

Women and Globalization: Ethical Dimensions of Knowledge Transfer in Global Organizations

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ABSTRACT. The topic of women and globalization raises fundamental questions on the impact of globalization on women, ethnic minorities and other socio-demographically under-represented actors in global organizations. This article seeks to integrate theories of procedural justice, psychological contracts, motivation and psychological ownership in knowledge transfer in global organizations, and the implications for women, and other under-represented actors. Our analysis concurs with current research on the need for a relativist perspective in business ethics research and one that encompasses the critical processes of exchange from a cognitive perspective. Our contribution is to show that globalization is a complex process, that has different impacts on actors, an impact that can vary widely depending on, whether the actors are in a dominant situation, or as in the case of women and ethnic minorities, in a relatively socio-demographic and geographically under represented situation.

KEY WORDS: women, socio-demographic, geo-political, psychological contracts, procedural justice, intrinsic motivation, knowledge transfer

Introduction

Existing research on globalization has not sufficiently analysed issues of women, and under represented socio-demographic and geo-political groupings (Carter and Ibeh, 2006) in the global business environment. We believe that globalization's impact differs greatly between groups that are dominant in their representation, and groups such as women, that are under represented in global organizations. In this

conceptual article, we apply the theme of women, globalization and global management to the ethical dimension of knowledge transfer and exchange in global organizations. The complexity and tacit (Polanyi, 1957) nature of knowledge creation and knowledge transfer processes help to reveal the multi-dimensional impacts of globalization and business ethics on global organizations in the 21st century.

Many firms, which traditionally placed knowledge management as part of their functional research and development unit have now integrated knowledge transfer into the central core of the firm (Mudambi, 2002). It is clear that knowledge management processes are important in facilitating the sharing of both explicit and tacit knowledge in organizations (Schlegelmich and Chini, 2003). Multinational corporations (MNCs) by virtue of their global operation across countries and cultures face challenges in terms of achieving credibility and trust from their stakeholders (Gilbert and Beham, 2004). Recent research in management and social sciences has shown the importance of very high levels of trust in all corporations as part of knowledge transfer processes. Many large corporations including prominent professional firms such as KPMG Peat Marwick have introduced compliance and integrity management into their system to ensure that compliance with laws, regulations, policies and codes of conduct is comprehensive (KPMG, 2004).

In many instances, trust becomes essential when the assets being exchanged or transferred are intangible or the nature of exchange presents difficulties in arriving at a market valuation or price. This applies to knowledge as an asset of which intangibility and inalienability are key facets (Spender, 1996).

Intangible knowledge is as it flows around and supports the core product and service value chain (Allee, 2002). Alienability refers to tangible assets and products, which are fundamental to market-based exchange. As a consequence, such commodities can easily be assigned monetary values. (Millar, 2004). In contrast, inalienability refers to assets whose value may be more difficult to measure without reference to the owner, giver or seller.

Schlegelmich and Chini (2003) recognise that multiple nodes play a crucial role in knowledge transfer flows between MNC units, especially power relations, cultural distance and organizational structure. Studies conducted by Snell and Herndon (2004) on code adoption in Hong Kong companies found that there has been a gap between the adoption of a code of ethics and the adherence to best practice prescriptions and that these are attributable to cultural factors such as power distance and traditional legalist assumptions.

Underlying many of these ethical dilemmas in multinational knowledge exchange are differing views about “procedural justice” (Kim and Mauborgne, 1991), psychological contract (Schein, 1965; Levinson, 1962), motivation (Szulanski, 1996; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000) and psychological ownership (Pierce et al., 2001). For example, the view of what is deemed fair in business relationships and the perception by one or either party that the exchange is unfair are some of the most common reasons for the failure of many business alliances.

