How composition and compilation of international experience in groups influences knowledge sharing: a theoretical model

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Abstract:

Purpose
This study presents a conceptual model of knowledge sharing in global organizations, examining the facilitating role of international experience through cognitive, relational and structural social capital perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach
This is a conceptual paper that applies multilevel thinking to the issue of knowledge sharing in global environments.

Findings
The presented conceptual model contributes to our understanding of the microfoundational role of international experience in facilitating knowledge sharing in global organizations by integrating individual, dyadic and group perspectives.

Practical implications
Managerial implications are discussed for how to strengthen individuals' propensities for knowledge sharing from international experience through strategic hiring, employee development, succession planning and expatriate mobility.

Originality/value
The presented framework explicitly considers the implications of individual heterogeneity in international experience for differences in organizational knowledge sharing capabilities, thereby contributing to the search for microfoundations of competitive advantage in global organizations.

Keywords: knowledge sharing | international experience | social capital | multilevel | groups

Article:

Introduction

Variance in multinational companies' (MNCs') abilities to create and capture value in the global business environment is partly determined by differential capabilities to receive, recombine and deploy knowledge. MNCs are superior vehicles for creating and transferring knowledge across borders and this superiority serves as the reason for the existence and growth of multinational firms (Caves, 1971; Kogut and Zander, 1993; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). However, creating knowledge in organizational contexts where multiple cultural, institutional and competitive perspectives intersect remains challenging, and sharing knowledge across borders is far from frictionless. Its success depends on the resources and capabilities of the organization (Kogut and Zander, 1993).

A valuable knowledge-based resource that underlies organizational capabilities for knowledge creation and knowledge sharing in global environments is the international experience of managers and employees (Tasheva and Nielsen, 2020). Defined as exposure to or interactions with members or elements of a different culture (Maddux et al., 2021), international experience stimulates knowledge creation through innovative problem-solving (Bantel and Jackson, 1989), enhanced creativity (Maddux and Galinsky, 2009) and superior leveraging of organizational knowledge (Oldroyd et al., 2019). It facilitates knowledge sharing because internationally experienced individuals have better and more flexible communication skills (Backmann et al., 2020; Jang, 2017; Hong, 2010), exhibit increased levels of interpersonal trust (Chua et al., 2012; Cao et al., 2014), display reduced outgroup bias (Tadmor et al., 2018) and have greater tendency toward facilitating knowledge flow (Wang, 2015).

However, despite these important insights indicating that international experience enhances individuals' capabilities for creating, disseminating and absorbing knowledge, the role of group or team dynamics in affecting knowledge sharing in global environments is undertheorized and understudied (Foss and Pedersen, 2019). Given that knowledge sharing is not only contingent on the experience of the knowledge sender but hinges also on the experience of the knowledge receiver (Burmeister et al., 2018), it is necessary to also examine how international experience and relational ties among group members prompt dyadic interaction among individuals. Furthermore, as global work is often performed in groups or teams (Zander et al., 2015), knowledge sharing in contemporary organizations is not just an interaction between a sender and receiver but emerges as a group process in which the composition and compilation of international experience among group members can be expected to matter. Indeed, as noted by Zhao and Anand (2009), knowledge sharing within a collective is more than a simple aggregate of individuals' abilities, motivations and opportunities to engage in the act (Burmeister et al., 2018; Shao and Ariss, 2020; Chang et al., 2012), but it is a synergistic outcome of individual complementarities, interdependencies and interactions in groups. Based on these insights, this study uses multilevel reasoning to present a conceptual model connecting: (1) individual-level cognitive impacts of previous international experience, (2) dyadic relationships between individuals that stimulate interaction, and (3) group-level compositional and compilational patterning of international experience, to knowledge sharing in collectives.

