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## Repatriate Knowledge Transfer: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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### Introduction

Based on the resource-based view of the firm, the value of knowledge for gaining and sustaining competitive advantages has long been established (Barney, 1991; Drucker, 1969, 1992). Knowledge can be defined as a “mental state of ideas, facts, concepts, data and techniques, recorded in an individual’s memory” (Bender & Fish, 2000, p. 126). Put differently, knowledge is information enriched by personal experience, values, beliefs, and contextual information. More recently, the relevance of intraorganizational knowledge transfers across national borders and the development of a globally savvy workforce has increased due to the international character of many organizations nowadays (Quigley, Tesluk, Locke, & Bartol, 2007; Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009). One mechanism that is applied by multinational companies to enable intraorganizational knowledge flows and to develop global leaders is sending

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employees abroad on international assignments (Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008; Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). Employees who are sent abroad on international assignments by their organization are called expatriates (McEvoy & Buller, 2013), and expatriates who return to their domestic organizations are called repatriates (Berthoin Antal, 2001).

Research has shown that both expatriates and repatriates can act as boundary spanners across national borders and units of the organization, as they have lived and worked in different countries in which the company operates (Harzing, Pudelko, & Reiche, 2015; Reiche, 2011). Furthermore, they can enable intraorganizational knowledge flows and organizational learning, due to their ability to adapt and restructure knowledge and to apply it to new contexts (Argote, 2013; Argote & Ingram, 2000). Consequently, expatriates and repatriates can play a very important role in enlarging and internationalizing the knowledge base of organizations (Hocking, Brown, & Harzing, 2004; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997). Studies on expatriate knowledge transfer have reported that the influence of expatriates as knowledge transferors has a positive impact on the performance of the subsidiaries (Chang, Gong, & Peng, 2012; Fang, Jiang, Makino, & Beamish, 2010). Nonetheless, scholars have acknowledged that this focus on expatriate knowledge transfers might be too narrow and ethnocentric (Kamoche, 1997). Therefore, the competency-based view of international assignments (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006) has been expanded to include the process of knowledge transfer upon repatriation (Berthoin Antal, 2001). Knowledge transfer describes an interactive and socially embedded process between knowledge senders and recipients. Knowledge is disseminated by knowledge senders, acquired by knowledge recipients, and then applied to new contexts (Szulanski, 1996; Wang & Noe, 2010). Therefore, knowledge transfer differs from other related knowledge exchange processes, such as knowledge sharing, due to its emphasis on the application of the newly acquired knowledge by knowledge recipients (Davenport & Prusak, 1998).

The body of the literature on repatriate knowledge transfer (RKT) has grown considerably since the first empirical study by Berthoin Antal in 2000. To date, scholars have provided typologies of repatriate knowledge (Berthoin Antal, 2000; Fink & Meierewert, 2005), developed conceptual models (Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008; Lazarova & Tarique,

2005; Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009), and started to examine the variables that influence RKT success (Burmeister, Deller et al., 2015; Huang, Chiu, & Lu, 2013; Oddou et al., 2013). While these studies have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of RKT, much empirical research remains to be done. For example, quantitative research is scarce, some relationships that have been proposed conceptually have yet to be tested empirically, and the complex interrelationships between variables on different levels need to be investigated. As a result, the complex processes and relationships associated with RKT are not fully understood.

As a first step to address these limitations, I reviewed the literature on RKT that has been published between 2000 and 2015, to describe the status quo of the current scholarly conversation. I draw upon the categorization of antecedents of knowledge transfers into knowledge, individual, relationship, and contextual characteristics, which are provided by the literature on general knowledge transfers (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003; Szulanski, 1996). As a result of this synthesis, I present an integrated multilevel framework of the antecedents of RKT. Furthermore, the theoretical foundation of the literature on RKT is examined. Based on the analysis of the literature on RKT, I propose avenues for future research as well as implications for practitioners.

## Method

### Data Collection

In order to increase the objectivity of results and to provide a comprehensive overview and a conceptual consolidation of the field of RKT, I conducted a systematic review of the literature on RKT (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). The identification of relevant publications was guided by the following selection criteria. First, only publications that focused on RKT and related knowledge transfer processes (i.e., inpatriate knowledge transfers; Reiche, 2011, 2012) within an intraorganizational context were included. For example, studies that focused on related but different topics, such as repatriate retention, adjustment, career development, and talent management, were excluded. Second, only peer-reviewed journal

articles and articles from edited volumes were included to ensure high quality of the publications (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). Third, only publications in English were included. Fourth, the literature review was limited to publications between 2000 and June 2015. I choose 2000 as the starting year because other researchers have shown that no earlier work on RKT has been published. For example, Oddou et al. (2009) argued that, at that time, only three published pieces on RKT existed (Berthoin Antal, 2000, 2001; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). In addition, the literature review by Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012) on repatriation identified 39 articles in total (1999–2009). However, only eight of these publications focused on organizational knowledge, knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing, and learning transfer. Again, the first publication that was referenced here was the work by Berthoin Antal (2000). I choose to extend the period of the literature review to June 2015, to provide the most recent summary possible.

The search for relevant publications on RKT was conducted as follows: First, relevant publications were identified through a keyword search in the databases Business Source Premier (via EBSCOhost), PsycInfo, and Web of Science. These databases were chosen because they provide a comprehensive overview of high-quality publications in the social sciences (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). The initial search of the databases was undertaken using two keywords—knowledge transfer and repatriation—and their derivatives (for example, knowledge sharing, knowledge exchange; repatriat\*). The *topic area* (that is, title, abstract, keywords) of publications was searched (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). This search returned 7 articles for Business Source Premier, 10 articles for PsycInfo, and 16 articles for Web of Science. However, 11 of these publications had to be excluded because they did not meet the selection criteria outlined above. Finally, after removing duplicates, 12 publications that focused on RKT remained. This initial search result was expanded by the use of the snowballing sample technique, which meant searching the reference lists of already identified publications for additional relevant publications (Greenhalgh, Potts, Wong, Bark, & Swinglehurst, 2009). The reference lists of the 12 articles were searched, and 14 other relevant publications were identified. In sum, 26 articles on RKT and closely related knowledge transfer processes (that is, in-patriate knowledge transfers; Reiche, 2011, 2012) were included in this systematic literature review.

