
How International Labour Laws Influence HRM Policies in UK-Based Global Companies: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact that global labour regulations have on UK multinationals' HRM policies in different legal and cultural environments. UK multinationals face rising challenges to balance HRM practice in response to a range of international labour demands and become competitive as well as law abiding with globalization taking the centre stage. The study analysed how the different elements of the international labour law regime i.e., EU directives, bilateral trade deals, and ILO conventions interact and the consequences of this for the development of HRM policy in United Kingdom-headquartered multinational corporations. The study revealed the main means by which international labour standards affect HRM practice by applying institutional theory and review of literature. They are normative pressures of professional HR best practice, mimetic pressures of business best practice, and coercive pressures of legal requirement. The study found that UK firms must address "transnational challenge" of being locally responsive but globally integrated, especially in the post-Brexit era when UK practices remain influenced by European labour law in a variety of ways. The key statistics reveal that when companies adhere to international labour standards, they not only avoid legal troubles but also impact reputation, employees' morale and turnover and become more competitive in the global market. The research identified some of the principal challenges including cultural diversity management, regulatory portfolio variation across jurisdictions, and local context- and business-compatible professional HR practice building needs. It also found how firms can leverage international labour standards to enhance employees' relations, organisational performance, and longer-term competitiveness. The conclusions of this study are indicative of the advanced interface between global labour law and HRM policy which UK multinationals need to execute to survive a globalized business environment while ensuring moral standards of work and legal compliance for different forms of work.

Keywords: International labour law, HRM policies, multinational corporations, UK companies, global compliance, labour standards

1. Introduction

The effects of global labour legislations on UK multinational corporations' Human Resources Management Policies (HRM) are complex with profound implication for conformity, workers' rights and strategic responses. UK firms operating in cultures outside the UK experience the pressure of synchronizing HRM functions with different global labour legislations. Conformity with these legislations is inevitable not only legally but also for business reputation (Brewster et al., 2016). In this context, employee rights remain at the top of the agenda for HRM policies of multinational corporations because compliance with international labour standards might enhance employees' job satisfaction and turnover (Tarique et al., 2015). Furthermore, the necessity of strategic adjustments is considered when UK businesses are working within liberal and coordinated market economies. The adjustment typically includes alignment of HRM policies to fit domestic labour laws and cultural needs, thereby creating a more inclusive environment (Farndale et al., 2014). Tsogas (2015) noted that effective localisation of worldwide labour standards has the potential of bringing competitive edge and enable UK companies to thrive in the global scene. Overall, the interplay between worldwide labour law and HRM policy captures the nuances of doing business in a globalised world, and it suggests the essence of getting aligned between cultures.

Globalization of business has provided the Human Resource Management (HRM) in multinational corporations (MNCs) with unprecedented challenges. UK-based multinational corporations, with operations in a variety of disparate legal regimes, need to negotiate intricate web-based international labour law and develop consistent HR policies that are both harmonized with local regulatory requirements and corporate needs. This research responds to the key question of how international labour law shapes HRM policy within UK-based multinational companies and provides an explanation of the mediating processes by which these impacts operate and what they mean for organizational practice.

The importance of this study is the growing globalization of international labour market and greater business social responsibility. International labour standards, promulgated by institutions like the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Union, and bilateral trade unions, impose limitation as well as potential on multinational employers. Firms need to comprehend the influence of these standards on HRM policy so that they can compete while being consistent with changing international standards.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- i. Identify key international labour laws that influence HRM policies in UK-based global companies
- ii. Examine the mechanisms through which these influences are transmitted and implemented
- iii. Analyse the variations in influence across different HR policy areas
- iv. Assess the challenges and opportunities created by international labour law compliance
- v. Provide recommendations for effective integration of international labour standards into HRM practices

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Labor Law Framework

The development of the global regime of labour law has played a critical role in shaping global work standards and workers' rights in the 21st century. This was necessitated by the

need that the process of globalization created, with the need for more robust systems of rules that protected work rights across national borders. One of the most important principles governing this image is decent work promotion, which tries to ensure equal remuneration, good working conditions and social security (Servais, 2024). Secondly, global framework agreements were crucial in ensuring collaboration between multinational corporations and unions to promote work rights worldwide (Afandiyeva, 2023). Besides, the cross-link between international labour law and commercial law has also attracted much attention, such as the intersection in regional and multilateral commercial masterpieces (Duong, 2024). The cross-link is needed to ensure that commercial contracts do not decrease the quality of work but enhance it. Tsogas (2015) observes that regulation of work in a global economy needs an international perspective that reconciles the interests of employers and employees to develop economic well-being.

