in the USA even further.

Under the pressure of Western powers to open up its markets, Japan transformed itself in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a closed off, feudal and rural country to a modern and economically powerful industrial nation. In this process Germany (and here particularly Prussia) was selected in many ways as a role model. Its structures were systematically copied in several areas (administration, military, law, economy). Civil and criminal law is still today

modelled after German law and research in these areas also follows closely the German example. With few exceptions, however, the USA took over after World War II as by far the strongest role model. While the older generation of Japanese management scholars might still be familiar with German management research, the following generations have focussed almost exclusively on American sources. This is particularly the case for HRM, which was introduced into management studies only after Japanese scholars lost their interest in German management research (Pudelko 2000).

On the basis of empirical data, it will now be investigated if the rather low degree of interest in the German HRM model assumed with regard to American and Japanese researchers can be confirmed for practitioners as well. Furthermore, the reasons for the attitude towards German HRM will be examined. If low interest is the case, it will be of particular interest to investigate whether it is primarily based on the opinion that German HRM is of low quality or if other reasons might be the deciding factor.

## METHODOLOGY

The results reported here form part of a major comparative study on German, American and Japanese HRM (Pudelko, 2000, 2005a, 2006). In order to obtain information on perceptions about German HRM – and in comparison about American and Japanese HRM – the heads of the HR departments from the 500 largest corporations in each of these three countries were approached with a questionnaire. It was assumed that they are because of their high position in the corporate hierarchy most likely to possess the necessary knowledge and vision to form educated opinions about other countries' HRM models. Furthermore, it was presumed that in large corporations knowledge of foreign HRM methods is more available than in small and medium sized companies. As subjective perceptions were objects of analysis, the author did not predefine what is to be understood by German (respectively American and Japanese) HRM. Instead this was left to the judgment of the managers and included in the survey.

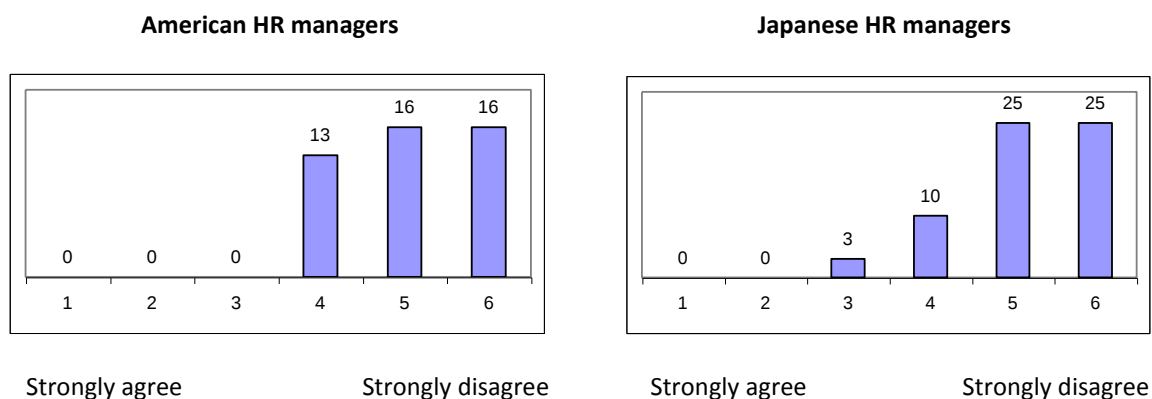
The questionnaires were sent out by mail in English, Japanese and German. In order to secure consistency among the three versions the method of back-translation was employed. 107 German (21 percent), 57 American (12 percent) and 68 Japanese (14 percent) HR managers filled out and returned the questionnaire. The survey does not claim to be representative of all large companies in the three countries. It should be noted, however, that the 232 companies included in this survey cover a broad variety of different service and manufacturing industries in Germany, the USA and Japan. Consequently, the data should be sufficiently robust, to allow meaningful conclusions.