This article seeks to draw out how these four more psychological dimensions of business relationships influence knowledge transfer in global organizations, and whether they can be verified normatively or positively. Our conceptual typology of knowledge transfer and exchange mechanisms with theoretical propositions, illustrates the different impact of such mechanism on actors that are dominantly represented, and actors such as women, who are socio-demographically under represented. The contribution of our article is that the complexities of knowledge transfer in global organizations, requires a greater appreciation of the different impacts of such knowledge processes, especially in terms of the impact on women, and other socio-demographically and geo-politically under represented (Carter and Ibeh, 2006) groupings in the business environment of the 21st century.

Knowledge exchange: representation and under representation

Knowledge transfer within multinational corporations is a complex process influenced by many factors. Existing research analyses knowledge transfer at three levels: country, organization and individual (Kostova, 1999). However the existing literature does not address the difference between overly represented groups and under represented groups, such as women. We believe this has created a substantial gap in the existing literature on business ethics, gender, globalization and international management.

Our article focuses on this distinction, which we believe is a key topic within the growing research on gender, women and globalization in the context of business ethics research in the 21st century. This could be examined through a conceptual model by drawing on social psychology and social exchange literatures (Choi and Hilton, 1999) and showing how the above four psychological dimensions of ethical behaviour affect knowledge transfer between highly represented groupings of actors and women and other under represented socio-demographic (Carter and Ibeh, 2006) groupings. These key psychological dimensions are analysed with theoretical propositions in the following sections.

Psychological contract

The term *psychological contract* originates from works by Schein (1965) and Levinson (1962), who suggested that contracts might involve strong emotional ties. These create implicit obligations that go beyond what may be laid down in an employment contract and create a “psychological contract” with expectations about “reciprocity” in terms of the obligations between organizations and employees. Early works on psychological contracts by Kotter (1973), Levinson (1962) and Schein (1965) focus on reciprocity and mutually shared expectations. Rousseau (1995), however, argues that such an assumption could not be easily made with issues of promises, implied contracts and expectations that may or may not be shared by employees and their employer organizations. Rousseau and Parks (1993) suggest that contracts may involve strong emotional ties and

trust. If such a contract is breached, the reciprocal good faith is put into question.

A particular problem in global organizations in the 21st century, is that psychological contracts may vary from country to country. For many years after World War II, in many of the largest Japanese corporations the psychological contract took the form of lifetime employment in return for unquestioning commitment to the company. By contrast, lifetime employment was much less common in the United States. But still, a psychological contract may exist in a form such that employees who were sent overseas and enjoyed the benefits of being expatriates were expected to stay within the company for considerable time after the assignment. Psychological contracts have undergone many changes in many countries. Recent literature, both academic and practitioner, have suggested such a change in United States businesses (Cavanaugh and Noe, 1999). According to the old psychological contract, the employer was seen as a caretaker for the employee (Ehrlich, 1994; Kissler, 1994; Robinson et al., 1994) and employees who were good performers were virtually guaranteed a job until retirement and were provided with good career development opportunities. Under the new psychological contract, both employees and employers have lower expectations for long-term employment and employees are responsible for their own career development (Stroh et al., 1994; Kissler, 1994).

Proposition 1

Psychological contracts are fundamental to effective knowledge transfer in organizations. Global organizations however need to more fully take into account the different impacts of such psychological contracts on under-represented actors, such as women in global leadership positions.

Procedural justice

Related to psychological contract is the idea of procedural justice. The seminal work of Thibaut and Walker (1975) provides the theoretical foundation upon which the procedural justice perspective rests.

Building on social psychology and law, Thibaut and Walker (1975) examined the methods commonly used to resolve conflicts and how individuals perceive the impact of procedural factors on the resulting resolution outcomes. Lind and Tyler (1988) expanded on the concept by emphasizing the importance of procedures (processes) by which the fairness of judgments are derived and not the outcomes in and of themselves.