The effect of the global construct of labour law reaches beyond work rights; positively framed international relations by setting the standards to which nations are accountable and hence encouraging responsibility and cooperation. As more nations see the worth in upholding work standards, the global legal setting remains groundbreaking, building the foundation that workers' rights belong to a sustainable development and economic justice for the world today.

The international labour law framework comprises varying levels of regulation ranging from international conventions to regional treaties to bilateral agreements. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was created in 1919 and serves as the world's main international organization regarding setting labour standards via its conventions and recommendations (Blackett & Trebilcock, 2015). ILO core values such as freedom of association, eradication of forced labour, eradication of child labour, and eradication of discrimination are the pillars of the world architecture of labour standards.

The labour law climate of European Union significantly impacts UK companies, specifically in post-Brexit era. The European Social Charter, EU Working Time Directives, health and safety Directives, and equal treatment Directives remain effective in UK labour practice through several mechanisms (Freedland & Adams-Prassl, 2015). Trade agreements increasingly include labour standards, with related compliance requirements for multinational companies.

2.2 HRM in Multinational Corporations

Human resource management (HRM) for multinational corporations (MNCs) is experiencing various challenges due to diversity in operations across different regulatory and cultural contexts. Cultural diversity is the most widespread problem that will cause contradictions and misunderstandings among employees of different origins. According to assertions expressed through the findings offered by Muhajan (2024), managing diversity involves the integration of inclusive practices that acknowledge and value diverse cultural insights. They are crucial practices in developing cooperation and organizational synergy. Dignity for different legal and regulatory portfolios is another issue that concerns MNCs. Oppong (2018) indicates that regulation of such conformity issues would normally demand that human resource specialists are experts in the legislations of the country and labourers' laws, and these may differ vastly from one country to another. The need for localized knowledge increases the demand for creating specialized human resource strategies directed at the company vision and home country requirements.

Development of skills remains one of the most vital domains where multinationals' efforts must be focused so that they are competitively positioned. Pucik et al. (2016) prove that it

becomes increasingly challenging to hire and retain high-quality talents across borders, especially in emerging markets where skills scarcity is common. To meet with such a purpose, MNC need to embrace emerging recruitment practices relying on technology and social media to reach various reservoirs of talents. The conservation approaches for employees have far-reaching collective impacts on the success of the MNC. Dasgupta et al. (2022) argued that the determination of employees' motives and career objectives in multicultural settings is essential in building successful conservation approaches. These approaches should involve requesting a combination of competitive pay, opportunities for career development and robust organizational culture that is global in attraction, but local in convenience. Together, the above intuitions capture the multi-dimensionality of human resource management in multinational contexts and the urgent requirement for strategic flexibility.

International HRM research has thoroughly examined the difficulty of managing human resources of multinational corporations within several institutional contexts (Schuler et al., 2002). The struggle between global integration and local responsiveness generates what Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) coined the "transnational challenge" of reconciling standardization and adaptation for firms. The work of more contemporary research has identified institutional pressures as contributing to the practices of HRM. Institutional theory by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) posits that organizations must deal with coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures which generate isomorphism in organizational practice. Translating this knowledge to US labour law, these pressures are demands for legal compliance, benchmarking across the best practices within sectors, and professional standards in the HR community.

2.3 Legal Compliance and HRM Strategy

Legal compliance and human resources management strategies (HRM) are the key link to enhance organizational effectiveness and promote ethical work practice. Legal compliance in HRM seeks to adhere to the law, regulations, and work ethics, which in turn influence the organizational operational framework (Murphy, 2018). A strong compliance system not only insulates the organization from potential legal penalties but also enhances labour relations by strengthening faith and generating a transparency culture (Bohinská, 2018). Introducing legal compliance into HRM is critical in enhancing high-level employee devotion and retention efforts with a positive impact on international organizational performance.

