

The international transfer of individual career capital: exploring and developing a model of the underlying factors

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this literature review is to critically analyze, synthesize and integrate the currently fragmented literature concerning the factors affecting the international transfer of individual career capital (CC).

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is a systematic literature review of the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC from/for expatriates, repatriates and other employed highly skilled migrants and return migrants. The findings are classified based on the Social Chronology Framework (SCF) proposed by Gunz and Mayrhofer (2015).

Findings – This systematic literature review suggests that the international transfer of individual CC, which can be expressed both as (1) individual-level transfer across different organizations located in different countries as the direct use and application of CC and (2) individual knowing-how transfer to other individuals within organization, is affected by the individual, organizational and broader contextual-level factors that are bound by the aspect of time. The authors summarize the findings by presenting a model of the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC.

Originality/value – The authors align the CC framework (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994) to the SCF (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018) by explaining the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC that go beyond the qualities of CC, including the Being, Space and Time domains. Moreover, the authors critique the current focus on the international CC transfer in the present suggesting that future research should explore this phenomenon as a more dynamic process. Finally, the authors contribute to the literature on the global mobility of highly skilled employees' by highlighting gaps in the knowledge of the international transfer of CC and presenting a future research agenda.

Keywords Repatriation, Expatriation, Global work, Knowing-how, Knowing-whom, Knowing-why, International transfer of career capital

Paper type Literature review



1. Introduction

Since the late 20th century, careers have shifted from those within a single organization toward career paths that encourage free movement between different career contexts such as between organizations nationally and internationally (Eby *et al.*, 2003; Hall, 1996). To stay attractive in the rapidly changing organizational, occupational and industrial markets and to pursue boundaryless careers, i.e. careers that allow us to move freely both physically and psychologically between jobs, organizations, occupations, industries and countries (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006; Eby *et al.*, 2003), individuals need to develop more flexible and adaptable career capital (CC) (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994). CC is an individual asset combining cumulative career competencies consisting of three types of knowing: career-related motivation, meaning and identification (knowing-why); career-relevant skills and knowledge (knowing-how); and career-relevant social networks (knowing-whom) (Arthur *et al.*, 1995; Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson and Arthur, 2001).

The international and cross-organizational accumulation and use of career/business relevant competencies has long been seen as a significant topic (c.f. Edstrom and Galbraith, 1977). Considering the large and growing numbers of employees working abroad (International Organization for Migration and United Nations, 2020), as well as ongoing scientific interest in this topic (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Jokinen, 2010), the international transfer of individual CC remains an important issue. It is clear that the global mobility of employees alone does not always guarantee CC transfer from one context to another (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). The main obstacle to a successful global career, as suggested by Defillippi and Arthur (1994), is CC that is not boundaryless enough – in other words, CC that is difficult to transfer internationally between organizations, occupations and/or industries. The causes for this might include knowing-whom that is too narrow or limited, knowing-why that is mainly bonded to the current employer and/or knowing-how that is too narrowly customized. However, the literature suggests that there is a variety of factors potentially affecting the international transfer of individual CC including differences in national career norms (Andresen, 2021).

The CC framework (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994) suggests that individual CC transfer is a basis for boundaryless careers. However, the literature so far concentrates on the qualities of CC (such as the extent to which CC is bound to a single organization) and neglects other contextual factors that matter potentially in the national and international context of the transfer of individual CC. Failure to transfer CC between organizations internationally can “constrain the realization of a boundaryless career” (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994, p. 320). This not only has negative implications for the international development of individual careers but also limits the innovation and globalization of organizations (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson and Arthur, 2001), which eventually could result in a lack of brain gain for economies (Dustmann *et al.*, 2011). Given the need to better understand what affects the international transfer of CC, we integrate the current literature based on the Social Chronology Framework (SCF) looking at the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC from the ontic, spatial and temporal perspectives (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015).

When referring to the international transfer of CC further in this paper, we mean *the transfer of individual CC by individuals* as the direct use and application of *individually accumulated CC* in an organization embedded in a different country (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Jokinen, 2010). This could mean the transfer of CC accumulated in the home country organization to the organization in the host country or the transfer of CC accumulated in the host country to the organization in the home country. The *transfer of CC by individuals* might also include *the transfer of individual CC* to other individuals within the organization in the different country as a way to apply and use CC in the organization (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). This is in line with the idea that we build our careers by investing in our CC (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994). Investing into our CC also means sharing our CC with the organization so that there are mutual benefits for the individual career and for organizational outcomes (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). For

instance, people would have to share their ideas (knowing-how) with superiors and/or colleagues for approval to implement those ideas widely within the organization.

Our systematic literature review (SLR) seeks to answer the following question: *What are the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC?* We answer this question by using the SCF (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015) as an ordering mechanism to gather, summarize and structure the currently fragmented literature on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC. Moreover, we contribute to the CC framework (Arthur *et al.*, 1995; Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson and Arthur, 2001) by adding and explaining the contextual and temporal factors affecting the transfer of CC that go not only beyond a single organization but also beyond national borders. Finally, we call for empirical research to unify, strengthen, deepen and enrich the literature on the international transfer of CC and in this way also provide insights into the global mobility of employees.

2. Types of globally mobile employees

In this paper, we will focus exclusively on highly skilled individuals. These include assigned expatriates (AEs), self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), assigned repatriates (ARs) and self-initiated repatriates (SIRs), as well as highly skilled working migrants and return migrants in general, as both expatriates and repatriates fall under the migration umbrella (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). AEs are employees who were sent on an international assignment by their organization (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). SIEs are individuals who initiate their own expatriation to the foreign country for work and life purposes (Suutari and Brewster, 2000). ARs are AEs who are repatriated to their home country by their home organization (Andresen, 2021), whereas SIRs independently make the decision to repatriate back to their home country and relocate without any organizational support (Andresen, 2021). Highly skilled migrants are people who are living abroad and who have gained the qualifications needed to practice a profession either by higher education or by work experience (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011). We have included only highly skilled employees as we interpret the level of qualification as an indicator of the career orientation of these individuals, in that they have been preparing for their career by gaining higher education or have the prior work experience leading to an interest in transferring their CC.

3. The international transfer of individual CC

The CC framework (Inkson and Arthur, 2001) suggests that career is a continuous process that can include moving between jobs nationally and internationally. This framework also suggests that boundaryless careers (Eby *et al.*, 2003) would not be possible if we could not take our CC with us, i.e. could not transfer CC between various career contexts throughout our career journey (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994). Research on the CC possessed by internationally mobile employees provides some evidence that individuals can transfer their CC not only between local organizations but also between organizations located in different countries (Dickmann *et al.*, 2016; Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Jokinen, 2010).

Research on the international transfer of CC points to the partial transferability of CC indicating that CC can sometimes be transferred only to some extent (Jokinen, 2010). This means that carrying our CC with us does not always mean fully transferring it between different jobs if we cannot actively apply or use it in the new workplace. The natural question that comes out of this is “what does the transfer of CC depend on?” or “what are the factors affecting the international transfer of CC?” A partial answer to these questions can be found in the competency-based view of boundaryless careers (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994).

Defillippi and Arthur (1994, p. 320) suggest that “asymmetries in the development of boundaryless career competencies may constrain the realization of a boundaryless career”.