Procedural justice theory argues that fair treatment is central to people and is a major determinant of their reactions to decisions. Within the procedural justice framework, there is a distinction between control over a decision outcome and control over the decision process. People care not only about the outcome of decisions, but also about the procedures used to make decisions, and the way decisions are made have a significant effect on the outcome. Fair procedures should result in greater equity of rewards and should be associated with positive attitudes like satisfaction, agreement and commitment towards a decision. Fair procedures also serve as a symbolic function and sign to individuals that they are valued and respected members of the group or organization, thus promoting harmony and trust in relationships with others. Consequently, fair procedures are associated with greater group harmony, greater trust and greater organizational commitment (Lind and Tyler, 1988).

Proposition 2

Existing procedural justice research must take into account the differences between fair procedures to individuals and fair procedures to groups. Under-represented groups such as women and certain ethnic minorities in global organizations may have different perceptions of what is fair to their group, and in turn the correct procedural decisions and process within knowledge based global organizations.

Intrinsic motivation

While psychological contracts and procedural justice relate to the knowledge transfer process itself, two

other key inhibitors of the transfer process relate to the psychological characteristics of the individual giver and recipient. Both have ethical dimensions. The first psychological requirement is in the area of motivation. Motivational factors might include, for example, the lack of motivation to give and receive knowledge (Szulanski, 1996; Carter, et al., 2004; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). Osterloh and Frey (2000) emphasise that a distinction needs to be made between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Motivation is extrinsic if employees are able to satisfy their needs indirectly, especially through monetary compensation. Money is a “goal, which provides satisfaction independent of the actual activity itself” (Calder and Staw, 1975, p.599). Extrinsically motivated coordination in firms is achieved by linking employees’ monetary motives to the goals of the firm. In such a case, the ideal incentive system is strictly pay-by-performance.

Intrinsic motivation has a long tradition in motivation-based organization theory (Argyris, 1964; Likert, 1961; McGregor 1960) and has been examined for example, in conjunction with psychological contracts (e.g. Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1995). The researchers emphasise intrinsic motivation in the form of identification with the firm’s strategic goals, shared purposes and the fulfilment of norms for its own sake. Intrinsic motivation is particularly associated with creative tasks that require going beyond stereotyped repetition. Extensive research has shown that intrinsically motivated and extrinsically motivated employees behave differently with respect to pressure and rewards. In particular, Osterloh and Frey (2000) suggest that transfer of tacit knowledge is strongly related to intrinsic motivation. Whereas explicit knowledge is relatively easy to value and monitor, the same is not the case with tacit knowledge.

This being the case, it is difficult to provide extrinsic motivation with regards to knowledge production or transfer. Employees cannot be sanctioned if they hold back their tacit knowledge and knowledge transfer becomes problematic because of the measurement issues. Part of the knowledge development process in firms is to convert tacit knowledge held by employees into explicit knowledge that can be used by the organization (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). However, Osterloh and Frey (2000) argue that the conversion process still requires

intrinsically motivated group members to commit to the process.

Proposition 3

Intrinsic motivation can be driven by personal motivations, as well as well being for one’s group. Women and other socio-demographically under represented groups in global organizations may have different needs in terms of personal intrinsic motivation, as well as an intrinsic motivation for their under represented group, in leadership positions in global organizations.

Psychological ownership

This has been defined as a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of it is “theirs” (Pierce et al, 2001). Pierce et al. (2001) consider that psychological ownership can have both positive and negative effects. For example, feelings of ownership are also accompanied by a sense of responsibility, including a responsibility to act in the interests of the organization. There is some evidence linking output increases to employees’ sense of ownership (Korman, 1970; Dipboye, 1977). On the other hand, a strong sense of ownership can also result in resistance to change when it is seen as threatening an individual’s sense of control and taking away that which the individual has attached to the project. For example, an employee may resist sharing the target of ownership with co-workers or may want to retain exclusive control over the target. In extreme cases, employees may engage in acts of sabotage to prevent others gaining control.

