
Guest editorial

Knowledge sharing and its management in an international work environment: drivers, challenges and consequences

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1. Sharing and managing knowledge in a global context

1.1 Introduction

As organizations are becoming increasingly multicultural in their composition and global in their focus, we set out to zero in on extant dialog around creating, sharing and managing knowledge in an international work environment with this special issue. With this objective in mind, we inform on a range of contributions to provide a perspective on meaningful future research opportunities in this exciting domain.

We first want to acknowledge that research is at an early developmental stage and has only begun to uncover factors that have the power to influence knowledge creation and transfer in an increasingly multicultural, international and diverse context. This is surprising since global work assignments and multiculturalism in the workplace have commonly been considered significant opportunities for the conveyance and generation of knowledge and a driver of learning. As an example, this research includes the crucial role of individuals' ability, motivation and career aspirations (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005), the role of cultural intelligence (Vlajčić *et al.*, 2019; Stoermer *et al.*, 2021), knowledge sharing activities of expatriates and host country staff (Heizmann *et al.*, 2018), language effects on knowledge sharing (Peltokorpi and Yamao, 2017) and reverse knowledge transfers from subsidiaries (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015; Kong *et al.*, 2018), including boundary conditions and the role of leadership (Bucher *et al.*, 2020; Duvivier *et al.*, 2019; Froese *et al.*, 2021). Building on these vital advancements, this special issued called for articles that could further illuminate why individuals are motivated to share knowledge, how they accumulate knowledge and why individuals opt to hide their knowledge in an international working context. Second, as organizations begin to rely on a much broader range of global personnel (Reiche *et al.*, 2019; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012) to tap into opportunities that can yield new organizational learning and other positive outcomes, a vast range of global work categories emerged. The special issue aims to elaborate on existing and elucidating new factors and dynamics that inform on knowledge creation and transfer nuances generated by a range of global work categories (Reiche *et al.*, 2020; Shaffer *et al.*, 2019), such as inpatriates or repatriates and associated management practices that can facilitate knowledge sharing by these specific categories of global workers. Third, international work arrangements do not have to necessarily be connected to physically transcending borders. In an age of digitization and in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, remote management and virtual international teams are gaining importance, but what are the ramifications for the sharing and management of knowledge in these fairly novel constellations of work? The articles featured in this special issue tackle these recent developments and the nascent gaps in research debate in or way or another and, thus, make a welcomed contribution to the pertinent literature and management practice.



2. Articles in this special issue

The articles in this special issue are diverse in terms of topics, theories and methodologies. The topics covered across articles focus on individual stakeholders, dyadic and across country relationships, and varying organizational contexts. In line with the diverse topics, articles are grounded in a variety of theoretical frameworks, such as expectancy value theory, relative deprivation theory, social capital perspective, leader–member exchange (LMX), social embeddedness theory and the lens of unofficial power in organizations. The methodological approaches can best be described as eclectic and range from conceptual work, qualitative interviews, survey-based quantitative studies, archival studies and multiple case study designs.

The first article, “How the composition and compilation of international experience in groups influences knowledge sharing: a theoretical model,” authored by Marketa Rickley presents a conceptual model advancing how previous international experience can accumulate and combine within individuals, dyads and among team members to affect collective propensities for knowledge sharing. Based on social capital perspective, findings suggest that individual differences in international experience influence not only personal cognition and individuals’ abilities to engage in knowledge sharing but also the pattern of interaction between knowledge senders and recipients.

The second article, “Global knowledge transfers through inpatriates: performance management, LMX and embeddedness,” authored by Jane Maley and Timothy Kiessling, explores inpatriation as a global work category. Centered on a qualitative approach, the article uses the lenses of LMX and social embeddedness theories to understand the role of performance management (PM) in multinational corporations’ (MNCs’) knowledge flows. Findings suggest that the inpatriate manager’s willingness to transfer knowledge is contingent on their LMX with their supervisor and embeddedness within the firm. The article identified PM as a vital facilitator of this process in that PM is required for employee embeddedness and will assist in developing strong LMX.