This means that career competencies that are in some way deficient or not boundaryless enough can limit our possibilities to engage in the boundaryless career. For example, if we identify our careers (knowing-why) too closely with our current organization we might miss opportunities for a career outside this firm (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994). Moreover, if our knowing-how is mainly company-specific then it might not be that relevant outside our current organization. Furthermore, if we do not have strong career relevant social contacts (knowing-whom) who could, for example, provide recommendations to a potential employer, this could prevent us from getting a new job. This also means that one bound career competency can prevent us from actively using and applying the other boundaryless career competencies we have. For example, we could have been directed toward new career opportunities by our social contacts (knowing-whom), or we could have utilized our current knowledge and skills (knowing-how) in a new career environment outside our current organization if our career identity (knowing-why) was less bound or attached to our current employer.

The extent to which our CC is bound to a current organization is useful in explaining the factors affecting transfer of CC. However, some writers suggest that there are more aspects affecting the international transfer of CC (e.g. Andresen, 2021; Choi and Johanson, 2012; Minbaeva and Michailova, 2004). For example, the individual ability and motivation to transfer knowledge is shown to be an important aspect in determining the extent of knowing-how transfer (Minbaeva and Michailova, 2004). Another example shows that the international transfer of CC is also affected by contextual factors such as national career norms that shape organizational attitudes toward the international working experience of potential and current employees (Andresen, 2021). Finally, the literature suggests that the previous expatriation experience of expatriates can enhance the success of knowing-how transfer internationally (Choi and Johanson, 2012).

4. The Social Chronology Framework (SCF)

The SCF was originally created to bridge the gap between organization and career studies, suggesting a common language and understanding of careers from the ontic, spatial, and temporal perspectives (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015). The ontic perspective focuses on the condition of the Being i.e. qualities and experiences of the career actor about whose career is being talked about and comparison of the condition of the Being to other career actors or career standards (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018). The spatial perspective focuses on the Space in which career is happening. This can include such aspects as the industry, organization, location of the organization, other organizational actors within the career field and Being's (hierarchical) relation to those people and career space in general, as well as all the rules and norms within the career space (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018). Finally, the temporal perspective connects Being and Space, and focuses on how Time changes the Being's condition and boundaries of the Space (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015). The temporal perspective suggests looking at careers as a process and analyzing the sequence of the events and the chronological journey of careers (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018).

Gunz and Mayrhofer (2015) suggest that the SCF can guide the research of career phenomena focusing on various career transitions, events, changes, or problems such as career mentoring and career success. We believe that the international transfer of CC is one of the best examples of career transitions. Hence, in this paper, we use the SCF (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015) as an ordering mechanism in understanding factors affecting the international transfer of CC that include not only individual level factors such as the qualities of CC itself but also other individual, contextual and time sensitive factors. It is important to incorporate this broader view to increase our understanding of the international transfer of CC through a more holistic, nuanced and time-sensitive analysis. Further in this paper, "Being" denotes individuals who possess and transfer CC, "Space" reflects the career context

such as organizations embedded in different countries and “Time” refers to the chronological journey from CC development to the process of the transfer of CC.

5. Methodology

To address the research question (*what are the factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC?*), we conducted an SLR (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). An SLR is argued to be a highly efficient, consistent, clear and transparent way of identifying, synthesizing and evaluating literature (Mulrow, 1994). As suggested by Tranfield *et al.* (2003), prior to conducting the SLR we developed a scoping study to evaluate the size of the existing literature on the topic of interest.

We include literature relating to various types of globally mobile employees in our sample. This includes both expatriates and repatriates, as well as highly skilled employed migrants and return migrants in general. These criteria were reflected in the key search terms (repatriates, expatriates, CC and transfer) and combinations of those key terms in the nine search strings. Search strings were applied to the title, abstract and keywords. Five databases were chosen: EBSCO Business Source Complete, ABI/Inform Complete via ProQuest, PsycINFO, Scopus and Web of Science. These databases were chosen to ensure peer-reviewed scientific and international articles across different disciplines, i.e. business, management, psychology and economics, as these disciplines appear to cover the topic of transfer of CC from micro, meso and macro perspectives. Our inclusion criteria for the articles were publications written in the English language only including empirical studies, literature reviews and theoretical or conceptual papers that were published in peer reviewed scholarly journals. We also applied additional filters for Scopus and Web of Science based on the subject area to avoid a large amount of non-relevant data. For example, we excluded such disciplines as biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology, and medicine. Application of the nine search strategies across the five databases resulted in the identification of 9,302 articles in total.

The first relevance screening phase included reading only the title and abstract of each article and excluding the articles that were clearly not relevant for our research (e.g. articles about salmon migration). This reduced the total number of articles to 1,637 articles. Next, we conducted a second relevance screening that involved reading the full article and selecting articles based on the criteria of the sample being currently employed highly skilled migrants, meaning that these individuals should possess either higher education or previous professional work experience (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011). We decided to exclude articles relating to other types of knowledge or capital at the organizational or family levels, e.g. transfer of HRM systems or transfer of cultural heritage. We therefore included only the articles that specifically focused on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC. The application of these criteria and deletion of duplicates left us with 61 articles in total.

We followed Pittaway *et al.*'s (2004) process and assessed each article based on theory robustness, implications for practice, methodology, generalizability and overall contribution. The total number of relevant articles after the quality appraisal was 47. We decided to exclude 15 purely conceptual papers from the final list of the papers analyzed in this SLR as these did not add additional insights on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC other than those already suggested by the empirical papers. We also consulted with experts in the field of the global mobility of employees and CC, and based on their suggestions added four more empirical papers to our SLR. The experts were chosen based on their numerous, high-quality publications on expatriation and career and human capital (transfer). These experts were chosen as those that had a good understanding of current research in the area and therefore would be able to identify papers that used alternative terminology and thus were not captured via the search strings. The total number of chosen articles was therefore 36.

6. Findings

There were an almost equal number of qualitative ($n = 17$) and quantitative ($n = 14$) articles as well as five mixed methods articles included in this SLR. In this Findings and the following Analysis sections, we will structure our results based on the international transfer of CC distinguishing Being, Space and Time *factors* influencing the international transfer of CC as found in our data (see Table 1).

The articles selected for this SLR have two different foci. (1) A relatively small number of articles (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Jokinen, 2010; Winterheller and Hirt, 2017) explore the international transfer of CC as the individual level transfer of CC across career contexts, i.e. involving two different organizations in two different countries and exploring the direct use and applicability of CC. These articles were published between 2010 and 2018, and all were based on qualitative methods, indicating the explorative stage of the research and novelty of this topic (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). (2) Most of the articles indicated in this SLR examine knowledge sharing, i.e. the international transfer of knowing-how to the organization through other organizational actors, mostly as a way of advancing organizational knowledge and goals (organization benefits focused approach). However, according to Inkson and Arthur (2001), knowledge sharing can also be considered as one of the ways of directly applying and using individual CC which is also to the benefit of the individual, as knowledge sharing is one of the tasks an individual is expected to do in the organization.

