

Broadening international mentoring

Contexts and dynamics of expatriate and HCN intercultural mentoring

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**Broadening international mentoring: Contexts and dynamics of expatriate
and HCN intercultural mentoring**

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Abstract

Purpose: To enlarge our focus on international mentoring beyond traditional company-assigned expatriates, this conceptual paper examines important contexts and dynamics of intercultural mentoring involving traditional expatriates and host country nationals (HCNs), with both as mentors and mentees.

Approach: This conceptual paper explores how intercultural mentoring in different contexts can guide the individual professional development of expatriates and HCNs, and, in doing so, contributes to MNC knowledge management and organization development.

Findings: Major contributions of this paper include increased attention to the role of culture in mentoring, and an illumination of important intercultural mentoring opportunities and imperatives involving traditional company-assigned expatriates and HCNs, who are key global talent players in MNC knowledge management and overall operations performance. This paper also provides practical recommendations on how organizations can facilitate mentoring within a global context, as well as suggestions for viable avenues for future research, including further extending the global talent reach of international mentoring.

Originality: This paper emphasizes the importance of taking the intercultural context into account when planning and managing mentoring in MNCs, and outlines how culture can affect mentoring relationships involving traditional company-assigned expatriates and HCNs. This contextual aspect has often been neglected in the extant literature, yet can be crucial for the success of mentoring relationships that cross cultural borders. With its inclusion of HCNs, this paper also expands the picture of international mentoring beyond the traditional focus on company-assigned expatriates.

Keywords

- Mentoring
- International HRM
- Global mobility
- Expatriation
- HCNs

INTRODUCTION

To survive in today's fast developing global professional environment, multinational organizations or corporations (MNCs) must assimilate and transfer knowledge across countries (Claver-Cortés et al., 2018). One of the key HR practices to increase knowledge transfer is mentoring¹ (Caligiuri, 2014), which is traditionally defined as 'a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career' (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5). A core feature of a mentoring relationship is that it is developmental in nature, with a primary focus on career development and professional growth, but it has long been recognized for its potential at both the individual and organizational level (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2016; Allen et al., 2008).

At the individual level, mentoring is a means to improving individual learning, as it leads to more positive performance evaluations, greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as significant career advantage for protégés or mentees (Maley & Moeller, 2018; Allen et al., 2004; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Mentoring is increasingly recognized as an important performance management tool for building quality relationships with employees that promote mutual knowledge sharing and employee learning for *immediate* performance mastery and longer range professional development and retention to also benefit the organization (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2016; Bell & Goldsmith, 2013). Mentoring is often reciprocal (Harvey et al., 2009): the mentors themselves also benefit by enjoying, for example, a higher level of motivation, job satisfaction, and an increased sense of accomplishment and self-esteem (Gentry et al., 2008). At the organizational level, mentoring can become a strategic tool that can stimulate organizational knowledge creation and knowledge transfer processes (Bryant, 2005; Harvey et al, 2009), as well as lead to enhanced talent retention and productivity (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Mentoring has even been suggested as a critical fixture of the

¹ Mentoring should be distinguished from coaching, since these terms are often wrongly used interchangeably in the literature. As opposed to coaching, mentoring is more long term, with a primary focus on professional and career development instead of immediate, current work performance (Hagen, Bialek, & Peterson, 2017; Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2016).

learning organization, because mentoring provides and facilitates vital experiential and collaborative learning opportunities and resulting professional network growth (Klinge, 2015).

Mentoring has been explored in depth since the 1980s, primarily with a domestic focus. However, these developmental relationships are increasingly enacted in an international context, frequently between individuals from different national cultures, and such intercultural mentoring is featured in only relatively few studies (e.g., Mitchell, 2018; Young et al., 2018; Purcell & Scheyvens, 2015; Ramaswami et al., 2014). As Abbott et al., (2013, p.488) note, "...culture is most conspicuous by its absence from mainstream literature and discourse on coaching and mentoring." This lack of scholarly attention and informed utilization is of particular concern, since the international environment presents several extra challenges to mentoring relationships, including cultural differences, language barriers, and geographical distance (Osula & Irvin, 2009; Purcell & Scheyvens, 2015). The neglect of the examination of intercultural dynamics in international mentoring is likely greatly due to the largely ethnocentric orientation of considerable past expatriate research (Vance & Paderon, 1993), involving the near exclusive focus on the mentoring of traditional home country company-assigned expatriates (hereafter simply referred to as "traditional expatriates") by their same-country mentors, both back home and in the international context.

Mezias and Scandura's (2005) Theory of International Mentoring focuses on traditional expatriates and applies a useful needs-driven approach. However, despite its important contribution, this work is hardly inclusive, and neglects important mentoring involving many other types of global talent present in today's MNCs, including other types of business expatriates (e.g., McNulty & Brewster, 2017; McNulty & Vance, 2017) as well as members of the local host country national (HCN) workforce. These other global talent players all can potentially contribute much and have different mentoring needs (Ando, 2021; Vance et al., 2015; Toh & DeNisi, 2005). DeNisi et al. (2021) recently have called for more research on HCNs, a particularly important but overlooked foundational source of MNC global talent, exploring their role in effective global performance management systems.

Our paper has three main conceptual contributions. First, based on theoretical foundations of social exchange theory and reciprocal mentoring, we extend the traditional, largely ethnocentric research conceptualization of international mentoring, with its predominant focus on assigned home country expatriates as mentoring recipients, to include the potentially beneficial involvement of HCNs, both as mentors and mentees. Second, we emphasize the importance of taking the intercultural context into account when managing mentoring in MNCs, and outline how culture can affect mentoring relationships. This contextual aspect has often been neglected in the extant literature, yet can be crucial for the success of mentoring relationships that cross cultural borders. Third, this paper makes an important contribution to building MNC organizational capability (Ansoff, et al., 2019) by focusing on intercultural mentoring as an important practice to increase knowledge sharing (Caligiuri, 2014), to promote the establishment and strengthening of internal collaborative professional networks (Rosser, et al., 2020; Mäkelä et al., 2009), and to more indelibly imprint a shared global mindset culture throughout the MNC (Henson, 2016; Colakoglu, 2012; Begley & Boyd, 2003).