## EMPIRICAL DATA REGARDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GERMAN HRM FOR AMERICAN AND JAPANESE HR MANAGERS AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

### ORIENTATION TOWARDS GERMAN HRM

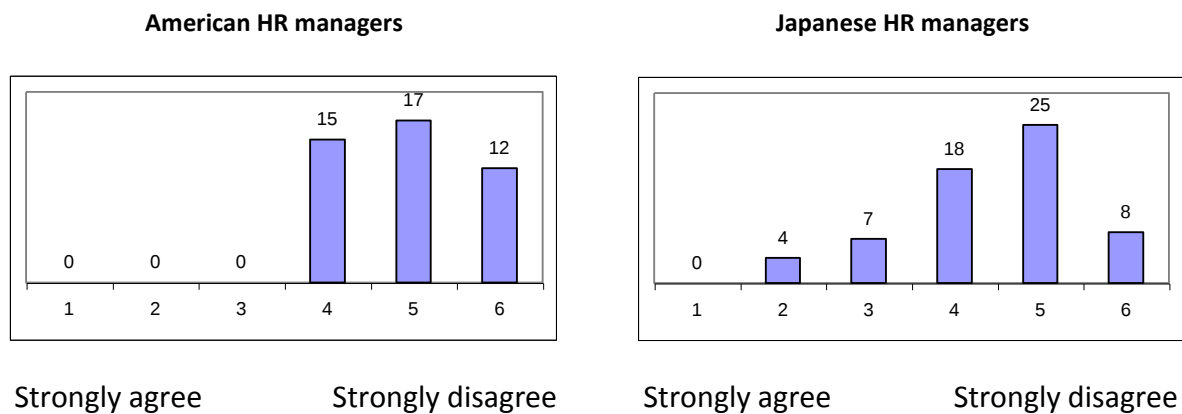
The 500 American (Japanese) recipients of the questionnaire were asked how they felt about the following statement: *“Since the 1980s, American [Japanese] corporations have oriented themselves towards, or adapted, particular German human resource practices.”* On a six point scale, going from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, the managers were asked to give their opinion about this statement.

**Figure 1:** *Agreement / disagreement with the following statement: “Since the 1980’s, American / Japanese corporations have oriented themselves towards, or adapted, particular German human resource practices.”*



The frequency distributions in Figure 1 clearly indicate that neither the American (left) nor the Japanese respondents (right) saw a noteworthy orientation of the companies in their country towards German HRM practices. In order to understand the perspective the American and Japanese managers take with regard to the influence of the German HRM model on their companies in the *future*, the following statement was formulated, which differs only with regard to the different time frame from the one above: *“In the upcoming years, American [Japanese] corporations should orient themselves towards, or adapt, particular German human resource practices.”*

**Figure 2:**      *Agreement / disagreement with the following statement: “In the upcoming years, American / Japanese corporations should orient themselves towards, or adapt, particular German human resource practices.”*



From the frequency distribution in Figure 2 it becomes evident that also with regard to the future American HR managers did not perceive German HRM to become a source of inspiration. Somewhat more differentiated were the reactions of the Japanese managers, who conceded to the German HRM model a modestly more prominent role in the future. This data already provides a first impression about the largely insignificant position of German HRM as a role model for American and Japanese corporations. A complete picture can, however, only be provided if the attraction of the American and Japanese HRM model is also tested. After all, it is well possible that none of the three models provides any inspiration to the other two countries and that this is therefore not specific to the German system. In order not to take up too much space, the frequency distributions will not be depicted here. Instead, the arithmetic means were computed and compared with one another. The smaller (higher) the mean, the more (less) the respondents of one country perceive in the respective HRM model a relevant source of orientation.

**Table 1:**      *Orientation towards other HRM models*

| Towards<br>From | Germany |         | USA  |         | Japan |         |
|-----------------|---------|---------|------|---------|-------|---------|
|                 | Past    | Present | Past | Present | Past  | Present |
| Germany         | ###     |         | 5,07 | 4,93    | 5,14  | 4,42    |
| USA             | 3,34    | 3,71    | ###  |         | 3,03  | 2,80    |
| Japan           | 3,98    | 4,25    | 4,14 | 4,57    | ###   |         |

The smaller (higher) the arithmetic mean, the more (less) the respondents of one country believed that an orientation towards HR practices from the respective HRM model took place in the past or will take place in the future.