To date, few studies on knowledge sharing feature individual behavior or account for heterogeneity among individuals (Foss and Pedersen, 2019). With the notable exception of Haas and Cummings (2015), fewer still link individual heterogeneity to knowledge sharing in groups or organizations (Foss and Pedersen, 2019). This study begins to fill this gap by explicitly attending to individual differences in international experiential backgrounds and by theoretically exploring how these differences affect individuals' propensities for knowledge sharing within a collective. This paper makes several theoretical contributions. First, by integrating cognitive

(individual-level), relational (dyad-level) and structural (group-level) social capital perspectives, the presented framework offers a conceptual foundation for future research on the microfoundations of knowledge sharing capabilities, which have so far received inadequate attention in global contexts (Foss and Pedersen, 2019; Meyer et al., 2020). Second, the study develops new multilevel theory on the nature of the relationship between international experience and knowledge sharing. Even as the scholarly literature on the benefits and drawbacks of international experience continues to expand, much of the emphasis remains on exploring individual-level outcomes, such as creativity or psychological adjustment of global workers, with less research investigating how international experience influences group dynamics (Maddux et al., 2021). This study extends international experience research to consider its influence on individuals' interactions and group behaviors.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I review relevant background literature on knowledge creation and knowledge sharing between individuals in global environments. Second, I theoretically link propensities for knowledge sharing to international experience. Third, I introduce a model depicting how enhanced individual cognition, dyadic relational ties, and the structural composition and compilation of international experience in groups influences knowledge sharing. Next, I discuss how the model can be empirically tested. Lastly, implications of the conceptual model for theory and practice are presented.

The role of individuals in knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing is integral to the productivity of MNCs (Kogut and Zander, 1993; Doz et al., 2001) and has been tied to MNC growth and capabilities for acquiring and sustaining competitive advantage (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). Despite recognition that knowledge is embedded in individuals (Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994) and is expressed through "regularities by which members cooperate in a social community (i.e. group, organization, or network)" (Kogut and Zander, 1992, p. 383), research examining knowledge flows between individuals in global contexts is comparatively limited (Haas and Cummings, 2015)–in particular when contrasted with the number of studies that conceptualize knowledge sharing as occurring not between people but between organizational units (for recent reviews, see Michailova and Mustaffa, 2012; Andersson et al., 2016; Foss and Pedersen, 2019).

A possible reason for the paucity of research on knowledge sharing among individuals is that the phenomenon is difficult to directly observe. By definition, knowledge sharing is a voluntary act between parties (Davenport, 1997) that transpires when information from the sender interacts with the recipient's perspectives and beliefs (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). As such, it is a cognitive act with few physical manifestations (Huber, 1991) whose success depends not only on the kind of knowledge being shared, but also on individuals' abilities, motivations and opportunities to share (Ipe, 2003). Several common factors have consistently been noted to affect individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviors in global environments. These include individuals' cognitive abilities (Li et al., 2014), cultural intelligence (Chen and Lin, 2013; Stoermer et al., 2021), absorptive capacities (Zhao and Anand, 2009; Minbaeva et al., 2003), communication skills (Heizmann et al., 2018) and also openness to diversity and change (Fong Boh et al., 2013). In the sender—recipient dyad, knowledge sharing is easier with demographic and experiential homophily (Haas and Cummings, 2015; Mäkelä et al., 2012), interpersonal trust (Fong Boh et al., 2013; Raab et al., 2014), overlapping knowledge domains (Phillips et al., 2004), as well as previous formal or informal relational ties (Li et al., 2014; Bell and Zaheer,

2007; Hansen, 1999). Finally, the structural properties of the interpersonal network have also been shown to influence the effectiveness of knowledge sharing in groups (Hansen et al., 2005).

These findings from management are augmented by insights from information systems research, where scholars have exploited the empirical advantages of using communication technology to examine knowledge sharing processes among individuals in organizational contexts (for a recent review, see Ahmed et al., 2019). In contrast to knowledge sharing that occurs face-to-face and is thus difficult for researchers to observe, capture and measure in real time, use of communication technologies generates visible, storable and recoverable trails of evidence about the knowledge sharing process (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). For example, social media use reveals not only the informational content of the knowledge being shared but also the patterns of communication between individuals (Leonardi, 2014), yielding valuable insights about the personal and communal factors that affect knowledge sharing behaviors in organizational settings. From this line of research, individuals' propensities to share knowledge with others increase when individuals perceive that contributing knowledge can enhance their professional reputations (Leonardi and Treem, 2012), when individuals share domains of expertise (Leonardi, 2017), when there are expectations of reciprocity (Leonardi, 2017) and with higher levels of interpersonal trust (Mejova et al., 2011). Furthermore, knowledge sharing is facilitated by greater professional homophily between individuals (Kwayu et al., 2021), by differences in status or hierarchical position (Kwayu, 2020) and by individuals holding accurate and shared metaknowledge of "who knows what" and "who knows whom" in the organization (Leonardi, 2014, 2015), suggesting that group composition and structure influence knowledge sharing behaviors among individuals.

