

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER BETWEEN EXPATRIATES AND HOST COUNTRY NATIONALS: CONTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FACTORS

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**Abstract.** *This paper presents a study on the contribution of individual factors (cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour) and social capital factors (shared vision and trust) on knowledge transfer between expatriates and host country nationals (HCNs) as perceived by expatriates. The study adopted Social Capital Theory, and Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory to support the theoretical framework of the investigation. Data were analysed from a sample of 90 expatriates from selected universities and multinational corporations (MNCs) in the area of Klang Valley, Malaysia. The results reveal that there is a positive relationship between individual factors as well as social capital factors and knowledge transfer. In addition, only shared vision shows a significant influence on knowledge transfer. The regression results disclose that the variables explain 24.1% of variance in knowledge transfer.*

**Key words:** *knowledge transfer, social capital, cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, expatriate, host country national.*

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## 1. Introduction

### *The Research Context and Research Questions*

In an increasingly globalized world, there is a need for companies to go cross-border. The current focus is not only on the home market but also to a great degree abroad, thus a company reaches a much larger market (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). As such, the practice of employing expatriates may be a strategic move on the part of a Multinational Corporations (MNCs) to increase the international experience and knowledge base of present and future managers (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991). Thus, expatriation is a tool by which organizations can gather and maintain a resident base of knowledge about the complexities of international operations. Generally, there are two types of expatriates: i) those who are assigned by their employers to be relocated to the foreign location, or ii) those who may initiate the assignment themselves (or self-initiated expatriation) (Lee, 2005; Inkson et al., 1998; Gupta & Govindarajan, 1994). Expatriates in this study refer to employees of both types of international assignment.

Expatriates on one hand, are individuals who work in a country that is not the country of their birth. MNCs employ them to exert direct control, and coordinate subsidiary units for the parent company, and to further the strategic goals of the parent company (Harzing, 2001; Martinko & Douglas, 1999). Expatriates may be parent country nationals (i.e., expatriates who are originated from the headquarters of the MNC), third country nationals (i.e., expatriates neither of the parent nor the host country), or inpatriates (i.e., foreign nationals who live and work in the parent country) (Reiche & Harzing, 2011).

Traditionally, expatriates have been sent abroad for multiple purposes, such as for providing direct supervisory control of international operations, management development, and organizational development (Edström & Galbraith, 1977). However, there has been a dramatic change in perceptions of the role of the expatriates in the international assignment, as the company increasingly becomes a global knowledge organization, where knowledge management is crucial (Doz, Santos & Williamson 2001; Thurow, 2000). As a testimony to this trend, recent extensive empirical and case studies have found that knowledge transfer at both subsidiary and headquarter levels is one of the most important reasons for expatriation (Hocking, Brown & Harzing, 2004; Harzing, 2001). Over the last decade or so, the nature of expatriate assignments has gradually changed. The old motto of expatriation – “just get the job done” – is no longer relevant. Today, expatriates are expected to engage in host country nationals’ (HCNs) development through the knowledge transfer process reciprocally.

HCNs on the other hand, are employees whose nationality is the same as that of the country in which the company is operating: for example, a Malaysian manager that works in a subsidiary of a Korean company that is based in Malaysia. These local employees are hired for jobs in their own country and work for the MNCs operating in

that country. Usually, the process of knowledge transfer is happening between the expatriates and the HCNs as they are working together or are work partners in the company (Hsu, 2012). It can happen between them in various situations such as on-the-job training whether in-house or outside the organization, spontaneous conversation, mentoring, formal and informal interactions in the daily work routines or as easy as a storytelling way.

Argote & Ingram (2000) are of the opinion that knowledge transfer happens at different levels of analysis and their study contexts are generally different in numerous ways. Some researchers clarified that there are three levels of knowledge transfer analysis, which are individual level, intra-organizational level and inter-organizational level (Wilkesmann, Fischer & Wilkesmann, 2009). At the intra-organizational level of knowledge transfer, it happens between two or more departments in an organization. Knowledge transfer at intra-organizational level is known to have occurred through the changes in knowledge or performance of the knowledge receiver. In contrast, transfer of knowledge that takes place between organizations is known as inter-organizational level of knowledge transfer. This study, however, focuses on knowledge transfer at the individual level in which the process requires a sender and a receiver of knowledge in an organization.

Knowledge transfer can be conceptualized in many different ways: as an entrepreneurial process (Dakin & Lindsey, 1991), diffusion process (Rogers, 1995), vaporization process (Leloux, van der Sijde & Groen, 2009) or communication process (Szulanski, 1996). In this study, knowledge transfer is regarded as a communication process in which knowledge is exchanged between expatriate and local employee in any way. It is also an interactive and iterative process, where the roles of “sender” and “receiver” alternate (Easterby-Smith, Lyles & Tsang, 2008).