Our paper first will examine social exchange theory and the concept of reciprocal mentoring as together providing a conceptual foundation for enlarging the traditional picture of international mentoring to include the involvement of HCNs as both mentors and mentees. We then will focus on culture in the international context, which complicates mentoring taking place in MNCs. As a major focus of this paper, we next will examine various important dynamics and contexts of intercultural mentoring relationships involving traditional expatriates and HCNs in different significant phases and contexts of their professional experience, with each in turn serving as a mentor and mentee. We conclude our paper with a discussion of important implications for research and managerial practice, including recommendations of further research to continue to expand the global talent borders as mentoring recipients and contributing to international mentoring theory (McNulty & Brewster, 2017).

INCLUSION OF THE HCN IN THE INTERNATIONAL MENTORING LANDSCAPE

According to social exchange theory (Cook et al., 2013; Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964), social exchanges have two (or more) willful, participating social actors or parties. The quality or nature of each exchange, as perceived by either party, will affect how each party will behave in this social exchange relationship. Within the workplace, any influence or power that is used by managers is given or granted by those whose performance is being managed, and in equitable exchange for something perceived of value or need, whether tangible or intangible. This perception may involve a desire to fulfill lower order needs such as food, money, or physical security, but can also involve higher-order transactions such as exchanges of loyalty, trust, or information, including mentoring advisement. HCNs working within the context of the traditional expatriate's assignment may therefore represent willful parties in the social exchange of power and influence, and assess what they receive in exchange for their total work efforts (Fee & Michailova, 2021). Based on their assessments, they will perform their work as directed by the expatriate to a degree consistent with the perceived equity in the exchange. This desired work may include HCN mentoring of PCNs (parent-country nationals, traditional expatriates hailing from MNC headquarters or elsewhere in the HQ home country) in the form of providing helpful information and advisement to promote their successful adjustment to the demands of the new host country workplace and surrounding environment (Sokro & Moeti-Lysson, 2018; Shen et al., 2018; Zhuang et al., 2013).

Personal career development opportunity is increasingly recognized as a significant perceived reward by employees worldwide in exchange for their strong organizational performance and commitment, and is associated with reduced turnover (Redondo et al., 2021; Reiche, 2007). Apart from unintended reciprocal mentoring involving MNC knowledge and increased awareness of future career opportunities that HCNs may receive in the course of their work in support of PCNs (Desai et al., 2018; Harvey et al., 2009), HCNs may also desire more formal reciprocal mentoring and career development support from PCNs and the MNC, especially in exchange for their close mentoring support of PCNs in their adjustment and assignment success (Grant, 2008). This type of reciprocity is

in line with what Harvey et al. (2009) referred to as *reverse mentoring*, where junior and often newer and younger employees are paired with older and more experienced managers to help the latter understand new technologies or the changing marketplace. In the case of expatriates, this reverse peer mentoring can help in the development of cross-cultural adjustment skills and facilitate cross-cultural transitions, thereby ultimately supporting expatriate performance. Assigning HCN mentors to expatriates fits the greater emphasis that is being placed on less traditional types of mentoring relationships such as peer mentoring and reverse mentoring (Murphy, 2012). Thus, from these perspectives of reciprocal mentoring and social exchange theory, we would expect that a fuller conceptualization of international mentoring would include involvement of HCNs as both mentors and mentees.

INTERCULTURAL MENTORING

Around the end of the 1990s scholars began to turn their attention to mentoring relationships that take place in an international context, focusing on how cultural differences could influence mentoring relationships (Murphy & Ensher, 1997; Feldman & Bolino, 1999), and how such developmental relationships could in particular benefit traditional expatriates who are sent abroad by their organization (e.g. Mezias & Scandura, 2005). *Intercultural mentoring* denotes ‘the interactive relationship when mentor and mentee come from different cultures’ (Osula & Irvin, 2009, p.38). In line with previous literature, we have chosen the label ‘intercultural’ as opposed to ‘cross-cultural,’ since our primary focus here is on the interaction between members of different cultures, and not on the comparison of cultural differences (Osula & Irvin, 2009).

Intercultural mentoring occurs when international professionals are engaging in mentoring in their current workplace as either a mentor or a mentee; their mentor or mentee might be from the host country (i.e., HCN) or from a third country (i.e., third country national or TCN), where cultural differences can play a role. PCNs, as a valuable source of MNC knowledge and expertise for local employees in the host country subsidiary, are often considered as serving in a vital knowledge and

information liaison role between MNC headquarters and the foreign subsidiary (Chang et al., 2012; Kamoche, 1997). In this important liaison leadership role, these PCNs are in a key position to provide immediate coaching and longer-range focused mentoring in future talent and leadership development for the local employees with whom they closely interact (Selmer, 2004). If the local employee is an HCN or a TCN, this relationship includes an intercultural element. Dunnagan et al. (2013), in their field research of American firms in India and China, found evidence that high potential HCNs often receive mentoring by both local senior HCN managers and PCNs in preparation for their international assignments to other subsidiaries within the MNC to further their professional and leadership development. This reality of an increasingly diverse workforce leads to more and more PCN-local employee mentoring happening in an intercultural context. It is important to pay attention to the cultural context, because it can involve different culturally-based expectations of mentoring behavior (Wang et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, most research has focused on individual and dyadic level variables, and has mostly overlooked culture as a contextual variable in mentoring relationships (Chandler et al., 2011). In fact, much of the current knowledge about mentoring relationships is based on U.S. domestic samples, and it is unclear if this knowledge can be generalized to other cultural contexts (Allen et al., 2008). What is clear, however, is that cultural differences do influence mentoring relationships (Wang et al., 2018; Ramaswami et al., 2014; Chandler et al., 2011). Murphy and Ensher (1997) outline five phases of the mentoring relationship that are influenced by cultural values: (1) the attraction phase, where culture influences perceived similarity; (2) the contracting phase, where expectations of the mentoring relationship are based on cultural values; (3) the growth phase, where culture can cause communication difficulties; (4) the maturation phase, which may even not be reached due to cultural differences and potential conflict; and (5) the transition phase, where culture influences the redefinition of the relationship. For example, Ramaswami et al. (2014) showed that women in Taiwan and the US needed to conform to cultural norms with regard to power distance to increase the positive association between mentoring and career attainment. Wang et al. (2018) demonstrated how a cultural

difference in assertiveness influences the effect that career and psychosocial mentoring have on performance ratings of the mentors themselves. Chandler et al. (2011) also suggest that cultural differences in the dynamics of social exchange and reciprocity, involving differences related to gender roles and expectations, may influence intercultural mentoring relationships.

