
“Shanghai-ed? eHR software and the management of people in emerging China”

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Abstract – This paper seeks to analyze the role of Human Resources Information Systems (eHR) in the consolidation and transfer of new organizational modes from developed countries to emerging economies – in this case, China.

Design-Methodology-Approach – This study employs qualitative interviews and juxtaposes primary data collection with a variety of secondary sources.

Findings – HR Information Systems are being significantly implemented in emerging economies (in this case, China) and, with them, new values and organizational forms are exported/imported. This becomes a possibility thanks to the (standardizing and mobility) possibilities of information to avoid local practices. We interpret this process as a kind of "kidnapping" exercise.

Originality-Value – This paper offers a critical analysis of common knowledge and IT transfer processes and is, to our knowledge, the first analysis of eHR technologies and their "micro-ordering" processes at the time of building and constructing the “H” of “H”uman Resources globally.

Keywords – Human Resources, eHR software, Informating
Introduction

The management of Human Resources (HR) has been converted into the most common form of organizing the work of people in a good part of the so-called “Industrialized/Developed World.” Recruiting, selecting, training, evaluating, compensating and promoting are some of the principal practices and operations of the mentioned management. Thus, the majority of these practices, currently, are promoted and strengthened by the Human Resources Systems (eHR). Together with the business management packages or software, the curious situation occurs in that such systems are being converted into one of the main business products of exportation to other continents and, hence, of IT knowledge/technology and technology transfer from Europe and the United States to the rest of the world.

Recently, a series of works have appeared that reflect critically on this exportation exercise (Jack, Cálas, Nkomo & Peltonen, 2008). More specifically, some studies have centered on the transfer of management practices to Asia (Chio, 2008) and in the exportation of information technologies (Mir, Barneeje & Mir, 2008). And, even moreso, China is one of the countries which has awakened more interest in this group of studies. Thus, the effects of technological innovation and importation have been analyzed (Xiaobai & Williams, 2005) and the transformation that the practices of HR which have arrived from the West introduce in that country (Wang-Cheung, 2008). Now, the role of the eHR software in this exportation-importation exercise still remains to be analyzed. Such an occurrence should not surprise anyone since such systems have a relatively short life and to-date the debates that have arisen are centered on purely functional preoccupations. The principal questions that are attempting to be resolved revolve around the implementation difficulties of the systems, the duration of the processes of installation, training necessities (Tansley, Newell, Williams, 2001; Tansley & Newell, 2007) and the decision processes that influence their purchasing in different countries (Florkowski & Olivas-Luján, 2006).

This article intends, specifically, to cover this lack. We shall distance ourselves from the purely functional reflections on the eHR systems and shall propose a critical look at the effects that their exportation generates in the receiving countries. In order to do such thing we shall analyze the case of China. The political and economic relevance of this country convert it into an exciting case regarding the assimilation of “Western” HR management practices. In this study, gathering some contributions of the Critical Studies in Management and the Studies of Science and Technology, we shall analyze the role of the eHR systems in the transfer of HR
practices and their organizational modes. We maintain that HR management and its “best practices” in its intention of increasing the “efficiency” of the management of people serve to order and regulate the workplace, to overcome local practices of resistance, to institutionalize auto-regulation and set regimes of truth (McKenna, Richardson, Xu, 2006). So, we shall maintain that the transfer of eHR systems is much more than an exportation of software or technology; it implies an assimilation of ways of seeing and organizing the relations among people, the systems establish certain patterns of the boss-employee relationship, they smooth out the unpredictability of face-to-face relationships, they control large populations and they permit that private areas of the person are open to surveillance, for expert judgement and for classification (Rose, 1990). In summary, that which is transferred in the processes of technological exportation is not a technical question but rather of “World-making” (Chia, 1998).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: we offer a view of the current HR and eHR Software presence in organizations from a critical, non-functional view. Then we present our empirical research. The following section synthesizes the current situation of eHR information systems in China. Through the analysis of the interviews and secondary data, we argue that the products of computerization are structures of meaning independent of countries or cultures, they cross borders, arrive and settle in. We conclude exploring the idea of “Shanghaiing” and its value for a critical approach for ICT transfer analysis.