The third article, “Knowledge exchange between expatriates and host country nationals: an expectancy value perspective,” was written by Yu-Shan Hsu, Yu-Ping Chen, Margaret A. Shaffer and Flora F.T. Chiang. Drawing on expectancy value theory, the quantitative study aims to understand whether receivers’ perceptions about senders’ motivation to transfer knowledge and perceived value of the knowledge jointly affected receivers’ motivation to learn and, in turn, facilitate knowledge acquisition and sharing. Findings reveal that regardless of senders being expatriates or host country nationals (HCNs), only when receivers perceive that knowledge to be transferred is valuable and senders are motivated to transfer, receivers are likely to be motivated to receive knowledge transferred from senders and, in turn, acquire and share knowledge.

The fourth article, “Chinese expatriates working with African partners: power struggles and knowledge hiding,” authored by Abdoukadre Ado, Roseline Wanjiru and Zhan Su, focuses on understanding the experiences of African partners when collaborating with their Chinese expatriate colleagues on assignment in joint venture (JV). Based on qualitative data from 29 Sino-African JVs across 12 countries in Africa, the article uses the lens of unofficial power to explain knowledge hiding tactics between knowledge-holding Chinese expatriates and host country knowledge-seeking locals. Findings reveal that Chinese expatriates employ five tactics to control knowledge based on power, behaviors and knowledge type.

The fifth article, “Knowledge sharing behaviour of overqualified repatriates,” written by Sharmila Jayasingam, Maggie Mei Kei Chong and Raida Abu Bakar, examines the antecedents that could influence repatriate knowledge sharing behaviors using relative deprivation theory. The authors apply SmartPLS to analyze a structural model based on the data from 152 corporate repatriates in Malaysia. Findings show that repatriates with highly perceived overqualifications tend to exhibit low affective commitment. Further, the impact of

their perceived overqualification on knowledge sharing behavior was fully mediated by their affective commitment. In addition, repatriation support practices were found to strengthen the positive relationship between affective commitment and knowledge sharing behavior.

The sixth article, “Knowledge management, sharing and transfer in cross-national teams and the remote management of team members: The onsite-offshore phenomenon of service EMNEs,” authored by Hussain Rammal, Parth Patel, João J. Ferreira and Verma Prikshat, examines how emerging market multinational enterprises (EMNEs) operating in the service sector manage knowledge and team members in their overseas subsidiaries and what role expatriates play in their operations. The article uses a multiple case study design based on interviews of 20 senior managers representing 16 Indian information technology (IT) firms’ subsidiaries in Australia. The findings show that Indian IT firms mostly transfer knowledge from headquarters to subsidiaries in host countries using the onsite-offshore model where work is divided and coordinated between team members situated between the two locations.

The seventh article, “Addressing the knowledge divide: digital knowledge sharing and social learning of geographically dispersed employees during the COVID-19 pandemic,” authored by Reimara Valk and Gabriella Planojevic, uses a case study approach to investigate digital knowledge sharing (KS) and social learning (SL) of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study presents interviews of 22 employees from geographically dispersed locations to explore their perspectives on and experiences with digital KS and SL. Findings show that successful digital KS and SL hinges on the motivation, intentions, attitude and behavior of employees to share and co-create knowledge embedded in supportive KS culture and climate.

3. Contributions and future research

Inspired by the seven articles in this special issue, we highlight three main contributions to the field of knowledge sharing and management in a global context and in parallel provide a perspective on meaningful future research opportunities.

First, the articles in this special issue continue to recognize the diversity in the presence of knowledge agents (Bonache and Brewster, 2001; Bonache and Zárraga-Oberty, 2008) who are serving as both repositories and conduits of knowledge with the potential to enhance organizational innovation and performance (Moeller *et al.*, 2016; Maley *et al.*, 2020; Kiessling *et al.*, 2021). The published articles acknowledge knowledge agents and their interactions and interplay in the form of home and host country nationals, often serving in capacity of knowledge sender (Bonache and Brewster, 2001), knowledge receiver (Chang *et al.*, 2012; Hocking *et al.*, 2007) or both. The first article’s primary contribution is in its argument that international experience stimulates knowledge sharing by its agents not merely by its simple accumulation within a team, but by its configuration as relational and structural social capital. This suggests that MNCs may need to emphasize person–team fit over person–role fit in their hiring strategies. The second article’s contribution points to weaknesses in in-patriate PM practices and how these may stymie MNCs’ global knowledge flows. The findings suggest that in-patriate managers’ willingness to transfer knowledge is contingent on their LMX with their supervisor and embeddedness within the workplace. It adds to our awareness of how MNC knowledge flows through a non-expatriate work experience and that good PM practices can act as a facilitator of relationships potentially across a number of different global work categories beyond in-patriation. The third article addresses mixed findings between senders’ motivation to transfer knowledge and receivers’ knowledge acquisition. Specifically, it argues that the senders’ motivation to transfer knowledge is not sufficient for the receiver to acquire or share knowledge; the receivers’ perception of the value of the transferred knowledge is also essential, responding to the question of what may motivate someone to absorb, select and share knowledge. The fifth article focuses on the repatriation experience and generates insight into organizations