Articles that discuss factors affecting the international transfer of CC across different organizations in different countries (as outlined by the focus 1 above) cover the individual-level (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Winterheller and Hirt, 2017), as well as the organizational-level (Begley *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Guo *et al.*, 2013) and broader contextual-level (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Watson, 2017), factors affected by the aspect of Time. The most commonly discussed factor was organizational attitudes toward CC that has been acquired/further developed in a foreign country (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Winterheller and Hirt, 2017). These organizational attitudes are also often affected by country-level characteristics (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008). This mostly means that in order to actively use and apply CC, individuals, their international working experience and their CC firstly need to be positively perceived, acknowledged and approved by the organization and other organizational actors (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Winterheller and Hirt, 2017). Moreover, it has been shown that substantial differences between the

Factors affecting the international transfer of individual CC

Foci of the international transfer of individual CC

<i>Factors</i> affecting the international transfer of individual CC	<i>Foci</i> of the international transfer of individual CC			
	Individual-level transfer of individual CC across different organizations in different countries as the direct use and applicability of the CC		Individual knowing-how transfer to other individuals within the new organization in the new country	
Home country → host country	Host country → home country	Home country → host country	Host country → home country	
Being (see Section 7.1)				
Space (see Section 7.2)				
Time (see Section 7.3)				

Table 1.
Structure for the analysis of the findings

organization in which CC was developed/advanced and the organization to which CC is being transferred (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016) as well as the differences between host and home country characteristics (Dickmann and Watson, 2017) make it more difficult to fully transfer CC. This can explain not only the transfer of knowing-how and knowing-whom but also the transfer of knowing-why in that the motivation, professional identity and goals of individuals need to fit with organizational goals. When two organizations are very different, that might mean that motivation, goals and identity would differ as well (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Dickmann and Watson, 2017). This is closely related to the ideas that transfer is more difficult when CC is not boundaryless enough or is too closely tied to a single organization, industry or country (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994).

Even though most of the literature focuses on the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals within the new organization in the new country (focus 2), this literature also incorporates the importance of other types of knowing. It is shown that the international transfer of knowing-how is often affected by knowing-whom (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Sitar and Mihelič, 2018), which means that in order to transfer the knowledge and skills to other individuals, we often need social interactions and recognition with and from the appropriate social networks at work. Moreover, research provides insights that the motivation (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015) to transfer knowing-how, as well as identification with the current employer (Riusala and Suutari, 2004), serves as push factors to transferring knowing-how. This suggests that knowing-why, which had to be transferred prior to transferring knowing-how, can also potentially have an impact on the transfer of knowing-how. This is in line with the CC framework (Inkson and Arthur, 2001), which says that all three types of knowing are interrelated in the way that they can influence and affect the development and transfer of one another.

In the following section of this paper, we will present a thorough synthesis and analysis of the findings.

7. Analysis

In this section, we distinguish Being, Space and Time factors shaping the international transfer of CC and divide these according to the two foci explained in the Findings section.

7.1 *Being*

Individual(micro)-level factors reflect Being, i.e. the person who possesses and transfers CC, and who affects the international transfer of CC. This includes the different characteristics of knowing-how and knowing-whom, individual abilities, motivation and opportunity seeking to transfer CC, as well as other characteristics, competencies and experiences of the individual who possesses CC (see Table 2).

7.1.1 *The way being affects the transfer of CC from the home country to the host country.*

7.1.1.1 Being affecting the international transfer of CC at the individual level (Focus 1). As we can see from Table 2, the direct application and use of CC in the organization in the case of AEs can be affected both positively and negatively by the specificity of the knowing-how that is being transferred and by the type of expertise and/or organizational position (Jokinen, 2010). This means that knowing-how that is too specific or too tightly bound to the home country's specific culture and organization is more difficult to directly apply and use in the organization embedded in the host country's culture (Jokinen, 2010). Moreover, managerial expertise can make it easier to transfer knowing-how, as managers possess more general and applicable knowing-how and can transfer their knowing-how more easily than employees in very specific job positions (Jokinen, 2010).

We did not find articles looking at the individual-level factors influencing the direct transfer of CC possessed by SIEs. However, qualitative research with other highly skilled

		Factors affecting the international transfer of Individual CC on the individual level across different organizations in different countries as the direct use and applicability of the CC		Individual knowing-how to other individuals within the new organization in the new country
From home country organization to host country organization	<i>ASSIGNED EXPATRIATES</i>	+ – Specificity of knowing-how that is being transferred 12 + – Type of expertise and/or organizational position (<i>indirect effect</i>) 12	– Tacit nature of knowledge/low codifiability of knowledge 16 – High levels of knowledge complexity/low levels of knowledge teachability 17 20 + Newly developed knowing-whom 19 + Boundary spanning 15 + Relationship development capability 7 + Nurturing feedback loops 6 + – Dependence and identification with the organization 16 20 + – Ability, motivation and opportunity seeking for knowledge transfer 5 + Cultural Intelligence 21 + Previous expatriation experience 7 + Psychological capital 19	
	<i>SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES</i> <i>Other highly skilled working migrants PLUS short-term assignees, international commuters, frequent flyers, and mission workers</i>	– + Accumulation of the career capital in the host country (<i>indirect effect</i>) 23	– + Ability to transfer knowledge 10 14 + Bilingual and bicultural competencies 13 – Limited host country language proficiency 11 + Ability, motivation and opportunity for communicating the knowledge 1 + Interaction between the ability and motivation to transfer the knowledge 3 + Disseminative capacity 4 18 + Cultural Intelligence 21 + Global management competency learning during the international assignment 8 + Amount and depth of knowing-how and knowing-whom acquired abroad (<i>indirect effect</i>) 18 + Positive repatriate adjustment 8	
From host country organization to home country organization	<i>ASSIGNED REPATRIATES</i>	–	– + Ability, motivation and opportunity for communicating the knowledge 1 + Interaction between the ability and motivation to transfer the knowledge 3 + Disseminative capacity 4 18 + Cultural Intelligence 21 + Global management competency learning during the international assignment 8 + Amount and depth of knowing-how and knowing-whom acquired abroad (<i>indirect effect</i>) 18 + Positive repatriate adjustment 8	
	<i>SELF-INITIATED REPATRIATES</i> <i>Other highly skilled working return migrants</i>	+ – Expatriation type (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 – Mobility during an early career stage (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 – Long-term expatriation (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 – Expatriation to less developed countries (<i>indirect effect</i>) 1 + Knowing-whom (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 9	– + Host country embeddedness (<i>indirect effect</i>) 22 + Home country embeddedness (<i>indirect effect</i>) 22	

Note(s): + factors positively affecting international transfer of CC. – factors negatively affecting international transfer of CC

1 - Amir *et al.* (2020). 2 - Andresen (2021). 3 - Burmeister *et al.* (2015). 4 - Burmeister *et al.* (2018). 5 - Chang *et al.* (2012). 6 - Chen *et al.* (2012). 7 - Choi and Johanson (2012). 8 - Furuya *et al.* (2009). 9 – Guo *et al.* (2013). 10 - Hussein (2014). 11 - Imai *et al.* (2019). 12 - Jokinen (2010). 13 - Liu *et al.* (2015). 14 - Minbaeva and Michailova (2004). 15 - Reiche (2011). 16 - Riusala and Suutari (2004). 17 - Riusala and Smale (2007). 18 - Sanchez-Vidal *et al.* (2018). 19 - Sitar and Mihelić (2018). 20 - Smale and Suutari (2011). 21 - Vljajčić *et al.* (2019). 22 - Wang (2015). 23 - Winterheller and Hirt (2017)

Table 2. Being (individual-level factors) affecting the international transfer of individual CC

migrants suggests that the accumulation of CC in the host country indirectly affects the transfer of CC to the host country positively by helping to validate CC that was acquired in the home country (Winterheller and Hirt, 2017). This means that the CC developed in the home country is more valued in the host country if these people also possess CC that was developed locally.