**HR and eHR Software**

Since the responsibility of the management of employees went from the owner of the factory or business to the first formal departments of “personnel management” at the beginning of the XXth century (Evans, 1999), the concepts, techniques and associations of professionals for managing people has done nothing but increase and expand its area of influence. In the 1980s the term “Human Resources Management” (HR) was coined and consolidated with the intention of accentuating the contribution of people to the strategy of organization, instead of the previous emphasis in the most transactional labors associated with “personnel management” (payment of salaries, dismissals, contract confection...). Today, the area of HR management has a very ample variety of concepts and practices available: the analysis of job positions, recruitment, selection, work performance evaluation, training and development techniques, compensation management, etc. Among the
most prominent innovations in the last decade in this area, we wish to point out three: a) The definition of a new HR agenda (Ulrich & Brockbank 2005) that intends to put all of the practices mentioned at the service of the “creation of value for the stakeholders”, b) The search for the “best HR practices” which allow for the activity of the HR specialists to become independent of the influence that local contexts exercise in the work world, and c) The emergence of the eHR systems.

The eHR systems appear in the 1980s as a response to the management needs of the Personnel and Human Resources departments (Walker, 2001; Gueutal & Stone, 2005). Under the eHR abbreviation is included software that covers concrete areas (for example, the management of selection or training), integrated software (for example, management of recruitment, training, performance and compensation), applications of the Manager Self-Service and Employee Self-Service type (the managers have access to and feed in data of their collaborators; the employees have access to the system to make consultations), etc¹. It can be affirmed that in a good part of the Western countries, in firms with staffs of more than 500 employees, eHR systems have a significant presence (Walker...). A growth tendency that also seems to be observed in the Asia-Pacific region (Thompson...) and in the emerging China (Watson...). For authors such as Hendrickson (2003), this software has converted itself into the backbone of the HR profession².

An accelerated examination would affirm that eHR systems are merely and essentially limited to speeding up and automating processes that had previously been based on paper. Printed curricula gave way to databases, interviews on capacities to eHR filters, etc. But eHR systems are much more: beyond mere automation, they significantly transform the traditional processes of HR (Alcaraz, 2004). In the first place, they have constituted themselves into the most important ally for the global integration of data on people. They eliminate the customary disparity of sources of information (papers, calculation sheets, small scattered databases) that circulate in firms. Information and different areas of Human Resource management (recruitment, training, evaluation, etc.) end up related, centralized and structured in a single digital environment.

¹ Florkowski... offers a detailed description of the applications that revolve around the HR software.
² (There are hundreds of eHR providers. Among them: SAP, Oracle, PeopleSoft, Meta4, Attract HR, ADPNet, Peopleclick Ltd, PeopleComeFirst, Frontier Software, Personnel Automated Screening Software, Recruitsoft, Talent Software, VantageHR, Vizual Management Solutions, Workbrain). The data of more than 60 million employees are managed with SAP software (SAP, 2006).
At the same time, they facilitate the use (inconceivable before) of enormous volumes of “variables”, their combination, “translation” as information and subsequent distribution. Once introduced into the organization, eHR technology elicits new forms of organization and management (as is the case of Employee Self-Service, a function from which the employee consults on-line the training actions that he/she should perform, or the Outsourcing processes that make the calculation of the salary of thousands of Americans possible and which is done today in Bangalore). The eHR systems standardize information on the employee and his/her management. For example, the Manager Self-Service and Employee Self-Service systems consolidate a new role for the line manager. This converts “who in truth knows and has to manage employees” into “the authentic HR director” that has access to the eHR system for making decisions (Keegan, & Francis, 2007).

Furthermore, the information which eHR software contains means the possibility of capturing-producing new relations of data linked to persons and generating scenarios and planning for the future (Tirado, Alcaraz y Domènech, 1999). To sum up, eHR systems acquire extraordinary significance in individual-organization relations.

In this sense, eHR systems mean a world that is more and more mediated by the “electronic text” (Zuboff, 1998). If, for this author, the work in our organizations from the advent of the information systems has consisted in manipulating symbols, eHR systems do nothing but strengthen this situation. HR software is a new negotiator. It stores, recombines, organizes and diffuses the information produced by it. It promotes new possibilities to informatize, that is, the generation of new information starting from previous information that the computing brings (Zuboff, 1998). This is the case, for example, of a pie chart showing the population of personnel eligible to be given early retirement, lines indicating tendencies in salaries, a datum synthesizing the group of people who work full- and part-time for the firm (“effective headcount”). The main consequence of all of this has to do with a redefinition of the figure of the employee.