The arithmetic means in the first row of Table 1 underline for the German HRM what was already established when evaluating the frequency distributions: neither the American nor the Japanese respondents saw a noteworthy orientation of companies of their country towards the German model. In contrast, it becomes evident (row 2) that both German as well as Japanese managers saw, with some reservations, a role model in the American system. The Japanese HRM (row 3) takes as a source of inspiration a position in between the American and the German system. These connections were tested for statistical significance. 13 of the 18 tested relations proved to be statistically significant, which should be interpreted as a confirmation of the arguments being made. It can therefore be shown that the orientation towards the German HRM model is in comparison with the orientation towards the American and the Japanese HRM models the weakest and this with regard to both the past and the future.

An even stronger indication of the low degree of attraction of the German HRM model is shown by the following: the HRM managers were asked to name characteristics (here not to be further discussed) of the other two HRM models which they perceived as worth adopting. From the 495 statements made in total, only 11 referred to the German system, more than ten-fold referred to the Japanese system (131) and more than thirty-fold to the American system (353). These results underline therefore in respect of the HR managers the statement previously made with regard to scholars: German HRM practices are hardly perceived in the USA or Japan as a source of inspiration. In contrast, the American model in particular is of significantly more interest and also the Japanese model has been at least with regard to the past of some, even though less attraction.

#### REASONS FOR THE NON-ORIENTATION TOWARDS GERMAN HRM

After having seen that the empirical data largely reflect the connections assumed before, it is now of interest to ask *why* the German HRM system is not regarded by the representatives of the other two systems as inspiring. In order to be able to compare the data for the various countries, data will be again reproduced not only regarding the German but also American and Japanese HRM. Table 2 summarizes the relevant data here.

*Table 2: Reasons for the non-orientation towards other HRM models*

| Reasons                 | Non-orientation towards Germany |                         |                         |                         | Non-orientation towards USA |                         |                         |                         | Non-orientation towards Japan |                         |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                         | Past                            |                         | Future                  |                         | Past                        |                         | Future                  |                         | Past                          |                         | Future                  |                         |
|                         | USA                             | JPN                     | USA                     | JPN                     | GER                         | JPN                     | GER                     | JPN                     | GER                           | USA                     | GER                     | USA                     |
| Unkown                  | <b>26</b><br><b>52%</b>         | <b>56</b><br><b>88%</b> | 17<br>39%               | <b>46</b><br><b>84%</b> | 15<br>27%                   | 0<br>0%                 | 2<br>4%                 | 1<br>9%                 | 22<br>31%                     | 10<br>29%               | 11<br>14%               | 7<br>16%                |
| Different circumstances | 21<br>42%                       | 8<br>13%                | <b>23</b><br><b>52%</b> | 8<br>15%                | <b>39</b><br><b>70%</b>     | <b>14</b><br><b>93%</b> | <b>37</b><br><b>74%</b> | <b>10</b><br><b>91%</b> | <b>45</b><br><b>63%</b>       | <b>23</b><br><b>66%</b> | <b>58</b><br><b>73%</b> | <b>34</b><br><b>76%</b> |
| Not worthwhile          | 3<br>6%                         | 0<br>0%                 | 4<br>9%                 | 1<br>2%                 | 2<br>4%                     | 1<br>7%                 | 11<br>22%               | 0<br>0%                 | 5<br>7%                       | 2<br>6%                 | 10<br>13%               | 4<br>9%                 |

(Absolute numbers and percentages; in bold the most frequently stated reason)

The left third of Table 2 gives reasons why an orientation towards German HRM since the 1980s did not occur or will not occur in the coming years. Three different alternatives (left column) were presented as possible responses and the American and Japanese HR managers were asked to state which one seemed to them the most relevant.<sup>2</sup>

It is striking how little is actually known about the HRM model of the world's third largest economy. This applies both to the Americans and especially to the Japanese, both for previous years and, as forecasts, for the coming years. If one considers the information gathered regarding the American and Japanese HR practices, then this statement is even more significant. Non-orientation towards the American and Japanese HRM model was mainly explained by the different cultural, social and institutional context in the respective own country on the one hand and in the USA or Japan on the other hand. Thus, the results for Germany clearly differ from those for the USA and Japan. One can conclude that the sweeping lack of knowledge about German HRM is the most important reason for its low importance as a role model and not, for example, a perceived low quality.