## Data Analysis

The initial analysis of the identified publications on RKT revealed that several conceptual (for example, Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008; Oddou et al., 2009) and empirical (for example, Huang et al., 2013; Oddou et al., 2013) publications focused on the identification of variables or antecedents that influence the RKT process. Therefore, this literature review focused on this aspect. The summary of the research results with regard to the variables that influence RKT was structured according to three levels: individual, dyadic, and organizational. This multilevel logic is based on the guidance of the literature on general knowledge transfer, which has identified four groups of antecedents of knowledge transfers: knowledge, individual, relationship, and contextual characteristics (Argote et al., 2003; Kostova, 1999; Szulanski, 1996). Szulanski (1996) had argued that the internal stickiness of knowledge transfers can be explained based on these characteristics, and this categorization is widely accepted and used by knowledge transfer researchers (for example, Riusala & Suutari, 2004).

Researchers have demonstrated that knowledge is embodied by individuals (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Therefore, I subsumed knowledge characteristics under the individual level. In addition, relationship characteristics reflect the dyadic level in the proposed RKT framework, and contextual characteristics are summarized on the organizational level. I aimed to summarize the research findings with a sufficient but limited number of categories on the three levels in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the most relevant antecedents of RKT. The categories followed the guidance provided by the literature on general knowledge transfers (for example, Argote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000) and the conceptual frameworks by Bonache and Zárraga-Oberty (2008) and Oddou et al. (2009). On the individual level the categories were *knowledge* characteristics (that is, type, tacitness, criticality), ability of repatriates and recipients, and motivation of repatriates and recipients. On the dyadic level, two categories were used: interaction and mutual trust. The interaction category subsumed more quantitative aspects of the relationship between repatriates and recipients, such as frequency and intensity of interaction. In contrast, the mutual trust category consisted of more qualitative aspects of their relationship. Finally, three catego-

ries were used on the organizational level: organizational culture, organizational support, and managerial support. These categories represent contextual characteristics that have been shown to influence knowledge transfer behavior (Santosh & Muthiah, 2012).

## Results

Table 8.1 provides a chronological overview of the 26 publications on RKT. The table includes information about the year of the publication, authors, outlet, theoretical foundation, research design, and variables under investigation. In addition, the main findings of each study are briefly summarized. Before the antecedents of RKT are presented, the theoretical foundations of the identified publications on RKT will be reviewed. This analysis should enable the reader to develop a more nuanced understanding of the theoretical embeddedness of the literature on RKT.

### Theoretical Foundation of the Literature

As can be seen in Table 8.2, the literature on RKT builds on diverse theoretical foundations.

Two different theoretical approaches have primarily been used: theories on knowledge creation and organizational learning as well as the resource-based view of the firm. First, studies on RKT that built on knowledge creation and organizational learning theories have discussed the process of knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), the process of knowledge transfers (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Szulanski, 1996), and the development of learning organizations (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Garvin, 1993). This perspective has emphasized the dynamic and interactive aspect of knowledge creation and transfer, and it has clarified that organizational learning is dependent on the creation, acquisition, and dissemination of individual knowledge within the organizational network (Garvin, 1993). Second, the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt,

Table 8.1. Overview of the literature

No.	Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
1	Bender and Fish (2000)	Journal of Knowledge Mgmt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Type of knowledge</li> <li>Organizational culture</li> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>First, the authors define the terms knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Second, they argue that high-quality repatriation processes are needed in order to retain internationally experienced and knowledgeable employees that can facilitate organizational learning.</p>
2	Berthoin Antal (2001)	Journal of General Mgmt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Case study, semi-structured interviews	N = 21, German sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge criticality</li> <li>Type of knowledge</li> <li>Knowledge tacitness</li> </ul>	<p>Five types of repatriate knowledge identified: declarative (know-what), procedural (know-how), conditional (know-when), axiomatic (know-why), relational (new, know-who).</p>
3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Case study, semi-structured interviews	N = 21, German sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational culture</li> <li>Organizational support</li> <li>Managerial support</li> </ul>	<p>The author argued that barriers to knowledge sharing are based on the absence of active interest and processes rather than actual impediments. In contrast, knowledge sharing is facilitated through smaller units, number of managers with international experience, and (position) power of returnees.</p>

*(continued)*

Table 8.1. (continued)

No. Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
4 Fink and Meierwert (2005)	Human Resource Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Qualitative, narrative interviews	N = 36, Austrian sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge criticality</li> <li>Type of knowledge</li> <li>Knowledge tacitness</li> </ul>	Five types of repatriate knowledge are identified: market-specific knowledge (e.g., local systems, language, customs), personal skills (e.g., flexibility, tolerance), job-related management skills (e.g., communication, project management), network skills, general management skills (e.g., business overview, nature of business).
5 Lazarova and Tarique (2005)	Journal of World Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career theory</li> <li>Fit theories (e.g., person-job fit, structural contingency theory)</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Type of knowledge</li> <li>Knowledge criticality</li> <li>Motivation to transfer</li> <li>Interaction</li> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	The authors argue that effective knowledge transfer is dependent on the fit between individual readiness (i.e., valuable knowledge, motivation) to transfer knowledge and organizational receptivity (i.e., tools, incentives) to knowledge.