In effect, eHR systems contribute to the construction of the identity of people based on the options (of modeling, classification, measurement, etc.) that are being consolidated in computer screens, graphs, hyperlinks, fields, available reports in the eHR system, etc. The employee reports his/her data on-line and the manager obtains scores, averages and differences: He operates with performances in each key objective, in the projects in which the employee has been involved, he uses each employee’s strengths and weaknesses, for each individual, by department… The eHR systems amplify the possibilities of defining persons as “a group of
competences”. The organization can initially establish the “existent” generic competences in the current and “desired or required” persons for the different positions. For example, teamwork, emotional intelligence, autonomy, empathy, with different levels of “mastery” (for example, unsatisfactory, satisfactory, excellent). The person-position comparison becomes, thus, a supposedly “natural” and simple continuum.

Thus, when eHR systems are exported and implemented in other cultural contexts, we do not limit ourselves to installing a simple technological device or an instrument that facilitates communication. Absolutely not, the transfer of technology is not a purely functional question; with it goes a package of consequences that has just been mentioned. That is, a way of understanding and seeing the world (Chia, 1998).

**Empirical Explorations**

Our main research question is: What is the role of eHR systems in the consolidation and transfer of Western HR practices to emerging economies (in this case, China).

We have based our analysis in 11 in-depth interviews and a variety of secondary sources: mainly materials from the most relevant eHR providers. The interviews took place during the year 2007 with some of the most renowned HR directors of China: IBM, Bose, Honeywell, GE, BMW, Braun, GM, Schlumberger and other top anonymous organizations.

Some of the HR directors of these companies enjoy a tremendous prestige in their country and are considered to be shaping its HR “agenda”. Our analysis resonates with that of Fournier and Grey (2000) y (Whittler & Spicer, 2008, p 612), departing from a commitment to ontological denaturalisation, the pursuit of epistemological reflexivity and a politically anti-performative stance: that is, moving beyond the sort of means-end rationality that reinforces existing power relations towards considering possibilities for new forms of social order.

**China and eHR Software**

The reforms of Deng Xiaoping at the end of the 1970s are directly responsible for the entry of “modern” techniques of management in China (Fernández & Underwood, 2006). Since then, the spectacular economic growth of the country, foreign investment and the inclusion of China in the WTO made a change possible in the legal framework of the country which permitted the institutionalization of
some formal practices of recruitment, differences in salary and evaluation systems of performance (Lai-Wan Cheung, 2008). In this context, the Chinese HR managers (especially those that worked in multinationals) began to look towards the Western practices of HR and their eHR systems as models of inspiration and work guide. After that, those responsible of the state-owned enterprises would join. The local academic literature leaves no doubt regarding the importance that this exercise had and has for Chinese firms:

"Empirical results from a sample of Chinese firms from various industries and regions showed that the levels of adoption of SHRM and HR practices were lower in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) than in foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) and privately owned enterprises (POEs). Both SHRM and HR practices were found to have direct and positive effects on financial performance, operational performance, and the employee relations climate." Hang-Yue Ngo, Chung-Ming Lau & Foley (2008, p. 1)

Thus, the eHR systems arrive in China. First those in charge of administrative processes, salary and personnel management will arrive, and later those that operate with ample functions of HR: management of training, development and compensation, etc. (Caplan, 2004). As some authors (Shen & Williams, 2005), have indicated, from the first moment such practices have been considered to be a simple utilitarian application of a neutral technological device. It is considered that the technology is a mere tool, devoid of the social and political burden that its context of use signifies. It is a final solution before a problem or demand which is basically of the economic type. So, the attitude of our directors interviewed was of a very significant opening and welcoming for the eHR systems and for the information that they contain. Wendy Tao, Director of HR of Braun (China) stated that:

“...much of the information that these systems contain (salaries, contracts, etc.) are valuable indicators for taking strategic decisions. But not all the information. Information about dismissals, rotations, age, education... If, for example, we are going to open a new plant in any part of China, we must consider salary average, and in this way we can calculate investment costs. The average of rotations must also be looked at. And age and education are important for considering the contracting of employees. One must take into account whether you are dealing with stable people or those who frequently rotate positions. Much of this information definitely gives us strategic insights.
And, precisely, one of the great “advantages” that is seen in the systems mentioned resides in that they agilely find a way around social, cultural and political constrictions of the local contexts of work. They are added to the habitual practices of transfer, from headquarters to branch offices, a practice that was marvelously reflected in the following words of Ruth Ruta Asimus, HR Director of IBM for the Asia-Pacific region:

“I believe that the culture of IBM is so strong that the national culture is converted into a secondary one. It is one of the things which we strongly lead, we have a global culture. We respect the local culture but we do not let the national culture run over the culture of the firm. The culture of IBM dominates, without a doubt. You cannot survive in IBM if your national culture does not allow you to adopt the norms of IBM. The culture of the firm dominates and we have to be sensitive, and we should fight against, well, not fight but rather train our managers.”

