

跨国公司内部知识转移研究
情境视角与外派经理的作用 (英文版)

**KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER
WITHIN MULTINATIONAL
CORPORATIONS
CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES AND
EXPATRIATE'S ROLES**

王锦程 著

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Abstract

The book aims to explore the factors impeding the knowledge transfer from European multinational corporations' (MNCs) headquarters to their subsidiaries in China. And the roles that the expatriates play in the process of knowledge transfer are also examined. A survey of 400 samples was made and the result showed that the knowledge tacitness, complexity, regulations, social norms, specific practices, absorptive capacity and trust are the primary causes of difficulties in the process of knowledge transfer. In addition, the study indicated that expatriates actively participate in a wide range of knowledge transfer areas such as the business management, corporate culture, human resource, marketing and product research and development.

Key words: Knowledge Transfer Context Perspective Expatriate Multinational Corporation

摘 要

本书旨在发现影响跨国知识转移的关键因素以及在转移过程中跨国公司的外派经理所发挥的作用。通过对近 400 名跨国公司在华外派经理进行问卷调查,发现知识的默会性、复杂性、法律环境、社会规范、具体业务、吸收能力和信任是影响跨国公司有效知识转移的主要因素。这项研究还发现外派经理在企业管理、企业文化、人力资源管理、市场营销和产品研发领域的知识转移过程中发挥着重要作用。

关键词: 知识转移 情境因素 外派经理 跨国公司

前 言

根据企业资源观的理论，知识是企业最重要的战略资源，企业通过对知识的创新、转移和利用可以获得可持续性的竞争优势。对于跨国公司而言，其母公司和分散在全球各地的子公司通过内部知识的创造、消化吸收和扩散以提高自身的核心竞争力。结合内部化理论的观点，跨国公司在内部知识转移方面更具有优势，比利用外部市场的机制效果更好、效率更高。特别是在转移那些复杂的、难以编码的和难以传授的隐性知识过程中，跨国公司的外派管理人员会发挥独特的作用。尽管如此，跨国企业内部知识转移并不是一件容易的事情，转移的过程中会受到多种因素的影响，因此是一个耗费成本、比较复杂和困难的过程。针对这一问题，本书将从影响跨国知识转移的因素和外派人员对知识转移的作用两个方面展开研究，以发现这两个方面对知识转移的影响。

为全面分析跨国知识转移的影响因素，特别是工业化国家的跨国公司向新兴经济体的子公司进行内部知识转移的过程中的影响因素，本书融合了知识特点、制度距离和文化距离等重要观点和理论，建立起一个整合的研究假设模型，对跨国企业内部的知识转移进行了实证分析。此外，本书对跨国公司的外派经理人员在知识转移过程中所发挥的作用进行了研究，提出跨国公司外派人员不仅承担着管理职责，还应在知识转移方面发挥重要作用。基于以上的研究思路，本书对知识以及知识转移的相关文献进行了综述，系统梳理了知识的概念、分类以及特点等基本内容。在此基础上，本书重点对知识转移的机制进行了分析和评价，明确了国内外学者提出的主要知识转移机制及其特点。根据跨国公司内部知识转移的机制，本书认为这一过程会受到不同情境因素的影响，例如东道国的法律环境、文化环境、企业组织环境、社会关系环境等。因此，本书在提出理论假设模型时结合了知识本身的特点和制度、文化情境因素，试图以全方位视角对跨国知识转移的影响因素进行研究，以弥补其他研究中只注重某一个或几个影响因素的不足，这是本书的一个创新之处。本书的另外一个创新之处在于对外派经理人员在跨国知识管理过程中所发挥作用的研究，特别是在转移隐性知识的过程中他们对不同知识的转移所表现的参与程度。

本书采用了定量的研究方法，对在我国境内的跨国公司的外派经理进行了问卷调查和采访，收集到了大量的样本数据。按照定量分析的研究方法和要求，本书对样本数据进行了相关性统计和回归模型分析，得到了相关的数据结果。研究结果显示影响