6	<p>Blakeney, Oddou, and Osland (2006)</p> <p>Palgrave Macmillan: International HRM and international assignments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource-based view of the firm</li> <li>• Communication theory</li> </ul>	<p>Conceptual</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Ability to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Ability to receive</li> <li>• Motivation to receive</li> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Mutual trust</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>The authors identify the components of the repatriate knowledge transfer process. These components are: the sender (the repatriate), the message (the repatriate's acquired assets), the recipient (domestic work-unit members), and their shared field of experience.</p>
7	<p>Furuya, Stevens, Oddou, Bird, and Mendenhall (2007)</p> <p>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication theory</li> </ul>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>N = 305, Japanese sample</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>The authors show that companies' human resource practices and repatriates' self-adjustment efforts are positively related to successful competency transfer upon repatriation.</p>
8	<p>Mäkelä (2007)</p> <p>Intl. Studies of Mgmt. &amp; Organization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social capital theory</li> </ul>	<p>Case study, semi-structured interviews and observation</p>	<p>N = 20, Nordic sample</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Mutual trust</li> </ul>	<p>Taking a social capital perspective, this article argues that expatriate relationships provide strong ties that function as channels of knowledge sharing across national borders. Expatriate relationships are on average richer than arm's length cross-border relationships and characterized by higher level of trust, multiplexity, and shared cognitive ground. Thus, expatriation can have a sustained effect on knowledge sharing within MNCs.</p>

(continued)

Table 8.1. (continued)

No. Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
9 Newton, Hutchings, and Kabanoff (2007)	Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[Not explicitly stated by authors]</li> </ul>	Quantitative	N = 52, Australian sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge criticality</li> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	The authors found that the function of the international transfer and an organization's belief about the value of the international experience of assignees affect the scope of the repatriation program offered. In order to harvest the value of the repatriates' newly gained knowledge, the functions of their international assignments and the organizational support offered need to be aligned.
10 Bonache and Zárrega-Oberly (2008)	The Intl. Journal of Human Resource Mgmt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge tacitness</li> <li>Ability to transfer</li> <li>Motivation to transfer</li> <li>Ability to receive</li> <li>Motivation to receive</li> <li>Relationship</li> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	The authors introduce a conceptual framework that analyzes the cause and effects of international assignments as knowledge transfer mechanisms. Accordingly, transfer success of international assignees will be affected by: the abilities and motivation of international staff; the abilities and motivation of local employees; and the relationship between local and international staff.

11	Crowne (2009)	Journal of Knowledge Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Managerial support</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	Knowledge transfer during and after international assignments is facilitated by feedback-seeking behaviors of top management (i.e., monitoring, inquiry, and indirect inquiry) as well as building and strengthening social networks of managers and international assignees. Thus, expatriates and repatriates can be effective knowledge transferors; however, they need to be supported by management.
12	Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, and Mendenhall (2009)	Journal of Intl. Business Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Quantitative	N = 305, Japanese sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	Intercultural personality characteristics, self-adjustment, organizational support, and repatriation policies influence the success of global competency learning while abroad, as well as global competency transfer to domestic work unit members upon return. In addition, global competency learning and transfer were positively related to repatriates' job motivation and performance.

(continued)

Table 8.1. (continued)

No. Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
13 Jassawalla and Sashittal (2009)	Human Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[not explicitly stated by authors]</li> </ul>	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	N = 50, US American sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>MNCs currently fail to take advantage of the knowledge that expatriates have acquired. Companies need comprehensive processes, systems, and structures to develop the next generation of globally trained managers that do not leave the firm after repatriation.</p> <p>The authors examine four interunit interaction contexts: interunit meetings, project groups, cross-border teams, and expatriate/repatriate interactions. They find that expatriate/repatriate contexts are associated with more interpersonal trust and shared cognitive ground than most other contexts. In addition, a significant relationship between expatriate/repatriate contexts and knowledge sharing, mediated by affective and cognitive social capital, was found.</p>
14 Mäkelä and Brewster (2009)	Human Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social capital theory</li> </ul>	Quantitative, structured interviews	N = 57 (N = 413 relationships), Finnish sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interaction</li> <li>Mutual trust</li> </ul>	

15	Oddou et al. (2009)	Journal of Intl. Business Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social categorization theory</li> <li>• Social identity theory</li> <li>• Communication theory</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Ability to receive</li> <li>• Motivation to receive</li> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Mutual trust</li> <li>• Knowledge criticality</li> <li>• Type of knowledge</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to receive</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>Oddou et al. (2009) developed a conceptual model of repatriate knowledge transfer. The model includes work unit characteristics (ability, motivation), repatriate characteristics (ability, motivation), and their interaction (shared field).</p>
16	Berthoin Antal and Walker (2011)	Emerald: The role of expatriates in MNCs knowledge mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Qualitative, structured interviews	N = 24, Chinese sample	<p>The authors argue that the success of knowledge transfers after international assignments is dependent on the following factors: organizational and individual readiness to learn, the value of the knowledge that returners have to offer, and the organized and informal processes of knowledge sharing that are in place.</p>	

(continued)

Table 8.1. (continued)

No.	Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
17	Reiche (2011)	Human Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social resources theory</li> </ul>	Quantitative	N = 269, German sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation to transfer</li> <li>Ability to receive</li> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>Reiche (2011) examined the role of expatriates as boundary spanners and knowledge transmitters. He found that expatriates' boundary spanning was positively related to their knowledge transfer efforts and their perceptions of HQ staff efforts to acquire knowledge. This relationship was moderated by perceived HQ absorptive capacity and mentoring by HQ staff.</p>
18	Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012)	European Journal of Training and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career transition theory</li> <li>Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Literature review	N = 39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>The authors conducted a literature review of articles published on repatriation, knowledge transfer, and organizational learning between 1999 and 2009. They identified four main themes with regard to repatriation: repatriation adjustment, organizational commitment, turnover attention, and career transitions.</p>

19 Reiche (2012)	Journal of Mgmt. Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social resources theory</li> <li>• Social exchange theory</li> </ul>	Quantitative, N = 85, from longitudinal 10 German MNCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of knowledge</li> <li>• Ability to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	Reiche (2012) examined the knowledge benefits of in-patriates' structural and relational host-unit social capital. He found that structural host-unit social capital enables continued access to host-unit knowledge, whereas repatriates' relational host-unit social capital facilitates both access to and transfer of knowledge upon return. In addition, perceptions of career and repatriation support moderated the relationship.
20 Santosh and Muthiah (2012)	The IUP Journal of Knowledge Mgmt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Quantitative N = 155, Indian sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge criticality</li> <li>• Managerial support</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> </ul>	The authors show that workplace professionalism, source credibility based on reputation and work experiences, high knowledge quality, source awareness of who has international knowledge, and a facilitating organizational climate had a positive impact on the knowledge-seeking environment. In turn, this kind of environment facilitated RKT.