#### REASONS FOR THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GERMAN HRM

In the following, the reason why the German HRM model is so little known will be explored. As was shown elsewhere in more detail (Pudelko, 2005a), the American, Japanese and German respondents described their own HRM practices in a way that the American and the Japanese HRM models can be understood in many ways as opposing each other, with the German HRM model taking a position in the middle. Table 3 summarises these connections. This pattern, the American and the Japanese HRM models at the extremes and the German one in between, seems to reflect the wider contextual framework in which these three models are embedded (Pudelko, 2006).

*Table 3: The three HRM models*

| USA                                                                                                              | GERMANY    | JAPAN                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Recruitment and release of personnel</b>                                                                      |            |                                                                                                   |
| Finding the best qualified person for a specific job (job-oriented), high labour turnover                        | In between | Finding the person who fits best for the company (people-oriented), lifelong employment           |
| <b>Training and development</b>                                                                                  |            |                                                                                                   |
| Training focused on specific, limited knowledge for individuals for narrowly defined tasks (specialist training) | In between | Widespread, extensive and group-oriented training for broadly defined tasks (generalist training) |
| <b>Employee assessment and promotion criteria</b>                                                                |            |                                                                                                   |
| Individual achievements and quantifiable criteria of importance (results oriented), specialist career            | In between | Seniority and contribution to collective achievements of importance (behaviour -oriented),        |

|                                                                                                  |            |                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| path                                                                                             |            | generalist career path                                                                          |
| <b>Employee incentives</b>                                                                       |            |                                                                                                 |
| Primarily material incentives, pay based on individual achievements, significant pay differences | In between | Material and immaterial incentives, pay based on seniority, small pay differences               |
| <b>Communication within the company</b>                                                          |            |                                                                                                 |
| Primarily vertical, structured and efficient                                                     | In between | Primarily horizontal, unstructured and extensive                                                |
| <b>Decision making within the company</b>                                                        |            |                                                                                                 |
| Top-down, authoritative, individual, confrontational and based on hard facts                     | In between | Bottom-up, participative, collective, consensus-oriented and based on soft facts                |
| <b>Superior-subordinate-relationship</b>                                                         |            |                                                                                                 |
| Specific, task-oriented, based on regulations                                                    | In between | Holistic, person-oriented, based on common values                                               |
| ↓                                                                                                | ↓          | ↓                                                                                               |
| <b>Overall HRM model</b>                                                                         |            |                                                                                                 |
| Short-term performance efficiency based on flexible market structures and profit orientation     | In between | Long-term behavioural effectiveness based on cooperative clan structures and growth orientation |

The uncovered 'middle position' of the German model can help us to understand why it is so little known abroad. Being 'in between' renders it rather difficult to find stereotypes, labels or categories which would help outsiders to define and grasp the essence of the German model better. In contrast, the more 'extreme' American and Japanese systems lend themselves much more to a straight forward description and categorization (see also Warner and Campbell, 1993). Furthermore, it appears that a system which is 'moderate', 'equilibrated' and shaped by 'compromise formulae' and which is therefore difficult to comprehend seems to be less attractive as a role model. In order to be a role model, the advantages should stand out a lot more than is the case with the German HRM model. Consequently, its 'in-between' character possesses only limited attractiveness.

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#### PROGNOSIS FOR FUTURE TRENDS

In order to obtain information on the managers' perceptions about future trends with regard to possible convergence of the various models, they were also questioned on this topic. The overwhelming majority of 81 per cent of the German, American and Japanese respondents foresaw that HRM practices "will become in some ways similar, without converging on an essentially common model", while only 14 per cent believed they "will always remain very different" and 5 per cent thought a "convergence on an essentially common model" will occur. The differences between the responses from the three countries were only minor.

