

**KNOWLEDGE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL UPON REPATRIATION:  
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNEES**

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# **KNOWLEDGE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL UPON REPATRIATION: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNEES**

## **Abstract**

This study integrates social resources theory and social exchange theory arguments to examine the knowledge benefits that international assignees' host-unit social capital entails upon repatriation. Specifically, I hypothesize that assignees' host-unit social capital, operationalized as their number of work group contacts and their proportion of trusted ties at the host unit, positively relates to two specific knowledge benefits upon repatriation: continued access to host-unit knowledge, and continued transfer of host-unit knowledge to colleagues in assignees' new positions. Assignees' perceptions of career and repatriation support are expected to moderate these relationships. The hypotheses are tested with a longitudinal sample of 85 inpatriate assignees in 10 German multinationals. I contribute to the literatures on international assignments, social capital, and MNC knowledge flows by explaining how and under which conditions assignees' host-unit social capital entails knowledge benefits upon repatriation.

**Key words:** repatriation, social capital, MNC knowledge flows, inpatriates, perceived organizational support, longitudinal research

## INTRODUCTION

For multinational corporations (MNCs) the international relocation of managers continues to be an important staffing strategy. This has been reflected in a growing body of research examining correlates and dimensions of international assignment success (Chen et al., 2010; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi, 2010). Specifically, scholars have argued that success is not only limited to the actual assignment but includes the repatriation phase (Yan et al., 2002). Repatriation can be defined as the completion of the international assignment and the assignee's move to a subsequent position, either at the individual's home unit or another MNC unit. However, despite the evidence highlighting the importance of repatriation (Harvey, 1989; Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh et al., 2000), it has received relatively less research attention (Kraimer et al., 2009).

Previous studies have addressed some of the issues in repatriation by examining the role of HR practices (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001), repatriates' expectations and commitment (Stroh et al., 2000), and factors that influence assignees' careers upon repatriation (Kraimer et al., 2009; Suutari and Brewster, 2003; van der Heijden et al., 2009). What these studies have in common is that they consider repatriation to be successful if the repatriate remains in the MNC, without examining the positive outcomes for the individual and the organization, nor *how* these benefits can be achieved (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). This is surprising given that international assignments are increasingly regarded as strategic transfers that can add long-term value to the organization (Hocking et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study is to address this gap and make three contributions to the literature. First, I apply a social capital perspective to the study of international assignments and their knowledge benefits upon repatriation. Despite the theoretical expectations (Farh et al.,

2010; Reiche et al., 2009; Toh and DeNisi, 2007) and initial empirical support (Liu and Shaffer, 2005; Reiche et al., 2011) that international assignees need to develop social relationships at the host unit to succeed, little is known about the usefulness of their social capital once assignees repatriate. I define assignees' host-unit social capital as the range and strength of their network ties (Kostova and Roth, 2003) and suggest that it entails benefits upon repatriation. One lasting benefit arising from assignees' host-unit social capital is the knowledge that is embedded in these social ties and that assignees may continue to access or transfer. Research has indeed considered international assignees both as knowledge senders (Bonache and Brewster, 2001) and knowledge recipients (Hocking et al., 2007). Scholars have also argued that these knowledge benefits not only occur during but also, importantly, after the assignment (Furuya et al., 2009; Oddou et al., 2009). In particular, I integrate social resources theory (Lin et al., 1981) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) arguments to examine how and under which conditions the social ties developed at the host unit lead to knowledge benefits upon repatriation.

Second, I address the call for adopting longitudinal research designs to facilitate the study of assignees' social ties (Farh et al., 2010), the effect of assignees' perceived organizational support (Takeuchi et al., 2009), and repatriation outcomes such as repatriate turnover or the willingness of other employees to accept an expatriate assignment (Bolino, 2007). Studies that provide data across multiple time points to study the long-term implications of international assignments for both the individual and the organization remain scarce (see Takeuchi et al., 2009 and Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010 for notable exceptions).

Third, I expand the international assignment perspective by concentrating on a specific group of assignees: inpatriates. Inpatriates are subsidiary employees that are temporarily transferred to an MNC's headquarters (HQ) (Harvey et al., 1999), and research shows that the

number of inpatriates in MNCs continues to grow (Collings et al., 2010). Although research has made significant gains in understanding the expatriation of parent-country nationals (PCNs) to foreign subsidiaries (Takeuchi, 2010), few studies have examined how individuals from other countries-of-origin deal with international transitions into the HQ and how this affects their repatriation. Initial evidence suggests that inpatriates differ in their adjustment processes to the host country compared to PCNs and third-country nationals (Shaffer et al., 1999). Similarly, whereas PCNs are equipped with the influence associated with their role as HQ representatives, individuals from the subsidiary are likely to encounter lower levels of credibility (Harvey et al., 2005). Scholars have also highlighted that cross-unit access to information and social ties at HQ, the center of the MNC, is especially critical for most subsidiaries to gain attention and influence within the MNC (Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008). This makes the study of inpatriates that can provide these resources particularly salient.

## **KNOWLEDGE BENEFITS UPON REPATRIATION**

A growing body of research has acknowledged the role of international assignees as knowledge agents that are able to adapt culturally and institutionally instilled knowledge from one MNC context to another (Fang et al., 2010; Hocking et al., 2007; Reiche et al., 2009). However, while it has been common to study knowledge sharing during the assignment, much less attention has been paid to continuous knowledge sharing upon repatriation. Conceptually, scholars have begun to examine how and why *repatriates* engage in knowledge sharing, building on the argument that both the sender's and recipient's ability and motivation to exchange knowledge are critical (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000; Minbaeva et al., 2003). Specifically, Oddou et al. (2009) conceptualize various repatriate and home-unit characteristics that affect the ability and motivation to share knowledge. Similarly, Lazarova and Tarique (2005) highlight the

role of the repatriate's readiness for and the MNC's receptivity to knowledge sharing. While empirical evidence is scarce, early research found that assignees acquire different types of knowledge that are valuable, yet underutilized sources for organizational learning upon return (Berthoin Antal, 2000). More recently, Furuya et al. (2009) studied the factors that predict an expatriate's learning of global management competencies and their transfer upon repatriation.

These initial findings point to two distinct benefits of repatriate knowledge sharing. First, by transferring the knowledge acquired during their assignment back home repatriates can benefit the organization (Reiche et al., 2009). For example, repatriates may use their experience to propose improvements to current practice (Berthoin Antal, 2000). A second benefit accrues at the level of the repatriate, for example by applying their learning upon return (Furuya et al., 2009). The literature has limited repatriates' individual benefits to knowledge acquired during the assignment. However, assignees are often unaware of their future job responsibilities until they return (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001), face substantial role conflict (Black and Gregersen, 1991) and undergo frequent job changes (Kraimer et al., 2009). As their job scope changes, their original learning from the assignment may be insufficient to perform in their new position and they may need to continue to access task-relevant knowledge from the host unit, especially if the host unit is the MNC's HQ (Harvey et al., 1999). Assignees thus act as knowledge senders and recipients not only during the assignment but also upon repatriation. Therefore, I consider two distinct knowledge benefits: ongoing access to host-unit knowledge that may benefit the individual repatriate, and transfer of host-unit knowledge to colleagues in the repatriate's new position, which may benefit the organization. The ability-motivation framework is a useful lens to examine the factors that influence the access to and transfer of host-unit knowledge. Because the repatriate is my main unit of analysis, I focus on repatriates' ability and motivation.