7.1.1.2 Being affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals within the organization (Focus 2). Table 2 provides a list of factors affecting the international transfer of CC possessed by AEs to other organizational actors in the host country's organization. When transferring knowledge to other organizational actors within host country's organization, knowing-how that is very complex (Riusala and Smale, 2007; Smale and Suutari, 2011), difficult to teach (Riusala and Smale, 2007) and difficult to codify (Riusala and Suutari, 2004) negatively impacts the transfer of such knowing-how. Moreover, developing, widening and maintaining social networks in the host country can help to transfer knowing-how developed in the home country to those people more effectively (Choi and Johanson, 2012; Reiche, 2011; Sitar and Mihelić, 2018). Chen *et al.* (2012) also suggest that learning more about the knowledge recipient's existing knowledge, experiences, background and learning styles can help to transfer knowledge more effectively as in this way individuals learn of the best way to transfer the knowledge to a particular person. Knowledge transfer can be positively affected by a sense of belonging to the organization, as well as the ability, motivation and opportunity seeking to transfer knowledge. However, if these aspects are missing then transfer of knowledge can be more difficult (Chang *et al.*, 2012; Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Smale and Suutari, 2011). Other factors positively affecting knowing-how transfer in the case of AEs are cultural intelligence (Vlajčić *et al.*, 2019), previous expatriation experience (Choi and Johanson, 2012) and psychological capital, which represents self-efficacy, resilience and optimism (Sitar and Mihelić, 2018).

There were no articles looking at the factors affecting knowledge transfer by SIEs. However, the ability to transfer knowledge was indicated as a factor positively affecting knowledge transfer by transnational social workers (Hussein, 2014) and expatriates on temporary assignments (Minbaeva and Michailova, 2004). Moreover, research with other highly skilled migrants shows that bilingual and bicultural competencies facilitate the knowing-how transfer (Liu *et al.*, 2015), whereas limited host country language proficiency negatively impacts the knowledge sharing process (Imai *et al.*, 2019).

7.1.2 The way being affects the transfer of CC from the host country to the home country.

7.1.2.1 Being affecting the international transfer of CC at the individual level (Focus 1). When looking at the international transfer of CC from host country to home country, we did not find articles looking at ARs. Articles focusing on SIRs suggested the importance of expatriation type, mobility during early-stage career, long-term expatriation, expatriation to less developed countries, and knowing-whom for the international transfer of CC back to the home country (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013). All these factors affected the international transfer of CC indirectly through the way it impacts organizational perception of the value of CC possessed by SIRs. It has been shown that in France, SIRs perceived that their international working experience was valued less by the organization than the international working experience of ARs (Andresen, 2021). Moreover, mobility during an early career stage and long-term expatriation was perceived to negatively impact French employers' attitude toward SIRs international working experience (Andresen, 2021). Furthermore, the international working experience of SIRs who have been working in less developed countries was viewed negatively by their French and German employers back in the home country (Andresen, 2021). Finally, home country developed knowing-whom can indirectly positively affect the international transfer of CC by helping SIRs to access job opportunities both in Germany, France and China (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013).

7.1.2.2 Being affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals with the organization (Focus 2). The individual-level factors influencing the international transfer of the knowing-how possessed by ARs to other organizational actors within the home country's organization are the same as those mentioned above in relation to the transfer from home country to host country organizations by AEs. These include ability, motivation and opportunity seeking to transfer knowledge (Amir *et al.*, 2020; Burmeister *et al.*, 2015, 2018; Sanchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2018), and cultural intelligence (Vlajčić *et al.*, 2019). It is worth mentioning that in the case of ARs, even though knowledge teachability was not shown to directly affect the international transfer of knowing-how, it was shown to moderate the positive relationship between organizational absorptive capacity and knowledge transfer as this relationship was even stronger when knowledge was difficult to teach (Burmeister *et al.*, 2018). Factors specifically relevant for the ARs are global management competency learning during the international assignment (Furuya *et al.*, 2009), the amount and depth of knowing-how and knowing-whom acquired abroad (indirect effect through increased repatriates disseminative capacity) (Sanchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2018) and positive repatriate adjustment after the international assignment (Furuya *et al.*, 2009).

There were no articles analyzing the factors affecting the international transfer of CC possessed by SIRs to other people within an organization in the home country. In terms of other skilled return migrants, both host country embeddedness and host country embeddedness have a positive indirect effect on the international transfer of knowing-how (Wang, 2015). Host country embeddedness allowed people to learn more during their expatriation period, whereas home country embeddedness helped to identify more opportunities for the knowledge transfer (Wang, 2015).

7.2 Space

The literature suggests that there are two blocks of factors representing the Space aspect. These are the organizational (meso) and broader contextual (macro)-level factors (see Table 3). Organizational (meso) factors relate to the other organizational actors/people (micro level embedded in the meso level) who represent the organization to which CC is being transferred (managers, colleagues, teams etc. in the organizations through whom CC is being transferred to the organization). They also relate to their abilities and motivation in receiving international knowing-how as well as attitudes toward international CC that has been acquired/further developed in a foreign country (see Table 3). This also includes supportive organizational practices toward assigned expatriation and repatriation, formal and informal communication opportunities (or absences of such opportunities) within the organization for the transfer of CC, and other organizational characteristics such as the mentoring opportunities provided for employees and the differences between host and home countries' organizations' goals (see Table 3). Broader contextual (macro)-level factors go beyond the organization and include the migration policies and other specific characteristics of the country in which the organization to which CC is being transferred is located (see Table 3). Below we will provide a detailed description and explanation for factors representing the Space aspect.

7.2.1 *The way space affects the transfer of CC from the home country to the host country.*

7.2.1.1 Space affecting the international transfer of CC at the individual level (Focus 1). As suggested in Table 3, the international transfer of AEs' CC at the individual level to the host country depends on the differences between home and host countries' perceived and/or actual hostility (Dickmann and Watson, 2017), as well as differences between the subsidiary's and headquarters' (HQ) goals (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016). This suggests that substantial differences between home and host countries and organizations can negatively impact the international transfer of CC making CC less relevant and applicable. There were no articles analyzing the factors affecting the international transfer of CC by SIEs and other highly skilled migrants transferring CC to the host country.