On the other hand, Louie Lu of GE (Fanuc), affirmed that “performance is first, very important, it is the basis of everything in GE”. And, in a similar sense, Daisy Dai of Unilever (China) stated:

“Many of the HR practices come in cascade fashion from the central offices. For example, in Unilever there is a planning process based on annual activities: You find the people, evaluate them, put them in “boxes” (your potential, what you are doing, how you are contributing…). You put them in a box-ranking and you begin to plan their career, how they are going to improve and how they are going to reach success”.

Obviously, none of the directors describes the adoption of these practices as a ridiculously easy road, but rather one of certain difficulties and of conflict with an established culture. Eunice Faletti of Honeywell (China) speaks along this line of thought:

“We need to train them in the philosophy of the firm. We are a firm that pays in function of performance. We pay the top performers. We do not pay the low performers. And here is the cultural problem: In China one should not stand out. Everyone thinks they should all be treated in the same way, the personal performance of each individual can be distinct but the administrators, due to the culture… The theme of compensation is not a topic of their culture. Aggressiveness or confrontation before their employees is not a theme of their culture. Those are
the occasions in which we see a challenge between the line that the firm wants to take and that which their administrators take.”

Thus, the Western HR practices, with their concepts, techniques and eHR software signify a regulating effort in an enormous territory that has enormous differences and peculiarities. For example, to compensate, promote, dismiss, congratulate, recognize…are currently operations that are based on measured performance (in part by means of eHR systems) and that ignore the value that was given to years worked. The preeminence of the concept and practices revolving around the management of performance are established with force in front of the traditional concept and value of “seniority”. At the same time, the tension between the new forms of measurement, classification and compensation that come with the HR practices and the eHR systems, and the traditional ones of the Chinese culture are well reflected in the following words of the Director of HR of Unilever:

“…China has its own culture, its perception of, for example,…different classifications. For instance, “putting people in a box”. Perhaps it is very logical. Your potential. True? For example, you are a “high flyer”. But from the feedback that I receive from my surroundings…not only mine, in the Chinese context we are not accustomed to telling the people this type of affirmation in black or white—you are a “high flyer” talent—because it usually lends itself to confusion. Many people with talent, if they receive this feedback, can think that they have arrived, and they themselves change their mentality, suddenly they become a bit pretentious with their co-workers, hierarchical, which does not necessarily put them in the correct environment of development. We believe that this is a question of cultural difference. And also when you move an employee up, it is easy, but when the change is down, this person feels strongly de-motivated and some even leave the company (...). "I, for example, worked in a company where it was little formal, indirect and you worked much better. You can give feedback, comment to a person where his/her strengths are, what the expectations of the company are of him/her, what ambitions exist regarding the worker, but you do not necessarily put the worker in a black box: “you have great potential…with a label or class of employee...”.

Of course, our interviewees also mentioned the necessity of carrying out adaptations to these eHR systems to the Chinese context:

“Definitely, adaptations to local necessities must be carried out. Language will be one of the keys, it will be English but at a very, very basic level, to make it
easier. These systems are designed to be global, they will have thought about that. Many employees, above all at lower levels such as technicians, do not speak English very well. We will see changes, but not so many. Perhaps there will be linguistic and location obstacles, but not that big. The way in which the system will be implemented will oblige managers to use it”. (Eunice Faletti)

Simplifying the language by using a very basic English. Making the system accessible to those who do not speak this language with skill...and few other changes. eHR software, thus, appropriates HR concepts. Avoiding, ignoring significant adaptations, helping to “commoditize” the HR categories. Something as simple as a screen, help in this process, from its presentation of fields (for example, “Type of Employee”) until the language it accepts, the logic which it uses points toward a direction which leaves no doubt for ambiguity or interpretation. A good example is the following. Modules concerning performance evaluation where “High Flyer” is one of the three categories that can be reported and appear in the interface, to be indicated for each employee—“before, we had seven categories but we reduced them to three”, Louie Lu, of GE (Fanuc) China, told us—has the following form in an eHR system:

01: “Top Talent”

02: “Highly Valued Employee”

03: “Less Effective Employee”.