(continued)

Table 8.1. (continued)

No. Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
21 Huang et al. (2013)	Journal of Knowledge Mgmt.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agent theory</li> <li>• Social exchange theory</li> <li>• Social network theory</li> </ul>	Quantitative	N = 140, Chinese sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Interaction (opportunity)</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	Huang et al. (2013) examined the role of formal and informal knowledge governance mechanisms (KGMs) on RKT success. The results indicate that both formal and informal KGMs have significant positive influence on the knowledge-sharing motivation of repatriates as well as their knowledge-sharing opportunities. As a result, knowledge sharing was facilitated.
22 Oddou et al. (2013)	Organizational Dynamics	• [not explicitly stated by authors]	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	N = 45, German, Japanese, U.S. American sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge criticality</li> <li>• Ability to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Mutual trust</li> <li>• Managerial support</li> </ul>	The authors analyzed hindering and facilitating factors for RKT. Hindering factors include being viewed as an outsider, unrelated job reentry job, working for uninterested managers, parochial work structures. Facilitating factors include repatriate ability, repatriate motivation, work unit acceptance and mutual trust, and the role of the manager.



23	Welch and Steen (2013) Human Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managerial support</li> <li>• Organizational support</li> </ul>	<p>The authors used three scenarios—learning from failure, failure to learn, and lost opportunities—to demonstrate how learning awareness can facilitate the efficacy of international staffing.</p> <p>The authors present a multilevel conceptual framework of expatriate knowledge utilization, including expatriate and subsidiary characteristics. They also discuss the relevance of outward knowledge flows that could follow the pattern of inward knowledge flows, even though outward knowledge transfer might be more complex.</p>
24	Gonzalez and Chakraborty (2014) Human Resource Mgmt. Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Conceptual	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to transfer</li> <li>• Motivation to transfer</li> <li>• Ability to receive</li> </ul>	<p>The authors present a multilevel conceptual framework of expatriate knowledge utilization, including expatriate and subsidiary characteristics. They also discuss the relevance of outward knowledge flows that could follow the pattern of inward knowledge flows, even though outward knowledge transfer might be more complex.</p>
25	Harzing et al. (2015) Human Resource Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge-based view of the firm</li> </ul>	Quantitative	<p><math>N = 813</math>, heads of human resources, 13 countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Examination of influence of different (a) types of assignees, (b) functional areas, and (c) countries]</li> </ul>	<p>Different categories of international assignees contribute differently to knowledge transfer success. The influence of former in-patriate managers (i.e., repatriates to subsidiaries) is more important than the influence of expatriates in facilitating cross-unit knowledge transfers.</p>

(continued)

Table 8.1. (continued)

No.	Authors	Outlet	Theoretical foundation	Method	Sample	Variables*	Main findings
26	Burmeister Deller et al. (2015)	Journal of Knowledge Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge creation and organizational learning</li> </ul>	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews	N = 29, German/US American sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge criticality</li> <li>Ability to transfer</li> <li>Motivation to receive</li> <li>Mutual trust</li> <li>Managerial support</li> </ul>	The purpose of this article is to understand how the knowledge transfer process unfolds in the repatriation context. The findings are summarized in a proposed RKT process model, which describes the roles and knowledge transfer-related activities of repatriates, recipients, and supervisors as well as their interaction during four transfer phases: assessment, initiation, execution, and evaluation.

Note: \*Variables as defined in Fig. 8.1. Multilevel framework of repatriate knowledge transfer

**Table 8.2.** Theoretical foundation of the literature

Rank*	Theory	Authors
1	Knowledge creation and organizational learning	1. Bender and Fish (2000) 2. Berthoin Antal (2000) 3. Berthoin Antal (2001) 4. Furuya et al. (2009) 5. Berthoin Antal and Walker (2011) 6. Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012) 7. Welch and Steen (2013) 8. Burmeister, Deller et al. (2015)
2	Resource-(or knowledge-)based view of the firm	1. Fink and Meierewert (2005) 2. Blakeney et al. (2006) 3. Bonache and Zárraga-Oberty (2008) 4. Crowne (2009) 5. Santosh and Muthiah (2012) 6. Gonzalez and Chakraborty (2014) 7. Harzing et al. (2015)
3	Social capital theory/Social resources theory	1. Mäkelä (2007) 2. Mäkelä and Brewster (2009) 3. Reiche (2011) 4. Reiche (2012)
4	Communication theory	1. Blakeney et al. (2006) 2. Furuya et al. (2007) 3. Oddou et al. (2009)
5	Social exchange theory	1. Reiche (2012) 2. Huang et al. (2013)
6	Others (only utilized once)	1. Lazarova and Tarique (2005) 2. Oddou et al. (2009) 3. Huang et al. (2013)

*Note:* \*Rank based on frequency of utilization in research on repatriate knowledge transfer. Some studies utilized more than one theory

1984) argues that resources that are valuable, rare, non-imitable, and non-substitutable can represent a sustained competitive advantage of firms. Emerging from the resource-based view of the firm, social capital theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002) and social resource theory (Lin, 1999; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981) have also been used to describe the value of resources that are associated with social relationships. These social resources can help individuals to achieve certain objectives by providing information and support (Mäkelä, 2007; Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009; Reiche, 2011, 2012).