In sum, the extant literature suggests that interpersonal knowledge sharing is facilitated by the (1) cognitive, (2) relational and (3) structural social capital of the individuals involved. In group settings, knowledge sharing is thus a multilevel process where individual heterogeneity, member interactions and the structure of the collective all play an important role (Mäkelä et al., 2012; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). In what follows, I draw on this three-dimensional concept of social capital introduced by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) as a basis for the theoretical exploration of international experience in facilitating knowledge sharing in global environments.

In the next section, I outline the rationale for why international experience can be expected to facilitate knowledge sharing at these three levels. Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical relationships to be explored in this study.

International experience as a facilitator of knowledge sharing

International experience as cognitive social capital

To provide a theoretical foundation for the cognitive impacts of multiple international experiences, I draw on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). These theories suggest that cognitive gains occur when encountered behaviors (Bandura, 1977) and experiences (Kolb, 1984) that do not fit with an individual's existing expectations lead to cognitive dissonance. For individuals studying, working or living abroad, cognitive dissonance is a common sensation. Colloquially it is referred to as culture shock, which is a psychological state that arises when the behaviors and interactions that people experience while in a foreign environment run counter to their existing knowledge and belief systems. It is uncomfortable and drives individuals to seek resolution through one of two learning processes:

assimilation or accommodation (Piaget, 1955).

The process of assimilation is triggered when individuals encounter new information that fits into existing cognitive schema (Piaget, 1955). Assimilation builds richness to existing schema and increases individuals' volume of knowledge. It develops individuals' intrapersonal competencies (Maddux et al., 2021), including general cognitive abilities, language skills and cultural intelligence, which is defined as the cross-cultural ability to effectively receive and process cross-cultural messages and display culturally appropriate behaviors in international settings (Ang et al., 2006; Early and Ang, 2003). Extant research also points to the power of international experience for general adjustment (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2013), which manifests in individuals' openness, flexibility and willingness to accept change.

While certain international experiences serve to enrich existing cognitive schema, others create connections between schemas. When international experiences do not align with an existing cognitive schema, they prompt a mental effort to change and reshape the connections between schematic elements through the process of accommodation (Piaget, 1955; Lord and Hall, 2005). Empirical evidence indicates that more international experience is indeed associated with more connections between cognitive schemas (Maitland and Sammartino, 2015). Access to more connected and more sophisticated schemas are, in turn, associated with valuable interpersonal competencies, including greater generalized trust (Chua et al., 2012), communication competence (Jang, 2017; Backmann et al., 2020) and reduced outgroup bias (Tadmor et al., 2018).

As international experience accumulates, individuals develop valuable intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies that notably match the individual-level factors associated with effective knowledge sharing introduced above, including enhanced cognition, cultural intelligence, communication skills, trust, and openness to diversity and change. For these reasons, I propose that international experience by individuals can facilitate knowledge sharing.

P1. Individual international experience facilitates knowledge sharing.
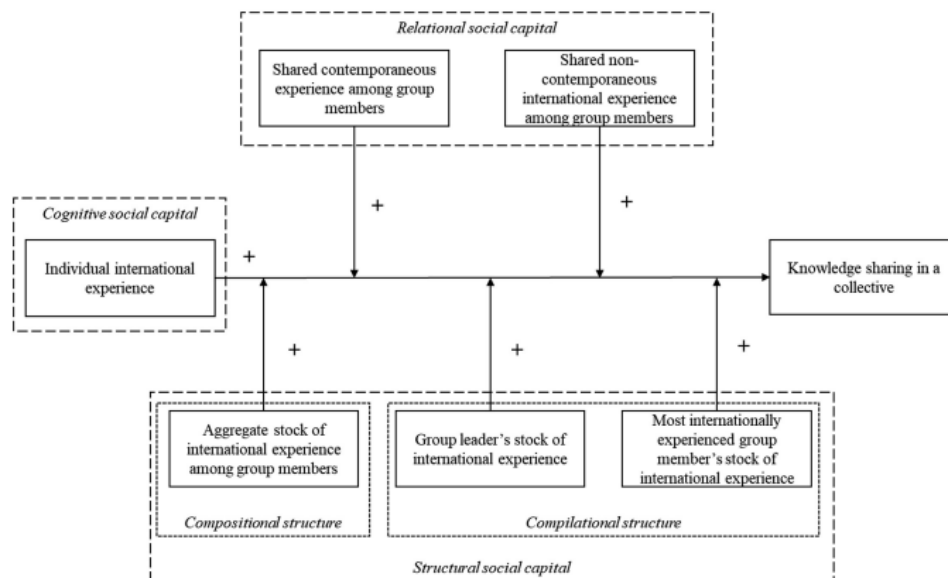