Finally it is of interest in which direction approximation tendencies are seen, if they are seen. Only 1 per cent of the respondents from all three countries expected a convergence towards the German HRM model to take place and only 2 per cent saw a convergence towards the Japanese HRM model. With 21 per cent clearly more of the HR specialists anticipated a convergence towards American HR practices. However, by far the largest preference (76 per cent) was for a combination of different practices. Once again the data from all three countries strongly resembled each other.

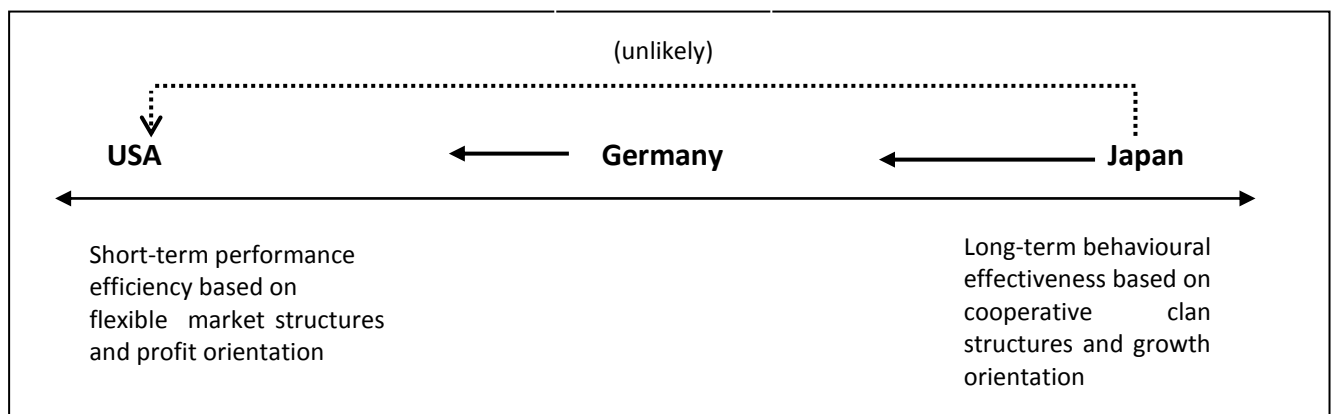
## DISCUSSION

When considering these findings, the following condition needs to be particularly emphasized: an important discovery was that a strong majority of the German, American and Japanese HR specialists classified their own HRM practices in such a way that the German system is seen as a kind of combination of the American and the Japanese systems. Furthermore, most experts from all three countries predicted a mutual melding of the HRM systems. And finally, a large number of the respondents from all three countries foresaw a movement towards a combination model. The German model is apparently not associated with this combination model even though, according to the data, it comes, because of its 'middle position', closest to it. For the American and Japanese HR managers, this may well be explained by the fact that for them, as already noted, German HRM is mostly unknown. But even the German respondents do not seem to notice the connection found here.

Describing the German HRM model as the closest to the 'combination model' requires some qualification. The German HRM system has also other distinctive features, in addition to the 'in between' characterization which was stressed here, when compared to the American and Japanese models. For example, the degree of autonomy of German HR managers is substantially curtailed because of the high number of labour laws, regulations, contractual agreements with the unions, and participation rights of works councils (Wächter & Muller-Camen, 2002). It can well be understood that this is not something American or Japanese HR managers would strive to copy. Furthermore, a substantial amount of literature suggest that the Japanese as well as the German HRM system is currently moving closer to the American model (see e.g. Sparrow & Hiltrop, 1994; Müller, 1999). Next, even though the respondents anticipated that HRM practices "will become in some ways similar", they largely rejected the perspective of moving towards a "convergence on an essentially common model". Finally, as the American and the Japanese HRM models can be perceived in many ways as being at the opposite ends of a continuum, not only the German but also many other, in particular European national HRM models can be characterised as 'in between' those extremes. Potentially these other models might serve as even better sources of inspiration. Consequently, this paper is far from implying that the German HRM embodies the ideal combination model to be adopted by other countries.