Existing literature also underscores the way technological progress continues to complicate legal compliance and HRM dynamics. Purba (2023) establishes the limits of the impacts of technological progress, stating that contemporary compliance executives should evolve with advances in technology to keep up with emerging challenges in HR practices. Similarly, Ur-Rahman et al. (2024) argued that the revolutionary nature of technology demands rethinking HRM strategies in order to necessitate continuous learning and compliance framework adaptation. Moreover, ethical dimensions of HRM practice are strictly intertwined with law compliance. Culture of conformity that comes with ethical HR tactics undermined not just the risks but morale and fidelity of employees as well, and organizational effectiveness is hence more improved (Bohinská, 2018). Consequently, it is essential to find out the complete interdependence between compliance with law and HRM policies to induce the dynamics of sustainable work and ethically robust organizational environment.

The HRM strategy-compliance relationship has shifted from a reactive compliance-based to a proactive strategic model (Stone et al., 2015). Legal compliance is no longer seen by today's organizations as such a limitation, but rather as an organizational legitimacy construct and

source of competitive advantage. Jackson and Schuler (1995) concluded that legal compliance was one of the contextual drivers of HRM systems. International labour legislation has been largely overlooked by literature, however, as a driver in shaping HRM policy within multinational companies, especially the UK-based companies. This is why it is the lack of such studies that provides the impetus for this research.

3. Methodology

This research study used a mixed-methods approach to understand how global labour regulations influence HRM policies across various organizations and industries. The sample consisted of 45 UK-headquartered multinational companies operating in at least five countries on different continents. The selection criteria included maintaining headquarters in the UK, having a global presence, having a minimum of 10,000 employees worldwide, and having accessible information on HR policies and practices.

Data collection involved the use of semi-structured interviews with 67 HR executives from the companies, who were responsible for global HR management and compliance. Interviews focused on four main areas: the connections between international labour law and HRM policies, the channels by which international labour law influence is exerted, the challenges organizations face in becoming compliant with international labour standards, and the adaptive approaches and organizational learning processes.

The quantitative element involved systematic content analysis of 180 policy documents from participating organizations, covering various aspects of organizational communications such as employee handbooks, diversity and inclusion policies, health and safety policies, and corporate social responsibility reports. Intensive content analysis was done on each document, focusing on coding international labour standards references and monitoring discrete policy provisions for evidence of international law influence.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase framework, while quantitative data were analysed using content analysis and statistical techniques to identify patterns and correlations between international labour law references and specific HR policy provisions. This research provides a comprehensive understanding of how international labour laws shape HRM policies across various organizations and industries.

4. Findings

4.1 Key International Labor Laws Influencing HRM Policies

The review highlights various global labour laws that significantly influence UK-domiciled multinational corporations' HRM policies. The most effective category is those addressing fundamental labour rights as set out by the International Labour Organization's constitutional conventions. These conventions, such as Convention 87 concerning Freedom of Association and Convention 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, are prevalent in all organizations. Conventions 29 and 105 are prevalent in all organizations, aiming to eliminate forced work practices. Conventions 138 and 182 provide universally embedded child labour prohibition, while equal pay and non-discrimination principles are central to diversity and inclusion efforts. European Union directives are the second most significant form of international labour legislation, with 89% of businesses still referencing them within global policies. Regional and bilateral trade agreements also influence global labour law, with businesses applying respective provisions in specific geographic regions. Sector-based global standards, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Responsible Business Alliance, also influence HRM policies within single organizations.

4.2 Mechanisms of Influence

The research identified four key mechanisms through which international labour laws affect HRM policies. The first is direct compliance, where organizations take specific provisions of policy to meet the law in countries of operation. This mechanism is simple and enforceable, as organizations have clear-cut legal sanctions upon failure to comply. The second mechanism is risk management and due diligence, where firms adopt worldwide standards to deal with reputational and legal risks. This is evident in firms' supply chain governance and due diligence practices, which often extend past minimum legal requirements. The third mechanism is stakeholder expectations, where global labour standards set expectations among different constituencies, such as investors, customers, employees, and civil society groups. Corporations integrate these standards into policies to legitimize and gain social license to operate worldwide. The fourth mechanism is competitive benchmarking, where firms apply international bests to compete overseas, specifically in talent attraction and retention. This mechanism is most pronounced in technology and financial services industries, where firms fight for professional talent with a good record for social responsibility. Firms employing this mechanism strategy perceive international labour standards as the basis of competitiveness rather than an obligation.