These studies highlight the importance of cultural context for the effectiveness of mentoring. The traditional domestic mentoring literature has shown that there is significant variation in the range and degree of mentoring functions within and across relationships; 'Like no other relationships, no two mentoring relationships are alike' (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p.6). This range is in all likelihood even more pronounced in an intercultural setting, where cultural differences further complicate matters because both mentor and mentee base their behaviors on potentially different cultural values and assumptions. Likewise, the potential benefits are also increased. Mentors working in a cross-cultural environment and mentoring people from other cultures can result in mentees building a significant range of intercultural communication and people skills, including the ability to relate to others, providing constructive feedback, and communicating effectively across cultures and organizational levels and boundaries (Desai, Rao & Jabeen, 2018; Young et al., 2018). Mentoring is one of the most powerful tools used in the development of global leaders to enhance both emotional and cultural intelligence (Alon & Higgins, 2005). In addition, effective intercultural mentoring can contribute to increased organizational capability through internal professional network development that enhances knowledge management and global workforce coordination and values alignment (Rosser, et al., 2020; Ansoff, et al., 2019; Colakoglu, 2019; Heidenreich et al., 2012; Vance et al., 2009), as well as a shared global mindset (Henson, 2016; Begley & Boyd, 2003).

Traditional Expatriate as Intercultural Mentoring Recipient

The bulk of studies on mentoring in an on-site foreign context has emphasized the mentoring of traditional expatriate parent country nationals (PCNs). In their Theory of International Mentoring, Mezas and Scandura (2005) focused on these traditional expatriates, putting forward 14 propositions

covering the developmental needs of PCNs in the pre-departure, sojourn, and repatriation stage, and suggesting a type of mentoring to fulfill these needs (formal/informal; peer/hierarchical). A major limitation of this work is its lack of clear emphasis upon the role of HCNs in intercultural mentoring, where much of the on-site mentoring is discussed as being provided by local expatriate peers and same-culture mentors back in the home country.

As early research on expatriate mentoring has progressed, it has become clear that successful individuals typically have more than one mentor within each expatriation phase, and that not all mentors belonged to the professional context or same home country cultural background (Ray & Maheshwari, 2021; Zhuang et al., 2013). For this reason, the concept of "multiple mentoring" has been introduced and involves what the mentoring literature calls *developmental networks* (Harvey et al., 2009). Effective multiple mentoring of PCNs can involve both home country and host country mentors (including HCNs), and can support the expatriate in various ways according to different needs experienced during different phases and stages of pre-departure preparation, sojourn, and repatriation (Ray & Maheshwari, 2021; Sokro & Moeti-Lysson, 2018; Shen et al., 2018; Zhuang et al., 2013; Mezias & Scandura, 2005). We now will focus on beneficial opportunities for HCN intercultural mentoring of expatriates during the pre-departure and host country sojourn stages, which heretofore have received relatively little attention in the theoretical conceptualization of international mentoring.

Pre-departure stage. Local home country informal contacts and peer-level colleagues of the same cultural background can serve as helpful mentors in the pre-departure stage where effective anticipatory adjustment is critical (Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Black et al., 1991). Peer mentoring is defined as an intentional one-on-one relationship between employees at the same or similar level in the firm that involves a more experienced worker teaching new knowledge and skills and providing encouragement to a less experienced worker (Eby, 1997). These mentors are especially helpful, in a surrogate intercultural aspect, when they themselves have been an expatriate, particularly in the host country and operation where the current expatriate is assigned. In this case, they can share their

experiences to help form positive yet realistic expectations (Black et al., 1991). Yet these traditional sources may lack potentially valuable information provided by intercultural mentoring. Vance and Ensher (2002) have described the great neglect of using the voice or input of HCNs in the preparation and training of expatriates. They identify different HCN employment levels where their input could be useful in preparing customized predeparture training and instructions for expatriates to enhance international adjustment and performance success, including through increased cultural understanding. For example, lower-level employees who have had experience with previous PCN from the MNC may serve as a valid source of input on what kinds of PCN behaviors contribute to effective local workplace interactions with HCNs, and what behaviors tend to be less effective or lead to conflict and lower productivity. Middle and upper-level HCNs in particular, with their strong familiarity with both the MNC and the local host site working environment (Zhuang et al., 2013), can be assigned as mentors and form a pre-departure working relationship to provide very valid and timely guidance contributing to effective anticipatory adjustment (Black et al., 1991). Such an effort that begins to enhance expatriate preparation and cultural intelligence at the predeparture stage also can contribute to increased effectiveness in the important traditional expatriate liaison objective of knowledge sharing with those in the host country operation (Stoermer et al., 2021).