Figure 1. Conceptual model

Shared experience as relational social capital

However, knowledge sharing in collectives is enabled not only by individuals' cognitive skills and abilities, but also by relational ties between the knowledge sender and knowledge recipient (Bell and Zaheer, 2007). Because knowledge sharing is performed person-to-person, relational ties are needed not only to discover the existence of relevant knowledge but also to lubricate the knowledge exchange. In other words, relational ties are critical to the success of both the search phase and transfer phase of knowledge sharing (Hansen et al., 2005).

Relationships increase awareness of who knows what in a group (Reagans et al., 2005). This idea underlies the theory of transactive memory systems, which asserts that collective awareness of who holds what expertise creates a "group mind" or "metaknowledge" which serves as an instrument for identifying and retrieving knowledge that is distributed among individual members (Wegner, 1987; Lewis and Herndon, 2011; Ren and Argote, 2011). Transactive memory is developed through relationships and cooperative interactions (Lewis, 2003; Hollingshead, 1998). It is through shared experience that individuals develop collective awareness of each other's knowledge. In what follows, two types of shared experience are discussed: contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous.

Contemporaneous shared experience is a basic building block of transactive memory. Since awareness of who knows what takes time to cultivate, the transactive memory of a group improves with time spent working together. With more time spent working together, group members develop a familiarity that builds interpersonal trust and can even lead to the creation of shared language and norms (Coleman, 1988). These increase cooperative behaviors (Taylor and Greve, 2006). Cooperative behaviors, in turn, facilitate communication and knowledge sharing (Payne et al., 2011; Marlow et al., 2018).

Relational ties among group members also interrupt possible stereotyping based on cultural backgrounds. People who know one another will see each other as individuals instead of as members of a demographic or cultural group. In global environments, reduced stereotyping improves knowledge sharing through information elaboration and deeper discussions (Peng and Luo, 2000). Taken together, relational ties based on shared contemporaneous experience strengthen group members' abilities to locate and share knowledge. Therefore, I propose that the positive facilitative relationship between individual international experience and knowledge sharing will be enhanced by relational ties based on shared contemporaneous experience.

P2. The facilitative role of individual international experience for knowledge sharing is strengthened by shared contemporaneous experience among group members.

While time spent working together builds awareness of who knows what, transactive memory is also enhanced by group members' awareness of who knows what on the team. As knowledge sharing often involves the transfer of tacit knowledge, recognizing what other group members know is not a trivial matter. To capture the extent to which group members are aware of what expertise others can share, I introduce shared international experience as a second building block of transactive memory. Shared international experience is conceptualized as a non-contemporaneous measure of whether two group members have spent time in the same country, not necessarily at the same time.

Knowledge sharing is more likely to occur with greater shared international experience among group members for several reasons. Research in social psychology indicates that groups

of people tend to discuss commonly held information more often and for longer than uniquely held information (Wittenbaum et al., 1999). Even after accounting for the higher likelihood of commonly held information being brought up in discussion, there are powerful social motivations driving this phenomenon. For instance, studies show that voicing shared information endows the presenter with greater social rewards than voicing unshared information (Wittenbaum et al., 1999). In group discussions, information that can be corroborated by other members gains validity because those with shared realms of experience and expertise can attest to its accuracy and relevance. Shared information is thus amplified and elaborated on during group discussions, while uniquely held information fails to gain traction. Furthermore, by providing encouragement and support through verbal as well as non-verbal cues, group members with intersecting sets of experience enhance one another's status in group discussions. Their dyadic interactions influence perceptions of credibility and competence as experts on a given topic. With stronger and more abundant relational ties based on overlapping countries of international experience, relevant expertise is more likely to be voiced, discussed and considered by the group.