## Social Capital and Repatriate Knowledge Benefits

A key element that *enables* repatriates to engage in knowledge exchange is social capital because social relationships are resources that provide access to information and influence (Burt, 1992; Lin et al., 1981). It has been common to distinguish between social capital as a private good that benefits the individual actor, and social capital as a public good that benefits the wider organization (Adler and Kwon, 2002). For example, scholars have suggested that assignees' social ties at the host unit not only facilitate their own cultural adjustment (Farh et al., 2010) and performance (Liu and Shaffer, 2005), but may also bridge previously unconnected resources across MNC units, thereby initiating MNC knowledge flows (Reiche et al., 2009). While previous research has pointed to the role of repatriates' social capital at the home unit (Oddou et al., 2009), some of these ties will have already been developed before the assignment, especially if the repatriate returns to the same unit. Much less addressed yet equally important for repatriate knowledge sharing is the social capital that assignees develop *during* the host-unit posting and that provides a source of host-unit knowledge (Reiche et al., 2009).

The concept of social capital emphasizes that social interactions are not only elements of social structure but serve as resources for conducting social exchange (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The focus in this paper is specifically on assignees' regular interactions with staff at the host unit, which I refer to as host-unit social capital. In the case of inpatriates, the host unit is the HQ of the MNC. In defining inpatriates' host-unit social capital, I build on Kostova and Roth's (2003) conceptualization of two distinct social capital dimensions: structural and relational. From a structural perspective, inpatriates' host-unit social capital is defined as the number of social ties with host-unit colleagues in different departments or work groups. Research shows that network range, for example in the form of contacts to distinct social circles, is associated with increased

creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006) and effective knowledge transfer (Hansen, 2002). The main element of relational social capital is trust because it strengthens the relationship between the individual and her contact ties (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Hence, I define relational social capital as the proportion of trusted ties in inpatriates' network of host-unit colleagues. Evidence suggests that trusting ties facilitate the sharing of strategic and tacit knowledge (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000; Bouty, 2000).

Repatriation provides a unique context to study the knowledge benefits of social capital for two reasons. First, upon assignees' completion of and return from their posting the host-unit social capital is transformed into boundary spanning ties that link the home and host units, benefiting both the individual and the wider MNC (Kostova and Roth, 2003). Second, repatriates' cross-unit ties have the potential to be more permanent than assignees' cross-unit ties during the assignment because they are not restricted by the duration of the assignment. This highlights the enduring knowledge benefits that social capital can have.

### **Perceived Career and Repatriation Support and Repatriate Knowledge Benefits**

The ongoing exchange of knowledge also depends on the focal actors' *motivation* to continue to engage in knowledge access and transfer (Watson and Hewett, 2006) and scholars have argued that this is particularly salient in the context of international assignees (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). Similarly, research has highlighted specific conditions under which social capital may be less likely to lead to knowledge benefits, for example because assignees are not motivated to develop boundary spanning ties between MNC units (Kostova and Roth, 2003). A key motivational factor for repatriates to engage in knowledge sharing is the perceived support from the MNC (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). Perceived organizational support concerns employees' general beliefs about the extent to which their



organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and has been found to affect assignees' adjustment (Takeuchi et al., 2009), commitment (Guzzo et al., 1994) and intentions to leave (van der Heijden et al., 2009).

One important form of organizational support is career and repatriation support (CRS) because assignees are concerned about the availability of suitable future positions in the MNC (Kraimer et al., 2009). Previous research has examined either the role of career support (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004) or repatriation support (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Guzzo et al., 1994). However, while both capture slightly different content dimensions they can be expected to form part of an overarching theoretical construct. For example, in his conceptualization Bolino (2007) explicitly distinguishes between specific repatriation assistance during assignees' return and career development plans that focus on their long-term career in the organization. Accordingly, I define perceived CRS as assignees' general beliefs about the extent to which their company provides support for (1) assignees' immediate return, and (2) their long-term career development. This perceived support signals future prospects in the MNC and will therefore motivate repatriates to continue to engage in knowledge access and transfer.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

In the following, I develop a conceptual model that theorizes about the role of assignees' ability and motivation to access and transfer host-unit knowledge upon repatriation. Specifically, while social resources theory provides a theoretical rationale for why in-patriates are *able* to access and transfer host-unit knowledge (Hypotheses 1 and 2), social exchange theory conceptualizes why assignees are *motivated* to do so (Hypothesis 3).

## **Inpatriates' Host-Unit Social Capital and Access to Host-Unit Knowledge**

I first propose that inpatriates' structural and relational social capital at the host unit will enable them to continuously access host-unit knowledge upon repatriation, which entails individual benefits. Social resources theory (Lin et al., 1981) suggests that an individual's social ties act as resources when they provide the individual with information and support for achieving specific goals and objectives. Indeed, Borgatti and Cross (2003) show that an individual's social ties with other organizational members enable the individual to learn more about what these colleagues know, which in turn facilitates the individual's search for relevant information. Similarly, Reiche et al. (2011) found inpatriates' social networks in the host country to positively relate to their firm-specific learning.

This logic also applies to repatriation. For example, certain HQ routines or standards change over time and these changes may affect how best to implement HQ policies in other MNC units. Contacting former HQ colleagues is an effective way for a former inpatriate to learn about the details of these changes. Theoretically, assignees' HQ ties can be expected to endure after the assignment for two reasons. First, research suggests that relational knowledge at the host unit – the *knowing who* – is an important resource for repatriates (Berthoin Antal, 2000). Therefore, repatriates will make an explicit effort to retain this social resource (Lin et al., 1981). Second, social capital develops through a series of positive interactions between two actors in which social resources are exchanged (Adler and Kwon, 2002). During inpatriation, these transactions may involve the inpatriate sharing local subsidiary knowledge with HQ colleagues and the latter socializing inpatriates at HQ (Harvey et al., 1999). To the extent that both parties have been responsive in their previous relationships at HQ, they will continue to expect benefits from interactions in the future (Nebus, 2006).

From a structural perspective, research suggests that the range of network ties increases the accessibility of information (Reagans and McEvily, 2003; Seibert et al., 2001b). For example, ties to different social circles facilitate an individual's creativity as these social circles are likely to possess non-redundant and heterogeneous resources (Perry-Smith, 2006). A greater range of network ties also implies an increased number of indirect ties because in a diverse network an actor's direct contacts are less likely connected to each other (Burt, 2007). Individuals may thus leverage their direct ties to access additional resources from indirect ties (Nebus, 2006). Indirect ties are less costly and relatively easy to maintain even if actors are not collocated (Hansen, 2002). In the inpatriate context, work groups at HQ will differ in terms of their functional or business focus even more so than at smaller subsidiaries. Therefore, inpatriates maintaining ties to different work groups will have a wider range of potential knowledge sources to access upon repatriation.

There is also evidence that relational social capital in the form of strong and trusting ties facilitates knowledge access. Seibert et al. (2001b) show that strong ties enable access to career-related information and sponsorship that benefit the individual. Similarly, in a study of R&D scientists Bouty (2000) found that strategic resources such as recommendations or project ideas can only be acquired under conditions of mutual trust. For inpatriates, such strategic resources may involve knowledge about the implementation of specific HQ practices. Scholars have highlighted that trust develops as a function of the cumulative history of past interactions between two actors and that these previous interactions provide cues about the other's likely trustworthiness in the future (e.g. Levin et al., 2006). To the extent that inpatriates have developed trust through interactions with HQ contacts during the assignment, this relational social capital is likely to endure upon repatriation.

