

Organizational Learning via Expatriate Managers: Collective Myopia as Blocking Mechanism

May M. L. Wong

Abstract

May M. L. Wong
Lingnan
University, Hong
Kong

Qualitative case studies of two Japanese multinational department stores in Hong Kong are used to illustrate possible blocking mechanisms and collective myopia that hinder Japanese expatriate managers in acquiring double-loop organizational learning in their international assignments. Four major blocking mechanisms were identified — parent company community spirit, *dozoku* inhabitants, parent company's translators and desire for normality. These blocking mechanisms were related to the Japanese head office's culture, ideology and desire to control. They inhibited the expatriates from challenging established practices, procedures and norms, prevented them from becoming knowledgeable human agents, and hindered them from forming reflexivity. The expatriates, as a result, failed to learn from their international assignments. A conceptual model for expatriate learning and blocking mechanisms is drawn from the case examples, and implications for improving expatriate management to strengthen organizational learning are discussed.

Keywords: organizational learning, blocking mechanism, collective myopia, expatriate managers, Japan, Hong Kong

Existing literature on expatriate management has focused on their adjustment from the point of view of individual well-being. This includes acculturation (Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, 1986), satisfaction and repatriation processes (Black et al. 1992), work role transition from working in the parent country to the host country (Nicholson 1984), problems of adjustment to foreign cultures (Black 1990; Black and Gregersen 1991; Black and Stephens 1989; Brewster 1993) and the nature of adjustment and commitment to the parent company after repatriation (Forster 1994; Gregersen and Black 1990). An important theme — enhancing expatriate managers' organizational learning capability through international assignments — has been largely overlooked. Yet, one of the important contributors to the competitiveness of multinational corporations (MNCs) in the future is thought to be their ability to learn faster than their competitors (Prahalad and Hamel 1990; Moingeon and Edmondson 1997); and one of the most important ways of improving organizational learning by expatriates is by international assignments (Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994). It is argued that 'knowledge transfer is important because so much tacit knowledge resides within human resource. If knowledge transfer is inefficient or ineffective, the enterprise is less competitive' (Gannan and

Organization
Studies
26(3): 325–350
ISSN 0170–8406
Copyright © 2005
SAGE Publications
(London,
Thousand Oaks,
CA & New Delhi)

Newman 2002: 123). Consequently, research on organizational learning through international assignments is an important issue.

Furthermore, although rising interest in organizational learning has resulted in growing bodies of research, significant gaps in empirical and conceptual understanding — especially in MNCs — remain. Much of the existing literature on organizational learning has focused on the management of cognitive capabilities which were assumed to have unified entities capable of processing information and making intelligent decisions (Bartlett and Ghoshal 2000; Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Fiol and Lyles 1985; Galunic and Rodan 1998; Gupta and Govindarajan 2000; Huber 1991; Inkpen 1995). However, in reality, organizational learning in MNCs is undertaken by individuals of different national origins, and cannot be separated from the individual and social context in which it occurs (Czegledy 1996). The sets of different norms and assumptions held by expatriates and local staff cannot be isolated from wider organizational learning activities. For instance, before expatriate managers are assigned to work overseas, they are already used to following a distinct learning pattern in parent companies which have radically different cultural environments from that of the host country. The organizational learning behaviour adopted by expatriates is thereby different from those of local employees due to different respective cultural assumptions. Therefore, it is essential for expatriates to understand and manage cultural differences both within and between the MNC and the external environment, between the parent and host country.

The reality, however, is that even though expatriate managers may recognize the importance of cross-cultural sensitivity to a variety of local employees' viewpoints, after some time they usually find it difficult to manage various problems of intercultural incompatibility. This situation is similar to what Argyris (1994) described as the 'failing case' of organizational learning in MNCs. There have been calls for a more robust exposition and further research in organizational learning processes in MNCs, especially from the perspective of expatriate managers, so as to understand why so many failing cases occur in organizational learning among expatriate managers on overseas assignments (Forster 1992; Kamoche 1997).

This paper, in pointing out that overseas assignment is one of an important set of processes for organizational learning in an MNC context, has a different emphasis from the existing literature on cultural adjustment. Given the dearth of empirical research of expatriate management and organizational learning, this paper focuses on analysing the 'blocking mechanisms' for organizational learning in the case of Japanese managers seeking to maximize organizational learning within their international assignments. Interestingly, it has been contended that Japanese firms learn by a continuous process of seeking new knowledge from outside and that this is shared widely within the organization (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). However, Japanese firms seem to be less effective in seeking new knowledge from overseas subsidiaries as there are many blocking mechanisms to organizational learning. These blocking mechanisms stem from 'collective myopia' which ultimately hinders Japanese MNCs from tapping into local indigenous knowledge, and from transmitting the knowledge

quickly and effectively throughout the worldwide network of operations (Adler and Bartholomew 1992; Hendry 1994; Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994), thereby affecting their corporate competitiveness.