跨国公司内部知识转移的主要因素包括知识的默会性、复杂性、法律环境、社会规范、具体业务、吸收能力和信任七个因素,涉及知识的特性、制度情境、组织情境以及关系情境等。此外,外派经理人员在跨国公司知识转移过程中发挥着积极的作用,特别是在子公司的管理、企业文化、人力资源管理、市场营销以及产品开发方面的知识转移中参与程度较高,这反映了跨国公司外派经理对知识转移的成功与否起着重要作用。

本项研究历时两年,在此过程中葡萄牙里斯本工商管理大学 (ISCTE - IUL) 的 Nelson Santos António 教授和 Virgínia Trigo 教授给予了作者很多的指导和帮助,在此对他们的付出表示真诚的感谢。

虽然本书对国际知识转移理论的发展作出了一定的贡献,但是由于作者水平有限,书中难免存在一些问题和不足,敬请各位学者提出宝贵的意见和建议,以帮助作者进一步提高自己的学术水平。

王锦程

天津外国语大学

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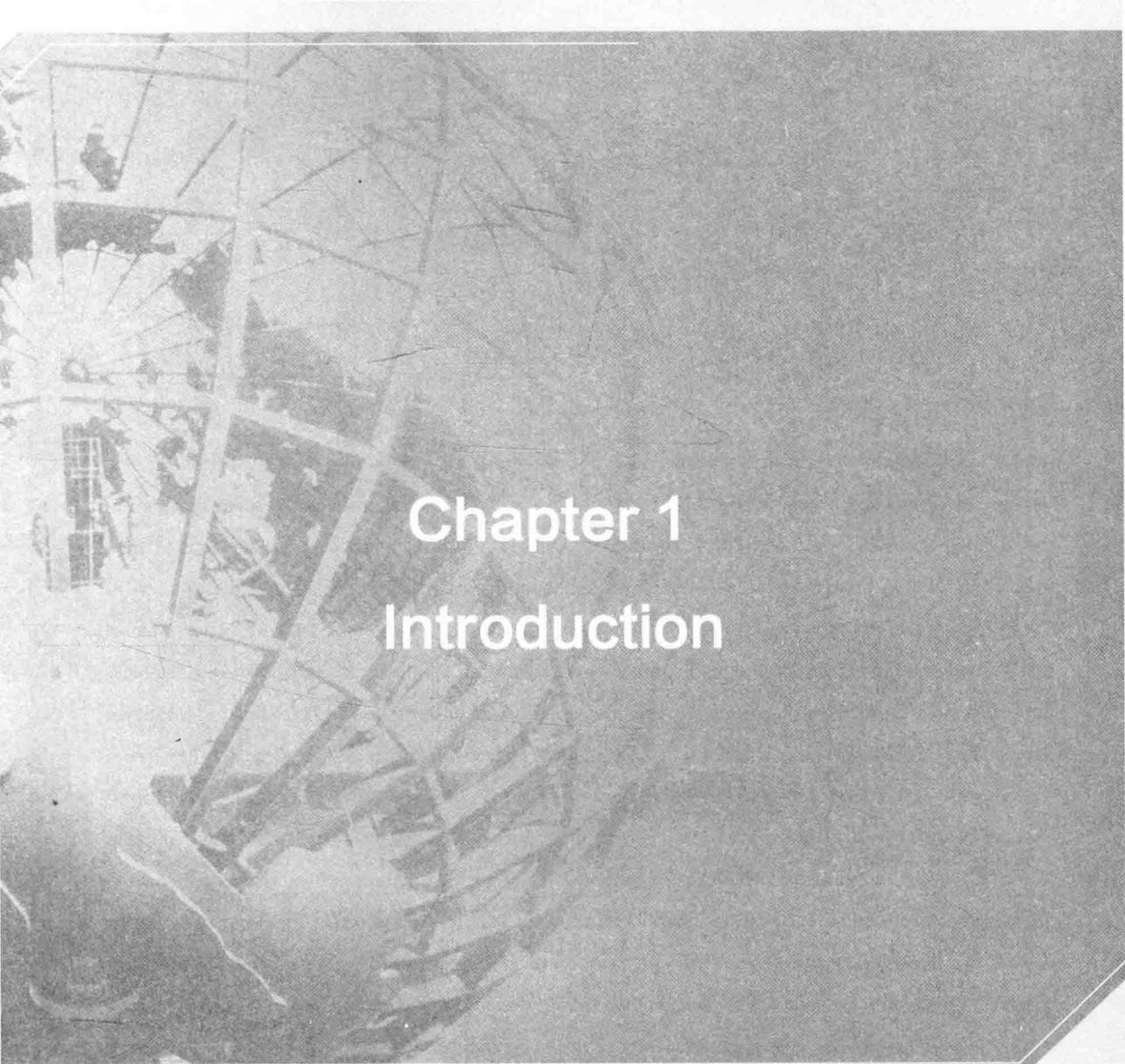
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Study