Host country sojourn stage. While home country mentors can provide helpful contact and support from back-home organization (Linehan & Scullion, 2008, Kraimer & Wayne, 2004) as well as psychosocial support promoting international adjustment (Zhuang et al., 2013), an increasingly recognized option for MNCs in addressing PCN on-site mentoring needs is to encourage and facilitate mentoring by HCNs within the local workforce (Ray & Maheshwari, 2021). Their close involvement can help PCNs to “hit the ground running” and to avoid early damaging pitfalls. The HCN intercultural mentor can guide the expatriate through the initial challenges of country and organizational acclimatization by introducing him/her to colleagues, the local organization, and cultural norms (Zhuang et al., 2013). This host-country mentor also can be useful in reducing expatriate job tension by providing necessary information on local office politics, work environment,

and situational ambiguities. In addition, the host-country mentor may also help the expatriate to increase both his/her job satisfaction and job performance by providing on-the-job support and coaching. These rather immediate mentoring initiatives, which also have longer-term career success implications (Holtbrügge & Ambrosius, 2015), may help the expatriate to better adjust to the host-country environment, both in professional and personal matters. Among the potential benefits of having a host-country mentor are also an enhanced identification with the local organization, a greater ability to receive and share local organization knowledge internationally, and greater skills to work in local teams (Carragher et al., 2008).

An important theoretical lens for HCN mentoring to promote local adjustment and improve knowledge transfer is the Host Country National Liaison (HCNL) Model (Vance et al, 2014) (Figure 1). This model highlights five important liaison roles between the expatriate and local workforce and work environment that HCNs can perform: (1) cultural interpreter, (2) communication manager, (3) information resource broker, (4) talent manager, (5) internal change agent (Vance et al., 2014). Four of these roles are particularly relevant for meeting expatriate mentoring needs, in particular in the initial adjustment phase.

(Insert Fig. 1)

First, a HCN as Cultural Interpreter can guide the expatriate in learning about the host country culture and how it affects local behavior, thereby facilitating host country adjustment. Even with common language fluency, PCNs and HCNs can hold deep culturally-based perspectives that differ significantly and may lead to misunderstanding, frustration, and conflict (Holden & Glisby, 2010). In serving as a cultural interpreter, the HCNL may help to clarify for either expatriate or HCN employees (both peer and lower-level) any uncertain or ambiguous communications (both non-verbal and verbal) that may often occur within the host country operation or surrounding environment. For example, an American expatriate in New Delhi might initially believe that his Indian supervisors are being insubordinate in a planning meeting by not assertively providing their feedback on areas for improvement, especially related to the expatriates performance. However, the expatriate's mentoring

local assistant could explain that these supervisors may feel that their providing such improvement feedback might directly contradict their need to show respect for the expatriate's authority and leadership position. This HCNL assistant also, in turn, may communicating to the local supervisors and other HCNs that such constructive feedback would actually demonstrate their support and respect for the expatriate in helping to achieve performance improvement goals. HCNLs also may proactively serve as cultural guides to direct and facilitate expatriates' adjustment to the local work environment by promoting understanding of the cultural basis underlying local events and common activities.

Second, the HCNL can assist the PCN as a Communication Manager. The complexity inherent in many MNC foreign operation environments, often involving multiple and different cultural backgrounds and languages, can pose a daunting challenge to newly arrived PCNs. In the communication manager role the HCNL can clarify for the expatriate critical work roles and generally how things are done in the subsidiary. The HCNL also can provide suggestions on how the expatriate can optimize his or her accessibility (both physical and psychological) to other HCN employees to facilitate their direct communications. In addition to direct translation of communications, the HCNL also may assist by correcting or moderating two-way communications as they are relayed between members of the host country workforce and expatriates to ensure effective information reception. For example, in translating an expatriate's communication to local employees, an astute HCNL might hear a phrase or word choice that, if translated literally and directly, could create unnecessary stress or resentment among local employees. The HCNL may wisely slightly alter and translate the message in a way that communicates the expatriate's intended message, but in a much more acceptable fashion for the local employees. Similar to altering the *content* of a message to make it more palatable for the workforce recipient, the HCNL may decide to change the *timing* of the delivery of the message, such as delay the knowledge transfer to the expatriate or to the local workforce until they are best able to understand and accept the information.

Third, and related to the communication manager role, the HCNL can take upon him/herself the Information Resource Broker role, and thereby make sure expatriates have the information they

need for doing their job. Although new expatriate training provided by the HCNL will likely be much less formal than that given to newly hired HCN employees, the expatriates' need for immediate information can nevertheless be significant. The HCNL can be a valuable source of informal information about the local organization and surrounding environment, including customer and regulatory expectations, internal individual and group relationship dynamics, informal rules, and important characteristics of the local office and working culture to avoid work performance disruption and unnecessary conflict. One of the present authors learned in a visit to a Panasonic plant in Tijuana, Mexico that new senior Japanese expatriates were rotated in and out of the plant every three to five years, while their HCN immediate support staff typically remained in their position at the plant for a much longer duration. Although the preceding expatriates tried to pass along helpful information to their Japanese PCN successors, inevitably much valuable local knowledge, especially experience-based tacit knowledge gained through daily interactions, did not transfer to the new expatriates. These remaining HCNs, serving in their liaison role with continuity and access to organizational memory, were often able transfer this valuable knowledge to the new expatriates. Besides the sharing of technical and job-related information, the continuing support intrinsic to the close expatriate-HCNL relationship also can help facilitate expatriate interaction adjustment (van Bakel et al., 2011).

Finally, one of the behavioural functions of Talent Manager is the HCNL serving as a more traditional mentor, focusing on longer-range career success and more explicitly addressing the expatriates' career development needs (Carragher et al., 2008). In addition, the HCNL can provide useful advice and a desirable role model to local less-experienced peers and lower-level HCNs who desire future career advancement within the local subsidiary and within other MNC operations. In their reverse mentoring capacity, HCNs can provide expatriates with useful on-site guidance that has immediate and longer-term career development value (Carragher, Sullivan & Crocitto, 2008). This HCNL on-site ongoing mentoring support may extend beyond initial adjustment to facilitate effective performance throughout the expatriate assignment, which in turn may also have future positive repatriation and other future career opportunities for the expatriate (Selmer, 2000). To illustrate, the

authors are aware of traditional expatriates with technical backgrounds (e.g., legal, IS, accounting, engineering) being mentored by HCNs who provided etiquette and other soft skills advice to expatriates to enhance their workplace effectiveness. Their learning about the importance of these soft skills in international work situations remained with these expatriates after their eventual repatriation, and subsequently aided them in their career. In another case, a local HCN mentor also helped an expatriate learn how to balance his life more effectively, which helped to reduce stress in the short-term and continued to prove very beneficial later in expatriate's career. Through regular personal interaction with expatriates and lower-level HCNs alike, the HCNL's on-the-job immediate coaching and ongoing mentoring can be especially useful for the transfer of tacit knowledge, which is difficult to codify and transmit by means of more formal training and information sharing methods (Holden & Glisby, 2010).