*Hypothesis 1a: Inpatriates' structural social capital with host-unit staff positively relates to their access to host-unit knowledge upon repatriation.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Inpatriates' relational social capital with host-unit staff positively relates to their access to host-unit knowledge upon repatriation.*

### **Inpatriates' Host-Unit Social Capital and Transfer of Host-Unit Knowledge**

I also propose that inpatriates' structural and relational social capital at the host unit will enable them to transfer the knowledge they developed during the assignments to colleagues in their new positions, thereby benefiting the organization. These organizational benefits may, for example, arise when former inpatriates convey their acquired knowledge about the HQ culture and specific standards to colleagues upon repatriation.

Repatriates' ability to transfer such host-unit knowledge may result from the status their host-unit social capital endows them with. Social resources theory posits that individuals possess status to the extent that their social ties entail resources that are valuable to other actors (Lin, 1999). Status thus derives from the focal individual's social capital relative to the social capital of another actor (Burt, 1992). For example, there is evidence that candidates with greater social capital are more likely to be selected as board members due to the strategic network position they occupy and which they can leverage for the company (Johnson et al., 2011). Applied to the present context, inpatriates' social capital at the host unit may provide them with status because it signals to members in other MNC units that the repatriate is a valuable source of knowledge. Two arguments support this contention.

First, colleagues in the repatriate's new position will learn about the social capital the repatriate developed abroad. This is because through their work interactions repatriates will share previous experiences with their new colleagues and, in doing so, will also convey information

about the specific contacts they maintain at the host unit (Borgatti and Cross, 2003). Second, inpatriates' social ties at HQ and the related benefits are likely to be valued by their colleagues upon repatriation, which will make colleagues receptive to these benefits (Oddou et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant as most decisions concerning the allocation of resources are made at HQ rather than the subsidiary. A repatriate's colleagues may be interested in knowledge about the HQ to help their own subsidiary gain more attention from HQ (Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008) or improve their unit's bargaining power vis-à-vis the HQ (Mudambi and Navarra, 2004). Other subsidiary staff that has not previously relocated to HQ is unlikely to have the same level of social capital with HQ staff and will not gain access to HQ knowledge as easily on their own.

While repatriates' transfer of host-unit knowledge will also depend on their colleagues' ability to acquire this knowledge, I focus on the repatriate's assessment of the ease of knowledge transfer for two reasons. First, recipients may not always acknowledge when they have acquired new knowledge or accurately identify the knowledge source (Argote and Ingram, 2000), especially if they deal with multiple repatriates. Second, as the process of communicating what one knows takes time away from potentially more urgent tasks, actors will explicitly take into account the recipient's capabilities before transferring knowledge (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). Overall, when inpatriates have developed social capital at the host unit, they should therefore be more able to transfer their host-unit knowledge to colleagues in their new positions.

From a structural perspective, inpatriates' ties to a greater number of different work groups at the host unit may signal to their new colleagues a greater source of potentially relevant host-unit knowledge. This is because ties to diverse groups and networks provide additive rather than redundant information benefits (Burt, 1992). As members of diverse networks are less likely to be intricately linked (Burt, 2007), having ties to diverse networks also helps to bridge one's

direct ties to reach additional resources from one's indirect ties (Nebus, 2006). From a relational perspective, individuals' organizational status and reputation depend on the extent to which they maintain trust to other key organizational members (Sparrowe and Liden, 2005). As many senior MNC employees are located at HQ, the centre of the MNC (Harvey et al., 1999), inpatriates' trusting ties to HQ staff may give them status towards their colleagues upon repatriation and signal credibility that inpatriates have acquired relevant HQ knowledge. This will make it easier to transfer this knowledge upon repatriation. Trusting ties are particularly important if this knowledge concerns sensitive information that HQ staff may be less willing to share with newcomers such as inpatriates (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000).

*Hypothesis 2a: Inpatriates' structural social capital with host-unit staff positively relates to their transfer of host-unit knowledge upon repatriation.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Inpatriates' relational social capital with host-unit staff positively relates to their transfer of host-unit knowledge upon repatriation.*

### **Inpatriates' Perceived Career and Repatriation Support as a Moderator**

In addition to repatriates' ability to access and transfer host-unit knowledge, knowledge benefits upon repatriation also depend on whether repatriates are motivated to do so (Oddou et al., 2009). Whereas social resources theory (Lin et al., 1981) helps to explain why inpatriates should be able to continue to access and transfer host-unit knowledge upon repatriation, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests an alternative mechanism through which repatriates will be motivated to achieve these knowledge benefits.

First, evidence suggests that unless social ties are periodically renewed their value may decay over time (Rhee, 2004), especially if colleagues are located in geographically dispersed units (Burt, 2000) as is the case for repatriates. This means that inpatriates' host-unit social

capital may have limited use for their ongoing *access* to host-unit knowledge (Kostova and Roth, 2003). For continued access the repatriate may need to update their previous ties and develop new ties at the host unit. Social exchange theory provides a theoretical rationale for why CRS from the organization may motivate repatriates to do so. Specifically, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) holds that human relationships are developed based on a subjective cost-benefit analysis and a comparison with alternative relationships. If an individual perceives the benefits of a relationship to outweigh its perceived costs, the individual will initiate and maintain it (Homans, 1961). Benefits are more likely to outweigh the costs of a new relationship, if an actor can sustain a relationship in the long term (Levin et al., 2006). Perceived CRS signals that the organization values the assignee's future contributions (Yan et al., 2002). This long-term commitment will motivate repatriates to invest in updating previous social ties and build new social ties at the host unit because the benefits of these relationships such as access to task-relevant information are more likely to outweigh the costs of initiating and maintaining them. Repatriates may update previous and develop new relationships through regular business travel to the host unit. They may also leverage their indirect ties at the host unit which have been shown to decay more slowly (Burt, 2000). The updated and newly developed ties will reduce the need for inpatriates' original host-unit social capital to access relevant host-unit knowledge.

In contrast, if CRS is perceived to be low, the original social capital will be a necessary condition for any continued access to host-unit knowledge. This is because repatriates will feel that the MNC does not value their future contributions (Yan et al., 2002). Given the perceived lack of future prospects in the MNC, the costs of updating previous and developing new relationships with host-unit staff will outweigh the benefits (Homans, 1961). Instead of updating and developing these ties, repatriates may be more motivated to invest in searching for job

opportunities outside the organization (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). Overall, this suggests a negative interaction between inpatriates' perceived CRS and inpatriates' host-unit social capital on repatriate access to host-unit knowledge.

*Hypothesis 3a: Inpatriates' perceived CRS moderates the positive relationship between inpatriates' structural host-unit social capital and their access to host-unit knowledge upon repatriation such that the relationship will be weaker at high levels of perceived CRS.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Inpatriates' perceived CRS moderates the positive relationship between inpatriates' relational host-unit social capital and their access to host-unit knowledge upon repatriation such that the relationship will be weaker at high levels of perceived CRS.*

Second, to the extent that inpatriates' host-unit social capital may decay over time the status that derives from their original host-unit social capital may also weaken (Burt, 2000). Therefore, inpatriates' original host-unit social capital may also have limited use for *transferring* host-unit knowledge to colleagues upon repatriation. For continued transfer repatriates hence need to develop new relationships. For example, a repatriate may build relationships with colleagues in the new position to facilitate his or her socialization (Morrison, 2002). These new relationships will reduce the need for inpatriates' original host-unit social capital to transfer knowledge upon repatriation.