In addition to these theoretical foundations, scholars who have examined RKT have also used communication theory (Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Wood, 1997) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Homans, 1961). The basic source-recipient model in communication theory posits that communication is dependent on a sender, a message, and a recipient. The transactional model of communication by Wood (1997) highlights the relevance of the relationship between senders and recipients, a relationship that she refers to as shared field. Social exchange theory posits that social behavior is a result of a self-interested cost-benefit analysis of the interactions with and relationships to others (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Homans, 1961). Thus, relationships are maintained as long as reciprocation of one's investments in that relationship can be expected. After this brief review of the theoretical foundations of extant research on RKT, I will now analyze the literature on RKT with regard to its antecedents.

## Multilevel Analysis of the Literature

The conceptual RKT framework presented in Fig. 8.1 synthesizes the research results of previous studies with regard to the antecedents of RKT on three levels: individual, dyadic, and organizational. The presentation of the results is structured according to this framework.

### Individual Level: Knowledge

#### Type of Knowledge

Two of the publications on RKT focused on the analysis of the type of knowledge that repatriates acquired while working abroad and then brought back to the parent company (Berthoin Antal, 2000; Fink & Meierewert, 2005). The typology by Berthoin Antal (2000) distinguished between the following five types of knowledge: know-what (declarative), know-how (procedural), know-when (conditional), know-why (axiomatic), and know-who (relational). The first four types of knowledge were

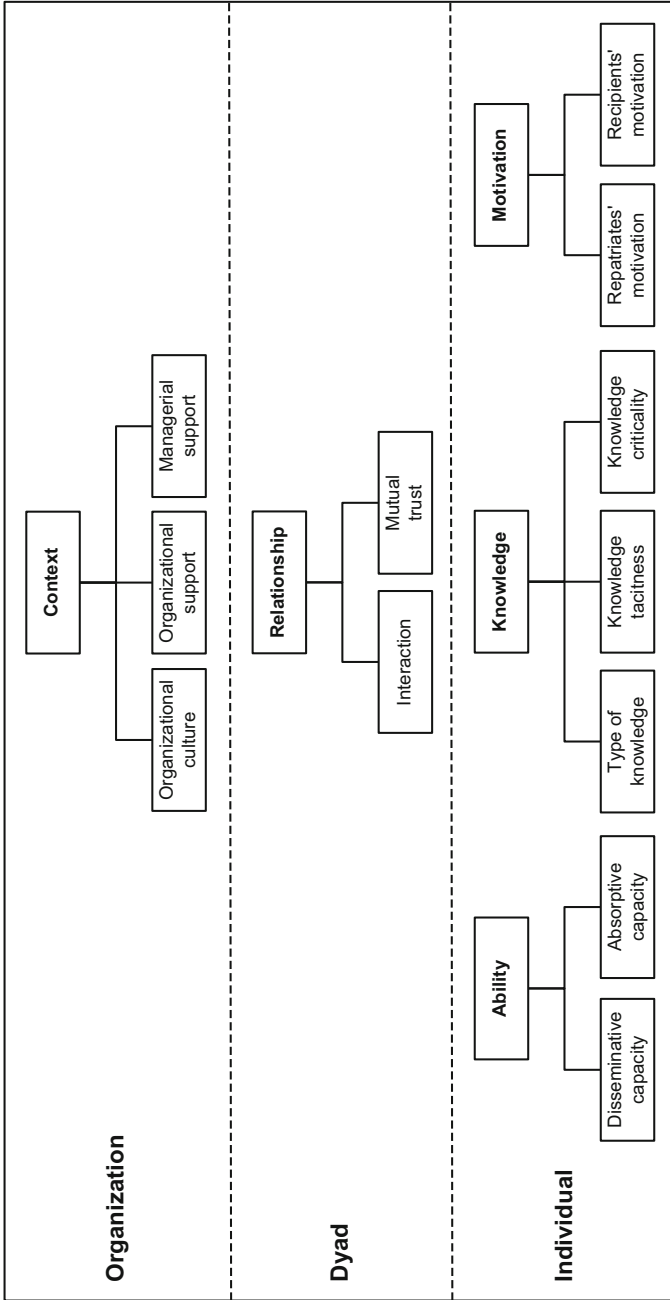


Fig. 8.1 Prerequisites for repatriation strategy implementation

derived from a review of the organizational learning literature, and only the last type of knowledge, relational knowledge, emerged as novel in the context of repatriation. Fink and Meierewert's (2005) typology of repatriate knowledge also has five categories, namely market-specific knowledge, personal skills, job-related management skills, network skills, and general management capacity.

### **Knowledge Tacitness**

In contrast to explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge has been defined as knowledge that is person-specific and context-specific, complex, difficult to codify, and difficult to teach (Polanyi, 1967; Zander & Kogut, 1995). In the context of RKT, many researchers have emphasized that repatriate knowledge is often tacit (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). For example, Fink and Meierewert (2005) argued that market-specific knowledge is relatively easy to codify and transfer, whereas personal skills, job-related management skills, and network knowledge are more tacit and, therefore, more difficult to transfer. To Fink and Meierewert (2005), general management capacity cannot be transferred at all because it is highly tacit. Consequently, repatriate knowledge can consist of tacit knowledge, and this tacitness of repatriate knowledge is likely to influence the mode of transfer between repatriates and domestic work unit members.

### **Knowledge Criticality**

Knowledge that is non-duplicative, relevant to the new context, and high in commercial and scientific value is more likely to facilitate the achievement of organizational aims. As a result, knowledge recipients tend to be more interested in acquiring this kind of knowledge (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Ipe, 2003; Szulanski, 1996). In the context of RKT, Oddou et al. (2013) found that repatriates were conscious about having the right knowledge before initiating RKT. Thus, they assessed their repatriate knowledge with regard to its capacity to contribute to solving current issues of the work unit. Burmeister et al. (2015) supported this finding and showed that repatriates critically assessed the value of their knowledge prior to the initiation of RKT.