An important contribution of the HCNL model is that it redresses the traditional imbalance in international management literature where the emphasis mainly lies with the expatriate. In fact, Takeuchi (2010, p.1041) concludes in his review that expatriate adjustment research is still predominantly 'expatriate-centric,' and neglects other stakeholders, such as host country nationals. In reality, when considering knowledge transfer in MNCs, well-prepared HCNLs are key to making sure knowledge effectively transfers to the host country workforce. This process not only involves information transfer from headquarters to the subsidiary, but also the other way around, and laterally between subsidiaries. To fully capitalize on the knowledge that is present in all the subsidiaries around the globe, and to open new channels for knowledge flow, the MNC should encourage, as part of a peer mentoring approach, the adoption of HCNL role components by key HCNs surrounding the expatriate.

In sum, the value of expatriate mentoring is undeniable; some authors even go as far as suggesting that mentoring can be a 'one-stop-shop for managing expatriates' (Jassawalla et al., 2006, p.135). The likely positive influence of expatriate mentoring for optimizing the success of the international assignment makes it important for MNCs to consider implementing a comprehensive

(including multiple mentors covering different stages of the expatriate experience) and culturally responsive mentoring program that features the right mix of home and HCN mentors (Ray & Maheshwari, 2021; Hartmann et al., 2010).

HCN as Intercultural Mentoring Recipient

With the primary focus on traditional expatriates, HCNs have traditionally been neglected in the expatriate and global talent management literature in terms of their potential contributions to foreign subsidiary success (van Bakel, 2019). As mentioned earlier, this trend has continued related to research on international mentoring, including research examining the mentoring of HCN talent. However, to successfully compete in the face of growing global competition, MNCs must be open to all employee sources in the attraction, development, and deployment of human talent (Takeuchi, 2010). In line with this imperative, we will examine the intercultural mentoring of HCNs in the differing contexts of host country operation, foreign assignment as an inpatriate, and foreign assignment as a TCN.

Host country intercultural mentoring of HCNs. From the above potentially productive interaction between HCNL and PCN, it is likely that not only the expatriate benefits from this relationship, but also the HCNL him/herself, through intercultural exposure and greater access to broader and even global MNC perspectives. These HCNLs, through reciprocal benefits of these interactions (Harvey et al., 2009), may in turn be excellent candidates for greater leadership responsibility, including future international assignments as TCNs and inpatriates. Thus, investing in the HCNL role not only supports expatriates and increases knowledge flows, but also may contribute to building the MNC's international talent pool.

Apart from the indirect, reciprocal developmental benefits to HCNs from experience in their HCNL role, it is increasingly recognized that a major PCN performance management effectiveness measure is his/her building of quality relationships with HCNs, which can lead to multiple beneficial outcomes for the MNC, including the expectation that "...better relationships make it easier for

international assignees to identify local talent that could be developed by the MNC for future assignments” (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2016, p.391). The quality of these relationships contributes to HCN individual absorptive capacity and motivational disposition to receive and value knowledge and information provided by the expatriate (Minbaeva et al., 2012; Minbaeva, 2007). And beyond the mere identification of HCN talent for future development, PCNs as managers are increasingly being held accountable for engaging in the development and mentoring of their employees, which can improve retention and build the organization’s professional and leadership talent pool (Bell & Goldsmith, 2013; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Such local largely intercultural mentoring for HCN career development was noted by Dunnagan, et al. (2013) in General Motors manufacturing operations in India, where American expatriates and other Indian managers, as part of their regular performance management and appraisal practices focusing on immediate performance improvement and goal achievement, also identified high potential HCNs. These HCNs, who demonstrated strong potential and expressed interest, entered career and professional development activities as part of an organized mentoring initiative coordinated by local GM management. This mentoring including active PCN intercultural advisement in providing ideas, resources, and connections for future local leadership opportunities. This intercultural mentoring provided by PCNs also involved future developmental assignments, with a career path aimed at returning to their own home country MNC subsidiary for providing local leadership.

In addition to PCNs, TCNs assigned to the host location also may provide mentoring that would involve at least one additional cultural dimension of a third country beyond the home and host countries. Experienced TCNs in particular may carry multiple and hybrid identities associated with their work in their home country, the host country, other country subsidiaries, and with the MNC’s home country (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011; Delmestri, 2006). Through their unique boundary spanning role, TCNs as mentors of HCNs may provide a more cosmopolitan, neutral, meta-cultural, and higher-level perspective of the complex intercultural and operational relationships of the local operation with headquarters and among the other MNC subsidiaries (Barmeyer et al., 2020; Mäkelä et al., 2019;

Levy et al., 2019). However, regional propinquity of TCNs should not diminish the concern for their pre-assignment preparation and on-site support in international adjustment to facilitate their influence as informal mentors since, due to a “culture similarity paradox” involving small cultural distance, TCNs from nearby countries to the host location may experience greater difficulty in sociocultural adjustment in the new host country than TCNs from other regions of the world (Vromans et al., 2013; Selmer, 2002). In addition, in some cases where TCNs come from relatively nearby third countries and even share a common or similar language, there might be strong adversarial traditions and a history of conflict and resentment, such as for Japanese TCNs in China, that need to be overcome to provide an intercultural relationship with the HCN based upon mutual trust and respect that supports HCN receptivity to TCN mentoring (Vance et al., 2011).