The main body of this discussion is divided into three parts, with a concluding summary. First, the concepts of collective myopia and organizational learning are discussed as the major analytical tool for identifying the blocking mechanisms for learning among expatriate managers. Second, the research methodology and company backgrounds are discussed. Third, the empirical research undertaken using Japanese expatriate managers is analysed. I then discuss the implications, including how blocking mechanisms are related to the Japanese mode of reasoning, which has to be changed in order to promote and strengthen organizational learning with respect to international assignments in MNCs. A short conclusion completes the paper.

Collective Myopia and Organizational Learning

Collective Myopia Leading to Lower-Level Organizational Learning

This study uses the concept of collective myopia to describe the situation in which members of communities are able to make sense of the context in which they live, but are not able to monitor nor reflect on the institution as a whole created by themselves. The condition maintaining the situation of collective myopia is largely due to ignorance of the existence of 'background knowledge' (Habermas 1984) which moulds their individual points of reference in perceiving the surrounding social environment. Individual organizational members fit into their institutions by conformity through the practice of socialization — the progressive departure of knowledge from individual to collective levels. Collective myopia occurs when conformity to the ongoing institution is unquestionable. Collective reality is accepted as common sense (Schutz 1967) by organizational members, and they use it as the normative standard of judgement. In this sense, the knowledge shared by the organizational members constrains the reasoning and judgement of fellow members (Mannheim 1956; Scheler 1980). Reasoning and judgement, then, control organizational learning activities among members. As a result, members are 'trapped' within the ongoing institutions reflected by their own realities, and organizational learning is mainly made within the currently available frames of mind or mode of reasoning. This situation often explains why organizations can only achieve lower levels of learning — zero- or single-loop organizational learning.

In cases where organizational learning does not occur, members receive information, but do not enact any forms of change. Although the information may lead to learning, it is not learning in itself. At this level of learning, there is no linkage between individuals' mental models and shared mental models (Bateson 1973).

In single-loop organizational learning, only instrumental or skill learning takes place; strategies of action are adjusted to get the desired outcome.

However, assumptions underlying the various strategies of action, and the basic system of assumptions that are left unchanged, lead to merely minor incremental change (Argyris and Schon 1974). Learning is adaptive when members adjust their actions to increase the possibility of achieving wider organizational goals, while their desired outcome remains the same. This learning process increases the firm's collective knowledge and competency base without altering present policies, objectives, mental maps and basic activities. In other words, learning at this level is reactive (Argyris 1993).

As a whole, in both zero- and single-loop learning contexts, expatriates stick to the current mode of reasoning without any desire to change their attitudes or behaviours in favour of cross-cultural adaptation. In this sense, collective myopia creates a restrictive situation for expatriates to acquire a proactive organizational learning, and explains why intercultural incompatibility persists in overseas operations.

Departure from Collective Myopia Leading to Higher-Level Organizational Learning

The ideal learning level for achieving the internationalization of MNCs' operations is to set expatriate managers free from collective myopia so that they can achieve a higher level of double-loop organizational learning. In double-loop learning, processes of strategic learning can be achieved in which new meanings and actions are transformed from enhanced mental maps. Members change their values of theory-in-use, strategies and assumptions since the underlying system assumptions are challenged and modified (Argyris and Schon 1974, 1978), leading to changes in the views of the nature of the business, the business environment and their place in the organization. Members see and make sense of things in totally different ways: predominantly by understanding why their prior meaning-making or goal-seeking systems were inadequate and led to logical incongruities and omissions. This new position leads to organizational learning by changing the firm's knowledge and competency base through the reframing of problems and through developing new shared paradigms, policies and objectives. In this way, double-loop learning takes place in a proactive manner such that solutions are actually produced as organizations seek to exist in order to accomplish intended consequences (Argyris 1993).

In order to achieve double-loop organizational learning, members need to disengage from collective myopia, a departure which requires institutional redefinition, challenging established and assumed practices or procedures (Oliver 1992), often involving changes in knowledge structure. The concept which leads to changes in knowledge structure is called 'reflexivity' (Beck 1994; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Giddens 1984). Reflexivity facilitates capabilities activating self-confrontation with problematic situations (Beck 1994). The initiation of a self-reflexive circle must start with the reconstruction of social reality by individual reflection.

