



4 Career capital as a key to a successful international career: How different ways of knowing affect the international transfer of career capital

Emilija Oleškevičiūtė

ABSTRACT

Career Capital (CC), which is combination of knowing-how; knowing-whom; and knowing-why, stands as a base for individual careers. Knowing-how represents career related knowledge and skills, knowing-whom stands for the career relevant social networks or people that we know, whereas knowing-why is all about career focused energy, motivation, direction, and identity. CC framework suggests that each part of CC affects one another's development and possibly even transfer between different career stages and environments e.g., organisations, occupations, and industries. Research shows that it is possible to individually transfer CC not only between organisations nationally but also internationally. However, the way different types of knowing (knowing-how, knowing-whom, knowing-why) might affect international transfer of CC is not explicitly clear. In this chapter we explore the way different types of knowing affect the international transfer of CC (knowing-how affecting the transfer of knowing-whom and knowing-why; knowing-whom affecting the transfer of knowing-how and knowing-why; and knowing-why affecting the transfer of knowing-how and knowing-whom). We do this by bringing real life examples from the qualitative interviews with Dutch and Lithuanian self-initiated repatriates (SIRs) who repatriated to their home countries on their own initiative and without organisational support after living and working abroad.

INTRODUCTION

International work experience can accelerate and enrich personal growth and professional learning. It can improve skills and knowledge and can increase networking opportunities with like-minded people, as well as further shape individual career aspirations while teaching the importance of desirable (and not so desirable) career directions. In other words, international work experience can enhance the development of expatriates' Career Capital (CC) (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009; Jokinen et al., 2008), which can be considered as a steppingstone into an often successful international career (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Suutari et al.). However, internationally developed CC is valuable only if individuals manage to use it in their later career steps whether these would be in a different organisation, industry, or even country (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Even though there are various contextual factors affecting the international transfer of CC that do not depend on the individual, such as the organisation the

individual is working for and the country where it is located (Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022), there is something that individuals can do to get the best out of their internationally developed CC. In this chapter we suggest that CC can serve not only as a steppingstone into a successful career but also as a tool leading to the successful application of CC in the first place. For example, an internationally developed social network (knowing-whom) could inspire an individual to pursue a different career path (knowing-why) or help to find a job where they can use their expertise (knowing-how). An understanding of their own desired career goals and destination (knowing-why) could push them to collaborate with like-minded people (knowing-whom). In return, these collaborations (knowing-whom) could help them to find a job where individuals would be motivated to use their skills and knowledge (knowing-how), be that abroad or in their home country. Alternatively, newly acquired knowledge and skills (knowing-how) could be attractive to people that the individuals know (knowing-whom) which could lead to potential work collaborations. International expertise (knowing-how) could also help get the job that matches individual career aspirations inspired during the work experience abroad (knowing-why).

In this chapter we will talk about what happens with the internationally developed CC after expatriates return to their home country. We will discuss the meaning of the international transfer of CC and will study a brief overview of the individual, organisational, and broader contextual factors affecting such a transfer. Finally, and most importantly, we will explore the way internationally developed professional skills and knowledge, social connections, and career related identity and motivation can affect the international transfer of CC. We will do so by looking into some real-life examples from the experiences of Dutch and Lithuanian self-initiated repatriates (SIRs).

This chapter contributes to the CC framework (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) literature by going beyond theoretical ideas and illustrating and explaining the way different types of knowing can affect the international transfer of CC. We provide real-life examples from a qualitative study that investigates SIRs' career experiences. We also contribute to the literature of global mobility of employees exploring the post-repatriation experiences of SIRs. Based on insights from the existing literature and qualitative interviews with SIRs, we provide recommendations for individuals. This might inspire them to get the best out of their international work and to make this experience a turning point for their future careers.

SELF-INITIATED REPATRIATION

SIRs are formerly assigned or self-initiated expatriates who, after living and working abroad, return to their home country of their own volition without any organisational obligations or support (Andresen, 2021). SIRs can either seek new

employment upon repatriation (inter-organisational SIRs) or can continue working for the same organisation (intra-organisational SIRs) as long as they initiate their own return to their home country (Andresen et al., 2014). Research shows that SIRs often struggle individually and professionally immediately after the return to their home country (Andresen, 2021; Begley et al., 2008; Ho et al., 2016). Some examples of the dark side of self-initiated repatriation are: difficulties in securing employment (Andresen, 2021), lack of appreciation by the potential local employers (Begley et al., 2008), and experiences of reverse culture shocks (Ho et al., 2016). However, at the same time, there is great potential for SIRs to experience long-term career success upon repatriation (Suutari et al., 2017).

