

International mobility of workers: new forms, processes, and outcomes

That we live in an era of immense movement of people around the globe is a fact that reiterating it becomes a tedious truism. Conservative figures bring the number of people who live in countries other than their countries of origin to at least 250bn worldwide (United Nations, 2015), with migration having seen further intensification in most recent years (OECD, 2016; United Nations, 2015). People move across country borders for a variety of reasons, economic or work-related being arguably the most frequent. The rate of movement has multiplied in the past quarter of a century for reasons that include collective agreements among countries (e.g. the EU treaty), relaxation of restrictions by particular countries in order to deal with real or perceived shortages of domestic labor or reinvigorate and boost their population growth, and the progressively global nature of the economy. Substantial developments in transportation and information technology (that facilitated the flow of information on employment opportunities across the globe) have amplified the effect of these factors. Finally, the increasing internationalization of education has enabled many individuals who pursued their undergraduate or postgraduate studies in foreign countries to opt to stay abroad as a career move (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2015).

International mobility takes many forms, ranging from short duration assignments that do not repeat themselves to long-term expatriate assignments either initiated by the employing organization or self-initiated (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). Self-initiated expatriation has only recently been studied systematically (e.g. Andresen *et al.*, 2015), but figures suggest that the numbers of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) globally exceed those of assigned expatriates (AEs) by multiple times (Finaccord, 2014). To that we should add the great number of cases where individuals move across borders with the intention to settle in the foreign country as immigrants (Andresen *et al.*, 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014).

The great numbers of internationally mobile workers (IMWs) along with the variety in motives and patterns of movement have made them a very important population to study from both an empirical and a theoretical perspective. This is because movement of such proportions impacts IMWs themselves and their families, but also host country native workforces and host societies, host and home country employers, and host country supporting institutions. This special issue (SI) contributes by hosting four articles that advance the field both theoretically and empirically. The articles cover nearly every form of international mobility.

Fu, Hsu, Shaffer, and Ren's paper reports the results of a longitudinal investigation with three points of measurement that enabled the study of the process of socialization of SIEs. Innovations in this study included the consideration of socialization from the viewpoint of systems that host country organizations had in place (rather than simply looking at socialization initiatives of SIEs themselves), the evaluation of job performance by a third party, and the deployment of calculative (continuance) commitment as the form of commitment that seems most relevant to SIEs. Using a sample of SIE teachers in Hong Kong, Fu *et al.* found that SIEs' perceptions of organizational socialization tactics at the beginning of the school year were linked to the degree of their social integration (i.e. integration of SIEs with host country nationals) and speed of on-the-job learning as measured three months later (near the middle of the school year). In turn, the degree of social integration was related to most elements of SIEs' expatriate adjustment five months afterwards (in effect, the end of the school year). Similarly, the speed of on-the-job learning was related to work adjustment at the end of the school year. Though the performance of



SIEs as rated by school principals at the end of the school year could not be predicted by the speed of on-the-job learning, SIEs' calculative commitment moderated that relationship. In particular, for those with weak calculative commitment (i.e. those who stayed with their host country employer for reasons beyond just perceived necessity) the faster the ascendance of the learning curve, the stronger the job performance. On the other hand, for those with strong calculative commitment, fast on-the-job learning was associated with lower job performance. This means that SIEs with simply calculative attachment to their host country employer are less likely to utilize what they learn in their jobs. Overall, the findings of Fu *et al.* underline the importance of formal organizational socialization systems in facilitating SIEs' social integration (rather than simply leaving the task to SIEs' personal agency) and fast mastery of the learning curve; and by extension SIEs' job performance. In addition, Fu *et al.*'s study indicates that socialization of SIEs is a process that goes beyond the initial weeks, while in order to maximize the effectiveness of their socialization systems host country organizations must try to understand what drives SIEs to work for them (i.e. is it simply financial reasons and potential benefits or other more intrinsic motives?).