Building on these insights, knowledge sharing will be more abundant with more shared international experience among group members. Groups characterized by greater overlap in members' countries of international experience will experience more knowledge elaboration and thus more knowledge sharing. This reasoning is notably also in line with accumulating evidence that homophily between knowledge senders and recipients stimulates knowledge sharing (Haas and Cummings, 2015; Mäkelä et al., 2012; Kwayu et al., 2021). Thus, I propose that the positive facilitative relationship between individual international experience and knowledge sharing will be enhanced by relational ties based on shared international experience.

P3. The facilitative role of individual international experience for knowledge sharing is strengthened by shared non-contemporaneous international experience among group members.

International experience as structural social capital

Structural social capital derived from the international experience of group members can be conceptualized using both compositional and compilational logic. While compositional logic posits that individual-level attributes are weighed equally to form a higher-level construct (such as the construct of structural social capital from international experience), compilational logic sees this higher-level construct as "a complex combination of diverse lower-level contributions" (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000, p. 17). In other words, compositional logic would assume that individuals' international experiences contribute equally to collective international experience, while compilational logic entertains the possibility that the international experience of a particular group member disproportionately affects knowledge sharing capabilities in a collective (Mathieu et al., 2014). In what follows, both logics are considered to build theory regarding the moderating role of structural social capital derived from international experience on knowledge sharing.

The compositional perspective. In line with compositional logic, I argue that group capabilities for knowledge sharing will be greater when its members can access more accumulated knowledge. In groups characterized by greater aggregate stocks of international experience across its members, individual international experience is more likely to stimulate

knowledge sharing. In such a context, the focal individual can compare and validate his or her knowledge base of international experience against a rich collection of group members' expertise. Furthermore, joint exposure to a foreign culture (not necessarily to the same foreign culture) may form the basis for shared experience, improving communication and interpersonal trust (Jang, 2017; Hong, 2010). Communication and trust, in turn, are important facilitators for effective knowledge sharing in a group (De Jong et al., 2016). Formally:

P4. The facilitative role of individual international experience for knowledge sharing is strengthened by the aggregate stock of international experience in the group.

The compilational perspective. Compilational logic allows for the possibility that some group members' international experiences are more consequential for facilitating knowledge sharing than others'. Indeed, a number of studies indicate that the most experienced member or members who occupy certain positions in a group may disproportionately influence group processes (Mathieu et al., 2014). For instance, some group tasks can be effectively performed as long as one person in the group holds the requisite knowledge or competencies (Lepine et al., 1997).

Drawing on this logic, the group member with the greatest stock of international experience may be able to deploy his or her arsenal of intrapersonal competencies (e.g. general cognitive abilities, language skills, cultural intelligence, openness and flexibility) and interpersonal competencies (e.g. trust, communication and reduced outgroup bias) to stimulate knowledge sharing in the collective (Maddux et al., 2021). Furthermore, individuals with substantial international experience act as cultural brokers and boundary spanners (Lücke et al., 2014). They integrate information not only from group members with whom they share international experience, but they also elicit information from those with whom they do not share previous experience (Jang, 2017). This rationale suggests that with greater stocks of international experience possessed by the most experienced member of the group, the positive relationship between individual international experience and knowledge sharing will strengthen. Formally, I propose:

P5. The facilitative role of individual international experience for knowledge sharing is strengthened by the most experienced group member's individual stock of international experience.

Another important compilational factor is the international experience of group members who hold critically important roles. In numerous contexts, group processes become more efficient when people in leadership roles or in the "strategic core" have high levels experience (Humphrey et al., 2009). For instance, in top management teams, where the chief executive officer (CEO) is the central strategic figure with outsize influence and power over the team's functioning, productivity and performance (Carmelli et al., 2012), CEOs can "neutralize both beneficial and debilitating composition effects" in groups (Jackson, 1992).

Internationally experienced group leaders can use their powerful and central position to effectively coordinate and integrate the knowledge of other group members. Internationally experienced leaders' enhanced interpersonal competencies positively impact group knowledge sharing capabilities through effective leadership (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009), and enhanced group trust and communication (Backmann et al., 2020; Jang, 2017). Leaders also have the

positional power to elicit knowledge sharing by subordinates, which is especially useful in heterogeneous groups, where group members may otherwise be less motivated and willing to divulge information to dissimilar colleagues (Kwayu et al., 2021). But the research also indicates that leaders can sometimes hinder knowledge sharing by nature of their powerful position, because subordinates are afraid to communicate freely (Kwayu, 2020). However, greater stocks of international experience by the leader increase the likelihood of the leader sharing international experience with individual group members. Common ground facilitates interaction, promotes collaboration and creates a basis for information exchange. I therefore propose that leader international experience positively moderates the relationship between individual international experience and knowledge sharing.