## Individual Level: Ability

### Disseminative Capacity

Extant research on general knowledge transfer has used the term disseminative capacity to refer to the ability of knowledge senders to transfer their knowledge (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004; Mu, Tang, & MacLachlan, 2010; Reagans & McEvily, 2003). This term is the counterpart to the widely accepted term absorptive capacity on the recipient side (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Minbaeva, Pedersen, Bjoerkman, Fey, & Jeong, 2003), and it has been defined as the ability of knowledge senders to contextualize, translate, and communicate knowledge to other individuals (Parent, Roy, & St-Jacques, 2007). In the context of RKT, a very limited number of empirical studies have examined the ability of repatriates to transfer their knowledge (Oddou et al., 2013; Reiche, 2012). For example, the study by Reiche (2012) suggested the importance of the social capital of inpatriates (that is, an employee who is transferred from a foreign subsidiary to headquarters) for the facilitation of knowledge transfer. Inpatriates' structural and relational host-unit social capital increased access to as well as the transfer of knowledge, to subsidiaries. Oddou et al. (2013) argued that repatriates must be able to detect teachable moments, in which members of the domestic work unit face challenges that can be tackled by using repatriate knowledge. In addition, repatriates, who were able to adjust their transfer approaches to the needs of different audiences, were more successful than other repatriates.

### Absorptive Capacity

Absorptive capacity is a widely accepted term in the literature on general knowledge transfer (Chang et al., 2012; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Minbaeva et al., 2003; Szulanski, 1996), and it is defined as the ability to “recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends” (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p. 128). Several publications on RKT have conceptually acknowledged the importance of the ability of domestic work unit

members to receive knowledge for RKT success (Blakeney et al., 2006; Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008; Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2014; Oddou et al., 2009). However, empirical research is largely non-existent. One exception is the study by Reiche (2011), in which he showed that low perceived absorptive capacity of the headquarters inhibited the positive effect of inpatriates' boundary spanning on knowledge acquisition by headquarter staff.

## **Individual Level: Motivation**

### **Repatriates' Motivation to Transfer Knowledge**

The motivation to transfer knowledge refers to the willingness to disseminate knowledge to others (Siemsen, Roth, & Balasubramanian, 2008). Research on RKT has emphasized extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors that facilitate knowledge transfer behavior of repatriates. With regard to external factors, researchers have argued that repatriates' willingness to share knowledge can be influenced by the level of organizational support received (Furuya et al., 2009; Huang et al., 2013; Reiche, 2012). For example, effective career and repatriation support can increase repatriates' motivation to share knowledge (Reiche, 2012). With regard to the internal factors, the findings by Oddou et al. (2013) indicated that repatriates are also motivated to share knowledge because they want to be good organizational citizens. Accordingly, repatriates were committed to contributing to organizational success by sharing their knowledge without expecting to be rewarded in return.

### **Recipients' Motivation to Receive Knowledge**

While many RKT researchers have conceptually highlighted the importance of the motivation of knowledge recipients for RKT success (Blakeney et al., 2006; Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008; Gonzalez & Chakraborty, 2014; Oddou et al., 2009), empirical research is scarce. Preliminary insights are solely based on qualitative studies. For example, the findings by Berthoin Antal and Walker (2011) indicated that the



members of the domestic organization needed to be ready to learn in order to enable RKT. In addition, Burmeister, Deller et al. (2015) examined the process of RKT and found that knowledge transfer attempts that were completed successfully increased the willingness of domestic work unit members to receive repatriate knowledge in the future.

## Dyadic Level

### Interaction: Frequency, Intensity, Opportunity

Similar to general knowledge transfer processes, RKT requires interaction between repatriates as knowledge senders and domestic work unit members as knowledge recipients (Szulanski, 1996). Therefore, RKT has been defined as a dyadic process (Oddou et al., 2009). The interaction between repatriates and knowledge recipients during the RKT process and the resulting quality of their relationship have been regarded as important for RKT success in current conceptual models (Blakeney et al., 2006; Crowne, 2009; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). The work by Mäkelä (2007) and Mäkelä and Brewster (2009) demonstrated that expatriate and repatriate interactions tend to result in closer relationships compared to other interaction contexts, such as interunit meetings. In addition, Huang et al. (2013) demonstrated that knowledge sharing opportunities have a positive and significant effect on knowledge sharing behavior.

### Mutual Trust

Knowledge transfer researchers have shown that mutual trust is necessary for knowledge transfer behavior to occur, or put differently, in the absence of trust knowledge transfer is unlikely (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ipe, 2003). Trust can be defined as the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of a trustee based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Empirical research on RKT that focuses on this variable is still limited, but Oddou et al. (2013) emphasized that a certain level of trust between

repatriates and the domestic work unit members is necessary for the initiation of RKT. In the absence of trust, domestic work unit members are less likely to accept the knowledge of repatriates.

## **Organizational Level**

### **Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture has been defined as “basic assumptions about the world and the values that guide life in organizations” (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013, p. 361), and it can unite organizational members and shape their assumptions about what is acceptable and expected within an organization. In turn, organizational members will adapt their behavior according to the organizational culture of the organization (Martin, 2002; Moon, Quigley, & Marr, 2012). In the context of RKT, research on the influence of organizational culture is scarce. However, Berthoin Antal (2001) and Santosh and Muthiah (2012) have emphasized the relevance of an organizational culture that is compatible with knowledge transfer behavior. In particular, they highlighted that an organizational culture needs to support learning and innovation, and diminish potential fears of lost power and stolen ideas when sharing knowledge openly with others.