McNulty and Vance's paper makes a substantial theoretical contribution by means of suggesting that global careers can be understood in terms of individual movement along the continuum formed by the notion of AE – meaning complete company control over the career – and SIE – meaning full individual control over the career. McNulty and Vance's view is that the distinction between AE and SIE is largely artificial. This is because AE and SIE represent career orientations that do not remain fixed but instead they change according to the individual's needs and other priorities at different points in time. According to the authors, changes in career orientations may result from changes in the nature and configuration of push factors (that force unwanted expatriate career decisions) and pull factors (that drive voluntary expatriate career decisions). McNulty and Vance also note that changes in the state of the psychological contract with the MNE can trigger shifts on the AE–SIE continuum, for example, breaches in the psychological contract are expected to lead to shifts toward the SIE end of the continuum. McNulty and Vance go on to identify eight types of global careers ranging from parent-country and third-country nationals to localized expatriates and expat-preneurs (AEs or SIEs who, after working for some time as employees in the host country, leave their employer – a local organization or an MNE – to start a new business there or SIEs who start a new business in the host country immediately upon arrival and without any prior exposure to the local market, Vance *et al.*, 2016). Using detailed cases, McNulty and Vance illustrate how shifts on the AE–SIE continuum lead to changes in one's global career type. McNulty and Vance conclude that a challenge – but also potential opportunity – for MNEs is not only to attract and retain talent, but also to identify where on the AE–SIE continuum their people find themselves at any given point in time and then optimally match this with their own needs as MNEs. And invoking agency theory, the authors propose that MNEs can to some extent manage and control for their own benefit expatriates' movement along the AE–SIE continuum by means of investing in transparent communication and reducing outcome uncertainty for expatriates.

The paper of Ballesteros-Leiva, Poilpot-Rocaboy, and St-Onge looks at how the interaction between personal and work life of internationally mobile employees (IMEs) relates to their well-being. The theoretical background of their study is the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which assumes that individuals strive to maintain and accumulate resources (e.g. time, energy, psychological resources) while resource loss is a higher priority than resource gain. Based on the principles and corollaries of COR theory, Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.* developed hypotheses that they tested in a sample of IMEs working in a variety of countries and coming from a large variety of origins. Their findings confirmed their idea that conflicts between work life (WL) and personal life (PL) in both directions (i.e. WL→PL and vice versa) were associated with lower overall satisfaction with

life and with reduced feelings of achievement and personal growth. On the other hand, enrichment as result of interaction of WL and PL had a limited – though by no means negligible – relationship with outcomes. That was in line with the principles of COR theory that assigns more importance to resource loss – presumably caused by conflict – than resource gain – presumably caused by enrichment. Ballesteros-Leiva *et al.* also looked that whether the type of expatriation, AE or SIE, moderated the observed relationships. Overall, they found that conflict appears more damaging to the well-being of SIEs than AEs. This is also in line with COR theory because apparently SIEs have less access to corporate support resources both for themselves and for their families, and hence they have fewer means to deal with conflicts between their PL and WL. The implication for employers is that they should have systems and mechanisms in place so work issues do not cause negative spillover with the personal life of IMEs, and especially SIEs. The other implication is that enrichments between the work and life domains also play a role, hence, employers should provide resources (administrative, logistical such as help with settling, schools and childcare, financial such as allowances, and career support) in order to extract the maximum from IMEs, and especially SIEs.

Finally, Winterheller and Hirt's paper focuses on highly skilled migrants (HSMs) and studies the process and patterns of accumulating career capital in host countries. Winterheller and Hirt view career capital through the prism of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Winterheller and Hirt adopt the view that, much more than low skilled migrants, HSMs are agents who actively shape their careers by accumulating and deploying their career capital within the constraints of the particular host country environment (also Legrand *et al.*, 2017). The authors utilized interviews with HSMs from Southeastern European countries (e.g. Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia) who had moved to Austria as "high potentials" during their university studies and, after spending some years in the host country, had either settled there (most of them), had moved to other host countries, or had returned to their home countries (a minority). Findings showed that HSMs accumulated symbolic cultural capital by means of mastering the local language and piling up work experience in the host country. They considered the latter as a very strong signal for host and home country employers. It emerged that recognition of their qualifications in the host country (commonly referred to symbolic cultural capital deficiency for HSMs) was not an issue because qualifications from their countries of origin were fully recognized by employers in Austria. Hence, acquisition of local qualifications had not been one of their strategies. HSMs acquired symbolic social capital mostly through ties they developed with host country nationals at work. Interestingly, though HSMs did consider symbolic social capital as helpful to their careers they were clear that it plays much less of a role in Austria than in their home countries. Based on their findings, Winterheller and Hirt went on to develop a typology of four career and adjustment patterns for HSMs: host country assimilator, host country bridge-builder, home country assimilator, and home country bridge-builder. The study of Winterheller and Hirt highlights the benefits for host countries of having in place bridging mechanisms (such as apprenticeships) that enable the integration of HSMs and, hence, maximize the benefits of hosting them. From the reverse point of view, however, such mechanisms appear to contribute to the "brain drain" effect for home countries.