		Factors affecting the international transfer of Individual CC on the individual level across different organizations in different countries as the direct use and applicability of the CC	Individual knowing-how to other individuals within the new organization in the new country
From home country organization to host country organization	<i>ASSIGNED EXPATRIATES</i>	– Differences between subsidiary's and HQ's goals 7 (MESO) – Differences between two working environments in terms of hostile environments 8 (MACRO)	+ Absorptive capacity of the organization 18 19 21 (MESO) + Provided mentoring for assigned expatriates 6 (MESO) + Organizational climate towards learning, innovation and change 18 21 (MESO) Subsidiary's strategic role 16 (MESO) – Cultural differences between home and host countries 14 16 (MACRO) – Social context 18 21 (MACRO)
	<i>SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES</i>	–	–
	<i>Other highly skilled working migrants</i>	–	– Highly restrictive immigration Policy 12 13 (MACRO) – Lack of professional and social recognition 22 (MACRO)
From host country organization to home country organization	<i>ASSIGNED REPATRIATES</i>	–	+ Absorptive capacity of the organization 5 (MESO) + Interaction between the ability and motivation of local staff to absorb new knowledge 3 (MESO) + Organizational support before and during expatriation 9 (MESO) + Organizational support before, during, and after repatriation 4 (MESO) + International assignments policy (<i>indirect effect</i>) 20 (MESO) + Repatriation supportive HR policies 9 + Formal and informal knowledge governance mechanisms (<i>indirect effect</i>) 11 (MESO) + Repatriate knowledge sharing environment 15 (MESO) + Formal opportunities for interaction between repatriates and domestic employees 5 (MESO) + Formal and informal opportunity for interaction between repatriates and domestic employees 3 (MESO) + Host unit social capital 17 (MESO)
	<i>SELF-INITIATED REPATRIATES</i>	+ Positive organizational perception of recent local working experience value (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 (MESO) – Negative organizational perception of international experience value (<i>indirect effect</i>) 2 (MESO) – Highly centralized power relationships 10 (MESO) + – Country-specific career structure norms (<i>indirect effect</i>) 1 2 (MACRO)	–
	<i>Other highly skilled working return migrants</i>	–	– Power relationships 22 (MESO)

Note(s): + factors positively affecting international transfer of CC

– factors negatively affecting international transfer of CC

1 - [Andresen \(2021\)](#), 2 - [Begley et al. \(2008\)](#), 3 - [Burmeister et al. \(2015\)](#), 4 - [Burmeister and Deller \(2016\)](#), 5 - [Burmeister et al. \(2018\)](#), 6 - [Carragher et al. \(2008\)](#), 7 - [Dickmann and Cerdin \(2016\)](#), 8 - [Dickmann and Watson \(2017\)](#), 9 - [Furuya et al. \(2009\)](#), 10 - [Guo et al. \(2013\)](#), 11 - [Huang et al. \(2013\)](#), 12 - [Kassan and Nakamura \(2013\)](#), 13 - [Orazbayev \(2017\)](#), 14 - [Peltokorpi \(2006\)](#), 15 - [Peterson and Steelman \(2015\)](#), 16 - [Qin et al. \(2008\)](#), 17 - [Reiche \(2012\)](#), 18 - [Riusala and Suutari \(2004\)](#), 19 - [Riusala and Smale \(2007\)](#), 20 - [Sanchez-Vidal et al. \(2018\)](#), 21 - [Smale and Suutari \(2011\)](#), 22 - [Williams and Baláz \(2008\)](#)

Table 3.
Space (organizational (meso) and country (macro)-level factors) affecting the international transfer of individual CC

7.2.1.2 Space affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals within the organization (Focus 2). Both qualitative (Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Smale and Suutari, 2011) and quantitative (Chang *et al.*, 2012; Reiche, 2011; Riusala and Smale, 2007) research shows that the absorptive capacity of the organization plays an important role in the international transfer of AEs knowing-how to the host country organizations. The absorptive capacity or “the ability of a firm to recognize the value of new, external information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends” (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990, p. 128) can have a direct positive effect on the international transfer of knowing-how (Riusala and Smale, 2007; Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Smale and Suutari, 2011). Moreover, absorptive capacity of organizational actors can moderate the positive relationship between the expatriate’s ability, motivation and opportunity seeking for knowledge transfer, and knowledge received by the organization. This means that this relationship is stronger when the organization’s absorptive capacity is greater (Chang *et al.*, 2012). Also, the relationship between expatriates’ boundary spanning and knowledge transfer becomes stronger when the absorptive capacity of an organization is higher, and when the absorptive capacity is lower the relationship becomes weaker (Reiche, 2011).

The literature on AEs shows that other factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how that depend on the organization are: mentoring provided by host countries’ organizations (Carragher *et al.*, 2008; Reiche, 2011); positive organizational climate toward learning, innovation and change (Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Smale and Suutari, 2011); and the subsidiary’s strategic role (Qin *et al.*, 2008). For example, mentoring can directly positively relate to the international transfer of CC (Carragher *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, high levels of mentoring can strengthen, whereas low levels of mentoring can weaken, the relationship between expatriates’ boundary spanning and knowledge transfer (Reiche, 2011). Broader contextual factors negatively affecting the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by AEs are cultural distance and differences between home and host countries (Peltokorpi, 2006; Qin *et al.*, 2008), as well as social context including bureaucratic barriers, issues related to legislation and taxation, high power distance and lack of openness in the culture, and corruption (Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Smale and Suutari, 2011).

There were no articles looking at the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by SIEs. The literature on other highly skilled migrants informs us of the negative impact that migration policies (Orazbayev, 2017; Kassin and Nakamura, 2013) and lack of professional and social recognition (Williams and Baláz, 2008) can have on the international transfer of CC. Restrictive migration policies can limit the amount of international talent that can enter the country (Orazbayev, 2017) which means less brain gain at the country level. This also can cause difficulties in transferring educational credentials between countries, which can negatively affect migrants’ employability (Kassin and Nakamura, 2013). This in turn can impede the international transfer of CC. A case study of Slovak doctors shows that lack of professional and social recognition due to migrants’ nationality can also be a barrier to the international transfer of knowing-how (Williams and Baláz, 2008).

7.2.2 *The way space affects the transfer of CC from the host country to the home country.*

7.2.2.1 Space affecting the international transfer of CC at the individual level (Focus 2). There were no articles analyzing the factors affecting the international transfer of CC possessed by ARs. In case of SIRs, negative organizational perceptions of the value of international experience indirectly negatively affect the international transfer of CC by creating difficulties in securing employment (Andresen, 2021). Alternatively, positive organizational perceptions of the value of recent local working experience indirectly positively affect the international transfer of CC by helping to secure employment back in the home country (Andresen, 2021). Another organizational factor negatively affecting the

international transfer of CC was the existence of a highly centralized power relationship preventing SIRs freely expressing themselves in front of their superiors and thus fully using their CC (Guo *et al.*, 2013). Research shows that the international working experience of SIRs is valued differently in different countries. This can have a major effect on the success of the international transfer of CC as transfer of CC strongly depends on the perception of the value of CC by the receiver (e.g. the organization and employees within the organization) (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008). For example, country-specific norms relating to career structure can indirectly affect the international transfer of CC by negatively or positively affecting employers' attitude toward international experience (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008).