Values that, assigned to people, permit consultations to be carried out, obtain lists of the “Top Talents” or “Less Effective Employees” that we have in the organization. In Shanghai. In Barcelona. In London. In Anchorage. In Cape Town. In Berlin. Percentages. eHR systems embody the priorities, values and inherited ways of seeing and operating in the world. The “machine” becomes the carrier of common sense that is taken from Hr. eHR systems consolidate (“black-box”, Latour 2005) HR practices. People, job positions and tasks are torn out, “flayed” from their local contexts and put into modules that can be used with ease. eHR systems cause an exercise of formidable global standardization:

“Tyler also explains that prior to mySAP HR, assessing employee performance was done differently in Europe than in the United States. “This was a real problem for us because no one really knew the common denominator,” says Tyler. “By having a common global appraisal process, you begin to get consistency, and it’s easier to understand the
Some authors have called this phenomenon “hyper-mobility” (Kallinikos, 2006). Information travels by means of systems, databases, headquarters, subsidiaries and organizations. It is standardized, assembled, “disemboweled”, re-assembled and transferred by means of environments. The difficulties and barriers for carrying out individual comparisons are eliminated at the global level. As is seen in a brochure of the provider Oracle (2006, p.4):

“The centralized nature of Oracle Applications allows for the creation and deployment of a single, enterprise wide competency framework. This lets organizations develop a standard description for all the core competencies and qualifications necessary for the ideal fulfillment of every role within the company. The central competency framework can become fundamental to the future success of an organization because it helps bring together disparate systems, removes international barriers to workforce comparisons, and creates a single view of the skills available within the workforce. Oracle HCM applications provide a complete set of integrated tools to ensure that leading-edge strategies for attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining the best employees are consistently applied throughout all levels of the organization, while reducing administrative costs.”

This firm emphasizes how its eHR systems help in the global management of talent...along with the identification and imposition of a single definition for all3. The processes transform themselves into information and they reconfigure themselves, thanks to strategies of (apparent) “common sense”. The eHR systems accentuate the “essentialism” that HR brings. Profiles and comparisons are reinforced in the screens. Even more interesting, people are translated into data (regarding “performance”, “competences” and “careers”) and are susceptible to forming a compact everything (information) from which “sources of talent” can be identified, carrying out analyses and taking more precise decisions. eHR tools gather individual data and consolidate them at a global level. This/These spectacular pirouette/s are one of the most illustrative effects that informing power of these systems brings to us:

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3 There are hundreds of systems providers at a world level, although only a dozen of them have the majority of the market of the multinationals. For more information on eHR systems providers: http://www.softwaresource.co.uk/.
“With mySAP HR, we can collect information about employees’ relative performance and career potential, and then consolidate it on a global basis,” says Tyler. “Before, we had no way of bringing this information to the table in a controlled and consolidated way. Now, we can identify talent pools, perform analyses, and make better, quicker, more thoughtful decisions about the deployment of our employees” (SAP, 2003, p. 3):

eHR software brings a high degree of homogeneity and standardization. It helps to bring the control and efficiency required by HR. The ordering and “professional expertise”. When “Compo” (a pseudonym for one of the Chinese firms of greatest international prestige) introduced the new HR practices, by acquiring the unit of IBM portable computers, what they did was:

“Firstly, HR professionals at Compco introduced a technology-based management information system (MIS). This system enabled the employees to be more efficiently administered (in theory) through an impersonal system to govern payroll, attendance and punctuality.” (McKeena et al 2007, p19)

Hence, eHR software interferes in salary decisions and others linked to people. It has a role at the time of transforming local practices. Where before, in a more traditional China, supervisor, boss and employee essentially interacted face to face (the line manager closely supervising), as Justin Ji of Dow Corning China told us. Now, employees should be “creative” and independent and, additionally, fill out certain forms of the eHR system. The policies of the firm appear, embody, take shape and amplify themselves in the hyperlinks of the eHR system. eHR technology helps to constitute and regulate. The line manager looks at the screen of his employees. He obtains percentages. He scrutinizes, supports, examines salaries, dismisses and promotes.

Shanghai-ed?

Our interviews have shown that Chinese firms are immersed in a strong importing tendency of the ”best practices” of Hr and their eHR systems. Apparently, the good news is that, in countries like China, organizations can adapt their practices without the need of great changes (Fernández, 2006):
"... The overriding response during our interviews recommended keeping international HR principles and policies largely intact. GE China Steve Schneider stresses that the company has retained most of its HR policies in China, making only minor adaptations in order to meet the requirements of the PRC labour law or local governmental restrictions.”