Again, social exchange theory would predict the repatriate to be more motivated to develop these new relationships if perceived CRS is high. This is because the relative benefits of developing such ties will increase as a function of the long-term prospects the repatriate views in the MNC (Homans, 1961). Through the relationships a repatriate develops the new colleagues will learn about and become interested in what the repatriate knows (Borgatti and Cross, 2003), irrespective of the signaling effect that the repatriate's original host-unit social capital may convey. This will make it easier for the repatriate to transfer host-unit knowledge to new



colleagues. In contrast, if CRS is perceived to be low, the status derived from an inpatriate's original host-unit social capital will be a necessary condition for transferring host-unit knowledge upon repatriation. This is because the costs of developing and maintaining relationships with colleagues in the new position will outweigh the benefits given the lack of future prospects in the MNC. Low perceived support may also lead repatriates to behave opportunistically and withhold host-unit knowledge from their new colleagues to improve their employability in the MNC (Leana and Van Buren, 1999). Taken together, this suggests a negative interaction between inpatriates' perceived CRS and inpatriates' host-unit social capital on repatriate transfer of host-unit knowledge.

*Hypothesis 3c: Inpatriates' perceived CRS moderates the positive relationship between inpatriates' structural host-unit social capital and their transfer of host-unit knowledge upon repatriation such that the relationship will be weaker at high levels of perceived CRS.*

*Hypothesis 3d: Inpatriates' perceived CRS moderates the positive relationship between inpatriates' relational host-unit social capital and their transfer of host-unit knowledge upon repatriation such that the relationship will be weaker at high levels of perceived CRS.*

## **METHODS**

### **Sample and Procedures**

To test my hypotheses, I sent an online survey to a sample of 643 inpatriates at 10 German MNCs' HQs, ensuring the confidentiality of responses to all participants. A reminder email was sent two weeks later. A total of 286 completed surveys were returned (a 44.5% response rate). These respondents came from 45 countries-of-origin, 76% were male, and 79% were married or had a partner. Their average age was 37 years and their average organizational tenure 9.4 years. They had spent an average of 24.5 months on their assignments.

To collect data on my dependent variables from repatriated assignees, I conducted a second survey two years later. The sample consisted of the 189 respondents that had voluntarily provided their email addresses at Time 1. Out of the 189 individuals that were contacted via their respective email addresses, 113 completed the Time 2 questionnaire and returned it (a 59.8% response rate). Of these, 20 were still in their original inpatriate assignments and eight had left the company, resulting in a final sample of 85 repatriates that came from all 10 German MNCs. The respondents' demographic breakdown was as follows: They came from 26 countries-of-origin, 88% were male, and 80% were married or had a partner. At the time of the first survey, their average age was 37.3 years, they had spent an average of 26.2 months as inpatriates, and their average organizational tenure was 9.2 years. These characteristics are similar to the full sample at Time 1. I conducted an analysis of variance to compare all Time 1 measures across those respondents not included in the final sample ( $n = 201$ ) and those that were ( $0 =$  Time 2 nonrespondents,  $1 =$  Time 2 respondents). Time 2 nonrespondents did not significantly differ from Time 2 respondents in their number of work group contacts ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SD = 4.45$ ,  $F = 1.52$ ,  $p > .05$ ), proportion of trusted ties in network ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = .87$ ,  $F = .41$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and perceived CRS ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ,  $F = .12$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This indicates that the subsample at Time 2 is representative of the larger sample at Time 1. Further, 46.3% of the respondents had received a promotion, 52.5% reported a lateral move and only 1.3% a demotion at Time 2.

## **Measures**

To avoid consistency bias in participants' responses, I used both ego-network and perception-based question formats at Time 1. Except for inpatriates' structural host-unit social capital, I measured all items along seven-point Likert-type scales. Inpatriates rated the predictor variables (structural host-unit social capital, relational host-unit social capital, and perceived

CRS) at Time 1 and the two outcome variables (access to host-unit knowledge, and transfer of host-unit knowledge) at Time 2.

*Inpatriates' host-unit social capital.* I measured inpatriates' structural social capital as their number of contact ties to other work groups (Seibert et al., 2001b). Respondents were asked the following question: 'With how many work groups (departments, work units, committees, taskforces, etc.) at HQ do you have regular contact?' Responses ranged from one to 24 work groups. I followed an ego-network approach to data collection to measure inpatriates' relational social capital. The ego-network approach takes the perspective of the focal individual in a network rather than the network as a whole and lends itself to the study of individuals that are dispersed across separate networks (Burt, 1992), as is the case with international assignees. Respondents were asked to consider up to 10 people with whom they interacted on an everyday basis and answer a set of questions for every person identified. I measured the proportion of trusted ties in network with a three-item measure based on Reiche et al. (2011). Respondents were asked to rate each item for each contact person listed in their ego network. An example item is 'To which extent can you rely on this person without any fear that s/he will take advantage of you?' (1 = not at all to 7 = to a great extent). To arrive at a ratio of trusted ties in network, I first aggregated and averaged these three items for each contact (alphas ranging from .70 to .81; average  $\alpha = .76$ ). Second, for each respondent I calculated the total number of contacts with an average score of trust (i.e. across the three items) of four or above (on a scale of one to seven), reflecting high trust. Third, to reflect the number of contacts a respondent had reported, I divided the number of high-trust contacts by network size (ranging from zero to 10).

*Perceived CRS.* Whereas scales exist that tap into dimensions of perceived CRS, these tend to focus either on career support (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004) or repatriation support (Guzzo

et al., 1994). However, given my conceptualization of an overarching theoretical construct of perceived CRS, I was interested in using an aggregate measure. This is in line with Chen et al. (2010) who similarly theorized about an aggregate subsidiary-level construct of perceived support. Because combining existing scales into a new measure potentially changes the properties of the original scales and therefore requires further validation (Schriesheim et al., 1993), I decided to develop a new scale (see Appendix for the final six items). I selected items that were similar in content to Kraimer and Wayne's (2004) scale of career support and Guzzo et al.'s (1994) scale of repatriation support. To assess the content validity of this measure, I subjected my items to an evaluation by four scholars with expertise in the careers and international assignment literatures. To check for face validity of my final six-item measure, I interviewed a random sample of eight inpatriates at a German MNC as part of a survey pilot test to confirm that these items are relevant. The six items that appear in the Appendix were confirmed as relevant by all eight inpatriates, and therefore included in my survey.

To provide further evidence of construct validity, I conducted a series of correlation analyses with theoretically-based variables that could be expected to either converge or diverge from perceived CRS. These variables were measured in the same Time 1 survey as my focal construct ( $n = 286$ ). Supporting convergent validity, perceived CRS correlated significantly positively with perceived career prospects ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ), measured with five items from Reiche et al. (2011). A similar effect size of correlation between a dimension of perceived career support and perceived career prospects has been shown elsewhere ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ; van der Heijden et al., 2009), indicating that both constructs are strongly correlated yet distinct. Perceived CRS also correlated significantly positively with intention to remain ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ), measured with three items from Bozeman and Perrewé (2001), career mentoring at HQ ( $r = .31$ ,

$p < .01$ ), measured with four items from Dreher and Ash (1990), and the degree to which the MNC had established a formal inpatriation program ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ). Supporting discriminant validity, perceived CRS was not significantly related to inpatriates' ability to absorb new knowledge ( $r = .08, p > .05$ ), measured with two items from Mahnke et al. (2005), inpatriate learning ( $r = .11, p > .05$ ), measured with four items from Reiche et al. (2011), or identification with subsidiary management ( $r = .13, p > .05$ ), measured with three items from Reade (2001).