The opposite side of psychological ownership is the rejection of information that is not considered to be owned. The “Not-Invented-Here” (NIH) syndrome is well known in innovation and has also been the subject of scholarly inquiry (Katz and Allen, 1982). There are at least two drivers of the NIH syndrome: (i) ego-defence mechanisms (Allport, 1937) which can lead some managers to block any information that might suggest that others are more competent than they are, and (ii) power struggles within organizations (Pfeffer, 1995) which can lead

some managers to try to downgrade the potential power of their peer units by pretending that the knowledge stock possessed by these peer units is not unique and valuable. In short, unless countervailing forces are present, the NIH syndrome can act as a major barrier to the inflow of knowledge in any focal unit.

Proposition 4

If a global organization relies on past history, in terms of the acceptance of rules, innovations and procedures, this automatically creates and bias and disadvantage for women, and other socio-demographically under represented groups. In order to avoid the multiplication of under representation of women, global organizations need to combine organizational history with the business benefits derived from global diversity through more equal representation of various socio-demographic groupings.

Integration and knowledge exchange structures

As described in earlier studies, the unilateral or one-way transfer of knowledge from the major represented group to women and under-represented groups, requires ethical considerations that include a psychological contract, a high sense of procedural justice, relatively high motivation to give and receive and a relatively low sense of psychological ownership. As described by Kostova (1999), legitimacy of the major represented group is required in order for its authority to be recognised, and legitimacy of the women and under represented groups is also required in order for its knowledge to be accepted. The acceptance of this greater diversity in turn will enhance the level of knowledge transfer and overall organizational effectiveness of global organizations in the 21st century.

Within organization and management theory, social exchange theory has been mainly applied to examine exchanges between superiors and subordinates (Marcus and House, 1973) or within work groups (Molm et al., 1994). However, Toyne has

noted (1989), that the theory has wider applications and can serve as a basis for much theorizing in international business. Using the concept of exchange, knowledge transfer in global organizations in the 21st century, can be viewed as possessing three characteristics:

1. It is an exchange of goods and/or services across or within national boundaries or between two or more actors or two or more groupings, in different countries.
2. It is an exchange process involving relationships, inputs and outputs between social factors in different countries and from representative as well as women, and under represented groupings.
3. It may be influenced by non-commercial considerations (e.g. political) as part of a wider long-term relationship and exchange.

Using the knowledge exchange perspective, two common types of social exchange can be identified in the context of the major group and the under-represented group. These are (a) negotiated exchange (exchange based on an explicit agreement or the terms of a trade) and (b) reciprocal exchange (sequential giving of benefits across time). Negotiated exchange is the exchange most commonly studied by economists i.e., marketplace exchange between anonymous actors (Hitt et al., 1996). Reciprocal exchange can be defined as types of exchange where there are informal agreements between parties in exchanging goods and services. Research by psychologists and sociologists suggest that these different exchange structures have different psychological effects (Lawler, 2001). The psychological requirements and consequences of each type of exchange are discussed below.

Negotiated exchange involves an explicit contractual agreement in which actors agree to the terms of trade. As the exchange is negotiated explicitly, each actor's consent is necessary for the exchange to take place. This implies that the sense of shared responsibility should be relatively strong. On the other hand, negotiated exchange has the potential to produce conflicting emotions or emotional ambivalence owing to its mixed-motives. For example, one party may be grateful to the other for what he or she has given but at the same time may harbour

some anger that the other party did not give more. In a reciprocal exchange, tacit and informal understandings replace the explicit agreement of negotiated exchange. As in negotiated exchange, each actor benefits individually from what the other provides for them. There is an implicit obligation to reciprocate when asked. However, the how, what and when of, whatever is to be given in return is left open to interpretation. Reciprocal exchange therefore entails more uncertainty and risk than negotiated exchange and hence, requires trust. In reciprocal exchange, the contributions of each actor are separable and distinguishable given the time lapse between giving and receiving. Therefore, perceptions of shared responsibility for the exchange should not be as strong as for either negotiated or productive exchange. On the other hand, research shows that commitment is greater in reciprocal than in negotiated exchange relations (Molm et al., 1994).