7.2.2.2 Space affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals within the organization (Focus 2). As with the case of SIEs, the absorptive capacity of the organization (Burmeister *et al.*, 2018) as well as the interaction between the ability and motivation of local staff to absorb new knowledge (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015) are likely to positively affect the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by ARs. Moreover, it has been shown that an encouraging organizational environment, support and other expatriation and repatriation supportive organizational practices can lead either directly (Burmeister and Deller, 2016; Furuya *et al.*, 2009) or indirectly (Huang *et al.*, 2013; Reiche, 2012; Sanchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2018) to the successful international transfer of CC. For example, organizational support before and during expatriation, as well as before, during and after repatriation has a positive effect on the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by ARs (Burmeister and Deller, 2016; Furuya *et al.*, 2009). The international assignments policy can indirectly positively affect the international transfer of knowing-how by increasing repatriates' disseminative capacity (Sanchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, high levels of perceived career and repatriation support makes the positive relationship between expatriates' structural host unit social capital and their transfer of host unit knowledge upon repatriation weaker (Reiche, 2012). Finally, formal (e.g. performance evaluations and other reward systems) and informal (e.g. social norms, teamwork, communities within organization and eating lunch together) knowledge governance mechanisms can indirectly and positively influence the international transfer of CC through knowledge sharing motivation and knowledge sharing opportunities of the ARs (Huang *et al.*, 2013). Other factors positively affecting the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by ARs were a repatriate friendly knowledge sharing environment (Peterson and Steelman, 2015), formal (Burmeister *et al.*, 2018) and informal (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015, 2018) opportunities for interaction between repatriates and domestic employees, host unit social capital (Reiche, 2012) and international experience of domestic employees which makes the relationship between opportunities for interaction and knowledge transfer less important (Burmeister *et al.*, 2018).

There were no articles exploring the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how possessed by SIRs. High-power distance between other highly skilled returnees and their colleagues and/or superiors in the home country's organization can impede the transfer of CC in the way that returnees in hierarchically low positions – their CC tends not to be taken seriously by colleagues and superiors in hierarchically higher positions (Williams and Baláž, 2008). Moreover, the literature suggests that there are three organizational-level aspects that can indirectly affect the international transfer of knowing-how in the case of other highly skilled migrants, through a moderation effect. First, the positive effects of host country embeddedness on knowledge transfer success diminish when other returnees are present in the home country workplace (Wang, 2015). Second, host country embeddedness has a stronger effect on knowledge transfer success when there is an industry similarity between host and home country workplaces (Wang, 2015). Finally,

higher home country embeddedness has a stronger effect on knowledge transfer success in xenophobic countries (Wang, 2015).

7.3 Time

According to Gunz and Mayrhofer (2018), time plays a crucial role in the individual career, which is seen as a work-related social and geographical journey of an individual through the working life time line. It is interesting to note that some of the Being- and Space-related factors affecting the international transfer of CC are situated in the present and some of them in the past. Time-related aspects will be further explored below.

Many of the individual and organizational factors as well as all of the broader contextual factors are situated in the present moment of the actual transfer of CC in the new career context. For example, even though psychological capital (Sitar and Mihelič, 2018) and cultural intelligence (Vlajčić *et al.*, 2019) that positively affect the international transfer of CC have been acquired through past experiences/learning – these are an outcome in the moment of the international transfer of CC, hence are in the present. Providing mentoring for AEs (Carraher *et al.*, 2008) and the absorptive capacity of the organization (Burmeister *et al.*, 2018) plays a crucial role in the present moment of the international transfer of CC. Finally, migration policies (Kassan and Nakamura, 2013; Orazbayev, 2017) also represent present boundaries to the successful international transfer of CC.

Some of the individual and organizational factors affecting the international transfer of CC constitute individual long- or short-term past experiences. Organizational support before, during and after repatriation (Burmeister and Deller, 2016) that positively affects the international transfer of CC represents a continuous process that mostly happened before the international transfer of CC, hence in the past. Long term expatriation (Andresen, 2021), previous expatriation experience (Choi and Johanson, 2012) and mobility during an early career stage (Andresen, 2021) are also factors affecting the international transfer of CC that have happened in the past.

In all 36 articles included in our SLR, the literature focused on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC, defined as direct applicability and use of the CC in the new career context, which is in line with the generally understood meaning of the international transfer of CC (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Inkson and Arthur, 2001; Jokinen, 2010). This focuses on the transfer that is happening in the present and which ignores the longer-term and ongoing nature of the transfer act. However, the very same literature does provide some implicit hints that transfer of international CC can be seen as a more temporal fluid process. For example, insights from qualitative research with AEs (Jokinen, 2010) suggest that even if individuals cannot directly apply or use their CC in their current organization, they see the potential to use this CC in other career contexts later in time, hence in the future. Furthermore, Jokinen (2010, p. 334) suggests that “future research may benefit from a more precise definition of “transfer””. The abovementioned weakness in the literature makes us wonder whether the current representation of the international transfer of CC accurately represents the reality.

We summarize the existing literature in the analysis section by presenting a model of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC (see Figure 1). This model reflects the current literature, suggesting that the international transfer of CC is affected by the individual-level factors that reflect the Being who possess and transfers CC, and the organizational and broader contextual factors that reflect the Space to which CC is being transferred. Our presented model provides an overview of the Being and Space factors that can affect two foci of the international transfer of CC to home and host countries (for detailed analysis and explanations refer to sections 7.1 and 7.2 and Tables 2 and 3). All of these factors are bound by

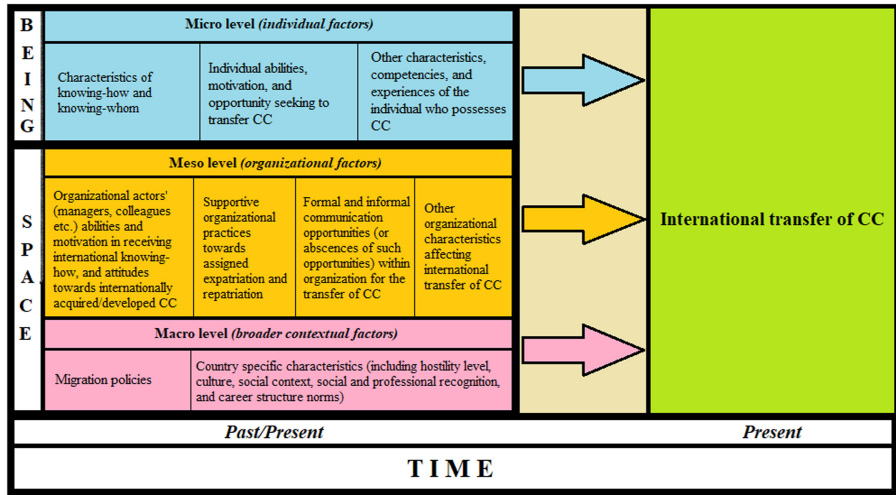


Figure 1. Model of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC, as explored in the literature

Time as they reflect either long- or short-term experiences or actions in the past and/or the outcomes of the past activities in the present moment of transfer.

8. Discussion

In the following section, we explore the findings of our SLR and suggest directions for future research. We divide the discussion section into Being and Space, as well as Time-related factors affecting the international transfer of CC. Afterward, we summarize our theoretical and practical contributions.