Reflexivity is initiated by 'knowledgeable human agents' — those who know what they are doing and how to do it (Giddens 1984). The achievement

of double-loop organizational learning therefore depends on the availability and activation of knowledgeable human agents. In order to accomplish double-loop learning, members need to engage with a reflection process — a retrospective monitoring involving the construction of organizational reality (Louis and Sutton 1991). However, not all reflective members can be regarded as knowledgeable human agents, primarily because such individuals need to possess the competence in cultural flexibility of moving from the state of enmeshment to a transcendent state where their vantage point is outside the organization or system (Harris and Cronen 1979). Unless a certain number of members advance their competence to this level, it is not easy to move to the reflexive circle from which double-loop learning occurs. In other words, there are many obstacles for members in overcoming collective myopia, reconstructing new modes or frames of reasoning, implementing reflexivity and achieving double-loop learning.

Obstacles in Implementing Reflexivity and Higher-Level Organizational Learning

A major reason why it is difficult for members experiencing collective myopia to activate self-confrontation is the nature of intensive socialization practices. As a result, collective knowledge shared by members induces them to maintain specific ways of behaving which become a facet of cultural tradition (Giddens 1984; Habermas 1992), largely because members share a collective memory of how things have been done and are supposed to be done (Abolafia and Kilduff 1988; Schutz 1967). These memories are retained as norms that serve as a guide to subsequent action and acceptable behaviour (Schutz 1967). Thus, institutions control conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, and members in collective myopia can only be active within the limited range of acceptance.

Furthermore, the acceptance of practical questions on a daily basis sustains the limitation of the acceptance range (Habermas 1973). Practical questions are posed with a view to the acceptance or rejection of norms — and the claim to validity to be supported or opposed is based neither on rationality nor objectivity but on ‘procedural validity’. Here organizational members reflect on past knowledge to infer the appropriateness of their behaviour according to the pattern of acceptance or rejection. In many cases, members do not change their modes or frames of reasoning as they judge the appropriateness of their attitudes and behaviours based on past knowledge exactly because they need to conform to a sense of shared reality and fit into the institution in order to survive, which hampers their organizational learning. As a result, there are not enough knowledgeable human agents who can depart from collective myopia to initiate a reflexive circle.

This explains why there are so few organizations that can achieve double-loop organizational learning. It is because learning through the progression from zero-, single-loop to double-loop learning entails an increase in social and cognitive adjustment and adaptation which requires activating self-confrontation. This limitation and the institutional framework often hinder members from forming reflexivity and becoming knowledgeable human agents.

Yet, this is not just an issue of expatriate management. A learning organization's characteristics include a 'learning climate' and 'ethos' of self-responsibility (Coopey 1996) which may need corporate culture change. Indeed, what is 'learnt' itself is contested, as indicated in the concept of 'context specificity' of knowledge (Kamoche 2001). This indicates that learning is dynamic and problematic, with the social and political context or organizations clear. Learning can be a challenge or threat to current taken-for-granted power bases or organizations and so, while it seems 'seductive', in practice there are difficulties. These include the organization's employees, who need to be capable and committed, and culture, which needs to be appropriate, such as supportive to questioning. It is argued that 'more perniciously, what they have learned abroad is sometimes viewed as counter-productive to narrow domestic concerns' (Gannan and Newman 2002: xxi). Furthermore, there is an emergent critique of double-loop learning itself (which is beyond the scope of this paper), while some, such as Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) with their knowledge-creating model, go beyond the limitations of the organizational learning literature in general.

Methodology and Company Background

The objectives of this research were to understand the process of organizational learning among expatriates and to identify potential difficulties encountered by them in forming reflexivity during overseas assignments. Therefore, rather than using organizational learning measurement instruments (such as Bontis and Crossan 1999), accounts of the meanings, intentions, experiences and events were sought. This research used qualitative inquiry, specifically the case study method, to collect data (Miles and Huberman 1994). 'Grounded theory' aspects of interviews were sought to reveal how expatriates were socialized into accepting the dominance of parent culture, ideology and control which had hampered their ability to learn in international assignments.

Company Background

Two case studies of Japanese retail stores in Hong Kong — given the fictitious names 'Morioka' and 'Chubunya' — were conducted. The profile of the case companies is shown in Table 1.

Morioka was a wholly owned Japanese department store which opened its first store in 1984. Its parent company moved its headquarters from Japan to Hong Kong in 1989 and relocated to Shanghai, China, in 1996. By mid-1997 the company had 10 store outlets in Hong Kong and Macao and employed a total of 2,700 employees in Hong Kong. In November 1997, the company declared insolvency.