### **Organizational Support**

Several empirical studies have examined the link between organizational support practices and improved RKT success. For example, Furuya et al. (2009) showed that organizational support and repatriation policies were positively related to competency transfer to the new job after repatriation. In addition, Reiche (2012) demonstrated that the perceived level of career and repatriation policies moderated the relationship between repatriates’ social capital and transfer of host-unit knowledge upon return. Thus, medium and high levels of career and repatriation reduce the need for repatriates’ structural social capi-

tal. In general, these and other studies on organizational support argue that companies need an integrated system of practices in order to take advantage of the knowledge that repatriates have acquired (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009).

## Managerial Support

RKT research has also shown that managers can play an important role when it comes to the outcomes of knowledge transfer processes because they are responsible for articulating the organizational objectives that provide guidelines for individual behavior (Berthoin Antal, 2001; Crowne, 2009; Oddou et al., 2013). For example, Crowne (2009) argued that top managers can be important facilitators of RKT when they create opportunities for interaction between repatriates and knowledge recipients. They can create these opportunities through feedback-seeking behaviors and the establishment of social networks. In addition, studies by Berthoin Antal (2001) and Oddou et al. (2013) showed that narrow-minded managers, who do not have a global mindset and lack international experience themselves, can be inhibitors of RKT success. Conversely, if managers acknowledge repatriate knowledge as a strategic asset and promote the value of that knowledge within their work unit, RKT success can be facilitated.

## Overview of the Current State of the Field

I provide an overview of the current scholarship that examines the antecedents of RKT in Table 8.3.

Except for organizational culture, the majority of the variables that were identified in the systematic literature review have, as this table shows, been included in conceptual models. A considerable number of these variables have been examined qualitatively, but quantitative research on most variables (except for organizational support) is scarce or nonexistent. There is, for instance, a lack of quantitative research on knowledge tacitness or the motivation to receive knowledge.

**Table 8.3.** Status quo of existing research

Level	Antecedent	Type of available research results			Total
		Conceptual	Qualitative	Quantitative	
Individual	Type of knowledge	3	3	1	7
	Knowledge tacitness	1	2	x	3
	Knowledge criticality	1	5	2	8
	Disseminative capacity	4	2	1	7
	Absorptive capacity	4	x	1	5
	Motivation to transfer	5	2	3	10
	Motivation to receive	3	3	x	6
Dyadic	Interaction	5	1	2	8
	Mutual trust	2	3	1	6
Organizational	Organizational culture	x	1	1	2
	Organizational support	6	3	6	15
	Managerial support	2	3	1	6
Total		36	28	19	

*Note:* Total = number of times respective variable has been examined by extant research on repatriate knowledge transfer; x = No research results available yet

## Discussion

In times of globally distributed organizational setups, repatriate knowledge can help to enlarge and globalize the knowledge base of organizations (Oddou et al., 2009; Reiche, 2012). This systematic literature review of the literature on RKT published between 2000 and 2015 contributed an integrated framework of the variables that affect RKT success. The extant research results were synthesized into a multilevel framework including variables on three levels: individual, dyadic, and organizational. This review showed that RKT is a complex and multilevel construct with a great variety of interrelated variables that influence the transfer process. To date, particularly quantitative research on RKT is still insufficient (Huang et al., 2013).

## Limitations

The findings of this systematic literature review on RKT should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. Even though a systematic approach was followed in order to increase the objectivity and reproducibility of the results, a certain level of subjectivity with regard to the synthesis of the identified publications cannot be eliminated. In addition, researchers have shown that a time lag of about two years exists between the submission and the final acceptance of publications in top tier journals (Phelan, Ferreira, & Salvador, 2002). Thus, additional publications on RKT might be under review currently, but not published yet (for example, Burmeister, Lazarova, & Deller, 2015). Nonetheless, I am hopeful that the multilevel framework of RKT provides guidance for both researchers and practitioners.

## Directions for Future Research

First, and as shown in Table 8.1, studies on RKT have used a variety of different theoretical foundations. Instead of treating these theories as distinct, future research can combine these different approaches to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of RKT. For example, linear communication models (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) identify the relevance of senders, recipients, and the message they intend to share, for communication processes. In addition, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Homans, 1961) explains why individuals engage in social behavior. Future research can combine these two theories in many productive ways. For example, researchers can examine whether and how the characteristics of the knowledge influence the motivation of repatriates and knowledge recipients to share and receive knowledge. Thus, knowledge characteristics can be used as a moderator to understand under which conditions motivational factors influence RKT success. This approach would lead to a more nuanced understanding of the variables that affect RKT.

Second, social exchange theory can also be used to investigate to which extent repatriates and recipients influence their perspective on

knowledge transfer behaviors. RKT researchers can collect data from repatriates and knowledge recipients, in order to perform dyadic data analyses and model the interdependencies of their perceptions. For example, RKT researchers can use the Actor-Partner-Interdependence-Model (APIM) proposed by Kenny (1996), which considers actor as well as partner effects when modeling relationships between independent and dependent variables. Several guidelines on how to conduct these analyses have been provided (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Kenny, Mannetti, Pierro, Livi, & Kashy, 2002; Ledermann & Kenny, 2015). Empirical research that models the interdependency between repatriates and knowledge recipients would acknowledge the interactive and dyadic nature of RKT processes. This approach would be more balanced and offer a more nuanced perspective on the variables that influence RKT.

Third, RKT researchers that wish to conduct quantitative research need to address the challenge that, at this point, there is no single measurement instrument that is based on a solid theoretical foundation and that captures RKT behavior in a reliable and valid way. This is also a shortcoming of the general knowledge transfer literature, and Wang and Noe (2010, p. 126) have pointed out that “because measures of knowledge sharing are not readily available in the literature researchers need to devote time to develop valid and reliable measures.” These kinds of measures need to consider current definitions of knowledge transfer and its different dimensions: dissemination, acquisition, and application of knowledge in new contexts (Minbaeva et al., 2003; Szulanski, 1996). The work by Wang (2015) represents an important step forward, as the author divided the process of knowledge transfer into two stages: knowledge sharing and knowledge adoption. Future studies can build on this approach and develop a scale that is reliable and valid (DeVellis, 2012; Hinkin, 1995). Another topic, related to the discussion of methodological shortcomings, is the lack of longitudinal research on RKT. To date, the study by Reiche (2012) on inpatriate knowledge transfer provides the only exception. However, insights with regard to the longitudinal development of RKT will advance the field. For example, studies could examine the difference between expected knowledge transfer upon return and actual knowledge transfer after return to the domestic organization.