To test for the possibility that perceived CRS may be two separate constructs, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. To ensure stable parameter estimates I used the larger Time 1 sample ( $n = 286$ ). Accordingly, I compared the one-factor model in which all items loaded on a single factor ( $\chi^2 = 115.18, df = 9, CFI = .87, SRMR = .12$ ) with the two-factor model that separated the items related to career support and repatriation support, respectively ( $\chi^2 = 79.45, df = 8, CFI = .91, SRMR = .07$ ). The decrease in  $\chi^2$  ( $\Delta\chi^2 = -35.73, \Delta df = 1, p < .01$ ) was significant, providing support for a two-factor solution. However, the correlation between both dimensions was .86 ( $p < .01$ ) and the substantive results were highly similar when analyzing the data with each dimension separately. Because theoretically both dimensions can be expected to form part of an overall construct (Bolino, 2007) I followed Chen et al. (2010) to aggregate and then average the six items to form a single score of perceived CRS ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

*Access to host-unit knowledge.* I operationalized access to host-unit knowledge upon repatriation as respondents' access to information and resources that are relevant in their new positions. I built on Spreitzer's (1996) six-item scale measuring access to information and resources and adopted it to the inpatriate context. An example item is 'I have access to the strategic information from HQ that I need to do my current job well' (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Again, all six items were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Transfer of host-unit knowledge.* Because knowledge transfer upon repatriation depends on the organizational receptivity to this knowledge (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005), I built on Reagans and McEvily's (2003) ease of knowledge transfer scale to measure respondents' transfer of host-unit knowledge to their new colleagues. The five items (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) capture both recipient motivation (e.g. 'My current colleagues are interested in the knowledge I have developed while working in my original in-patriate position') and recipient ability (e.g. 'My current colleagues' expertise makes it easy for me to transfer the knowledge I have developed while working in my original in-patriate position') and were averaged to create a scale score ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

*Control variables.* I included a set of controls that may potentially influence the study's outcome variables. I controlled for gender (1 = male, 2 = female) because it was shown to affect the formation and inherent benefits of social ties (Lin, 1999). In line with repatriate research (Kraimer et al., 2009), I also included the demographic variables of age (self-reported in years) and organizational tenure (self-reported in months). As social capital takes time to develop (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), I controlled for the time respondents had already spent on their assignments at Time 1 (measured in months). Moreover, Oddou et al. (2009) have suggested that repatriate knowledge transfer is more likely to occur if recipients are able to absorb the knowledge that repatriates share. This absorptive capacity may result from having engaged in previous knowledge transfer with the repatriate's predecessors. At Time 1, I therefore controlled for whether respondents took over their position from another in-patriate of the same subsidiary (0 = No, 1 = Yes). Further, international assignees may obtain specific objectives concerning the knowledge they are expected to transfer while abroad (e.g. Hocking et al., 2007). If in-patriates have received such objectives prior to or during the assignment, they may continue to engage in

knowledge transfer upon return. Accordingly, I included a two-item measure of knowledge transfer objectives ( $\alpha = .86$ ), including 'I have received clear objectives regarding the information and knowledge I am expected to share with my colleagues at HQ' (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Finally, building on Seibert et al. (2001a) I controlled for respondents' career move from their inpatient assignments to their new positions at Time 2 (1 = demotion, 2 = lateral move, 3 = promotion). As there were no statistically significant mean differences in my endogenous variables across the 10 companies, neither for access to host-unit knowledge ( $F = 1.30, p > .05$ ) nor for transfer of host-unit knowledge ( $F = 1.13, p > .05$ ), I combined the data to conduct my analyses.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

Because my moderator and dependent variables were all continuous, multi-item and perception-based measures, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate their discriminant validity. Accordingly, I compared the one-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 264.80, df = 119$ ) with a two-factor model in which both dependent variables loaded on the same factor ( $\chi^2 = 257.70, df = 117$ ) and a three-factor model differentiating between each respective variable ( $\chi^2 = 249.43, df = 116$ ). The respective decrease in  $\chi^2$  between the one-factor and the three-factor model ( $\Delta \chi^2 = -15.37, p < .01$ ), and between the two-factor and the three-factor model ( $\Delta \chi^2 = -8.27, p < .01$ ), was significant, suggesting that all three variables are distinct constructs.

Although my longitudinal research design limits the risk of common method bias, the data across both time periods stem from the same respondents. Therefore, I tested for the potential of common method bias. I followed Lindell and Whitney's (2001) recommendations to introduce a marker variable for conducting this test. Such a marker should be measured by the

same instrument as the scales used in the analysis and should be theoretically unrelated to the substantive variables in the study. I chose the variable ‘identification with subsidiary management’ (three-item scale,  $\alpha = .75$ ), measured at Time 1, as a marker variable because this variable was not used in my analyses, a theoretical relationship to the other variables was not to be expected and because it was measured in the same way as most of my other variables. An inspection of the partial correlations between all variables, controlling for identification with subsidiary management, showed that all significant correlations in Table 1 remained significant. I also note that because common method variance acts as a main effect, it does not inflate the possibility of falsely detecting moderation (Shaffer et al., 1999). Overall, this provides confidence that common method bias is not an important issue in my study.

Table I reports the variables’ means, standard deviations and correlations, including their 95% confidence intervals (CI). In the regression analyses, I only used control variables whose 95% CI of their correlation with any of the endogenous variables does not include zero. Eliminating controls that are uncorrelated with the endogenous variables avoids potential spurious effects that controls may have when they are significantly related to the predictor, but not the criterion variables (i.e., Type I errors are reduced), and it helps to conserve power for detecting statistical significance (Becker, 2005). Maintaining statistical power is important given the study’s relatively lower sample size. Cohen (1992) suggests that to achieve a power of .80, with an alpha of .05 and a medium-to-large effect size, a sample of approximately 80 respondents has sufficient power for analyses containing eight independent variables. Because the correlations of only three control variables (gender, knowledge exchange objectives, career move) with either endogenous variable have a 95% CI not including zero, my sample provides sufficient power to detect medium-to-large effect sizes.



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Insert Table I about here  
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### **Analytic Procedure**

I used moderated regression analyses to test all hypotheses. Accordingly, I centered the substantive variables (number of work group contacts, proportion of trusted ties in network, and perceived CRS) before creating interaction terms (Aiken and West, 1991). For each of the two dependent variables – access to host-unit knowledge and transfer of host-unit knowledge – I conducted a separate regression analysis. In the first step, I entered the three control variables. In the second step, I added number of work group contacts, proportion of trusted ties in network, and perceived CRS to examine the main effects. The third step added the two-way interaction terms between number of work group contacts and perceived CRS, and between proportion of trusted ties in network and perceived CRS.