8.1 Factors affecting the international transfer of CC

In line with the ideas of [Gunz and Mayrhofer \(2015, 2018\)](#) and based on our SLR, we suggest that the international transfer of CC is affected by the three types of factors: Being, Space and Time. Being and Space factors have two separate foci. First, the transfer of CC on the individual level across different organizations in different countries as a direct application and use of CC (Focus 1). Second, the transfer of knowing-how to other organizational actors within the organization (Focus 2). They are analyzed from the perspective of the transfer of CC from home country organization to host country organization and vice versa. We suggest that factors portraying Being and Space are bound by the Time aspect (see [Figure 1](#)).

Based on our SLR, the knowing-how transfer (or second focus of the international transfer of CC) seems to be the most understood aspect of the international transfer of CC. Does this mean that knowing-how transfer is more important than the international transfer of knowing-why and knowing-whom? Or does it simply mean that knowing-how transfer is more easily understood, measurable and directly connected to the job and organizational goals? We suggest the latter. We also suggest that knowing-whom and knowing-why transfer needs further research considering the competitive advantage these could bring to the organization ([Zikic, 2015](#)) and the influence they have on the international transfer of knowing-how ([Andresen, 2021](#); [Burmeister et al., 2015](#); [Guo et al., 2013](#); [Riusala and Suutari, 2004](#); [Sitar and Mihelić, 2018](#)). For example, higher knowing-why motivation might signal higher motivation to adapt, integrate and perform well and achieve higher individual and organizational goals ([Zikic, 2015](#)).

Knowing-whom might help individuals to adjust and integrate in the job market and to enter organizations where foreign knowing-whom could help in expanding organizational networks internationally (Zikic, 2015). Moreover, knowing-why transfer is essential for knowing-how transfer as knowing-how transfer would likely not happen if individuals are not motivated for this transfer (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015; Riusala and Suutari, 2004). Furthermore, the transfer of knowing-whom might lead to the transfer of knowing-how as the appropriate social connections and recognition create space and opportunity to show and use the knowing-how (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013; Sitar and Mihelič, 2018).

8.1.1 Being affecting the international transfer of CC. The international transfer of CC highly depends on the Being who possesses and transfers CC and is affected by such individual characteristics and assets as characteristics of CC, individual abilities, motivation, and opportunity seeking to transfer CC, personal relation to the organization and country, individual competencies such as cultural intelligence, relationship development capability or language skills, as well as previous expatriation experiences and readjustment to the home country (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

As we can see from the number of articles exploring individual-level factors affecting the international transfer of CC at the individual level (Focus 1), these factors are less explored than the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other organizational actors (Focus 2) (see Table 2). This brings our attention onto the need for further empirical research and analysis of the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-why and knowing-whom to create a more holistic image of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC in general. We challenge future research by asking—what makes us realize our career goals, see the fit for our career identity and feel motivated to pursue our careers in one company and/or country more than in another? Moreover, why can we utilize some of our social contacts better than other social contacts for our career purposes and how can we make the utilization of our social contacts for career advancement purposes more achievable? How far does the utilization of our social network depend on our ability to utilize it, or the characteristics of our social networks such as strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1973)? In which ways does this depend on our career context (profession, industry, organization, country etc.), or all of these aspects together, or more?

Even though most of the literature looks at the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how to other individuals within the organization, both knowing-whom and knowing-why are shown to influence the international transfer of knowing-how. For instance, knowing-whom, reflected in career relevant social networks, can positively influence the international transfer of knowing-how (Sitar and Mihelič, 2018) and the international transfer of CC in general (Andresen, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, research suggests that knowing-why in terms of the motivation to transfer knowing-how (Burmeister *et al.*, 2015) and identification with the current employer (Riusala and Suutari, 2004) can also affect the international transfer of knowing-how. This is in line with the career competency view of CC (Inkson and Arthur, 2001), which suggests that the three types of knowing can influence one another. However, apart from the influences of knowing-why and knowing-whom on the transfer of knowing-how, we notice a lack of empirical research on the wider interrelationships between the three types of knowing and their impact on transfer success. Therefore, we suggest future research should explore whether and how knowing-how might affect the international transfer of knowing-whom and knowing-why, i.e. in what way could our professional knowledge and skills affect the international transfer of our career-related social networks and professional identity as well as work motivation? Another question is whether and how knowing-whom might affect the international transfer of knowing-why? How could our social networks affect our motivation to work in and be part of the new organization? Finally, in which way can our professional identity and work

motivation (knowing-why) affect the way we utilize our social networks in the new career context?

As we can see from [Table 2](#), there were no articles looking at the factors affecting both the international transfer of CC on the individual level (Focus 1), and the international transfer of knowing-how to other people in the organization (Focus 2) in the case of SIEs, and in the case of SIRs when looking at the knowing-how transfer. This could indicate a gap in the literature on self-initiated international employees' CC transfer. However, this could also illustrate the confusion and inconsistent use of different terminology when it comes to SIEs, SIRs, and highly skilled migrants as well as highly skilled return migrants ([Cerdin and Selmer, 2013](#); [Vaiman et al., 2015](#)). As suggested by [Andresen et al. \(2014\)](#), both SIEs and SIRs fall under the migration umbrella. Therefore, it is possible that the articles on other highly skilled migrants and return migrants included in [Table 2](#) were also looking at SIEs and SIRs without specifying that those were SIEs and SIRs.

8.1.2 Space affecting the international transfer of CC. Our findings suggest that there are two levels of characteristics reflecting the Space aspect described by [Gunz and Mayrhofer \(2018\)](#). These are organizational and broader contextual-level factors. Organizational factors include other organizational actors' abilities and motivation in receiving international knowing-how and attitudes toward internationally acquired/developed CC, organizational practices toward assigned expatriation and repatriation, organizational communication opportunities and other organizational characteristics (see [Table 3](#) and [Figure 1](#)). Broader contextual-level factors include migration policies and other specific characteristics of the country in which the organization to which CC is being transferred is located (see [Table 3](#) and [Figure 1](#)).

Only a small number of articles included in the Space factors analyze the international transfer of CC at the individual level considering all three types of knowing (Focus 1). However, the majority of those articles emphasize the importance of the organizational attitudes toward CC that has been acquired/further developed in a foreign country ([Andresen, 2021](#); [Begley et al., 2008](#); [Guo et al., 2013](#); [Winterheller and Hirt, 2017](#)). Hence, future research could benefit from looking more closely at the international transfer of knowing-whom and knowing-why from the perspective of organizational and broader contextual-level factors as both highly skilled migrants' knowing-whom and knowing-why can contribute to the final outcomes and/or creation of the competitive advantage of the organization ([Zikic, 2015](#)). Individual knowing-whom might be relevant in higher positions for partnering with other companies, learning about new training opportunities and getting a wider public visibility of the organization. Moreover, knowing-why changes might mean that people leave (or consider leaving) an organization so that CC might be transferred to the next employer. Therefore, we raise the following questions. How can organizational characteristics and actions as well as characteristics, behavior and the attitude of other organizational actors, and also country-level characteristics and policies affect whether we can utilize our foreign social networks in the new company? Also, how can all of these aspects influence the way we see our career identity and work motivation to fit in the new job role at the new organization in the new country? Empirical answers to these questions could enrich our current understanding of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC.