Fourth, the global mobility literature has moved away from a focus on traditional forms of international assignees, such as company-initiated expatriates, and now also focuses on alternative forms of international assignments, for example short-term, frequent flyer, and commuter assignments (Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther Jr, & Clarke, 2009; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). RKT research has yet to acknowledge the influence of these different types of assignments on the RKT process and its outcomes. Therefore, future studies can investigate RKT in the context of alternative forms of international assignments.

Fifth, while research on RKT has started to examine the antecedents of RKT (for example, Huang et al., 2013; Oddou et al., 2013), there are no studies on the consequences of RKT. The resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) could be used to identify outcomes of knowledge transfer behavior in the context of repatriation. This kind of perspective is likely to complement extant research on the antecedents of RKT and to provide additional arguments for the usefulness of harvesting repatriate knowledge. This kind of research can draw on the multilevel framework that I presented. For example, on the individual level, outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, or turnover intention could be examined. On the dyadic level, researchers could investigate team performance indicators. Finally, the impact of RKT on the organizational level could be examined by looking at a variety of indicators, for example innovativeness, project completion times, cross-unit cooperation, and organizational performance.

## Implications for Practitioners

The multilevel RKT framework proposed here can be a starting point for organizations to evaluate and, if necessary, to improve their current practices related to the management of RKT. First, organizations can evaluate whether their organizational culture is compatible with the attitudes and behaviors needed for successful RKT. Effective organizational cultures need to improve transparency, teamwork, open information and knowledge sharing, and innovation (Oddou et al., 2013; Santosh & Muthiah, 2012). Second, organizations can assess whether their organizational sup-

port practices are suitable to increase the knowledge transfer ability and motivation of repatriates and knowledge recipients. For example, specific training programs could be introduced to improve knowledge transfer skills (Argote et al., 2003). Repatriates, in particular, can be motivated by involving them in international projects where they can leverage the knowledge they gained abroad in a way that contributes to organizational performance (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012). In addition, financial and non-financial benefits can be given to repatriates and recipients to reward their engagement in knowledge transfer and to increase their motivation to continue to do so in the future. Third, line managers and senior managers have to reflect on their role in RKT. Being curious about the knowledge and experiences of repatriates and involving other domestic work unit members in the discussion can increase mutual understanding, and, in turn, facilitate RKT.

## North American Perspective

### Repatriate Knowledge Transfer: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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This is an excellent review of the repatriate knowledge transfer (RKT) literature published from 2000 to 2015. As Burmeister notes, this is an important topic in that RKT is a potentially critical competitive advantage for multinational firms. Nevertheless, research in this area is scant. Of the 26 articles reviewed here, only 17 are empirical (9 quantitative and 8 qualitative); the remaining 9 are conceptual in nature. The nascent state of this body of literature certainly leaves the door open for a great deal of research in this area.

For me, one of the key questions is: “What differentiates repatriate knowledge transfer from expatriate knowledge transfer—or even from



knowledge transfer in general?” Based on the antecedents that were identified in this review, it seems that the process is similar across types of global employees and perhaps even across employees in general. Is there something special or unique about repatriates that would differentiate them from others? For example, perhaps the knowledge repatriates are transferring is more strategic in nature. While expatriates are in more of a two-way boundary spanning role (for example, communicating headquarter values/goals/practices to host country nationals and sharing with headquarters knowledge of the host country), repatriates are more responsible for transferring knowledge that is relevant to the international scene to inform strategic planning. In other words, for expatriates, knowledge transfer is a two-way process, but for repatriates, it is more of a one-way process. So I agree with the author that it is important to consider differences in knowledge transfer across different types of global employees, and I encourage researchers to examine differences in both the process and the content of the knowledge transferred.

Another key question that I have is: “If repatriate knowledge transfer is so important, why don’t multinational companies try harder to retain repatriates?” It seems that scholars are in accord that this is an important issue, but multinational companies (MNCs) seem to ‘think’ differently—at least the high attrition rates of repatriates indicate that MNCs are not successful in retaining repatriates. Perhaps, however, the high turnover of repatriates is mainly a problem for North American MNCs. It is interesting that only three of the empirical studies in this review involved North American respondents (maybe due to lack of access to them), while the others targeted either Asian or European repatriates. If there are differences in retention rates of repatriates, then it would be worthwhile looking at why this is the case. I think another critical area for investigation has to do with the extent to which the knowledge transferred by repatriates contributes to the firm’s strategic planning, international expansion and operation decisions, and so on. Such pursuits would be consistent with the author’s suggestion for multilevel research on RKT, and they could offer MNCs some insight into the important role of repatriates as knowledge transfer agents.

A couple of other questions that arose as I read this review have to do with the complexity of the knowledge transfer process and the medium

of communication. With respect to the complexities of the KT process, I think it is important to recognize that this is not necessarily a dyadic sender to receiver process. It could involve a sender transferring knowledge to a group or to an organization. This perspective again supports the author's suggestion for multilevel research on this topic. While the medium of communication was not addressed in the review, this may also prove to be a fruitful area of investigation. Certainly expatriates are more likely to rely on computer-mediated forms of communication; repatriates, however, may engage more in face-to-face communication. To what extent does this influence the knowledge transfer process?

As highlighted in this review, there is still much that we need to learn about RKT. I hope that this chapter and these comments will stimulate scholars around the world to take up the challenge of doing research on this important and timely topic.

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