At the individual level, success of knowledge transfer depends on the characteristics of individuals involved as the provider and recipient of knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Lyles & Tsang, 2008; Szulanski, 1996; Wang, Tong & Koh, 2004). Knowledge transfer is a broad term encompassing a range of activities that include the sharing of expertise, knowledge, business practice and intellectual property. In simple terms, knowledge transfer in this study context emphasizes the learning process between the two individuals, viz. expatriate and HCN.

Factors contributing to knowledge transfer in the context of this study consist of individual factors and social capital factors. On one hand, individual factors are aspects inherited in the person itself, developed within oneself and thus, they reflect the individual. People vary in many ways: physically, mentally, on personality traits, knowledge, skill and experience. All this leads to reasons why the organization should make sure the individual factors are managed accordingly to achieve expectation in knowledge transfer. According to the anxiety and uncertainty management theory by Gudykunst (1998), cultural intelligence and feedback seeking behaviour play a significant role in

reducing anxiety and uncertainty within expatriates. This hence helps expatriates make faster cultural adjustment (Ang et al., 2007) and reduce discomfort while interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Thomas et al., 2008).

On the other hand, social capital refers to the social links such as shared values, shared vision, trust and understanding in any organization that enable employees and groups to work together through a mutual social network (Ismail, 2015). Kostova & Roth (2002) further explain that social capital is crucial in enhancing learning and knowledge transfer. Relationship among individuals such as shared vision and trust are identified to precede individual intellect in learning process (Uzzi & Lancaster, 2003). In other words, social capital factors, viz. shared vision and trust are important in assisting the knowledge transfer process.

Much of the knowledge transfer that is currently occurring originated from developed countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan, to developing countries such as India, China, Malaysia, Turkey, Poland and the Philippines. In Malaysia, research focusing on factors contributing to knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs in MNCs is still underdeveloped. Research on MNCs' knowledge transfer has argued continuously for the behaviour of knowledge senders to be a determinant of knowledge transfer. The available research on factors leading to knowledge transfer usually focuses on other factors such as disseminative capacity (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004), behaviour of knowledge sender, characteristics of knowledge and the general mechanisms of knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). The research on social factors such as shared vision and trust, and individual factors such as cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour was largely absent, especially based on Malaysian context.

Past research in international management has also had a predominant focus on expatriates, failing to consider the important contributions of HCNs to the effective process of knowledge transfer. Although various variables that affect knowledge exchange and transfer have been posited (such as firm intent, absorptive capacity, and control systems) (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005), there are a limited number of studies that focus on the influence of both individual factors (cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour) and social capital factors (shared vision and trust) towards knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs from the perspective of expatriates.

Thus, this study aims to fill the above knowledge gap among expatriates and HCNs working in MNCs as well as other international institutions in Malaysia. This article addresses the following research questions: What is the level of selected individual factors (cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour) of expatriates? What is the level of social capital factors (shared vision and trust) of expatriates? What is the level of knowledge transfer between expatriate and host country nationals as perceived by the expatriates? Do individual factors (cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour) and social capital factors (shared vision and trust) have relationships with knowledge transfer by expatriates and host country nationals? Which of the independent variables

(cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust) contributes most to knowledge transfer between expatriates and host country nationals?

The findings of this study would contribute to knowledge transfer and human resource management theory and practice in relation to the roles of expatriates and HCNs. This research will shed new light on the significance of cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust among the expatriates. This study should benefit human resource management, as they will be the ones that provide human resource activities such as training, need analysis and performance appraisal in relation to knowledge transfer functions in the organization. Additionally, this study is also significant to the expatriates and HCNs as this will help them to understand better the importance of enhancing cultural intelligence as well as feedback-seeking behaviour, sharing the same vision and inculcate trust in order to boost the performance and effectiveness of knowledge transfer based on a context of emerging economy in South-East Asia.

The next section of this paper will provide a literature review on an in-depth meaning of knowledge transfer, factors influencing knowledge transfer from the perspective of expatriates. The paper continues with the theoretical and research framework of this study and hypotheses. The next section discusses the research procedures undertaken, the results, and finally ends with a conclusion and recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Knowledge Transfer Defined*

Alavi & Leidner (2001) define knowledge as “information possessed in the mind of individuals which may or may not be new, unique, useful, or accurate related to facts, procedures, concepts, interpretations, ideas, observations and judgments” (p. 109). This personalized knowledge must go through re-creation process in the mind of the receiver (El Sawy, 1998). Knowledge is “a dynamic process of justifying personal belief towards the truth” (Nonaka, Toyama & Nagata, 2000, p. 7). In the present day of k-economy, knowledge is a source of competitive advantage for companies (Argote & Ingram, 2000). The company itself can generate this knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), or it can be acquired from another knowledge source (Tsai, 2001; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Transfer of knowledge is the process of giving other access to and exchanging knowledge. This process of knowledge transfer that occurs reciprocally is described as the “dyadic exchange of organizational knowledge between a source and a recipient unit in which the identity of the source and recipient matters” (Szulanski, 1996).