The findings reported in Table 1 clearly suggest that for the German and the Japanese managers, the American model serves, with limitations, as a source of inspiration. In contrast, American managers see both the Japanese and the German model as significantly less worth emulating. This finding is in agreement with a substantial body of literature (e.g. Watanabe, 2003; Matanle, 2003; Müller, 1999). Adopting elements from the American model should be less of a drastic step for the German model as, due to its 'middle position', it is already closer to the American model than the Japanese one is. Despite the efforts of Japanese managers to learn and adopt practices from the American model, it would be highly unlikely that the Japanese HRM model would ever 'surpass' the German model, while moving towards the American system. This would go too much against the cultural-institutional context in which the Japanese HRM model is embedded (see also Dore 2000; Matanle, 2003; Pudelko, 2004). Consequently, it is likely that any efforts by the Japanese to 'learn from America' would actually bring the Japanese model closer to the German one than to the American one. Figure 3 depicts these connections.

*Figure 3: Dynamics of the three HRM models*



From this it follows that the Japanese HR managers, or for that matter, HR managers from any other country with HRM practices that are quite opposite to the American ones, should not rely exclusively on a model that is in many ways diametrically in contradiction to the traditional domestic approaches. A more 'balanced', 'moderate' and 'equilibrated' model (in this case, the German one) might provide a better 'fit' to the domestic cultural and institutional environment and therefore serve as an important additional source of inspiration.

## CONCLUSIONS

Only some ten years ago, in the first half of the 1990s, the superiority of the American management model was increasingly put into question (Reich, 1990; Thurow, 1993). The future seemed in many ways to belong to the Japanese model (Womack et al., 1990). This prediction proved to be fundamentally erroneous. This should warn us against extrapolating from current developments into the future. The history of national competitiveness did not come to an end and therefore it would be wrong to perceive the American system as the ultimate winner over the Japanese model. It might be possible for instance that the current phase of radical change (new technologies, major restructuring, mergers and acquisitions etc.), for which the highly flexible American management model appears to be particularly well suited, might be followed by a period of more gradual change (incremental improvement steps, fine-tuning and optimization processes) for which the Japanese model is considered to be more advantageous (Pudelko 2005b).

Given the increasing complexity and difficulty of forecasting future developments, globalization should not be understood as a reason to emulate 'best practices' from that management model which is currently perceived to be the most dominant one, but a reason to strengthen a country's own competitive advantages, while at the same time being open to outside inspiration, in order to supplement and combine one's own strengths with those of other models. The outcome should again be a unique set of characteristics and not a copy of what is perceived as 'best practices'. Given the changes in the external environment which seem to appear with increasing frequency, the ability to follow according to necessity different and even opposing paths should be regarded as an essential advantage in the long-term successful HRM model. The statements of the American, Japanese and German HR managers in this survey who strive for a 'combination model' should be understood as an indication of this necessity.

For HR managers this study contains one important lesson: in their efforts to obtain inspirations from other HRM models, they should not be guided exclusively by those models which are, because of rather extreme positions, comparatively easily portrayed and understood. Models which are characterized by a 'middle position' or a compromise between extremes might be more difficult to grasp immediately and their advantages might stick out less; however, they could serve as additional sources of inspiration as they are well suited to providing a dynamic balance between opposing exigencies. German HRM was not introduced here in order to suggest that HR managers from other countries should refer to it as (an additional) role model, but to illustrate this point.

For comparative (HR) management research this contribution implies two conclusions: First to pay more attention to those (HR) management models which are not necessarily characterized by extreme or clear-cut features but by more 'balanced' approaches, very much along the lines of the suggestion made to managers. Beyond this scholars should strive for a better understanding of what managers know about foreign management models, how

they evaluate them, what they expect to learn from them and how they put any learning process into practice. Without a better understanding of these issues, we are not able to understand if, to which degree and how convergence of different management models take place. This contribution took a step in this direction. The analysis of additional national management models and other management functions (beyond HRM) would increase our knowledge in this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to this statement are surveys of foreign employees within multinational enterprises.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that in Table 2 only statements of those respondents can be processed who have previously largely negated any orientation towards the respective HRM model. Due to rounding not all cumulated percentages add up exactly to one hundred per cent.

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