> P6. The facilitative role of individual international experience for knowledge sharing is strengthened by the group leader's individual stock of international experience.

A proposed methodology

Although empirical testing of the theoretical relationships proposed in this article is outside its scope, I briefly explore two quantitative approaches to test and validate the conceptual model presented above that may inspire future research in this area: survey-based and archival studies. The two approaches involve certain trade-offs and provide different perspectives on the focal research question: what is the role of group or team dynamics on knowledge sharing?

First, survey-based methods can be used to gather relevant information from established groups performing cross-cultural or global work on (1) the configuration of the group's cognitive, social, and structural capital and (2) group members' knowledge sharing behaviors. Survey participants would be asked to respond to questions pertaining to personal international experience (e.g. time spent abroad, countries of international experience [Propositions 1, 3, 4, and 5]), group tenure [Proposition 2], group role [Proposition 6] and knowledge sharing. (For a valid and reliable measure of knowledge sharing, see Yi's (2007) knowledge sharing behavior scale.)

The survey-based approach is useful as it provides information on respondents' attitudes, opinions, behaviors and attributes. It also allows researchers to ask about all varieties of knowledge sharing, including personal interactions, written contributions and organizational communications, among others. Furthermore, surveys can be designed to provide both qualitative and quantitative responses, letting researchers probe deeper into respondents' assessments of knowledge sharing behaviors as related to group composition/compilation. However, surveys generally capture respondents' subjective experiences, in addition to being influenced by the researcher's perspective, and therefore the findings would need to be interpreted within that context.

The second proposed approach uses objective, archival data to qualify and quantify knowledge sharing in groups and relate it to group international experience composition/compilation. To gather archival data on international experiential backgrounds, scholars can codify employees' LinkedIn profiles (e.g. Rickley, 2019). In studies of boards of directors or top management teams, scholars have used databases such as BoardEx, Bloomberg's Executive Profile and Biography or Forbes (e.g. Piaskowska and Trojanowski, 2014). Researchers can then probe the theorized relationships by analyzing the type and flow of information within a group that is transmitted through various forms of communication

technology (e.g. email, collaborative documents, social media platforms, conferencing technology, etc.) and determine whether there exists a relationship with the group's cognitive, social and structural capital.

Although the archival methodological approach mitigates concerns arising from response subjectivity, accessing objective data on knowledge sharing that is sufficiently comprehensive and rich from global organizations is likely to be a challenge. For instance, it may be difficult to obtain detailed data on knowledge sharing that includes both verbal and written communication or formal as well as informal personal interactions. In light of the trade-offs that exist between survey-based and archival studies, empirical insights on the relationship between group configuration and knowledge sharing will likely benefit from researchers pursuing multiple methodological approaches.

Discussion

Implications for theory

Although researchers have long noted the increased heterogeneity of employees in global organizations (Shafferet al., 2012), examinations of the theoretical implications of individual level heterogeneity for differences in organizational capabilities for knowledge sharing remain sparse (Foss and Pedersen, 2019). This conceptual paper advances research in this area by theoretically exploring how previous international experiences can accumulate and combine within individuals, in dyads, and among group members to affect collective propensities for knowledge sharing. Specifically, I argue that individual differences in international experience influence not only personal cognition and individuals' abilities to engage in knowledge sharing, but also the patterns of interaction between knowledge senders and recipients. Furthermore, I posit that structural dynamics emerging from compositional and compilational experiential aggregation affect group capabilities for knowledge sharing.

By theoretically linking individual differences in international experience to knowledge sharing capabilities through individual, dyadic and group-level mechanisms, the presented framework has two important theoretical implications. First, this study offers a theoretical justification for the role of group dynamics as a factor that can promote or stymy knowledge sharing in global contexts, which has so far remained largely unexamined. Currently, the factors that are thought to promote knowledge sharing in global contexts include (1) individual-level factors, such as cultural intelligence (Vlajcic et al., 2019a), organizational embeddedness (Froese et al., 2021); (2) dyadic factors, such as abilities, motivations and opportunities to share (Burmeister et al., 2018; Amir et al., 2020; Shao and Ariss, 2020), the relationship between local and international employees (Bonache and Zarraga-Oberty, 2008), the role of empowering leadership for the leader–follower relationship (Bucher et al., 2020); (3) organizational-level factors, such as organizational support (Froese et al., 2021; Lazarova and Tarique, 2005), high-commitment human resource practices (Shao and Ariss, 2020), geographical distance between headquarters and subsidiaries (Vlajcic et al., 2019b), subsidiary absorptive capacity (Chang et al., 2012) and (4) the characteristics of the knowledge being shared (Duvivier et al., 2019; Bonache and Zarraga-Oberty, 2008). This current research expands the set of potential factors that promote knowledge sharing in global contexts to include group dynamics arising from international experience-based cognitive, relational and structural capital of the group.