More experienced HCN employees may also have the opportunity to receive ongoing intercultural mentoring from multiple sources, both formal and informal, from regular interactions with peer and hierarchical company colleagues (virtual and in-person at company meetings) who are working in operations in the MNC’s home country (including headquarters) and in other country subsidiaries. For example, Blue Yonder (formerly JDA Software Group) is an American software and consultancy company headquartered in Arizona, with over 5,500 employees and offices in over 40 countries in North and South America, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Only two or three PCNs are assigned to their regional offices at a given time, and leadership development of identified high potential HCNs is managed through regular training conducted locally and at regional centers, as well as at Arizona headquarters. Aside from already having a formal mentoring relationship with an experienced HCN manager, high potential HCNs also meet once a year virtually for one-on-one intercultural mentoring with a member of the company’s executive leadership team to discuss such topics as company values and performance priorities, as well as current HCN work challenges. These HCNs also meet in virtual quarterly regional conferences and in bi-annual in-person conferences at company headquarters. Considerable cross-border connections are made and informal networking takes place at these training events and conferences, where all participants are encouraged to share

problems and ideas on current project-based assignments. These connections made by HCNs lead to considerable intercultural peer mentoring through ongoing informal cross-border knowledge-sharing and advisement interactions across MNC operations (Dunnagan et al., 2013), and taking advantage of multiple telecommunications advancements to facilitate these intercultural mentoring interactions (Sanyal & Rigby, 2017). By the establishment of these multiple intercultural mentoring relationships, high-potential, mid-level, and professional HCNs clearly benefit in their careers from developmental mentoring networks (Harvey et al., 2009), also contributing to greater organizational capability through increased integration and coordination of effort and knowledge sharing throughout MNC operations (Ansoff, et al., 2019; Caligiuri, 2014; Heidenreich et al., 2012; Mäkelä, Björkman & Ehrnrooth, 2009).

HCNs on inpatriate assignments. Inpatriates are high potential HCNs or foreign subsidiary managers brought to the MNC's home country, typically to headquarters, and often for leadership developmental reasons. In many cases inpatriation has the strategic intent of the inpatriates eventually returning and furthering their leadership careers within their own home country or other operations of the MNC (Moeller et al., 2016; Moeller & Reiche, 2016; Reiche, 2006). Inpatriate assignments also are increasingly being recognized as an opportunity to increase headquarter knowledge about foreign subsidiary operations and to visibly value and support the development of a more pervasive global mindset within MNC headquarters (Reich, 2011; Harvey et al., 2010). As reported by Vance et al. (2014), Bayer, the large chemical and pharmaceutical MNC headquartered in Germany, has been very active for many years in encouraging inpatriate assignments, which involve bringing to headquarters for two or three-year visits employees from its various subsidiaries located in over 80 countries—both developed and developing. Bayer executives claim that these headquarter-based assignments, as part of a global HR staffing policy, not only provide valuable experiential learning for these inpatriates, but also inevitably provide valuable knowledge transfer to Bayer headquarter leadership about foreign markets, as well as the development of a broader, global perspective.

Inpatriates' intercultural mentoring (formal and informal, peer and hierarchical) is intended to promote international adjustment and new work assignment mastery. This intercultural mentoring also should address increased understanding and identification with the MNC's organizational culture and mindset that are typically felt most at headquarters (Sekiguchi et al., 2019). In addition, supportive mentoring should be provided to assist inpatriates in overcoming negative local perceptions of foreignness bias, particularly as former HCNs from developing country subsidiaries (Mäkelä et al., 2012), and challenges of local workforce trust development (Harvey, Reiche & Moeller; 2011).

Where foreign operations knowledge transfer and broader corporate global mindset development are of a greater strategic priority than inpatriate leadership development, inpatriates may remain at headquarters for an extended, even indefinite period, which promotes the sharing of tacit knowledge to headquarters leadership (Kiessling et al., 2021). Such an extended foreign assignment should clearly involve hierarchical mentoring with differing objectives than for the inpatriate targeted for leadership development and eventual placement in other operations, as well as repatriation to his/her home country. Regardless of the former HCN's inpatriate assignment objective, regular, meaningful, and personalized intercultural mentoring with local headquarter supervisors is critical for maintaining inpatriate commitment, and in achieving intended inpatriate assignment objective success (Maley & Moeller, 2018).

Inpatriates also often come from an economic environment that is less developed than that of the MNC's home country. Especially with an extended amount of time in the new, often more affluent MNC home country, these former HCNs may be reluctant to return to their less-developed country at the close of their assignment to take upon new leadership responsibility within the subsidiary (Griga, 2017). As part of a broader and coordinated performance management effort that includes, where appropriate, clearly communicated performance goals and associated incentives (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2016), hierarchical intercultural mentoring should emphasize customized long-term rewards and career plans that encourage successful repatriation to the inpatriate's less-developed home country,

and secures a desirable return on the MNC's developmental investment of the in-patriate leadership development assignment (Griga, 2017).

HCNs on TCN assignments. Especially in comparison to PCNs, expatriates serving as third country nationals represent a greatly under-researched global professional talent category (Barmeyer et al., 2020; Selmer, 2002). They are often valued for their boundary spanning knowledge and experience, almost as hired mercenaries, with the ability to make judgements that are impartial to local host country and MNC home country vested interests (Barmeyer, Stein & Eberhardt, 2020). They also are often assigned by company headquarters to a nearby host country due to their familiarity with the geographic region as well as local language, as well as their relatively low-cost ability to provide expertise that is lacking in that host country operation (Vance et al., 2011; Reynolds, 1997). High-potential HCNs may be sent on assignment to another local subsidiary, other than MNC headquarters, to make use of their unique skills and abilities. As reported by Dunnagan et al. (2013), such use of TCN assignments is common as leadership development experiences for high potential HCNs, where Indians were assigned as TCNs to work in GM operations in China and other relatively nearby Asian countries. These new TCNs who were recently HCNs also can benefit from intercultural mentoring to support their international adjustment success. In fact, this beneficial mentoring can come from both local HCNs (to support local environment and work adjustment) and local PCNs (who have a greater understanding of future career development opportunities and valuable network connections within headquarters and other operations of the MNC).