The knowledge transfer adopted in this research is based on the school of thought where it is about a human-to-human process (Norling & Retz, 2013) in which the behavioural change in an individual is due to the experience of the other person. Knowledge transfer is closely relevant with knowledge management, knowledge sharing,

knowledge transmission and technology transfer. Knowledge management as explained by McCampbell, Clare & Gitters (1999), is “the strategy and process of identifying, capturing and leveraging knowledge” to improve effectiveness. While knowledge transfer occurs at a higher level as it involves at least two individuals at a time, which also might occur between groups, department and organization, knowledge sharing implies the dissemination of knowledge in a single direction from the source to the recipient of knowledge (Tangaraja et al., 2016). Previous research has equated knowledge transmission with knowledge transfer. However, they differ in a sense that knowledge transmission is referred to as passing an existing knowledge from one generation to another (e.g., from generation X to generation Y) (Sharif et al., 2016). Technology transfer is a narrower and more targeted construct that usually embodies certain tools for changing the environment (Gopalakrishnan & Santoro, 2004). Specifically, knowledge transfer implies a broader, more inclusive construct that is towards understanding the reasons for change. An active knowledge-transfer activity in the organization will result in a built-up competitive advantage and harmonized operations in different business environments (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004; Kogut & Zander, 1993). In the context of human resource development and management practices, one of the main goals of organization is to develop its talents and employees. One of the ways to achieve this is through the process of knowledge transfer. Therefore, this study uses the definition of knowledge transfer by Argote & Ingram (2000) which defines the knowledge transfer as a process where one unit (e.g., a group, department or division) is affected by the experience of another. Thus, this research focuses on the influence of cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust towards knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs as perceived by the former.

### ***The Individual Factors (Cultural Intelligence and Feedback Seeking Behaviour) and their Relationships with Knowledge Transfer***

According to Early & Ang (2003), cultural intelligence is defined as someone’s capability to be able to adapt effectively when they face new cultural contexts. Meanwhile Thomas (2006) perceives cultural intelligence as a person’s ability to understand and interact effectively with people from different cultures. In line with it, based on research done by Ang et al. (2007) with 794 respondents from various fields and educational contexts in USA and Singapore, cultural intelligence is an individual’s ability to behave and manage effectively in culturally diverse contexts.

Cultural intelligence comprises four domains. The first, metacognitive domain deals with mental processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including knowledge of and control over individual thought about culture. The second domain is cognitive, which refers to knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures acquired from education and personal experience. The third is motivational matter that refers to the capability to direct attention and energy

toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences; and the last domain is the behavioural aspect that refers to the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2007).

Cultural intelligence is also found to enhance the likelihood that individuals on international assignments would actively engage in the four stages of experiential learning (experience, reflect, conceptualize, experiment), which in turn leads to global leadership development including role in knowledge management (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009). The current global context demands leaders and managers to learn how to deal with other cultures and to be flexible in order to adjust to new situations caused by differences among cultural values (Thomas & Inkson, 2005). With this in mind, MNCs have to be capable of transferring the knowledge across units and networks separated by cultures (Ambos & Ambos, 2009).

Therefore, cultural intelligence should play a major role in helping individuals to understand and adapt to new environments and situations (Triandis, 2006). Cultural intelligence is relevant to both the adaptability of expatriates as learners (Feitosa et al., 2014) and knowledge transfer (Kodwani, 2012). Specifically, those who have high cultural intelligence are more likely to make accurate and rapid cultural judgments (Kodwani, 2012; Ang et al., 2007) and would feel comfortable interacting with people from diverse cultures. The major advantage of those who have high cultural intelligence is that they are more likely to have meaningful interactions that facilitate the transfer of knowledge when interacting with people from culturally diverse backgrounds (Ismail, 2015). Thus, we hypothesize:

*H<sub>1a</sub>: Cultural intelligence significantly predicts knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs.*

Another individual factor is feedback-seeking behaviour, which is a proactive behaviour that is instrumental for gaining information about job performance. Feedback is critical for improving employee performance at work. Feedback provides cues to redirect behaviour in the workplace, and it motivates people to do things more effectively. Feedback also helps employees to ascertain whether they are on track, and it can thereby enhance internal motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (e.g., Renn & Fedor, 2001; Ashford & Tsui, 1991).