The globalization of markets and production has caused a primary change of corporate strategy in many companies. The ability to create and transfer knowledge internally is one of the main competitive advantages of multinational corporations (MNCs). The MNC is considered to be a differentiated network, where knowledge is created in several parts of the MNC and transferred to various inter-related units (Hedlund, 1986; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). Against this backdrop, knowledge, knowledge transfer, competence development in MNCs, and related issues have been studied both separately and in relation to each other from different perspectives within different disciplines for a long time (Boekema *et al.*, 2000). The focus on knowledge is shared by several recent theoretical perspectives such as the resource-based and the knowledge-based views of the firm. Both of the theories see knowledge as the most important resource and the one with the greatest potential for providing sustainable competitive advantage for the firm (Grant, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). It suggests that firm specific knowledge development is dependent upon its competitive capabilities and its ability to access and transfer such capabilities. Hence, the ability of how MNCs manage knowledge transfer has become one of the central issues of research in the international management literature.

The recently espoused knowledge-based view of the firm focuses specifically on knowledge as an organization's most strategically significant resource and accordingly emphasizes the capacity of the organization to integrate and transfer this knowledge (Conner and Prahalad, 1996; Doz, Santos, and Williamson, 2001). In this context, the issue of knowledge transferability is important, not only between firms but even more important within the firm (Grant, 1996). The previous studies also assumed that the MNC existence largely attributes to their superiority over external market mechanisms in internalizing intangible assets (e.g., Ghoshal, 1987) and more specifically in transferring and leveraging knowledge (e.g., Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). Almeida, Song, and Grant (2002) found empirical support for MNCs outperforming strategic alliances and markets in facilitating the flow of both codified and tacit knowledge through the flexible use of formal and informal mechanisms. As a key characteristic of the firm, knowledge transfer capacity is emerging as a significant explanatory fac-



tor in the performance of MNCs (Martin and Salomon, 2003) .

From a network perspective, MNCs are commonly perceived as networks of geographically dispersed units that exchange capital, products, and knowledge (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990) . The network-based view of the MNC argues that the differentiated MNC has greater capacity of processing and mobilizing knowledge in the creation and renewal of competitive advantage for its ability to access knowledge residing in its internal as well as external networks (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989) . Although it is generally accepted that MNCs are better able to exploit knowledge more efficiently internally than would be possible through external market mechanisms (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1986) , effective transfer of organizational knowledge is still likely to be problematic and laborious, especially within diversified and differentiated MNCs (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1992) .

