

DOCTORAL THESIS

Expatriate knowledge sharing: a three dimensional typology and the importance of perceived deep-level similarity

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ABSTRACT

As organizations strengthen their presence overseas, the number of expatriates is increasing rapidly (Armstrong, & Li, in press; Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2015). Expatriates are often used by multinational corporations (MNCs) for knowledge sharing (Fang, Jiang, Makino, & Beamish, 2010; Hocking, Brown, & Harzing, 2004). Knowledge sharing refers to a relational act based on a sender-receiver relationship which involves sending one's knowledge to another as well as receiving another's knowledge (Foss, Minbaeva, Pedersen, & Reinholt, 2009). Effective knowledge sharing is key for MNCs in order to create and sustain competitive advantage (Jensen & Szulanski, 2004; Schwaer, Biemann, & Voelpel, 2012; Wang & Noe, 2010). Given its relevance, organizations invest significant amounts of resources in the development of knowledge-management systems and provide employees with incentives to encourage knowledge sharing (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006). MNCs however often face difficulties in encouraging employees to share their knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, 2005) and growing evidence suggests that in international contexts employees are even more reluctant to share their knowledge due to cultural, nationality, ethnicity and linguistic barriers (Gilson, Lim, Luciano, & Choi, 2013; Mäkelä, Andersson, & Seppälä, 2012). It is therefore critical to identify how to enhance knowledge sharing between expatriates and host country national (HCN) colleagues despite the cultural, linguistic, nationality, and ethnicity barriers they may experience when working together (Peltokorpi & Clausen, 2011).

The first aim of this dissertation was therefore to identify how to enhance knowledge sharing between expatriates and HCNs. Survey data was collected from 84 expatriate-HCN dyads

working in 31 different host countries in all parts of the world. Drawing upon the supplementary person-person (P-P) fit literature, a specific type of person-environment (P-E) fit, it was demonstrated that when expatriates perceive high similarity between themselves and their HCN colleague in terms of deep-level characteristics such as values, personality, goals, and abilities (i.e. high P-P fit) they are more likely to engage in information elaboration which in turn facilitates knowledge sharing. Interpersonal citizenship behaviour was identified as a moderator which increased information elaboration and knowledge sharing even when expatriates perceived low deep-level similarity between themselves and their HCN colleague (i.e. low P-P fit).

Furthermore, we do not know what types of knowledge expatriates share with their HCN colleagues (Armstrong & Li, in press) despite the fact that knowledge is often considered as an organization's most important resource (Zander & Kogut, 1995). The second aim of this dissertation was therefore to systematically examine what types of knowledge expatriates share with their HCN colleagues. Survey data was collected from 197 expatriates working in 52 different host countries in all parts of the world. By means of a qualitative content analysis of written descriptions regarding the types of knowledge shared, a three dimensional typology of expatriate knowledge sharing was constructed which identifies the full range of knowledge types shared by expatriates. Three types of knowledge were identified: regulative knowledge, normative knowledge, and cultural-cognitive knowledge, each consisting of several subtypes. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: *Expatriation, Cross-Cultural Management, Person-Environment Fit, Knowledge Management.*

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