Feedback-seeking behaviour, the proactive search for feedback information in the environment (Ashford & Cummings, 1983), has been a subject of research for over three decades. This literature has portrayed feedback-seeking as a valuable resource for individuals because it facilitates their adaptation, learning, and performance. As many workers and students find themselves in a feedback vacuum (Ashford, Blatt & Walle, 2003), feedback-seeking behaviour probably has never been more important. Feedback-seeking behaviour can be defined as the conscious devotion of effort towards determining the correctness and adequacy of one's behaviours for attaining valued goals

(Ashford & Cummings, 1983). From this definition it follows that feedback-seeking constitutes goal-oriented behaviour. Through feedback-seeking, individuals want to improve their chances of attaining valued end states, such as skill development, good performance, or a promotion.

Crowne (2009) concurs the importance of creating feedback-seeking behaviour. This behaviour implies that leaders try to seek feedback instead of avoiding it in fear of embarrassment. Trust is mentioned as the most important factor for this feedback to be successful, making the sharing of knowledge possible thereby benefiting the company. This behaviour also refers to how individuals use social relationships to overcome difficulties when transferring knowledge (Chang, Gong & Peng, 2012). Previous studies have considered dispositions for feedback inquiry or feedback-seeking from a feedback-as-resource perspective (Wu, Parker & De Jong, 2013). For example, individuals with higher proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993) (or who want to act on their environments to bring about change) tend to seek feedback (Parker & Collins, 2010), as they require information to guide their actions and bring expected change (Frese & Fay, 2001). Thus, knowledge workers such as expatriates and HCNs who are interested in feedback devise creative ways to ascertain whether they are on the right track.

Feedback is an important determinant of learning which indeed helps to discover opportunities for skill improvement and obtain information about the dominant behavioural norms in a team or organization. The expatriates can learn that knowledge or skills as the knowledge being transferred to them. Research has been focusing on five key aspects of feedback-seeking (Ashford, Blatt & Walle, 2003): (a) the method used to seek feedback, (b) the frequency of feedback-seeking behaviour, (c) the timing of feedback-seeking, (d) the characteristics of the target of feedback-seeking, and (e) the topic on which feedback is sought. Although each of the five aspects of feedback-seeking behaviour is important, most of the literature has been devoted to understanding the antecedents and consequences of the frequency with which employees use two methods of feedback-seeking (i.e., inquiry and monitoring). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H<sub>1b</sub>: Feedback-seeking behaviour significantly predicts knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs.*

### ***Social Capital Factors (Shared Vision and Trust) and their Relationships with Knowledge Transfer***

Shared vision refers to a clear and common picture of a desired future state that members of an organization identify with themselves – essentially a vision, which members of the organization internalized. It is also a universally agreed and expected position that the organization will take. Shared vision is closely associated with organizational learning. It has been frequently identified as a factor influencing knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer activities (Loon Hoe, 2007). A shared vision helps to clarify an

organization's direction on what to do and what to learn. Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) argued that an organizational intention drives the knowledge creation process. This intent usually takes the form of a corporate strategy, the most critical element of which is a shared vision. Some of the organizations even have a corporate strategy that highlight a shared vision the aim of which is to improve the organization performance through one of the learning processes of knowledge transfer.

Previous studies suggested that shared vision, the extent to which different individuals share long-term goals, is an important cognitive element characterizing social relations that influence knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). Research also suggests that a shared identity (Kane, Argote & Levine, 2005) and a shared vision (Fey & Furu, 2008) increase knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. A research found that shared language, beliefs, judgments, dependency, mind-set, and values predict knowledge transfer (Hsu, 2012). This is also in line with the fact that a shared vision promotes mutual understanding and provides a crucial bonding mechanism that helps different actors to integrate knowledge (Hsu, 2012).

Past research also stated that one of the predictors of successful knowledge transfer is the quality of the dyadic relationship (Song, Almeida & Wu, 2003; Van Wijk, Jansen & Lyles, 2008) that involves two types of social capital mentioned above (shared vision and trust). Resources which provide representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among parties (Hsu, 2012) are personified in qualities like shared vision and values, which then lead to a common understanding of collective goals and targets (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Shared vision (i.e., the extent to which different people share one common, long-term goal and vision) is a vital cognitive element that influences knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H<sub>2a</sub>: Shared vision significantly predicts knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs.*

Social capital is a concept that can add value to the study of network social processes (Lee, Lee & Pennings, 2001; Leenders & Gabbay, 1999). In various academic contexts (e.g., Adler & Kwon, 2002; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) and practitioner-oriented experience (e.g., Anand, Glick & Manz, 2002), researchers recently have argued that access to new sources of knowledge is one of the most important direct benefits of social capital. Moreover, there is evidence suggesting that intensive social interactions of organizational actors facilitate knowledge transfer (Zahra, Ireland & Hitt, 2000; Lane & Lubatkin, 1998).