A main theme that emerged from the SI is the importance for MNEs and host country organizations alike to understand the motives, preferences, and needs of their IMWs. For example, the reasons they chose to expatriate, the extent they feel integrated with the local workforce, the state of their psychological contract, the extent to which the demands of their work and personal life interfere, and whether they feel able to cope with that interference. Importantly, motives and psychological states are fluid and may change according to personal circumstances of the IMWs and as result of the very experience of international mobility. This does not mean, however, that employers have no option but to

stay passive and simply react. MNEs and host country employers can mitigate and leverage this dynamic to their advantage if they have an accurate up-to-date picture of where their IMWs stand so they can match IMWs motives and needs with their own needs as employers. For that reason, MNEs and host country organizations must have in place open and transparent two-way communication mechanisms with their IMWs while they should also provide them with a sense of security. The articles of the SI also point at the importance for host countries and host country organizations of systems that facilitate the entry, adaptation, and integration of IMWs. The process of adaptation and integration is long and is not limited to the first few weeks as it is often assumed. The way this process is handled by host country employers largely determines the benefits, or liabilities, that IMWs will bring for them.

Beyond providing new insights the SI also underlines gaps in existing knowledge and lights up new directions for research. For example, it emerged that host country nationals play an important role in the IMWs experience (e.g. interaction with host country nationals is critical in the expatriate adaptation process and its consequences). However, there is still limited knowledge on the factors (e.g. personal characteristics of IMWs, organizational systems, local cultural norms) that shape the perceptions and subsequent behaviors of host country nationals toward IMWs (also Bozionelos, 2017). This is a significant issue that demands systematic research. Part of that research can compare and contrast the points of view of IMWs with those of their host country colleagues and identify the antecedents and consequences of discrepancies and similarities. Another avenue for future research is McNulty and Vance's argument that IMWs' motives, needs, and intentions may change as a result of shifts in their position on the AE–SIE continuum, which can occur as result of changes in the nature and configuration of push and pull factors. This argument has important implications and must, therefore, be empirically tested. That testing should aim to provide a fine-grained picture of how the shift on the AE–SIE continuum occurs (including the triggering factors and the exact way these exert their effects), and how that shift leads to movements across the cells of the IMW typology. Given the importance of establishing valid conclusions about causal relationships, this line of research calls for analogous methodologies. Hence, methodologies that have only infrequently been utilized in international mobility research so far, such as diary studies, longitudinal designs with multiple measurement points, or even field experiments are in order. Finally, it emerged from the papers of this SI that host country culture, institutions and systems that host country organizations have in place influence end results for IMWs in the host country and beyond, for example, the careers of expatriates who return to their home countries or expatriates who make further cross-border moves. Future research should look at how the experience in the host country affects longer term outcomes and career trajectories of IMWs. It also appears that cultural differences between home and host countries (e.g. the importance of social capital for career success and business transactions) can considerably impact the experience and outcomes for IMWs. Key factors (e.g. forms and importance of social capital, Bozionelos, 2015; Legrand *et al.*, 2017) where national differences may impact IMWs' experiences and outcomes in the host country and beyond should, therefore, be identified in future research, as they can inform both practice and theory.

Overall, key issues for practice that emerged from the SI include the significance for MNEs and domestic host country organizations of knowing where their IMWs stand at any point in time in terms of motives, needs, aspirations and priorities, along with the importance for host countries and host country employers to have in place structures, systems, and available resources that facilitate SIEs and immigrants' adaptation, integration and functioning at work. Avenues for research opened by the SI include further development and empirical testing of the idea that different types of international mobility are simply reflections of IMWs' career orientations as represented by the AE–SIE

continuum, the identification of the processes that govern shifts on that continuum, the isolation of the factors and processes that shape the attitudes and behaviors of host country nationals toward IMWs, and the understanding of how host and home country cultural differences impact IMWs experiences and their short- and long-term career outcomes.

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