to understand how repatriates' perception of overqualification influences their level of affective commitment and subsequently, the extent to which they share knowledge upon returning. This is important as the past literature had pointed out that many of such repatriates tend to leave their respective organizations as a result of not being able to fully utilize their newly acquired knowledge and skills, which led them to perceive that they were overqualified in the first place. The seventh article presents an evidence-based model depicting the factors that influence digital KS and SL, the benefits and outcomes. The model aids researchers and practitioners to better understand the dynamics of digital KS and SL between organizational members in a cross-cultural business environment during times of crises. Not least because of the ramifications of Covid-19 and the increasing usage of digital working arrangements, the article provides vital insights regarding the influence of individual antecedents and organizational configurations on digital KS and SL. Collectively, these contributions point to the importance of studying stakeholders in varying roles, interaction patterns and across varying employee lifecycle stages. In addition to these advancements, we argue that several categories of globally mobile personnel remain overlooked. It seems reasonable to suggest that future studies should continue to investigate a range of actors in the field of global mobility (e.g. short-term assignees, international commuters and international entrepreneurs to name a few) and different contexts where global mobility takes place including corporate and noncorporate communities (e.g. healthcare employees, international volunteers, academics and sport professional to name a few).

Second, the articles in this special issue contribute to the enduring inquiry into the type of knowledge acquired, selected, its qualities, how it is created and valued and ultimately transferred. In this vein, the fourth article responds to the question of how and when knowledge sharing/hiding unfolds in expatriate–HCN dyads. It conveys insight into the analysis of power boundaries (official and unofficial) regarding knowledge control mechanisms in JV collaborations between employees from China and Africa. Unofficial power appeared as a major leverage for Chinese expatriates in monopolizing their strategic knowledge. The sixth article suggests that EMNEs do not follow all the stages of the knowledge transfer process identified in previous studies and find evidence of knowledge hoarding at the headquarters. It also alerts us that the onsite-offshore arrangement utilized is not as effective as expected, and the entire process is hampered by one-way knowledge sharing, with communications extended predominantly between headquarter staff and expatriates. While both studies demonstrate the importance of knowledge qualities, how it is valued and how organizational challenges can often impede the transfer of knowledge, more research is warranted on focal points, such as the qualities of sender/receiver, the quality and utility of knowledge or both.

Third, the articles in this special issue represent a diverse set of empirical approaches, with the exception of the first, conceptual article. The second, fourth, sixth and seventh article make their contribution through a qualitative approach, one being a multiple case study design. The investigated samples and related contexts are as diverse as 24 inpatriates in UK healthcare MNCs in the second article, 75 African host country nationals in 29 Sino-African JVs across 12 countries in the fourth article, 20 senior managers representing 16 Indian IT firms' subsidiaries in Australia in the sixth article, to 22 interviews with employees from geographically dispersed locations studying the perspectives during times of COVID-19 in the seventh article. Quantitative works include 40 matched expatriate–HCN dyads across MNCs located in Hong Kong as per the third article and 152 data points from returning corporate repatriates in Malaysia in the fifth article. Although each article in this special issue assists to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge sharing and its management in a global context, it seems reasonable to encourage future researchers to continue to explore innovative research designs. Contextualization across country settings, organization

structure (e.g. JVs, MNCs, SMEs, start-ups) and industry (e.g., healthcare, sporting, academe) present worthwhile pursuits, while studies at the intersection of these areas generate additional contributions.

This special issue aimed to improve our understanding of the breadth and depth of the processes, contents as well as drivers and barriers of knowledge sharing and its management. Each article offers something unique, whether it be a previously unexamined stakeholder, new relationship dynamics, novel cross-cultural contexts or a series of meaningful theoretical lenses through which knowledge sharing and management can be understood in a global context. It remains a promising stream of research, and we envision for future research to evolve our understanding of knowledge sharing and its management globally.

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