Due to the critical role of international knowledge transfers within MNCs, there has been increasing interest in understanding the difficulties related to such transfers. This is also related to the fact that for a long time it has been recognized that such internal transfer is not very successful (e. g. , Kedia and Bhagat, 1988; Zander and Kogut, 1995) . Such difficulties have been attributed to the existence of “stickiness factors” (Szulanski, 1996; Teece 1977; Von Hippel, 1994) . The term “stickiness” has been applied in various ways to capture such notions as immobility, inertness and inimitability (Szulanski, 2003, p. 12) . When applied more specifically to the transfer of information and knowledge, stickiness has come to represent an aggregate measure of multiple factors that impede transfers, relating to the characteristics of knowledge as well as to the characteristics of the source, the recipient, and the context (Minbaev, 2007) . Accordingly, stickiness has been defined as the degree of perceived difficulty in transferring knowledge in organizations, which in turn refers to the extent of problems (e. g. , communication difficulties, unmet expectations) and the extent of eventfulness (the escalation of disruptive, transfer-related problems) (Jensen and Szulanski, 2004) . In general, research into the stickiness of knowledge transfer represents a concerted attempt to gain insights into the pervasiveness of transfer impediments. However, although there have been attempts to form theoretical frameworks, it is argued that they have been accompanied by few attempts at rigorous and systematic empirical research evidence (Foss and Pedersen, 2002; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000; Szulanski, 1996) .

Researchers have shown that there are various barriers to knowledge transfer. Some are related to the characteristics of the knowledge being transferred and others of a cultural and organizational nature (Kedia and Bhagat, 1988; Zander and Kogut, 1995) . Despite the fact that every organizational practice, routine, or piece of information is embedded within its unique

context, there have been few studies examining the impacts of contexts on the knowledge transfer with few notable exceptions (e. g. , Kostova, 1999; Riusala and Suutari, 2004; Szulanski, 1996) . The aspect focusing on the organizational influences as well as country-level influences on knowledge transfers within MNCs has not received much attention from management scholars. Some researchers call for further research to bring context back into the study of organizational behavior (e. g. , Mowday and Sutton, 1993) and to integrate macro and micro paradigms and constructs (House, Rousseau and Thomas-Hunt, 1995) . Based on the idea that the process of knowledge transfer does not occur in a social vacuum but rather is contextually embedded (Mowday and Sutton, 1993), Kostova responded to the calls by proposing that the transfers are embedded in three types of context—social, organizational, and relational—that operate at the level of country, the organization, and the individual respectively. Although her theoretical framework has been widely recognized in the field of MNCs knowledge transfer, there have been few rigorous and systematic empirical studies related to her model.

Knowledge transfer cannot occur without the existence of systems and mechanisms that enable and facilitate the process. Research has identified a number of control and coordination mechanisms used by MNCs that enhance and encourage efficient transfer and integration of knowledge within the MNCs (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1988) . When an MNC decides to transfer knowledge, particularly tacit knowledge, between different units, it needs MNCs to develop and deploy more sophisticated cross-border transfer mechanisms in order to facilitate a successful and unproblematic process. Expatriation, as a link between headquarters and foreign subsidiaries, is argued to be one such sophisticated transfer mechanism, which is ideally suitable to tacit knowledge transfers through its capacity to cope with and teach the human elements of knowledge (Bonache, Brewster, and Suutari, 2001) . Traditionally, expatriation has been associated with an ethnocentric approach and indicated the practice of using parent-country nationals for staffing key positions in foreign-owned subsidiaries. Consequently, the primary goal of expatriation was explicit and well-defined control and coordination: By relocating expatriates, parent organizations have been able to exert control and achieve global integration across subsidiaries (Evans, Pucik, and Barsoux, 2002; Tung, 1993) . According to Harzing (2001) expatriates are used for effect control, in both a direct and indirect manner.