Chubunya was also a wholly owned Japanese department store established in 1986. It operated five store outlets in Hong Kong, employing 1,300 local employees. The company also opened a new store after the case interviews.

Table 1.
Profile of Two
Japanese
Department Store
Companies (mid-
1997)

| | Morioka | Chubunya |
|----------------------------|---------|----------|
| Year of establishment | 1974 | 1986 |
| Year first store opened | 1984 | 1987 |
| Length of active operation | 15 | 11 |
| Japanese ownership | 100% | 100% |
| Number of store outlets | 10 | 5 |
| Number of employees | 2,700 | 1,300 |

Source: compiled by the author based on company reports

Research Questions

The research instrument was semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Emerging research questions included the following: What were the norms and values in both the parent company and the operation in Hong Kong? To what extent had they prepared themselves before taking up the overseas assignment? To what extent did they understand local cultural assumptions and modes or frames of reasoning? How much effort had they exerted to change their own frames of reasoning in order to suit the local environment during the overseas assignment? On what basis did they judge the appropriateness of their attitudes and behaviours (e.g. rationality, objectivity or past knowledge), especially those from the head office? Did they feel that the culture or control from the head office imposed any limitations on them in learning while on international assignment?

Data Collection and Analysis

The case studies were based on interviews in 1997 of 40 Japanese expatriate managers — 25 from Morioka and 15 from Chubunya — who had worked with their respective company for at least one year (Table 2) because it takes time for expatriates to adapt to the host environment. At the beginning of their assignment, expatriates often encountered a ‘slow learning curve’ which might adversely affect their learning ability (Adler 1994). The interviewees represented more than 70 percent (25 out of 35) of the total number of expatriates in Morioka, and nearly 90 percent (15 out of 17) in Chubunya.

The interviewees represented a range of age and professional status; all were male apart from a single female expatriate in Morioka (Table 2). In terms of age, Morioka had more younger expatriates since 3 out of 25 (12 percent) were aged between 26 and 30. In terms of hierarchy, 6 out of 25 (24 percent) in Morioka and 4 out of 15 (26.6 percent) in Chubunya were directors; 13 out of 25 (52 percent) in Morioka and 8 out of 15 (53.3 percent) in Chubunya were department managers; 5 out of 25 (20 percent) in Morioka and 3 out of 15 (20 percent) in Chubunya were section managers. In addition to this sample, one female expatriate was a merchandiser in Morioka. A majority of the interviewees in both case companies worked in operational departments (household, food and apparel) — 13 out of 25 (52 percent) in Morioka and 8 out of 15 (53.3 percent) in Chubunya. The profile of the interviewees is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.
Profile of Japanese
Expatriate
Interviewees

| | Morioka | Chubunya |
|----------------------------|---------|----------|
| Position | | |
| Managing Director | 1 | 1 |
| Director | 5 | 3 |
| Department Manager | 13 | 8 |
| Section Manager | 5 | 3 |
| Others | 1* | 0 |
| Department | | |
| Household | 5 | 3 |
| Food | 4 | 3 |
| Apparel | 4 | 2 |
| General Affairs | 2 | 1 |
| Accounting | 3 | 1 |
| Personnel | 1 | 0 |
| Electronic Data Processing | 0 | 1 |
| Others** | 6 | 4 |
| Age | | |
| 26–30 | 3 | 0 |
| 31–35 | 3 | 3 |
| 36–40 | 3 | 3 |
| 41–45 | 4 | 3 |
| 46–50 | 6 | 2 |
| Over 50 | 6 | 4 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 24 | 15 |
| Female | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 25 | 15 |

*A merchandiser who is a female expatriate

**Mainly those at director grade

One possible limitation was that culturally the Japanese tended to give *tatemae* (superficial) and rigid answers and say what they were ‘supposed to’ to outsiders. This problem was alleviated by interviewing seven ‘intimates’ of the author (17.5 percent). They could be more frank in revealing their *honne* (true feeling) in the accounts of the meanings, intentions, experiences and events (Dalton 1959) since they had been close friends of the author for at least 5 years. In addition, the interviews with the intimates were conducted in less formal situations, such as going out together for a drink or a meal. It was found that the interviewees’ rigidity was largely reduced in these situations. Interviews were conducted in Japanese, and lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. All interviews were recorded on tape, and transcribed. On occasion, background noise at the bar or restaurant made transcription difficult. In anticipation of this, the author transcribed all intimates’ tapes immediately after the interviews so that the unclear parts of the tape recording could be supplemented by the author’s fresh memory.