### **Tests of Hypotheses**

Table II summarizes the OLS regression results for inpatriates' access to and transfer of host-unit knowledge. Hypotheses 1a-b propose that inpatriates' number of work group contacts and their proportion of trusted ties in network should be positively related to repatriate access to host-unit knowledge. As shown in Model 2, both number of work group contacts and proportion of trusted ties in network were significantly positively related to access to host-unit knowledge, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Hypotheses 2a-b assert that inpatriates' number of work group contacts and their proportion of trusted ties in network should also positively relate to repatriate transfer of host-unit knowledge. Model 5 reveals that the proportion of trusted ties in network

was significantly positively related to transfer of host-unit knowledge, whereas number of work group contacts was not. Hypothesis 2b is hence supported and Hypothesis 2a rejected.

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Insert Table II about here  
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According to Hypothesis 3a, perceived CRS will moderate the relationship between inpatriates' number of work group contacts and repatriate access to host-unit knowledge. As shown by Model 3, the interaction term is negative and significant, indicating an antagonistic interaction effect of number of work group contacts and perceived CRS on access to host-unit knowledge. Figure I shows the regression equation at high and low levels of perceived CRS (one standard deviation above and below mean). Post-hoc analyses (Aiken and West, 1991) revealed that number of work group contacts is positively related to access to host-unit knowledge when perceived CRS is low ( $\beta = .50, t = 3.12, p < .01$ ) but not significantly related to access to host-unit knowledge when perceived CRS is high ( $\beta = .06, t = .37, p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 3a is therefore supported. No significant interaction effect was found between inpatriates' proportion of trusted ties in network and perceived CRS on access to host-unit knowledge, thus failing to support Hypothesis 3b.

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Insert Figure I about here  
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Hypothesis 3c posits that perceived CRS will also moderate the relationship between inpatriates' number of work group contacts and repatriate transfer of host-unit knowledge. Model

6 reveals a negative and significant interaction term, supporting an antagonistic interaction effect of perceived CRS and number of work group contacts on transfer of host-unit knowledge. Figure II illustrates this interaction effect at high and low levels of perceived CRS. Post-hoc analyses showed that number of work group contacts is positively related to transfer of host-unit knowledge when perceived CRS is low ( $\beta = .33, t = 2.25, p < .05$ ) but not significantly related to transfer of host-unit knowledge when perceived CRS is high ( $\beta = -.12, t = -.98, p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 3c is therefore supported. In contrast, I detected no significant interaction effect between inpatriates' proportion of trusted ties in network and perceived CRS on transfer of host-unit knowledge, leading me to reject Hypothesis 3d.

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Insert Figure II about here  
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## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study used a longitudinal research design to investigate the ongoing knowledge benefits of inpatriates' host-unit social capital upon repatriation. Specifically, the results suggest that inpatriates' structural host-unit social capital relates to repatriate access to host-unit knowledge whereas inpatriates' relational host-unit social capital relates to both their access to and transfer of host-unit knowledge upon return. Further, inpatriates' perceptions of CRS by the organization were found to weaken the need for their structural host-unit social capital in relating to inpatriates' access to and transfer of host-unit knowledge upon repatriation. The moderator results help to explain why I did not find a main effect of number of work group contacts on repatriate transfer of host-unit knowledge. It seems that inpatriates' structural host-unit social

capital is only relevant for their transfer of host-unit knowledge when perceived CRS is low but neither at high nor medium levels of perceived support.

### **Theoretical Implications**

My results contribute to research on international assignments, social capital, and MNC knowledge flows. First, this study is among the first to collect data on international assignees both during and after their relocations. Drawing from social resources theory, this allowed me to explicitly study how the social ties assignees develop at the host unit serve as future social resources. My findings highlight that assignees not only need to develop host-unit social capital to succeed during their posting as previously suggested (e.g. Farh et al., 2010) but, importantly, that this social capital is instrumental for their future positions. Specifically, my study offers two specific resources that research may incorporate as additional criteria for assessing assignment success: continued access to host-unit knowledge that may provide repatriates with task-relevant resources in their subsequent positions, and ongoing transfer of host-unit knowledge to their new colleagues upon return. Overall, these findings provide empirical support to the notion that assignment success reaches beyond the relocation stage (Yan et al., 2002) and address the call for empirically investigating the extent to which repatriate knowledge transfer actually occurs (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007).

Further, I integrated social resources theory and social exchange theory arguments to explain repatriates' ability and motivation to access and transfer host-unit knowledge, and show that they imply alternative mechanisms through which these knowledge benefits occur. My result that in-patriates' structural host-unit social capital only positively related to their transfer of host-unit knowledge at low levels of perceived support suggests that CRS is a more important determinant of repatriate transfer of host-unit knowledge than structural host-unit social capital:

Whereas perceived CRS reduces the need for structural social capital during the assignment, the latter does not reduce the need for perceived CRS. This finding points to a relative importance of social exchange theory explanations and hence individual motivation for achieving knowledge benefits upon repatriation. It also supports the contention that, to a certain extent, MNCs may influence repatriation benefits irrespective of the assignee's experiences during relocation by providing adequate support (Oddou et al., 2009). While social exchange theory has been suggested as a fruitful lens to study expatriate adjustment (Takeuchi, 2010) my study demonstrates its instrumental value for other assignment-related phenomena.

In addition, I focused on inpatriates, a group of assignees that has received relatively less empirical attention. Scholars have called for a more differentiated analysis of groups of international staff and their distinct characteristics (Collings et al., 2010). My findings suggest that the social capital inpatriates develop at HQ has several distinct benefits. Although my study did not include data from PCN assignees and their social capital at foreign subsidiaries, we may speculate that compared to PCNs inpatriates' host-unit social capital entails relatively greater benefits given that the HQ remains central in MNC-wide strategic decision-making and resource allocation. For example, inpatriates' HQ social capital may provide access to influential senior managers at HQ that can offer future career sponsorship (Seibert et al., 2001b).

Second, my results contribute to social capital research. The finding that structural social capital had no significant effect on assignees' transfer of host-unit knowledge suggests that the status derived from these ties may indeed weaken over time. This may be because social interactions with members from different networks fluctuate as individuals change positions at the host unit. This confirms research illustrating that unless actors adapt their ties to these changes, the ties may lose their instrumental value (Rhee, 2004). However, because perceived

CRS did not reduce the need for in-patriates' relational host-unit social capital my results also suggest that different tie types (i.e. trust vs. network range) may vary in their relative tendency to decay. It is also possible that repatriates' new relationships take time to initiate trust, which makes their original relational social capital important in the meantime. This is especially the case for the new ties that repatriates build with host-unit staff as the lack of face-to-face contact may limit the development of trust altogether (Kostova and Roth, 2003).

The results highlight that trusting relationships developed *during* the assignment are a necessary condition for future knowledge benefits to occur. For example, such trust may be needed to counteract the physical distance between repatriates and host-unit staff for continued *access* to host-unit knowledge. Further, having trusting ties may not only enable access to information but may also be a motivation in itself to do so (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). Trust towards host-unit staff may also be a necessary condition for repatriates to continue to *transfer* host-unit knowledge: Scholars have argued that HQ employees may be unwilling to share sensitive and strategic information with subsidiary staff because they perceive them as outsiders (Harvey et al., 2005). Therefore, only if in-patriates have developed trusting ties and thus gained credibility towards HQ staff will their colleagues upon return view repatriates' host-unit knowledge as valuable. This suggests that social capital not only signals the existence of social resources embedded in an actor's ties (Seibert et al., 2001b) but also under which conditions these resources are considered beneficial by others.