CAREER CAPITAL

CC is an individual asset accumulated throughout an individual's career journey, that consists of three types of knowing: knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why (Arthur et al., 1995; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Knowing-how represents professional skills and knowledge (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Knowing-whom stands for all the career relevant social connections individuals possess such as co-workers, managers, customers, and friends (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Knowing-why is the individual's understanding of their own career motivation, identity, and sense of career direction (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

According to Inkson and Arthur (2001), each type of knowing is interrelated in the sense that the accumulation and formation of one type of knowing can lead to the accumulation and formation of another type of knowing and the strengthening of CC in general. Inkson and Arthur (2001) also suggest that it is up to the individual to decide to consciously and continuously develop their own CC. Individuals must decide which career opportunities they want to seek, with who they want to connect, and what they wish to learn and think is important to pursue. This implies that even though there may be many external circumstances that affect individual careers, independent of the individuals themselves, shaping their own CC is within their power and is their own responsibility.

THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER OF CC

The basic premise of boundaryless careers, i.e. careers that are not limited to a single job position, organisation, occupation, industry, or perhaps even country (Eby et al., 2003), is based on the idea of boundaryless or transferable CC (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). The international transfer of CC is generally understood as the direct use of CC for the individual career in an organisation located in a country different to the one where the CC was developed (DeFillippi & Arthur,

1994; Dickmann & Cerdin, 2016; Dickmann & Watson, 2017; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Jokinen, 2010). Some scarce literature also suggests that the international transfer of CC might extend beyond CC being used in one job position/organisation upon relocation to another country (Jokinen, 2010; Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022). In other words, this means that in SIRs' case, individuals might be able to use their internationally developed CC in later career stages even if they had difficulty using such CC initially upon repatriation.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF KNOWING AFFECTING THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSFER OF CC

There are many factors that can affect the international transfer of CC (Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022). These can be divided into different level factors: micro (e.g., characteristics of CC, motivation and abilities to transfer the CC, and individual experiences such as the type and duration of expatriation), meso (e.g., organisational attitude towards international employees and their internationally developed CC), and macro (e.g., differences between host and home countries and country specific career structure norms) (Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022). Later in this chapter we will focus on micro-level factors and more specifically on the way individual career competencies such as knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom can affect the international transfer of CC.

Below, we will look at real-life examples of the way three types of knowing affect the international transfer of CC in the context of SIRs from different European, African, and American countries to the Netherlands and Lithuania. These examples derive from qualitative interview data collected between February and November 2021. We will specifically look at the four cases of Jonas, Lina, Bram, and Anouk ^[1]. This allows us to go beyond the theoretical ideas of Inkson and Arthur (2001) and to explore the way different types of knowing affect the international transfer of CC in actuality. Finally, we will discuss the knowledge gleaned about the way individuals can make better use of their internationally developed CC after repatriation to their home country and mistakes they should avoid.

The international transfer of knowing-whom

The international transfer of knowing-whom would mean the utilisation of social connections that were developed during SIRs working abroad, for career purposes, upon repatriation. An example could be them finding a job in their home country because of the recommendations from people they have met whilst abroad. It could also mean international inter-organisational collaborations with

¹ All the names of the SIRs provided in the examples have been changed due to the confidentiality agreement.

their connections made abroad, learning from each other's career experiences in different countries, and getting professional advice or mentoring.

Impact of knowing-how and knowing-why on the transfer of knowing-whom

Here we can see an example of the way individual knowing-how and knowing-why might affect the international transfer of knowing-whom. Jonas is a 31-year-old Lithuanian inter-organisational SIR who has lived and worked in the Netherlands as a research assistant as well as a doctoral researcher in the field of Sociology. Due to personal and professional learnings abroad, Jonas decided to switch his career path (**knowing-why developed abroad**) and has started working as a machine learning engineer in Lithuania. However, Jonas' social connections that were developed in the Netherlands, were mainly in the academic sector (**knowing-whom**), hence possessed mainly academic skills and knowledge (**knowing-how**). Therefore, Jonas was not able to utilise most of his connections developed abroad (**knowing-whom**) in his career back in his home country.

“When I made the decision that I would go back to Lithuania. I, maybe consciously maybe not started to now talk more with the people I know here (Lithuania). And people in the Netherlands, the contacts I had there were very professional contacts. Were very tailored to my academic endeavours. So I naturally just shifted them, never really utilized too much of the Dutch contacts.”