Knowledge assets and knowledge transfer are seen as fundamental to the global organizations and society of the 21st century. We believe that the existing research needs to take a more holistic and broader view of knowledge exchange, especially in order to address the issue of women, and socio-demographically under representation of certain groups in global organizations. Such a holistic approach, will better incorporate the business benefits of global diversity, within global organizations. This typology of knowledge exchange mechanisms, which attempts to provide such a conceptual integration is shown in Table I.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this conceptual article was to analyse the theme of women, globalization and global management with an application to the complexities of knowledge transfer and exchange in global organizations in the 21st century. The tacit (Polanyi, 1957) nature of knowledge makes the transfer process unusually complex. The existing literature on knowledge transfer and exchange has insufficiently analysed the issue of the major or dominantly represented group's knowledge transfer interaction with women and under socio-demographically (Carter and Ibeh, 2006) under represented groupings. In this

TABLE I
Women, globalization and types of knowledge exchange in global organizations

Types of knowledge transfer/exchange	Psychological characteristics	Suitable type of knowledge
Entitlement	Requires high-procedural justice	Most appropriate for transfer of explicit knowledge that can be monitored
Negotiated exchange	Requires strong psychological contract between giver and recipient of knowledge	Most appropriate for explicit knowledge whose value can be agreed
Reciprocal exchange	Requires medium-high motivation to give and receive	Most appropriate for tacit knowledge that has certain value
Generalized exchange	Requires low-psychological ownership of knowledge	Most appropriate for explicit knowledge that has uncertain value
Productive exchange	Requires extrinsic or intrinsic motivation	Most appropriate for tacit knowledge that has uncertain value

article, we created a typology of different knowledge exchange mechanisms, which can shed light on issues of dominant representation and under representation and the impact on knowledge transfer. We believe that such distinctions are key to research on women, globalization and global management in the 21st century.

Since each type of exchange is associated with different psychological and ethical dimensions, we suggest that this can be extended to different exchange structures for the transfer of different types of knowledge (Table I). Unilateral transfer works best with explicit knowledge since the performance of the act needs to be readily monitored. Unilateral transfer is more commonly associated with explicit knowledge. Negotiated exchange requires a strong psychological contract between the giver and recipient of knowledge. Given the need to reach a negotiated agreement, the value of the knowledge being transferred also needs to be readily determined. Thus like unilateral transfer, negotiated exchange is more commonly associated with explicit knowledge.

Reciprocal exchange is more commonly associated with tacit knowledge and requires a relatively high motivation to give and receive and a relatively low-psychological ownership, since it must be repeated over time. Given that tacit knowledge generally requires repeated interaction to be transferred, we hypothesize that this form of exchange would be more commonly used. The analysis of the four psychological dimensions of knowledge transfer marks a shift in understanding business ethical behaviour that used to rely on the absolutist model or a mechanistic model. The increased interest in intangibles and corporate transparency in the knowledge economy and the increasing role of women in global organizations, implies that new approaches have to be adopted that are grounded in principles of living systems, where the basic pattern of organization is that of a network of tangible and intangibles exchanges (Allee, 2002).

The above analysis helps to identify areas in which there have been relatively few studies conducted and which warrant further research especially empirical evidence that is required to confirm the relationship between the types of knowledge exchange and the psychological factors and how these factors vary in different types of exchange.

The current research interest in conjoint analysis (Tsalikis et al., 2001), multi-dimensional scaling and meta-analysis (Orlitzky et al., 2003) illustrates the need for an integrative, quantitative study of such knowledge transfer issues in global organizations. We believe that such analysis will shed further light on the important emerging issue of women, globalization and global management in the context of business ethics in the 21st century.

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