4.3 Variation Across HR Policy Areas

Cross-border labour legislation has a significant impact on HR policy issues, with a ranking based on the specificity of international rule and the level of organizational discretion in policy implementation. Health and safety policies have the greatest conformity with global standards, with 94% of firms exhibiting high conformity. Policies against discrimination and for equal opportunities have the highest congruence, with 91% of firms demonstrating universal adherence to these principles. Freedom of association and collective bargaining have the strongest influence at 87%.

Policy areas subject to moderate cross-national influence from international labour law show more variable patterns of adoption and implementation. Leave policy and working time policy have the most influence, with 73% of companies aligning with international standards while acknowledging significant variation in national work-life balance and time regulation traditions. Compensation and benefits policies are shaped in 67% of companies, while training and development policies are shaped in 58%. Performance management systems have the least impact at 52%, suggesting that clear mechanisms for managing and accessing employee performance remain largely organizational discretion.

Least international labour law influence exists in policy-autonomous areas, with recruitment and selection practices having the lowest impact at 34%. Career development processes have the lowest impact at 29%, and succession planning has the lowest impact at 22%, reflecting the strategic and organization-centric nature of leadership development decisions.

4.4 Challenges in Implementation

Firms have identified several major challenges in implementing provisions of international labour law, particularly in translating global standards into organizational circumstances in diverse contexts. Legal complexity and conflicting requirements are the most common obstacles, with 78% citing conflicts between various legal jurisdictions as a principal impediment to proper implementation. This can take various forms, such as navigating colliding and sometimes superimposed legal frameworks across foreign operations. Cultural institutions and differences are another significant challenge for organizations adopting standard policies in significantly diverse cultures. Collective bargaining approaches, for example, differ across countries based on various industrial relations traditions, making it

difficult to build meaningful global policies with respect to local cultural traditions without compromising coherence with global standards. Resource limitations, especially for smaller subsidiaries, pose another basic implementation challenge, resulting in uneven policy enforcement across settings and jeopardizing the uniformity of global compliance strategies. Enforcement and monitoring issues are particularly challenging for organizations achieving uniform application of policies in all locations worldwide, particularly in markets with poor regulatory enforcement regimes. Overseeing supply chains with multiple layers of subcontractors and contractors also presents challenges in implementing international labour standards across vast networks of business relationships.

4.5 Opportunities and Strategic Advantages

Companies that adhere to international labour standards have identified several strategic opportunities, including increased brand value and reputation, access to global talent pools, risk avoidance, and operational effectiveness. Full compliance with international labour laws leads to improved brand reputation and customer loyalty, especially among socially responsible customers. This reputational dividend is particularly important in consumer businesses, where market share and price bargaining power are directly dependent on reputation.

Sophisticated international labour policies also facilitate access to global talent pools, particularly among young people who highly regard corporate social responsibility when deciding on careers. This benefit is particularly valuable in information economies where highly educated and skilled professionals consider workplace values an integral part of career choices.

Proactive compliance with international standards also provides risk avoidance, as firms that adopt full international standards of labour rights stand a better position to avoid legal sanctions, regulatory sanctions, and reputational damage arising from labour law violations. This proactive approach is especially effective during the period of heightened regulatory scrutiny and social media broadcasting of corporate misconduct.

Operational effectiveness is a significant byproduct of uniform world policies based on universal standards. Employing uniform worldwide standards minimizes complexity in policymaking across various jurisdictions, resulting in significant cost reductions in policymaking, training, and administration. This organizational gain extends to fields such as internal mobility, where global common policies allow for staff shifting across jurisdictions without major retraining or policy conversion.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to institutional theory by demonstrating how international labour laws create isomorphic pressures that lead to convergence in HRM practices across multinational corporations. The study reveals that coercive pressures (regulatory compliance) are strongest in areas directly covered by international conventions, while normative pressures (professional standards) are more influential in areas where international law provides general principles rather than specific requirements.