Due to the differing work expectations, power dynamics, and company leadership development objectives involved (e.g., returning to future leadership responsibility in their home country where they originally were HCNs), these new TCNs would require different mentoring approaches, corresponding to their differing professional goals, than what might be provided for PCNs or more experienced TCNs who already have had other third country assignments (Barmeyer et al. , 2020). Given these new TCNs' typically less exposure to the national culture of the MNC's home country as well as the prevailing strategic mindset and culture at MNC headquarters, they also may lack

important background knowledge that can be shared by PCNs. Furthermore, as with the cultural similarity paradox referenced before and in keeping with the old adage, “familiarity breeds contempt,” there may be historical, political, and social sources of tension and conflict that provide obstacles to the sociocultural adjustment and the local HCN mentoring support for these newly assigned TCNs in the nearby host country that would not exist in the same degree for the more distantly arriving PCNs (Vromans et al., 2013; Selmer, 2002). In addition to special preparation and on-site training of these new TCNs to support their international adjustment in the new host country, special considerations for the selection and preparation of local HCNs may also be needed to encourage their full commitment to providing supportive and productive mentoring relationships to these new TCNs.

Facilitating Mentoring within MNCs

Organizations that acknowledge the important role that HCN employees in the foreign subsidiary can play in MNC knowledge management should make sure HCNL role components are taken on by the HCNs surrounding the expatriate. At the very least, organizations should ensure that their expatriates are aware of the important liaison roles that HCNs can play, so that they can invest time and energy into soliciting HCNL support and building up the right local network. An attractive way to encourage this approach is to appoint one person as the HCNL – similar to a buddy or local host (van Bakel et al., 2011; 2014; 2017) – and prepare that person for this role. It is also possible that HCNL roles can be taken on by several people, similar to a developmental network. For example, local HR professionals or other managers could inform the expatriate about what has happened in the subsidiary in the past and help the expatriate to identify the local talent within the subsidiary. A personal assistant or a communication department HCN colleague might assist in the communication with the local workforce, for example, by translating messages or inform the expatriate about certain problems that the local workforce may have. It is worthwhile to make an inventory of the people in the local subsidiary who may be able to take on some of the HCNL roles for a particular expatriate,

and make sure that the expatriate meets these persons early on in the assignment as part of the orientation process.

Organizations also should consider how to best select and prepare these HCNs for their liaison roles (Wang & Fang, 2014). Such factors as HCN personality, the perceived compensation gap between HCNs and expatriates, social categorization and in-group versus out-group assessment, previous experience with expatriates, interpersonal affect, and relationship quality may influence HCN attitudes and behaviors toward expatriates related to useful information sharing and mentoring (Kang & Shen, 2018; Varma et al., 2011; van Bakel et al. 2016). Helpful preparation may involve informing HCNL candidates about organizational expectations and also training them to fulfill these HCNL roles and behavioral components (e.g. language training for HCNs to remove language barriers while communicating with the expatriate, or by offering them a short stay at headquarters as in-patriates to increase familiarity with the MNC's organizational culture) (Vance & Paik, 2005). Furthermore, offering career development support encourages HCNs to display extra-role helping behavior towards expatriates, which in turn also enhances the HCN's perceived career capital (Yamao et al., 2020). Without appropriate preparation and training, HCNs may hold cultural values that discourage their effective mentoring. In fact, the predominant host country culture may influence the amount of mentoring an expatriate receives while abroad; expatriates are more likely to receive mentoring in individualistic cultures, and in those cultures with small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance (Feldman and Bolino, 1999). Moreover, since both PCNs and HCNs can influence the nature and quality of the interpersonal interaction, they both may benefit from pre-assignment and on-site preparation and training to reduce potential misperceptions and problematic behaviors and encourage interpersonal behaviors that would increase trust, mutual understanding, and affinity leading to positive working relationships where knowledge sharing and mentoring can flourish (Wang & Varma, 2018; DeNisi & Sonesh, 2016; Vance & Paik, 2005; 2002). Training can help reduce barriers to the development of the intercultural relationship (Murphy & Ensher, 1997), and should focus on understanding cultural differences, increasing communication skills of both parties

and encouraging the setting of ground rules to enable open communication, and providing opportunities for the mentor to solicit feedback from the mentee. Effective (i.e., culturally aware) mentors need to pay attention to the culturally-based perceptions and behaviors of their protégés to optimize positive outcomes. Both mentee and mentor should learn as much as possible about each other's cultural values, assumptions, experiences, and expectations before fully engaging in a mentoring relationship to facilitate a good start and realize the full potential of the relationship. Although it is normally expected that such cross-cultural learning will take place, practice shows that this is not always the case (Osula & Irvin, 2009). Murphy and Ensher (1997) also suggest that it is helpful for organizations to set up formal programs and reward systems that emphasize the importance of developing others through mentoring and evaluate employees on their effectiveness as mentors.

DISCUSSION

Mentoring can have many benefits, both for those involved in the mentoring and for the organization in terms of organizational knowledge creation and transfer, which is essential for MNCs to manage the ever-changing international environment (Minbaeva et al, 2003; Caligiuri, 2014). However, the international and cultural contexts of mentoring relationships have been largely neglected in the literature (Wang et al, 2018), calling for further empirical research and conceptualization. Major conceptual contributions of this paper have been to highlight the role of culture in mentoring, and to expand upon the traditional focus on expatriate mentoring in international business (Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Carraher et al, 2008) by also considering HCNs as mentors and mentees. In this next section we outline several areas for future research, and discuss important implications for organizations utilizing mentoring in an international context.