It is widely accepted in the management literature that trust is vital for organizational success (Bibb & Kourdi, 2004; Beccerra & Gupta, 1999) and there is recognition that trust conveys benefits for organization (Kramer, 1999). Evidence shows that trust helps in organizational problem solving process (Boss, 1978; Zand, 1972), communication (Thomas, Zolin & Hartman, 2009), quality improvement (Hacker & Willard, 2002), and employees' commitment (Darrough, 2008; Dietz & Hartog, 2006; Ristig, 2004). Further, trust leads to employees' satisfaction (Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale &

Hackman, 2010; Callaway, 2007; Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis & Winograd, 2000; Driscoll, 1978), and reduction of transaction cost (Chow, 2008). Trust further influences productivity enhancement (Kramer & Cook, 2004; Dwivedi, 1983), profitability (Bibb & Kourdi, 2004; Davis et al., 2000), continuance of collaboration (Malhotra & Lumineau, 2011), team performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) and organization health (Beccerra & Gupta, 1999).

Knowledge transfer is encouraged by trust between source and recipient of knowledge (Szulanski, Cappetta & Jensen, 2004; Lane, Salk & Lyles, 2001). According to Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998), trust is an expectation that the partner within the relationship will act munificently and will not harm the other, which influences knowledge transfer by creating or enhancing indispensable conditions such as openness in communication and fairness in judgment. Trust is essential for organizational success (Meyerson, Weick & Roferick, 2006; Bibb & Kourdi, 2004).

It is noticeable that up-to date knowledge and innovation are the key competitive advantages in a turbulent business environment with a special interest on the connection of organization trust with knowledge creation and transfer, and innovation. Therefore, this study will analyse how the social capital factors, shared vision and trust, would relate with knowledge transfer. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*H<sub>2b</sub>: Trust significantly predicts knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs.*

### Theoretical Framework

In this study, we chose individual factors and social capital factors as variables contributing to knowledge transfer. Figure 1 shows the hypothesized framework of this study. This study is a response to a suggestion by Argote & Ingram (2000) calling for more investigations regarding individual characteristics of international assignees in knowledge transfer as they may be knowledge providers and recipients. The function of rela-

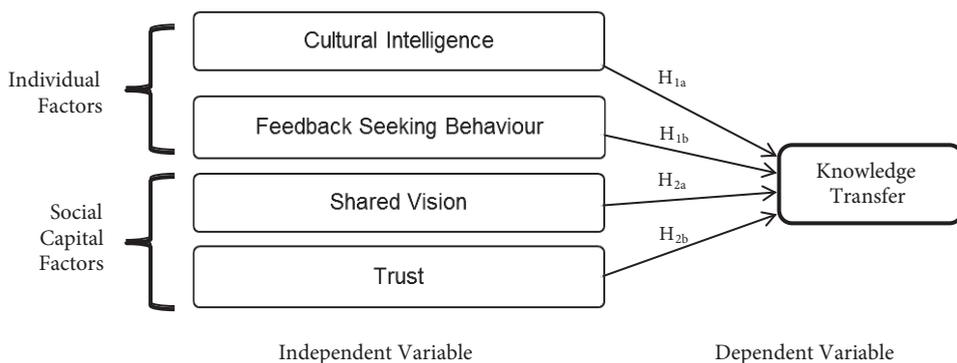


FIGURE 1: The hypothesized framework illustrating the independent and dependent variables

tionship qualities (shared vision and trust) implies that there is a need to look at the fact that expatriates and HCNs are from different cultural backgrounds and so they have to depend on social capital factors to facilitate the transfer. This study also responds to Kamoche's (1997) call for an international human resource management theory and practice to view the factors within a framework of knowledge transfer.

### 3. Methods

#### *Population and Sampling*

We conducted this study among expatriates that are working in selected universities (public and private) and MNCs in the Klang Valley of Malaysia. The minimum sample size required for four predictors was identified using formula of  $50+8k$ , where  $k$  represents the number of independent variables (Green, 1991) yielding a total of

TABLE 1. Demographic and Nationality Profile of the Respondents (n = 90)