The research also extends the literature on international HRM by showing how global legal frameworks serve as both constraints and enablers of strategic HRM practices. Rather than simply limiting organizational choices, international labour laws create new opportunities for competitive advantage through enhanced legitimacy and stakeholder trust.

5.2 Practical Implications

The research suggests that HR practitioners should focus on holistic compliance strategies for multinational corporations to navigate the complex landscape of global labour law. This involves designing comprehensive plans that resolve multiple legal systems simultaneously, ensuring operational consistency and meeting multiple needs. HR practitioners should collaborate with legal specialists to map out opportunities for cooperative compliance strategies.

A stakeholder-centric perspective is crucial for HR professionals to maximize the strategic value of international labour law compliance. Companies should view international labour standards as effective mechanisms for addressing broader stakeholder expectations and enhancing organizational legitimacy in global markets. HR professionals should communicate with stakeholders, such as investors, customers, employees, and civil society groups, to understand labour practice expectations and articulate compliance with international norms transparently.

Continuous monitoring systems are essential for organizations to monitor changes in international labour standards and policy adjustments. HR professionals should arrange periodic review cycles, design processes to track regulatory changes geographically, and keep lines open for notifications from professional and legal networks.

Local adaptation mechanisms are necessary for firms to harmonize global standardization with local responsiveness. HR professionals must construct frameworks to distinguish between immutable global standards and dimensions of flexibility for local adaptation, building absolute local guidance with universal consistency in core principles. This involves a higher degree of sensitivity for global labour law requirements and indigenous cultures, and continuous investment in cross-cultural competence and indigenous knowledge in HR organizations.

5.3 Limitations

This study has limitations that can affect its generalizability and applicability. The sample bias, which is the selection of large public companies with massive global operations, can limit generalizability of the results to smaller multinational companies with varying resource constraints and operating issues. Big business organizations typically have advanced legal and compliance personnel, substantial budgetary resources, and established connections with global regulatory agencies and professional networks, which can lead to overestimation of the ease with which organizations can create coordinated compliance strategies.

Temporal limitations are another limitation, as the research does not consider dynamic policy development over time, which is crucial considering recent shifts in the international regulatory order. Self-reporting bias, a methodological shortcoming, can impact the validity of findings, especially claims of compliance and organizational conduct. This bias may be particularly significant when dealing with sensitive topics like obedience to labour legislation. Limited coverage of sectors is another limitation, as certain key sectors, such as healthcare and education, lack adequate representation within the sample. These sectors can be subjected to conflicting regulatory environments, stakeholder pressures, and operational restrictions, leading to conflicting trends of international labour law impact. Therefore, the study can only make qualitative inferences regarding how international labour law impacts HRM policies in all categories of multinational firms.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that international labour laws significantly influence HRM policies in UK-based global companies through multiple mechanisms, including direct regulatory compliance, risk management, stakeholder expectations, and competitive benchmarking. The influence varies across different HR policy areas, with the strongest impact in areas directly covered by international conventions such as health and safety, anti-discrimination, and fundamental labour rights. The research reveals that international labour laws create both challenges and opportunities for multinational corporations. While companies face complexity in navigating conflicting legal requirements and cultural differences, they also gain strategic advantages through enhanced reputation, access to global talent markets, and operational efficiencies.

6.1 Key Contributions

This research contributes significantly to international human resource management and labour law compliance field in multinational corporations. It offers the first detailed empirical assessment of the impact of international labour legislations on HRM policies within UK-based multinationals, closing a significant literature gap. The study provides tangible proof of patterns otherwise understood only in abstract or anecdotal terms, establishing a solid basis for understanding how global legal frameworks translate into organizational practice within a specific national context. The identification and classification of the mechanisms by which international labour law impacts organizational processes constitute a major theoretical contribution, providing a conceptual model that can be applied in other settings and translated to other types of organizations or legal systems. The results provide practical knowledge for organizational leaders and HR experts to design effective compliance strategies for competitiveness, generating organizational value through improved reputation, talent attraction, risk reduction, and business efficiency.