“If I continued working in academia, on the same topic or something related to what I did for my dissertation I guess I would already have contacts. There's a lot of time and, and you know social capital and whatnot invested and in this field sort of. And now I switched a little bit to data science and to business basically applications. Not really doing research, so the contacts that I have developed aren't as relevant. So that's you know, that's a pity. But I'm happy because this is what I want to do.”

As we can see from the quotes above, Jonas has made a conscious decision to switch career focus and to move to Lithuania (**knowing-why**). This inspired him to take the initiative and change his strategy for acquiring **knowing-whom** that will be more relevant for his job position back in his home country. Jonas was not able to utilise most of his **knowing-whom** developed abroad as these contacts were mainly coming from an academic background (**knowing-how**) and he was planning to switch to another industry. At the same time, because of his desire to switch career fields (**knowing-why**), Jonas strategically started talking more to the professionally relevant (**knowing-how**) people he knew abroad and those from his home country (**knowing-whom**) who were working in the field he wanted to move into. Even though most of Jonas' connections developed abroad were not utilised

upon his repatriation, he managed to utilise some of them that were relevant for his new career path. In the end Jonas was happy with the outcome as he was able to match the *knowing-why* that he developed abroad to his current job position in Lithuania.

The international transfer of knowing-why

The international transfer of knowing-why mainly means finding a job position that matches an individual's own career preferences and aspirations that were refined while working in another country. For example, if while working abroad, individuals understand that they prefer working in a lively environment where they can work with other people directly rather than constantly working alone – internationally transferring their knowing-why would mean finding a job in their home country where they could consistently collaborate with other people and work in a team.

Impact of knowing-whom on the transfer of knowing-why

Here we come back to Jonas. It is interesting to see that his decision to switch career paths (*knowing-why*) was initially influenced by conversations with his friends (*knowing-whom*) who were pursuing an academic career in Lithuania. As we can see from the quote below, Jonas' friends' experiences influenced his decision to not pursue an academic career in his home country and to switch to a job with a data science focus in the corporate world.

“So I didn't really apply to a postdoc here in Vilnius because some of the PhD students I knew didn't really seem to be too happy about working in the (academic) department. And I've kept a little bit of contact with people there, and now that I'm here, it seems to be... It seems to be the case, so I don't really regret this decision not to pursue a postdoc.”

Impact of knowing-how on the transfer of knowing-why

Below we can see the example of the way knowing-how affects the international transfer of knowing-why based on the experiences of Anouk, a Dutch inter-organisational SIR who has worked and lived in the Czech Republic in the HR sector. Anouk went to the Czech Republic straight after her studies when she was only 22 years old and started working in an entry-level job as she did not have any previous HR related job experience. She worked there for a year and afterwards decided to pursue her career in HR in her home country (*knowing-why*). Anouk was afraid that she would not be able to get a more senior job position in HR in the Netherlands (*knowing-why*) due to her small amount of job experience that

mainly focused on administrative HR skills acquired from abroad (**knowing-how**). However, her invaluable inter-cultural communications skills (**knowing-how**) made it possible to get a more senior job position in HR and to pursue her dream job in the Netherlands (**knowing-why**).

“I think the first month or two months it was kind of that ‘just fake it until you make it’ kind of thing – so just trying to work with what they're giving you and just not letting them know that what you did previously was very administrative. I don't really remember anymore - I remember that I was feeling very lucky that I managed to get such a job, like really a grown-up job because, as I really started with this entry level job, it did feel like I made quite a big step leap in terms of my career and so I cherished this and really appreciated it... I still had the things I learnt in university and just being a quick learner makes it possible for you to thrive in a lot of environments or a lot of jobs and then it isn't that much dependent on the actual skills that I learnt in my previous work - it was more like your general skill set - so like processing information quickly and having a bit of a social feeling and having the ability to interact with people from different cultures and like managers from Germany who were very strict and Denmark - so a lot of different people and as long as you have the skills to sort of work with that, then it was fine - so I had an expectation that maybe I will get into trouble because I didn't acquire the skills in my working life up to that point, but in the end that wasn't the most important thing.”

The international transfer of knowing-how

The international transfer of knowing-how means directly using professional skills and knowledge for individual career purposes in a country different from where that knowledge and skills were acquired or developed. In SIRs' cases it would be actively using their internationally developed knowledge and skills for their job in their home country.