Gradually, eHR systems become embedded in the organization, “vaso-capillarizing” the management of people, thus converting the new HR technicians in the possessors of the “truth” about the organization of people and their work. Justin Ji, of Dow Corning (China), discusses this in the following fashion:

“The Chinese are more willing to be directed by foreigners than by Chinese because they want to learn from them and they want to be directed by foreigners, which means that the managers should also dedicate greater efforts in understanding the Chinese and showing them that it is a reciprocal learning process (I can also learn from you; you are my mentor of the Chinese culture”). Because, sometimes Chinese employees think: “You are the manager, I must learn from you”. If this process of dialogue is developed successfully, the Chinese subordinates will feel more comfortable and independent inside the firm. Sometimes they have the abilities but not the confidence.

The Western manager is seen, subtly, as a hero. The Chinese employee wants to learn from the Westerner, while the inverse process hardly seems to be necessary.

It is useful to mention here that HR techniques, especially those related to performance and salary management, tend to individualize the mode in which we interact within the companies. HR becomes a way to contain and eliminate. Techniques that calm down, undermine and distract from what could perhaps be the “natural” conflicts that laboral relations entail (Hanlon, 2007). eHR systems contribute to this by exposing and opening the person to inspection via screens, links, fields, tables, reports, queries, etc. And by submitting him to a self-service model.

A critical look at these processes of conquest should also bring to light the fact that state-owned enterprises in China are also turning to the private sector and to internationally renowned consulting agencies in search of inspiration, such as Daisy Dai, of Unilever, has commented to us.
The products of computerization—for example, “employee types”, performance categories, rotation indexes, indicators of absenteeism, the line of tendency of salaries, reports on motives for leaving...--these structures of meaning are independent of countries or cultures, they cross borders, arrive and settle in. They eliminate <<ambiguities >>. Local processes lose their singularity. People, in part, also.

“People speak of a global environment but, in fact, it is an American environment”, a director of one of the automobile companies of greater world volume, who was interviewed here, told us. The opening and welcoming are usually characterized by scarce tension between the local culture and the implementation of the corporate culture. Essentially, the latter one is simply imposed. Here is where the scarce questioning found becomes very significant to us. The need to carry out significant adaptations or localizations shines by its absence, as Wan-Cheung (2008) also confirms. We believe that that described here accentuates what was analyzed by Gellner (1996) and Kallinikos (2003) regarding the progressive involvement of the employee in the organization in terms of role and not as person. That is, the human agency conceived as the construction of assemblies of independent behaviors that can be used and combined to respond to different demands receives an additional turn with the presence of eHR software, with its options of treatment and analysis of the management of competences, abilities, knowledge, etc. We become employees when we use segments, pieces (independent) of ourselves, mobilized at will and by the need of the organization for which we work. John Smith... (fictitious names of fictitious employees) are or can be a series of accessible registers in an eHR system. That they will appear when a query is executed for employees with a specific profile to cover a specific need, when a query is executed for the “capabilities of the organization”. Standardization, interchangeability and disintegration are some of the qualities that information and eHR systems strengthen—now in a global dimension—in the “modular person”.

The great exercise that helps to consolidate HR software is that of reconstructing the heterogeneous nature of people, the organization and their relationship as information. “The Brave New World of e-HR: Human Resources in the Digital Age”, candidly reads the title of one of the most recent books on this type of software (Gueutal & Stone, 2005), framed within purely functional preoccupations and completely ignoring this exercise of reconstruction. And these options are gradually more linked to the potential/limitations/characteristics that information brings. Here, we would say, taking up that affirmed by Kallinikos on information technologies (2006, p. 49) that eHR systems take a step further the
“computational rendition of reality”; information “increasingly impose its own recalcitrant actuality”. Perhaps eHR software represents, measures and replicates a vision of the person conceived as a “resource” in which, as Boulton and Houlihan (2005, p. 10) indicate, “the rich, warm and unpredictable faces of humanity are all too clearly absent”. It becomes necessary, thus, to rethink the ”H” of “Human” Resources, such as it is constructed by HR practices and their eHR systems, in order to take them for what they are, mere “options”, and open our experience to the multitude of possible local, alternative, complementary, unfamiliar or however one wishes, ways of organization to the “achievements” of information.

The word “shanghaied” in the English of the United States is frequently the synonym of “kidnapped”. The exportation of eHR practices and systems contribute to this type of “kidnapping” with the homogeneity that such systems entail, the suppression of cultural differences and the elimination of local characteristics.
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