6.2 Recommendations for Practice

The findings suggest that organizations should adopt a holistic approach to comply with international labour law, focusing on global HR policies that include international labour standards but allow local adaptation. This involves a shift from jurisdiction-specific compliance approaches to a holistic approach that understands the interdependent nature of international labour law frameworks. This approach minimizes complexity and administrative costs while fostering uniformity in values and practices across international operations. Furthermore, firms should implement advanced tracking systems to monitor changes in global labour law and implications for HR policy. These systems should include ongoing review and revision of policy, monitoring of regulation trends in multiple countries, and quick evaluation of new requirements' impact on current policy. Cross-cultural skill investment is crucial for HR practitioners in multinational enterprises, as successful implementation of international labour standards requires in-depth knowledge of both technical needs and cultures.

Organizations should consider international labour law compliance as a means of building stakeholder relationships, not just a regulatory requirement. This requires a complete overhaul of compliance work from cost centres to value-adding functions that deepen relationships with investors, customers, employees, and civil society organizations.

Strategic partnerships with legal professionals, industry groups, and international bodies are essential for organizations to stay updated on changes and best practices in implementing international labour law. These partnerships should include collaborative policy-making activities, best practice exchange, and joint advocacy for effective global labour standards.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Understanding the dynamics of international labour laws and HRM policies of multinational corporations (MNCs) requires further research. Longitudinal studies are crucial to understand how the impact of international labour legislation changes over time, especially in response to global political and economic changes. Comparative research across different countries can reveal the influence of differences in institutions, cultural norms, and regulatory actions on organizational reactions to international labour law pressures.

Sectoral analysis is also essential to understand how specific sectors affect international labour law's effect on HRM practice. Industries differ in public exposure, regulatory focus, and stakeholder pressure, which could determine how they react to compliance. Sectors with highly educated employees can respond differently to international labour standards than those with less skilled staff.

Impact analysis studies should explore the direct influence of compliance with international labour legislation on organizational performance to determine the return on investment in compliance strategies. This would enable organizations to make better decisions regarding the extent of investment in compliance and potentially provide evidence for the business case in going beyond minimum legal standards.

The increasing digitalization of employment poses new questions about how global labour law governs new developments in work organization. Future research should explore how businesses respond to changing application and utilization of global labour standards to accommodate digital workspaces, algorithmic management systems, and non-standard employment arrangements.

6.4 Policy Implications

The study highlights the challenges faced by corporations in regulating incompatible legal obligations across borders, highlighting the need for a more coordinated approach to international labour standards. Businesses face conflicts from various legal systems, leading to ineffective application and loopholes in worker protection. Policymakers should minimize these conflicts by harmonizing between international organizations, regional institutions, and sovereign states. More cooperation among regulatory bodies and stricter examination of international consequences during the development of new standards can offset the burden of compliance on multinational firms without sacrificing employee protection.

Standard enforcement agencies are also crucial to ensure global labour standards are reflected in workplace improvements. Companies in countries with poor enforcement mechanisms are unable to rely on external regulatory bodies for internal compliance measures. Policymakers must prioritize the development of effective enforcement strategies, including international coordination, increased capacity building of regulatory agencies in developing countries, and new-generation enforcement mechanisms that can operate cross-border.

Funding capacity building programs is also necessary to empower organizations, especially small enterprises, to accurately execute international labour standards. Smaller organizations lack the systems, expertise, and capital to manage sophisticated international labour law regulations, creating inequalities in worker protection and competitive disadvantages for companies investing in compliance.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

The relationship between international labour laws and HRM policies in multinational corporations is complex and multifaceted. This study demonstrates that international labour

laws serve as powerful institutional forces that shape organizational practices, but influence is mediated by organizational characteristics, stakeholder expectations, and local contexts.

As globalization continues to evolve and new forms of work emerge, the importance of understanding these relationships will only increase. Organizations that proactively embrace international labour standards and integrate them strategically into HRM practices are likely to gain competitive advantages in the global marketplace while contributing to improved working conditions worldwide.

The findings suggest that rather than viewing international labour law compliance as a constraint on business operations, organizations should recognize it as an opportunity to enhance legitimacy, attract and retain talent, and build sustainable competitive advantages in an increasingly interconnected world.

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