I also contribute to weak tie theory. Scholars have argued that an actor's weak ties can bridge separate networks, offering access to unique resources (Granovetter, 1973). However, there is evidence that weak ties may be inadequate for transferring more complex knowledge (Reagans and McEvily 2003). My findings imply that repatriates' continuous access to and

transfer of host-unit knowledge require strong and trusting rather than weak ties with host-unit staff. This may be because the knowledge assignees acquire and transfer to other colleagues will be more complex, tacit and locally embedded (Bonache and Brewster, 2001). Only trusting ties will therefore be sufficient for adapting host-unit knowledge to another MNC unit context.

Third, I advance the micro-level foundations of MNC knowledge flows (Gooderham et al., 2011). Whereas MNC knowledge flows have been primarily studied at the organizational level (e.g. Fang et al., 2010) this approach entails several limitations, for example the underlying assumption that individuals and their knowledge are homogeneously distributed throughout the organization (Felin and Hesterly, 2007). My study points to the role of international assignees as knowledge agents in MNCs that are in a unique position to access and transfer knowledge between MNC units, not only during but also after their assignment. This provides them with a more permanent boundary spanning role than previously assumed (Kostova and Roth, 2003). It also highlights that the mere movement of people across intra-organizational boundaries does not automatically entail ongoing knowledge outcomes. Instead, assignees will be *able* to generate future knowledge benefits only if they develop social ties at the host unit, and will be *motivated* to generate future knowledge benefits if they receive adequate CRS. Finally, whereas research has conceptualized actors' ability and motivation either as additive (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000) or synergistic (Minbaeva et al., 2003) predictors of knowledge transfer my results indicate that they may, to a certain extent, compensate each other. Specifically, there may be a certain minimum level of ability and motivation to exchange knowledge, for example as shown by the necessary role of relational host-unit social capital in my study, above which however both can compensate each other. My findings also argue against the common practice of studying only the ability dimension in knowledge transfer (e.g. Mahnke et al., 2005).

## Managerial Implications

My study entails several practical implications. First, the results suggest that the benefits of the social ties assignees develop abroad reach beyond the assignment and facilitate ongoing cross-unit knowledge flows. Consequently, it is important for MNCs to actively support assignees in developing social ties at the host unit, for example through a more systematic use of induction programs and other socialization tactics (see Morrison, 2002). Similarly, MNCs need to create work environments that foster organizational citizenship behavior, not only among host-unit staff but also among assignees. Scholars have argued that citizenship behavior including the involvement in social activities enhances structural and relational social capital (Bolino et al., 2002). MNCs would also benefit from making better use of host-country mentors. Mentors can serve as an explicit source of new social capital, for example by introducing their mentees to an existing colleague network (Higgins and Kram, 2001). In addition, MNCs need to pay careful attention to managing company-internal rotations. If assignees' former social contacts move to other units or leave the organization altogether, the host-unit social capital and its inherent assets may become obsolete. This suggests that host-unit social capital may require continuous updating, for example in the form of repeated staff transfers.

My findings also highlight the role of specific organizational support practices for the exchange of information and resources in MNCs, and suggest *when* such support is necessary for repatriation benefits to materialize (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). Indeed, I showed that career and repatriation programs can reduce the need for assignees' original structural social capital for continuously accessing and transferring host-unit knowledge and thereby potentially facilitating cross-unit knowledge flows. This support is particularly important during shorter assignments where assignees have less time to build sufficient social ties. It is also relevant in culturally more



distant contexts where the development of social ties is more challenging (Farh et al., 2010). As a result, MNCs need to more carefully plan and deploy their support practices than is currently done (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study's contributions have to be considered in light of its limitations. A first limitation concerns the relatively small sample size. While this limitation is duly acknowledged, it is the result of two factors: the longitudinal research design and the difficulty to obtain large repatriate samples. Indeed, the response at Time 1 was respectable given the still small population of inpatriates (Collings et al., 2010). Accordingly, a trade-off had to be made between obtaining a large sample size and further exploring the ongoing social capital benefits of international assignments. The current study shifted the balance to the latter. My study compares favorably to extant research in that it has a similar sample size to other studies ( $n = 84$  repatriates, Kraimer et al., 2009;  $n = 58$  repatriates, Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001;  $n = 133$  repatriates, Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007), yet includes data collected at different time points. I also note that because a small sample size reduces the statistical power to detect interaction effects (Aguinis, 1995) my study is a conservative test of the proposed moderating relationships. This may further explain why I did not find a significant interaction effect between proportion of trusted ties in network and perceived CRS.

In addition, the study only considered inpatriates in German MNCs. While this helped to reduce extraneous variation due to country differences, some of the findings may be unique to German MNCs. Further, although I provided evidence of construct validity for my newly developed scale of perceived CRS, it is possible that the six items do not assess the construct space sufficiently. While other scholars have also used shortened measures (e.g. Kraimer et al.,

2009) future research should further validate my scale, more explicitly contrast my items with those of other perceived support measures, and develop additional items. Similarly, my study only focuses on assignees' direct ties at the host unit without measuring their indirect ties and the inherent knowledge benefits (e.g. Hansen, 2002). While my study's multi-company, longitudinal design made this unfeasible future research may examine assignees' host-unit social capital in greater depth by focusing on a single organizational context. Finally, the use of self-report data entails various sources of response bias. The study's longitudinal character and the additional tests that were reported limit the risk of common method bias; the existence of these effects, however, cannot be completely ruled out.

The study could be extended in additional ways. For example, it would be fruitful to survey repatriates' new colleagues to examine the extent to which repatriates' host-unit knowledge is actually absorbed and benefits the organization. It would also be interesting to study for how long repatriates may serve as knowledge conduits in their new positions. Unless regularly renewed, repatriates' host-unit knowledge may become obsolete, which may lead their new colleagues to lose interest in the repatriate as a source of knowledge. In sum, this study highlights some of the factors that determine how and under which conditions individuals and MNCs continue to benefit from international assignments. In so doing, it stresses the need to examine these assignments from a strategic and career-integrative perspective rather than considering them as isolated staffing events.

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**Table I. Means, standard deviations and correlations<sup>a</sup>**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Number of work group contacts	6.45	5.08	–										
2 Proportion of trusted ties in network	.77	.28	-.09 (-.30,.13)	–									
3 Perceived CRS	3.46	1.53	.11 (-.11,.32)	.16 (-.05,.36)	<b>.89</b>								
4 Access to host-unit knowledge <sup>+</sup>	5.30	1.17	.22* (.01,.41)	.26* (.05,.45)	.24* (.03,.43)	<b>.88</b>							
5 Transfer of host-unit knowledge <sup>+</sup>	4.77	1.09	.07 (-.15,.28)	.23* (.02,.42)	.31** (.10,.49)	.48** (.30,.63)	<b>.82</b>						
6 Age	37.29	6.80	.21 (-.00,.40)	-.11 (-.32,.11)	.04 (-.17,.25)	.01 (-.20,.22)	-.09 (-.30,.13)	–					
7 Gender	1.12	.32	.00 (-.21,.21)	.04 (-.17,.25)	-.05 (-.26,.16)	.21* (.00,.41)	.09 (-.13,.30)	-.18 (-.38,.03)	–				
8 Time on assignment	26.24	19.41	-.05 (-.26,.16)	.03 (-.18,.24)	-.10 (-.31,.12)	-.14 (-.34,.08)	-.16 (-.36,.05)	.33** (.13,.51)	.01 (-.20,.22)	–			
9 Tenure	110.82	73.73	.20 (-.01,.40)	-.11 (-.32,.11)	-.00 (-.21,.21)	-.01 (-.22,.20)	-.10 (-.31,.12)	.53** (.36,.67)	-.07 (-.28,.15)	.46** (.27,.61)	–		
10 Knowledge exchange objectives	3.42	1.77	.18 (-.03,.38)	.14 (-.08,.34)	.47** (.29,.62)	.33** (.13,.51)	.25* (.04,.44)	.04 (-.17,.25)	-.06 (-.27,.16)	-.16 (-.36,.05)	-.02 (-.23,.19)	<b>.86</b>	
11 Inpatriate predecessor	.09	.29	.09 (-.13,.30)	.07 (-.15,.28)	-.01 (-.22,.20)	-.04 (-.25,.17)	.14 (-.08,.34)	-.10 (-.31,.12)	.12 (-.10,.32)	.04 (-.17,.25)	-.05 (-.26,.16)	-.10 (-.31,.12)	–
12 Career move <sup>+</sup>	1.55	.53	-.05 (-.26,.16)	-.12 (-.32,.10)	.08 (-.14,.29)	.08 (-.14,.29)	.22* (.01,.41)	-.15 (-.35,.07)	-.10 (-.31,.12)	.20 (-.01,.40)	.20 (-.01,.40)	.08 (-.14,.29)	.04 (-.17,.25)