Directions for Future Research

First, as previously mentioned, most of the research on expatriate mentoring has (at least implicitly) focused on traditional expatriates—PCNs, at the neglect of other significant global talent categories. As described by McNulty and Brewster (2017), two primary groups of business expatriates are assigned expatriates (AEs) and *self-initiated expatriates* (SIEs), who also are residing in the host country on a temporary (albeit more indefinite) basis, and have entered the host country through their own efforts and initiative and personal resources. Besides PCNs, TCNs, and inpatriates, AEs also may include short-term assignees (Mayerhofer et al., 2004) and expatriates of host country origin (also called ex-host country nationals; Tung, 2016). While all business expatriates may benefit from local host-country mentoring associated with the current foreign assignment, as a competitive advantage imperative, each category of global talent merits its own special considerations for receiving effective mentoring. To be truly comprehensive in our understanding of international mentoring, future research should examine how these non-traditional business expatriates beyond PCNs may benefit from mentoring that is customized to fit their unique circumstances as international professionals.

SIEs in particular merit greater attention since they are probably less likely than other business expatriates to participate in a formal mentoring program, yet they face many of the same challenges as assigned expatriates. Furthermore, SIEs are increasingly an important part of the talent pool in larger organizations, and stimulating mentoring among them could increase their effectiveness, and, hence, be beneficial for the organization itself (McNulty & Vance, 2017; Vaiman et al, 2015). Taking an even broader view, intercultural mentoring also is relevant for groups of expatriates outside the traditional business professional context, such as international students, professional athletes, religious workers and those providing humanitarian aid, and refugees and other immigrants (McNulty et al., 2017). Future research also should examine to what extent and in what ways intercultural mentoring can help these additional nontraditional expatriate sojourners.

Future research is needed in better understanding the dynamics of relationships where the expatriate is the mentee. Although some useful conceptual and empirical work has been done in this

area (Crocitto et al., 2005; Mezas & Scandura, 2005), there also are contradictory findings. For example, while Carraher et al. (2008) find support for the needs-driven approach, some of their findings for home country mentors contradict the domestic mentoring literature. They found a negative effect of a home country mentor on job satisfaction and organizational identification. However, they did not separate the three stages of the expatriate assignment, preparation, sojourn, and repatriation. It is possible, for example, that a home country mentor may have a positive influence during predeparture preparation and later repatriation, but potentially have a negative influence during the sojourn stage of the expatriate experience by causing the expatriate to focus too much attention on back-home issues rather than the present host country adjustment demands, including the potentially productive development of intercultural mentoring relationships with HCNs. Schuster et al. (2017) show no significant positive direct effect of host country mentorship on expatriate psychological well-being, although a host country mentor may moderate the relationship between certain personality traits and psychological well-being. Future research should further explore the most effective approaches and benefits of expatriate mentoring involving multiple mentors, taking into account the location of each mentor, the mentor's cultural background and cultural distance, mentoring influence during the various phases of the expatriate cycle, and other possible moderating factors, such as personality, age, and perceived status (Feldman & Bolino, 1999).

More attention also is needed to the quality of the mentoring relationship, and how to improve this (van Bakel et al., 2015), which has been found to be crucial to the benefits derived from mentoring (Eby et al., 2013; Ragins et al., 2000; van Bakel et al., 2016). Van Bakel (2019) outlines the importance of taking the quality of the contact into account when examining expatriate-local interactions (e.g., an expatriate and a host country mentor), and not just examine antecedents and outcomes, since the quality of the contact may moderate this relationship. Ragins et al. (2000) propose that a mentoring relationship needs to be seen on a continuum, where some relationships are 'marginal' and others even dysfunctional. They particularly highlight 'marginal' mentors, which are

‘good enough’ but may produce outcomes similar to those of non-mentored individuals. This situation may skew results if one compares mentored individuals to non-mentored individuals.

Future research should further examine HCNL roles and how both expatriates (PCNs) and HCNs experience them. It is also important to focus on the challenges of reverse mentoring (Harvey et al., 2009), which may occur if a host country employee takes on some of the HCNL roles but is lower in the hierarchy than the expatriate (especially potentially problematic in high power distance host country cultures). What effect does this upward reverse mentoring have on the benefits accrued through this relationship, and how should such a relationship be effectively created and managed?

Another important avenue for future research is longitudinal studies. Since mentoring involves a longer-term career perspective, such studies could be very helpful in determining the relative effectiveness and value of various international context mentoring approaches. It also would be worthwhile to examine through longitudinal and case research how peer mentoring of assigned expatriates by local HCNs at local operations, which initially focuses on assisting the expatriates in their professional development and building of global career competencies for success in the local assignment, may lead to reciprocal mentoring of high potential HCNs. For example, HCN mentoring of expatriates in the local host country context may lead to the development of trusting relationships where expatriates, after their repatriation later provide advice and ongoing mentoring support to HCNs interested in career advancement within the MNC. Such longitudinal studies also could be very helpful in particular in shedding greater light on how international mentoring efforts can individually and collectively lead to enhanced knowledge management and knowledge transfer between MNC headquarters and foreign subsidiaries and across subsidiaries. With such mentoring over time, the resulting formation and strengthening of professional networks throughout MNC operations and associated enhanced organization development and MNC capability should be examined.

CONCLUSION

Important intercultural mentoring relationships of growing variety are increasingly taking place in an international context, a phenomenon that has been somewhat neglected in extant literature. When expatriates are mentored by an HCN, or when they mentor HCN or TCN colleagues or subordinates, cultural differences arise that may influence the relationship. Furthermore, organizations should be aware of the various global talent categories within their organization that could benefit from a mentoring relationship, including HCNs, and not limit their mentoring attention to only their traditional expatriates. In particular, new forms of intercultural mentoring for and by expatriates and their HCN colleagues may represent a fruitful avenue, benefiting both the expatriate and the HCN as well as playing a key role in effective MNC knowledge management, productive professional network formation, and a greater global mindset and cultural alignment, all contributing to MNC capability enhancement.

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Figure 1. HCNL mentoring for improved organizational knowledge transfer (adapted from Vance et al., 2014: 175)