Variables	Freq (f)	Percent (%)	Mean (S.D)
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	63	70.0	
Female	27	30.0	
<b>Nationality</b>			
Indian	18	20.0	
Japanese	11	12.2	
British	6	6.7	
Indonesian	6	6.7	
Yemeni	6	6.7	
Iranian	5	5.6	
Korean	4	4.4	
Philippine	4	4.4	
Singaporean	4	4.4	
Turkish	4	4.4	
Bangladeshi	3	3.3	
German	3	3.3	
Nigerian	3	3.3	
Pakistani	3	3.3	
Others (Dutch, Palestinian, Thai, Lebanese, New Zealanders, Swiss, Syrian)	10	11.0	
<b>Age (years)</b>			<b>39.8 (8.9)</b>
25.0-35.0	23	25.6	
35.1-45.0	46	51.1	
45.1-55.0	17	18.9	
55.1-65.0	1	1.1	
65.1 and above	3	3.3	

82 respondents. The total respondents obtained in this study were 90, which is above the minimum sample size calculated. We used purposive random sampling technique to get the sample. Kunasegaran et al. (2016) used this technique among the dispersed repatriates or returnees in Malaysia to investigate their workplace adaptation.

The sample consists of 70% of male and 30% female respondents who represent 21 nationalities. Indian respondents make up the largest part (20%), followed by Japanese (12.2%); Yemen, Indonesian and British nationals are represented at equal

TABLE 2. Professional Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Freq (f)	Percent (%)	Mean (S.D)
Relationship with host country national colleague (n=87)			
Superior-subordinate	32	36.8	
Peer	34	39.1	
Both	21	24.1	
Duration of Service with the Company (years) (n=88)			5.7 (4.8)
≤ 5.5	54	61.4	
5.6-10.5	25	28.4	
≥ 10.6	9	10.2	
Duration of being working closely with host country nationals (years) (n=87)			4.4 (3.8)
0.0-6.0	64	73.6	
6.1-12.0	19	21.8	
12.1-18.0	4	4.6	
Name of Organization (n=55)			
University (30)			
International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM)	14	25.5	
Multimedia University (MMU)	7	12.7	
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	7	12.7	
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	1	1.8	
Kyutech MSSC	1	1.8	
MNCs (25)			
HCL AXON SDN. BHD	9	16.4	
Kinokuniya	3	5.5	
F-Secure	2	3.6	
Hanwha QCELLS	2	3.6	
Al-Bayan Corporation Sdn. Bhd	1	1.8	
BASF Sdn Bhd	1	1.8	
British Council	1	1.8	
Fashion Jewelry	1	1.8	
Kifah	1	1.8	
Mathew	1	1.8	
Petronas HQ	1	1.8	
Petronas Carigali	1	1.8	
Viral Oversea Trading Sdn. Bhd	1	1.8	

Headquarter's Location (n=62)			
Malaysia	28	45.1	
India	8	12.9	
Japan	8	12.9	
Singapore	4	6.5	
Korea	3	4.8	
Iran	2	3.2	
Nigeria	1	1.6	
Indonesia	1	1.6	
Iran	1	1.6	
Jeddah	1	1.6	
Lebanon	1	1.6	
Thailand	1	1.6	
Turkey	1	1.6	
United Kingdom	1	1.6	
United States of America	1	1.6	

proportions of 6.7% each. There is just one representative from 4 countries: Lebanon, Syria, New Zealand and Switzerland(1.1% each) In terms of age, most of the respondents are between 35.1 to 45 years old (51.1%), followed by 25 to 35 years (25.6%) and 45.1 to 55 years (18.9%). The remaining respondents are between the age range of 55.1 to 65 years (1.1%) and 65.1 and above (3.3%), respectively. Table 1 above shows the demographic and nationality profile of the respondents.

The professional profiles of the respondents are quite diverse. Out of 87 responses, 31.9% are peers with their respective HCN colleagues, followed by superior-subordinate (36.8%), and both peer and superior-subordinates (24.1%). The data further show that, from a total of 88 responses, the duration of service of the respondents in their organization is mostly within the range of  $\leq 5.5$  years (61.4%), followed by the range between 5.6-10.5 years (28.4%) and  $\geq 10.6$  years (10.2%), respectively. Nonetheless, from a total of 87 responses, 73.6% of the expatriates have been working closely with their HCN colleagues within the range of six (6) years or less, 21.8% of them have been working together within the range of 6.1 to 12 years, while another 4.6% within the range of 12.1 years or more. Table 2 below shows the professional profile of the respondents.

### ***Instrument***

The study instrument was a questionnaire containing items on knowledge transfer, cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust. In terms of knowledge transfer, this study has adopted the instrument by Dhanaraj et al. (2004), which is a 6-item questionnaire with a 7-point Likert-type scale. Knowledge transfer instrument requires the expatriates to evaluate the extent to which they have learnt

*tacit knowledge* such as new marketing expertise, knowledge about foreign cultures and tastes as well as managerial techniques from their HCN peers. The expatriates are also required to evaluate the extent to which they have learnt *explicit knowledge* such as written knowledge about technology, procedural manuals or technical information, and written knowledge about management techniques. We used the instrument from Ang & Van Dyne (2008) to measure cultural intelligence, which consists of a 9-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert-type scale. For this, expatriates are required to rate the extent to which they agree with statements in the instrument such as “I know the values and religious beliefs of other cultures”.