Impact of knowing-whom on the transfer of knowing-how

Lina, a 33-year-old Lithuanian intra-organisational SIR, is pursuing a less typical highly dynamic and creative career pathway. She has extensive work experience in conference production and the creative technology design industries and has lived, studied, and worked in Belgium and in the US. Lina's **knowing-how** is highly versatile – she is experienced in programming, project management, teaching, theatre performance, and more. Even though her skill set, knowledge, and expertise are so diverse, highly sought after and applicable in multiple industries, Lina wanted to work in a very specific and rare creative technology niche.

“I mean I knew that I could easily get any job I wanted in Lithuania because of my talent and everything but I guess, because I didn't know the community here, I just wasn't sure if the skills that I used in New York would exist at all in Lithuania, so I just had some doubts...”

In order to apply her **knowing-how** developed abroad in the specific way she wanted, she depended a lot on her social connections (**knowing-whom**) as she was not sure if her dream job even existed in her home country.

“I had a list of new people I needed to meet - so like I had really strong connections with the Lithuanian community in New York and so before coming back, I talked to them about like ‘oh, if I want to work in a museum, who do I talk to about doing so?’ and I had a list of people who I didn't know but I would have to meet – and although I didn't have the network in Lithuania my previous network helped me...”

In the end, Lina was able to apply her **knowing-how** exactly how she wanted to because of her social connections (**knowing-whom**).

Impact of knowing-why on the transfer of knowing-how

Bram is a Dutch inter-organisational SIR who has lived and worked in Spain, Italy, South Africa, Romania, and the Czech Republic. One of the main reasons Bram went abroad was to learn more about his passions and to figure out what kind of career he actually wanted to pursue (**knowing-why**). During these international experiences Bram worked as a DJ and guest services specialist. Once he started working as a technical support specialist he decided to stay in this field and to continue building his expertise, skills, and knowledge accordingly (**knowing-how**). International work experience also taught Bram more confidence in his skills and abilities and to trust in himself as a professional who can achieve career success if he continues his career journey calmly, patiently, and confidently (**knowing-why**). This attitude (**knowing-why**) helped Bram do his job better and apply his knowledge and skills (**knowing-how**) in a more efficient way in his home country.

“Everything that I've learned over the years was definitely helpful because at the time when I wasn't in a consultancy role, you're talking to clients and from my experience with Dutch clients, there's a lot more pressure and what it really taught me over the years that I was living abroad is to keep yourself calm and give yourself time and accept if something is not possible, accept then that the answer is no, or if it takes a little bit more time it takes a little bit more time - and that really helped me in the move back. ... So it did help me as well in my

work, yes, because it gave me also more perspective and the confidence to relax a bit more and if I'm more relaxed, then the client will notice that I'm more relaxed. ... And they (clients) notice that if I'm still relaxed and they call me and they say it's not working anymore and I respond and say 'okay sure, let's find out what went wrong, let's analyse it and let's fix it' - and so if you do it in a calm tone and in a calm way, you bring it also onwards to them and you then notice that they are also getting more relaxed."

"... personally because I grew a lot and it really changed my mind and thinking about things in different ways instead of just staying within your own bubble, you explore more and see that there are other things and see that there are different ways of adjusting or handling some things – but professionally of course, all the knowledge that I gained over the years, I think the combination of that really made you personally and professionally a lot stronger in a position to support the high demand clients that you have here..."

DISCUSSION

The four cases presented above suggest that it is worth not only continuously developing our CC but also mindfully and actively using it when thinking of, planning, and pursuing our career wherever we go. The example of Jonas shows that knowing-why in terms of the decision to switch career paths can actually limit the utilisation of our social networks (knowing-whom). If our current network is mostly from our previous career field, it will likely possess different knowledge and skillsets (knowing-how) to the ones required for our new job and hence it will not be as relevant. Therefore, when thinking of starting a new career it would be wise to consider connecting with people from that new professional field just as Jonas did. Jonas' experience illustrates that the social connections, whether developed abroad or in our home country before expatriation, could further help to pursue a new career field.

Jonas' learnings from his friends who work in academia (knowing-whom) heavily influenced his decision to switch career paths upon repatriation (knowing-why). This signals the importance of actively talking to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances especially before making big career decisions as this could have a meaningful impact on the way individuals perceive their future career. Whilst Anouk's example suggests that having a strong professional background and expertise and being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of our own internationally developed professional knowledge and skills (knowing-how) can aid with becoming a stronger professional and bring us more confidence in our future career journey (knowing-why). The more prepared that individuals are for what they want, the easier it is to get there.