<sup>a</sup> Bold values = alpha coefficients. All correlations two-tailed, 95% confidence interval in brackets, n = 85.

<sup>+</sup> Measured at Time 2

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

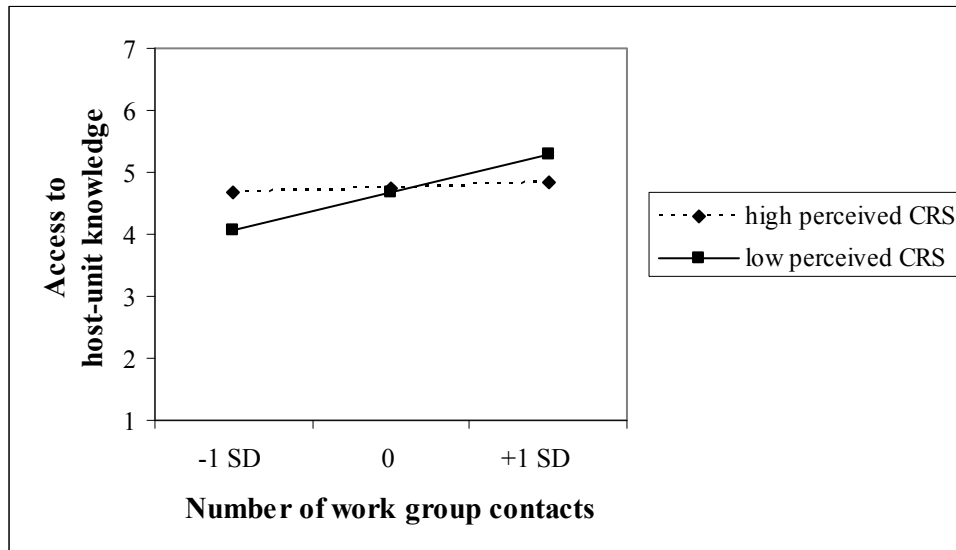
**Table II. Results of regression analyses for access to and transfer of host-unit knowledge<sup>a</sup>**

Variables	Access to host-unit knowledge						Transfer of host-unit knowledge					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β
Gender	.66 (.38)	.19	.64 (.36)	.18	.58 (.36)	.17	.42 (.36)	.13	.41 (.35)	.13	.43 (.35)	.13
Knowledge exchange objectives	.19 (.07)	.29**	.13 (.08)	.20*	.11 (.08)	.16	.15 (.07)	.25*	.06 (.08)	.10	.06 (.08)	.10
Career move	.21 (.24)	.10	.28 (.23)	.13	.20 (.24)	.09	.44 (.23)	.22*	.47 (.22)	.23*	.47 (.23)	.23*
Number of work group contacts			.06 (.02)	.25*	.06 (.02)	.29**			.03 (.02)	.14	.03 (.02)	.14
Proportion of trusted ties in network			1.10 (.46)	.25*	.92 (.47)	.23*			.80 (.44)	.24*	.78 (.45)	.23*
Perceived CRS			.05 (.10)	.06	.07 (.10)	.09			.10 (.09)	.16	.11 (.09)	.19
Number of work group contacts × Perceived CRS					-.03 (.02)	-.22*					-.03 (.02)	-.21*
Proportion of trusted ties in network × Perceived CRS					-.17 (.32)	-.06					-.23 (.31)	-.09
Δ R <sup>2</sup>			.09*		.08*				.10*		.08*	
R <sup>2</sup>	.13		.24		.32		.13		.23		.31	
F	3.48*		3.83**		4.15**		3.41*		3.71*		4.01*	

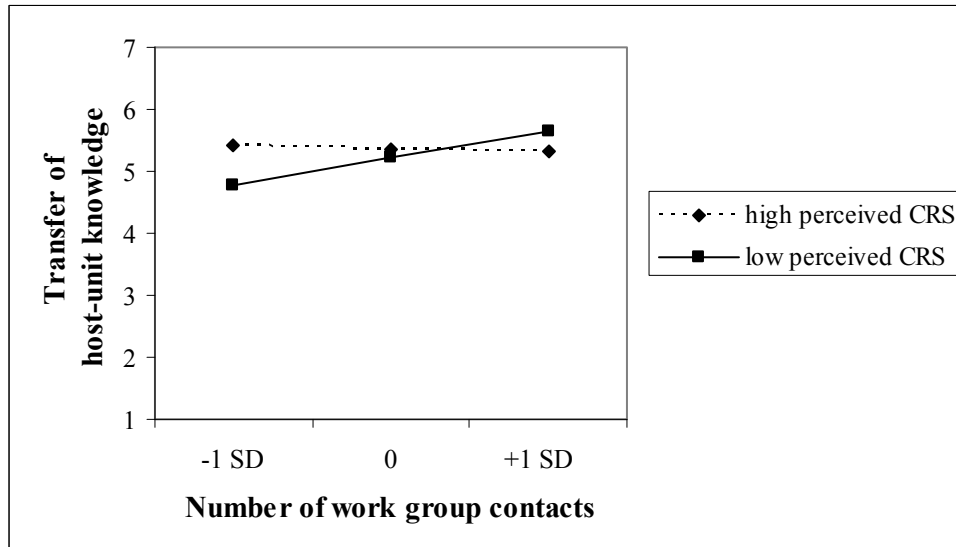
<sup>a</sup> B = unstandardized regression coefficient, S.E. = standard error, β = standardized coefficients. Two-tailed tests, n = 85.

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

**Figure I. The relationship between number of work group contacts and access to host-unit knowledge at high and low levels of perceived CRS**



**Figure II. The relationship between number of work group contacts and transfer of host-unit knowledge at high and low levels of perceived CRS**



## **APPENDIX**

### **Perceived Career and Repatriation Support Scale**

(1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

- (1) I believe the company has established a transparent repatriation system.
- (2) I believe the company has established a transparent career management system.
- (3) I believe the company handles the repatriation of its inpatriates well.
- (4) Before the assignment started, I was informed about possible subsequent job positions within the company.
- (5) I don't expect any problems with my own repatriation.
- (6) I am aware of a long-term plan for my career within the company.