Furthermore, feedback-seeking behaviour is measured using the instrument from Ashford (1986). The measurement consists of a 7-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert-type scale where expatriates are required to rate the extent to which they agree with statements in the instrument such as “I would like to get feedback on what behaviours will help me advance within the company”. Shared vision was measured using the instrument developed by Gutiérrez, Lloréns-Montes & Sánchez (2009). It consists of a 6-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert-type scale to measure the extent to which respondents have engaged in shared vision. For this item, expatriates are required to rate the extent to which they agree with statements in the instrument such as “My host country colleague and I share a clear vision guiding the strategic goals and missions of the organization”. Finally, we used an instrument developed by Cook & Wall (1980) to measure trust in this study. The instrument consists of an 8-item question with a 5-point Likert-type scale. In measuring trust, expatriates are required to rate the extent to which they agree with statements in the instrument such as “I can trust my host country colleague to lend me a hand if I need it”.

The reliability of the instruments is acceptable, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.86 to 0.96 (for the pilot study among expatriates working in one of the public universities in Malaysia) and 0.78 to 0.92 (in the actual study). We obtained help from the Human Resource Division of each organization to administer the questionnaire. We also used online procedures in the data collection.

## 4. Results

### *Comparison of Variables by Types of Organization*

Independent sample t-test results as shown in Table 3 designate that there is no significant difference in knowledge transfer between the types of organization, *viz.* university and MNCs, as well as three other predictors, *i.e.*, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust. Only cultural intelligence shows significant difference between the two types of organization in which expatriates from the universities perceive higher cultural intelligence ( $M=4.096$ ) than MNCs ( $M=3.702$ ).

TABLE 3. Results of independent sample t-test of variables between university (n=30) and MNC (n=25)

Variables	Mean	SD	t	p
Knowledge transfer University	4.344	1.573	-.040	.968
MNC	4.360	1.273		
Cultural intelligence University	4.096	.586	2.669	.010
MNC	3.702	.490		
Feedback-seeking behavior University	3.924	.972	.061	.952
MNC	3.909	.865		
Shared vision University	3.857	.947	.724	.472
MNC	3.700	.571		
Trust University	3.871	.986	-.220	.827
MNC	3.925	.810		

***Level of Cultural Intelligence, Feedback Seeking Behaviour, Shared Vision, Trust and Knowledge Transfer***

Levels of all the variables were driven based on the categorization of data into three, which are low, moderate and high. The results indicated high levels across all four independent variables (shared vision, trust, cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour). The top three of the four independent variables were feedback-seeking behaviour (M=4.01, SD=.77), cultural intelligence (M=3.99, SD=.51) and shared vision (M=3.96, SD=.78). The overall mean of knowledge transfer was at a moderate level (M=4.59, SD=1.35).

***Correlation between Individual Factors (Cultural Intelligence and Feedback-Seeking Behaviour) and Social Capital Factors (Shared Vision and Trust) and Knowledge Transfer***

Pearson product moment correlation analysis results as shown in Table 4 indicate the highest value is shared vision ( $r=.487, p=.000$ ), followed by trust ( $r=.346, p=.001$ ) and cultural intelligence, which has the same value as feedback-seeking behaviour ( $r=.328, p=.002$ ). All independent variables are significant at  $p < .05$ . This shows that the variables have potential to be significant predictors of knowledge transfer. The study validates

that the respondents experience a high level of individual factors, which are cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour. As the expatriates are working abroad in a different country, they would surely experience an altered cultural setting and some of them might not be able to adapt well. Thus, high level of cultural intelligence shows that the expatriates working in universities and MNCs in Malaysia are able to adapt to Malaysia's cultural setting which consist of a variety of races, religions and cultures itself. Furthermore, the expatriates also experience a high level of feedback-seeking behaviour, which ensures that the knowledge or task is being validated and accurate.

Thus, according to Hong, Heikkinen & Blomqvist (2010), by understanding the cultural differences, knowledge transfer is smoother. This is evident through studies in China (Wang-Cowham, 2008; Perrin, Rolland & Stanley, 2007) in understanding Chinese culture and guanxi in facilitation of knowledge transfer in their industry, R&D institutions and multinational corporations. Similarly, feedback-seeking behaviour and trust showed positive relationship with knowledge transfer.