Lina's experiences teach us of the power of networking. Internationally developed networks (knowing-whom) can help and support individuals in various ways – even if there is no possibility of working with these people directly in the future, they can connect us to others who might be able to help us find a job that matches our individual expertise (knowing-how). Finally, the experiences of Bram show us that living and working abroad can help us with finding our own passion and becoming more confident as both individuals and professionals (knowing-why). In return, this can make people obtain better careers whether abroad or in their home countries. When people know what they want and they trust in themselves that they are good enough and deserve a great career, then they become more resilient and can see the power of their knowledge. Moreover, they can find a job where other people see and value their expertise (knowing-how) and themselves as professionals in general.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Inkson and Arthur (2001) suggest looking at CC the same way people look at financial capital. It is important to constantly invest in it by continuously developing and sharing it with organisations so that in the end it brings profit both for the company and the individual. The more people invest, the more they get back as profit. This chapter suggests that consciously and continuously investing in one's own CC can also serve as a great strategy that in the end can lead to a more successful international transfer of CC.

Cohen, Duberley, and Musson (2009) suggest – there is no such thing as work - life balance as work is not a separate world but an actual part of life. This suggests that there is nothing wrong in making friends at work or asking friends and family for professional advice. Hence, by being more like Lina and Jonas and actively talking to our own social networks, whether colleagues or friends, people can learn that some career paths are not for them. Active networking can also lead to new career possibilities and other connections that can be directly helpful for future career path development. At the same time, if individuals start connecting with the new people in their desired career field, both in the host and home countries, individuals can gain more professional support, advice, a job recommendation, or a new collaboration. By being less like Anouk and by consciously and actively investing in and reflecting on our own professional knowledge and skills, individuals can land their dream job more easily and without pretence, as they already know they are equipped for this position. Finally, by following Bram's example, individuals can settle into a job where their CC and they themselves feel valued if they decide exactly what they want and have confidence enough to achieve their goals. By taking each part of their own CC seriously people can

strengthen themselves as professionals no matter which job position, organisation, industry, or country they decide to continue their career journey in.

REFERENCES

- Andresen, M., Bergdolt, F., Margenfeld, J., & Dickmann, M. (2014). Addressing international mobility confusion – developing definitions and differentiations for self-initiated and assigned expatriates as well as migrants. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(16), 2295-2318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.877058>
- Andresen, M. (2021). When at home, do as they do at home? Valuation of self-initiated expatriates' competences in French and German management career structures. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 32(4), 789-821. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1511612>
- Begley, A., Collings, D. G., & Scullion, H. (2008). The cross-cultural adjustment experiences of self-initiated repatriates to the Republic of Ireland labour market. *Employee Relations*, 30(3), 264-282. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425450810866532>
- Cohen, L., Duberley, J., & Musson, G. (2009). Work—life balance? *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 18(3), 229-241. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1056492609332316>
- Defillippi, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1994). The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 307-324. doi:10.1002/job.4030150403
- Dickmann, M., & Cerdin, J.-L. (2016). Exploring the development and transfer of career capital in an international governmental organization. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(15), 2253-2283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1239217>
- Dickmann, M., & Watson, A. H. (2017). I might be shot at! Exploring the drivers to work in hostile environments using an intelligent careers perspective. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 5(4), 348-373. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jgm-12-2016-0066>
- Doherty, N., & Dickmann, M. (2009). Exposing the symbolic capital of international assignments. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(2), 301-320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190802670664>
- Eby, L. T., Butts, M., & Lockwood, A. (2003). Predictors of success in the era of the boundaryless career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 24(6), 689-708.
- Ho, N. T., Seet, P., & Jones, J. (2016). Understanding re-expatriation intentions among overseas returnees – an emerging economy perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(17), 1938-1966. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1088884>
- Inkson, K., & Arthur, M. B. (2001). How to be a successful career capitalist. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30(1), 48-61. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0090-2616\(01\)00040-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0090-2616(01)00040-7)
- Jokinen, T., Brewster, C., & Suutari, V. (2008). Career capital during international work experiences: Contrasting self-initiated expatriate experiences and assigned expatriation. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(6), 979-998. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190802051279>
- Oleškevičiūtė, E., Dickmann, M., Andresen, M., & Parry, E. (2022). The international transfer of individual career capital: Exploring and developing a model of the underlying factors. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 10(3), 392-415. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429352690>

Suutari, V., Brewster, C., Mäkelä, L., Dickmann, M., & Tornikoski, C. (2017). The effect of international work experience on the career success of expatriates: A comparison of assigned and self-initiated expatriates. *Human Resource Management*, 57(1), 37-54. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21827>