However, over the last decade, the nature of expatriate assignments has gradually changed. The old motto of expatriation- “just get the job done” -is no longer relevant. Today, expatriates are expected to engage in local staff development and support skills transfer from the MNC headquarters to the subsidiaries. The previous research reveals various possible strategic



targets for expatriates in that area. For example, some of these targets include developing top talent and future leaders of the company, improving the trust/commitment of the subsidiary, training local employees in order to improve their individual and team skills, implementing knowledge practices, developing, sharing, and transferring best practices and developing international leadership (Bonache and Fernandez, 1999). The knowledge-related function of expatriates is complementary to the traditional function of coordination and control. Delios and Bjorkman (2000) noted that under the control and coordination function the expatriate works to align the operations of the unit with those of the parent organization, while the complementary knowledge function requires the expatriate to transfer the parent company's knowledge to the foreign subsidiary under conditions where the parent has greater proprietary knowledge. Indeed, the role of expatriates as vehicles for transferring knowledge across MNC units has emerged as a new area of inquiry in international management, though empirical work is scarce.

Because there has not been very much research on the role of expatriates in international knowledge transfer processes, there may be a potential for the development of research based on the notion of expatriates as an agent of knowledge transfer (Bonache and Brewster, 2000; Downes and Thomas, 2000). When this is connected to the earlier discussion regarding the stickiness factors relating to such knowledge transfer, the research can be further extended by applying the framework of the stickiness factors to knowledge transfers through expatriates.

Transfers of organizational knowledge can occur in various directions within MNCs, including transfers from parent companies to foreign subsidiaries, from foreign subsidiaries to parent companies, or from one subsidiary to another. In this study, considering the research context and for purpose of clarity of the presentation, we focus on one particular type of transnational transfer: that of a parent company in Europe to its subsidiary in China.

1.2 The Research Context

Since the inception of economic reforms in 1979, China has become one of the world's fastest-growing economies. From 1979 to 2010 China's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an average annual rate of 9.9% (China Statistical Year Book, 2010). After three decades of spectacular growth, China passed Japan in the second quarter of the year 2010 to become the world's second largest economy behind the United States. Many economists speculate that China could become the world's largest economy at some point in the near future, provided that the government is able to continue and extend economic reforms, particularly in regard to its inefficient state-owned enterprises and the state banking system.

During the last three decades China has been undergoing a fundamental transformation from a central-command to a market-led economy. At its 14th congress in 1992, the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) approved the “Socialist Market Economy”, thereby signaling that the Chinese government has finally abandoned orthodox Marxist economic theory in favor of the western style free market economy. Joining World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 marked another important milestone in the economic development of China. WTO membership opens up China’s market for more international trade and investment, and opens up the world economy for China’s exports. The impacts of the membership on China are not only related to its economic institutions, but also to its legal and political institutions. Chow (2003) identified the impact of China’s entry into the WTO includes changes in economic structure and the rate of growth of GDP, formal legal institutions, legal behavior of the Chinese people, and the forces toward the development of democratic political institutions. Because the terms of the membership agreement have been introduced gradually and the economic, legal and political institutions do not change easily, the effects are taking place in a gradual pace.

Economics generally attribute much of China’s rapid economic growth to two main factors: large-scale capital investment (Financed by large domestic savings and foreign investment) and rapid productivity growth. An important part of the economic reform process in China has been the promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI). Since adopting the Open Door policy in 1978, China has attracted a large amount of FDI into China to improve the economy. Lured by China’s low cost labor and huge market potential, FDI inflows have maintained a strong growth rate. China has now become one of the most important destinations for cross-border direct investment.

Many researchers believe that foreign direct investment in China has played a largely positive role in China’s economic development during the reform (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 1995). Chen *et al.*, argue that FDI can generate more benefits than help solve the capital shortage problem in a developing country. FDI may provide better access to technologies for the local economy. Moreover, FDI can also lead to indirect productivity gains through spillovers (Fung *et al.*, 2002). For instance, multinational corporations (MNCs) often increase the degree of competition in host-country markets which will force existing inefficient firms to invest more in physical or human capital. In addition, MNCs can provide training of labor and management know-how which can enhance economic development of host country.

During the 1980s, FDI inflows grew steadily but remained relatively low, confined largely to joint ventures with Chinese state-owned enterprises. In early 1992, Deng Xiaoping, the former senior Chinese leader, toured the south; encouraged a massive wave of foreign direct