TABLE 4: Correlation between independent variables (cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour, shared vision and trust) and dependent variable (knowledge transfer)

Variables	r	p
Shared Vision	.487	.000
Trust	.346	.001
Cultural Intelligence	.328	.002
Feedback Seeking Behaviour	.328	.002

Notes: \*\* $p < .05$

TABLE 5: Results of Multiple Linear Regressions (MLR)

Variables	b	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	-.459	1.053		-.436	.664
Shared Vision	.639	.199	.371	3.208	.002
Trust	.148	.185	.090	.800	.426
Cultural Intelligence	.433	.277	.164	1.565	.121
Feedback Seeking Behaviour	.052	.202	.030	.256	.799

Notes: \*\* $p < .05$ ;  $F = 8.072$ ;  $\text{Sig } F = .0001$ ;  $R = .525$ ;  $R^2 = .275$ ;  $\text{Adjusted } R^2 = .241$

However, as shown in multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis (Table 5), it is found that only shared vision is significant in explaining knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs from the perspective of expatriates ( $\beta = .371$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Trust, cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour do not yield enough evidence to contribute to the variation of knowledge transfer. The adjusted  $R^2 = .241$  inferred that the significant predictor explained 24.1% of the variance in knowledge transfer. Thus, we conclude that the results support one ( $H_{2a}$ ) of four hypotheses in this study, i.e. shared vision significantly predicts knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs as perceived by the expatriates.

## 5. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between individual factors (cultural intelligence and feedback-seeking behaviour) and social capital factor (shared vision and trust) with knowledge transfer from expatriates to HCNs in selected organizations in Malaysia. The study further aimed to find which of the factors predicts knowledge transfer the most. The correlational analysis shows shared vision has the strongest relationship with knowledge transfer, followed by trust, cultural intelligence, and feedback-seeking behaviour. This indicates that social capital factors are stronger than the individual factors in relation with the knowledge transfer.

Based on the multiple regression analysis, however, only shared vision of the social capital factors showed significant positive contribution towards knowledge transfer between expatriates to HCNs as perceived by expatriates. Past studies supported this result in which shared vision is an important predictor of knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs (Hsu, 2012; Van Wijk, Jansen & Lyles, 2008; Song, Almeida & Wu, 2003). Thus, shared vision, which involves a cognitive relation between participants in the process of knowledge transfer, is one of the qualities of inter-individual communication that would make the outcome of interactions between individuals into a knowledge flow process (Ismail, 2015). Shared language, beliefs, judgments, dependency, mind-set, and values predict knowledge transfer as shared vision promotes mutual understanding and provides a crucial bonding mechanism that helps different actors to integrate knowledge (Hsu, 2012).

According to previous researchers, cultural intelligence is found to be crucial in facilitating knowledge transfer (Ismail, 2015; Crowne, 2008; Triandis, 2006). Nonetheless, feedback-seeking behaviour is also found to enhance knowledge transfer as it develops one's desire to adapt, learn and perform (Ashford, 1983). Trust is recognized to be one of the predictors of knowledge transfer and it is vital for organizational success (Meyerson et al., 2006; Bibb & Kourdi, 2004). However, the findings of this study do not support the significance of cultural intelligence, feedback-seeking behaviour and trust as predictors of knowledge transfer. This is due to the small number of sample (i.e.,  $n = 90$ ). A higher number of respondents might be able to prove otherwise.

As agreed by many scholars, shared vision plays an essential role in retaining organization's competitive advantage. For that matter, expatriates and HCNs in organization should be aware on the importance of shared vision in order to achieve organizational goals. It is best for both clusters of professionals to learn and better understand the importance and benefits gained by having collective goals between them. Thus, such learning process could be provided through training, which is to be offered by the organizations. Nonetheless, organization's management should be able to monitor the expatriates and HCNs in order to ensure that they are communicating common sets of goal and vision between each other. Additionally, shared vision can be improved through the frequency of interaction and communication between expatriates and

HCNs. Recurrent interaction between them would increase the tendency of knowledge transfer through the exchange of shared vision between both expatriates and HCNs.

This study is not without its limitations. As the results presented in this article are based on a limited number of sample, it is suggested that a greater number of sample is required involving more specific types of MNCs in Malaysia based on countries of origin such as Japanese, British, American or Korean. As espoused by Kang & Kim (2013), future studies are needed to include other organizational and knowledge characteristics as well as embedded resources dimensions to maintain active social relationship with colleagues as mediators who have the required resources. Another suggestion is to conduct this particular research in the perspective of both expatriates and HCNs, which will lead to a dyadic relationship of factors influencing knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs. Finally, it is crucial for future research to look at the study framework from a gender perspective as more women have taken up expatriation as a form of global career option.

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