Second, by theorizing how individual differences in international experience may either

facilitate or hinder dyadic interactions and group processes for knowledge sharing, I contribute to the search for microfoundations of competitive advantage in global organizations, which are currently under-researched and poorly understood (Foss and Pedersen, 2019; Meyer et al., 2020). When individuals' tacit knowledge from international experience is bundled together, it becomes a socially complex, causally ambiguous and path dependent resource. As such, it is difficult for competitors to imitate or substitute (Teece et al., 1997), and it can contribute to competitive advantage (Daily et al., 2000; Carpenter et al., 2001). By understanding how various compositional and compilational patterns of international experience in groups can promote or impede knowledge sharing, we can gain additional insights into the sources of competitive advantage in MNCs.

Finally, my work is not without limitations. Like all conceptual models, this model will benefit from greater theoretical specification and empirical testing. For instance, future theorizing may expand the model to include additional forms of compositional structure (e.g. disparity, separation or variety in the stock of international experience among group members) and compilational structure (e.g. the least experienced group member's individual stock of international experience). Also, the scope of this current work is limited to theoretical exposition and does not pursue a discussion of measurement of the presented constructs. In organizational settings, both "knowledge" and "knowledge sharing" are fuzzy constructs (Davenport et al., 1998) with several available definitions. Similarly, "international experience" is a multi-dimensional construct with both categorical ("where") and continuous dimensions ("for how long") that need to be considered simultaneously (Takeuchi et al., 2005; Rickley, 2019). While the conceptual model recognizes these constructs' complexities, the issue of how to measure and operationalize them is left to future work. The ideas presented here, however, already have several practical implications.

Implications for practice

The presented conceptual model of the facilitative role of international experience for knowledge sharing in collectives contributes practically to the improved management of global mobility in several ways. First, this conceptual exercise suggests that international experience may be an important linking mechanism enabling knowledge sharing in groups where the process is impeded by cultural, geographic or functional barriers–such as in multicultural teams where members have different nationalities (e.g. Haas and Cummings (2015)), in global virtual teams separated by geography (e.g. Pinjani and Palvia (2013)), or in management teams whose members are defined by their functional roles (e.g. M€akel€a et al. (2012)).

Second, the foregoing discussion frames international experience as a mechanism that needs to be considered in context. In particular, this paper argues that international experience can facilitate knowledge sharing when an individual has adequate accumulated stocks of international experience to yield needed cognitive benefits, when there is experiential overlap between the knowledge sender and recipient, and when there are favorable compositional and compilational structural dynamics in the group or collective.

Third, for global managers seeking to stimulate knowledge sharing among their employees, the preceding discussion of cognitive, relational and structural social capital suggests that MNCs need to emphasize person-group fit over person-role fit in their hiring strategies. Furthermore, the decision to apply group profile logic as opposed to the more traditional individual models of hiring has implications not only for current hiring decisions or succession

planning but also in earlier stages of employee development and firm-led mobility planning–because where employees are deployed, for how long, and with whom all likely matter for MNCs seeking to exploit the facilitative role of employees' previous international experience for knowledge sharing in their organizations.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this conceptual study adds to our understanding of the microfoundations of knowledge sharing by exploring the facilitating role of international experience. A primary contribution of this study is in its argument that international experience stimulates knowledge sharing not merely by its simple accumulation in a group, but by its configuration as relational and structural social capital. It connects emergent compositional and compilational processes to knowledge sharing, thereby illuminating additional factors that have the potential to promote or impede knowledge sharing in global contexts and thus MNCs' abilities to gain and sustain competitive advantage. Finally, this work contributes to the conversation surrounding multilevel issues in global mobility and international management research by articulating how international experience accumulates from the individual to the collective to affect knowledge sharing in global organizations and environments.

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