It is important to note that even though there were articles focusing on skilled migrants in general, there were no articles looking specifically at SIEs, and only a few articles looked at SIRs ([Andresen, 2021](#); [Begley et al., 2008](#); [Guo et al., 2013](#)). In line with the ideas of [Crowley-Henry et al. \(2016\)](#), we suggest that this indicates the paucity in the research of the international transfer of CC possessed by highly skilled self-initiated international employees. Even though AEs and ARs transfer their CC internationally between the international locations of a company, other parts of boundaryless career ([Sullivan and Arthur, 2006](#)), such as free movement not only between countries but also between

organizations, seem to be under researched. Thus, considering the significance and continuous interest in the topic (Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Jokinen, 2010), we call for empirical research into international and at the same time cross-organizational transfer of CC.

Research shows that those who pursue a boundaryless career substantially increase their CC during expatriation (Dickmann *et al.*, 2016; Doherty and Dickmann, 2009; Jokinen *et al.*, 2008; McNulty *et al.*, 2013) and have the potential to reach great career success in the long-term upon repatriation (Dickmann *et al.*, 2016; Suutari *et al.*, 2017). However, SIRs often struggle in the early stages of repatriation (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008; Ho *et al.*, 2016), which could also signal difficulties in transferring their internationally advanced CC to organizations in their home country. For instance, research shows that SIRs face difficulties in seeking and securing employment and experience a demotivating lack of notice and appreciation by employers (Andresen, 2021; Begley *et al.*, 2008). Dissatisfaction with such career difficulties could lead to a decision to re-expatriate (Ho *et al.*, 2016), even before the attempt to transfer CC into the organization within the home country. Considering the lack of research in the context of those who pursue boundaryless careers, difficulties SIRs face straight upon repatriation and increased repatriation worldwide due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we suggest future empirical research should focus on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC in the context of self-initiated international employees and especially in the context of SIRs.

8.1.3 Time affecting the international transfer of CC. Based on our review, the current literature represents both the factors affecting the international transfer of CC that were situated in the past and are an outcome of these past experiences in the present. The current literature on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC explicitly focuses on transfer as a direct use and applicability of CC in the first workplace after expatriation/repatriation (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Dickmann and Cerdin, 2016; Dickmann and Watson, 2017; Inkson and Arthur, 2001; Jokinen, 2010). This focuses only on the short-term international transfer of CC as it happens in the present moment. This is surprising considering the importance of the time aspect in individual careers in general. Moreover, a qualitative study by Jokinen (2010) shows some inconsistencies in the current understanding and conceptualization of the international transfer of CC. Even though some of the interviewees could not fully apply and use their CC in their current organization straight after repatriation they saw a possibility to do so in their future careers (Jokinen, 2010).

These inconsistencies and gaps in the literature on the international transfer of CC make us question the validity of the current conceptualization of the international transfer of CC in relation to the reality. In line with the need for a more elaborate conceptualization of the international transfer of CC with regard to the Time aspect, we suggest future research into this topic. We challenge current understanding asking whether the concept of CC transfer should integrate elements of the past and future. Does the international transfer of CC only happen momentarily, or can it be an outcome of past individual planning? If CC is not being fully applied and used straight upon expatriation/repatriation, can it be applied in the later stages upon expatriation/repatriation? Finally, if the international transfer of CC actually includes more than just directly applying and utilizing CC in the new workplace then that could also change our understanding of what affects the process of the international transfer of CC. Hence, we call for empirical time sensitive research on the process of CC transfer. This could be any time sensitive research approach e.g. a longitudinal, qualitative or qualitative retrospective study. We suggest continuing with qualitative research before conducting quantitative surveys as there is still a need to better understand and to explore in depth the process of the international transfer of CC. In addition, we encourage investigations exploring how Being, Space, and Time aspects affect the process of the international transfer of CC.

8.2 Implications for theory and practice

Our SLR has two major theoretical contributions. First, we develop a model of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC. We emphasize that the literature mostly focuses on the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-how, whereas the factors affecting the international transfer of knowing-whom and knowing-why as well as their interrelationships remain underexplored. This identifies a weakness in current research and an opportunity for the further exploration of the factors affecting the international transfer of CC in general. As most of the literature focusses on assigned employees who transfer their CC between international locations of the same organization, this brings our attention to the lack of empirical research in the field of international boundaryless careers. We align the CC framework (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson and Arthur, 2001) to the SCF (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2015), where characteristics of CC fall under the Being category, while at the same time showing that the factors affecting the international transfer of CC cover not only the characteristics of CC but also other individual, contextual, and temporal aspects as suggested by findings of this SLR. We also enrich the CC framework (Defillippi and Arthur, 1994; Inkson and Arthur, 2001) by exploring each level's factors in detail and, based on current empirical research, by illustrating how different types of knowing can affect each other's transfer (mainly how knowing-whom and knowing-why can affect the international transfer of knowing-how).

Second, we challenge the current literature around the international transfer of CC, questioning the validity of current understanding and conceptualization of the international transfer of CC. We suggest that the current view of the international transfer of CC focuses on the short-term transfer in the present, neglecting the continuous nature of individual careers and the temporal aspects affecting the international transfer of CC. We base our ideas regarding the conceptualization of the international transfer of CC on the inconsistencies and gaps in the literature. This stresses the need for empirical research that takes a dynamic, process-based view of the international transfer of CC, as well as a better way of exploring how Being, Space and Time might affect CC transfer process. Such empirical research could also have practical implications both for the individuals who want to utilize their CC to its fullest and even more importantly to the organizations who might employ international employees. As suggested by Zikic (2015), skilled migrants' diverse CC can be considered as a source of competitive advantage if it is incorporated and integrated in the company by the mutual interest and effort of the individual and the organization. If international employees cannot fully utilize their internationally developed CC, they might choose instead to apply it more fully in the future beyond their current organization – this might mean the loss of international talent and their expertise to the current organization. Keeping this in mind, organizations could focus more on improving organizational factors, e.g. implementing mentoring schemes and supporting both formal and informal opportunities for interaction between domestic and international employees, that both directly and indirectly affect the international transfer of CC by international employees.

9. Conclusion

Our SLR unifies and synthesizes a currently fragmented literature on the factors affecting the international transfer of CC. As suggested by the literature, we differentiate between two foci of the international transfer of CC: (1) transfer of CC on the individual level across different organizations located in different countries by directly using and applying it in the workplace and (2) knowing-how transfer to other individuals in the organization. The findings of this SLR bring our attention to the importance of understanding the factors affecting the international transfer of CC that go beyond the qualities of CC itself, including other

individual-, contextual- and time-related factors. This allows us to highlight the weaknesses in the literature and to unpack the international transfer of CC in detail in the context of AEs, SIEs, ARs, SIRs and other highly skilled migrants. Moreover, by emphasizing the Time-related inconsistencies in the current understanding and conceptualization of the international transfer of CC, we call for further empirical research on the process and the factors affecting the international transfer of CC. Such research could benefit both the Being who possesses and transfers CC, as well as the Space in relation to organizations who could gain more of their international employees' CC, and countries who could benefit from the brain gain potentially provided by the international workers.

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