The technique used to analyse the data was grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Data collected was categorized into recognizable clusters involving abstraction and conceptual processes until the clusters were ‘saturated’ (Glaser 1978). Although the interviewees described their experiences

and reflections in their own context of workplaces, the empirical results formed 'analytical generalization' that could explain a general phenomenon experienced by others (Husserl 1973; Yin 1989).

Data and statements collected from the interviewees were cross-checked through the interviewing of multiple individuals in their respective organizations, exploring different levels of meaning and actively shaping the course of the interview (King 1995; May 1993; O'Sullivan et al. 1995). Descriptive narration (Miles and Huberman 1994) was selected as the most appropriate analytical method in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. Because of the relatively small number of interviewees and companies interviewed, the results could not be considered as representative of Japanese expatriates in general. However, conclusions might be generated from the particular which might or might not be applicable to general patterns or trends (Allison 1993; King 1995; May 1993; O'Sullivan et al. 1995).

Cultural Background

This includes the cultural backgrounds of both companies and locations. The characteristics of Japanese society (Nakane 1970; Sano 1998), companies and their practices (Dore 1973; Clark 1991; Sano 1998) had been noted. The broader environment in which the business operates is, obviously, important; see the classic work of Hofstede (1980) and critiques such as Rowley and Lewis (1996), overviews such as Punnett (1998) and developments such as Triandis (2002). Details on these are readily available elsewhere and beyond the focus of this paper except to make the following broad points. On the one hand, some commentators believe cultural differences may be lessening (the convergence school) while for others they retain their salience (divergence supporters), with obvious different implications for management (Rowley 1998; Rowley and Benson 2002).

Blocking Mechanisms

For the purpose of data categorization, the blocking mechanisms were labelled and constructed with the assistance of key research informants. This section describes the blocking mechanisms by showcasing some of the qualitative data given by the respondents.

Parent Company Community Spirit

A majority (more than 65 percent) stated that they were not happy when they were informed by the *Jinjibu* (personnel department) that they were to take up a Hong Kong assignment. For one manager from the accounting and finance department of Chubuya:

'When I heard the news of the Hong Kong assignment, I had a strong feeling like I was sent into exile. I was quite scared that my efforts in building up my credentials in the head office would be jeopardized when I am away from the power centre. You

know, if I cannot keep my *jinmyoku* (human network) because of the assignment, I might risk losing my identity with my group, and thus become neglected for further advancement opportunities in Japan.'

The above worry could be easily understood when the social system in Japan is considered. The Japanese emphasize group consciousness, a sensibility which derives from the concept of *ie* (the household group). *Ie* is a social group constructed on the basis of an established frame of residence, and is often extended to an employee's organization. This creates strong corporate clans in which employees have high degrees of corporate identity and community spirit (Clark 1991; Dore 1973; Ouchi 1981). Apparently, the expatriates consider the parent company in Japan as the community base in which their attention was focused. It is because the human relationships within the *ie* (the parent company) are more important than all other (including the Hong Kong operation) human relationships (Nakane 1970).

Furthermore, Japanese strengthen the frame of their group by stressing the group consciousness of 'us' against 'them' (Ouchi 1981). It is observed that group harmony tends to exist mainly among members within the parent company, but less among different groups in the company's overseas operations. This can be explained by social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg 1990). Japanese expatriates regarded their colleagues in Japan, rather than local employees, as the reference group (Kopp 1994) since the overseas assignments were only part of their job rotation. Thus, Japanese expatriates tended to identify only with the Japanese parent company, distancing themselves from local social groups or systems. These identifications by expatriate managers may not be compatible with the general MNCs' objectives for internationalization (Bartlett and Ghoshal 2000). When there are incompatibilities in national cultures and objectives, the outcome of organizational learning is likely to be restricted to the zero- or single-loop learning levels, and unlikely to reach the double-loop learning level. It is only in the double-loop learning level that the managerial mindsets of expatriates can have the ability to understand the criteria and conditions for organizational competitiveness and success in an international context (Child 1995).

Another aspect of Japanese corporate membership that has hampered expatriates in achieving double-loop learning is that membership in the *ie* of the parent company requires one's actual presence in Japan where one can personally engage in economic, ritual and social relationships (Nakane 1970). However, working in overseas subsidiaries restricts expatriate members in engaging actively with members of the parent company. This explains why managers are reluctant to accept overseas assignments. The reason why Japanese corporate membership is so restrictive territorially is attributed to the fact that the corporate members have different psycho-cultural attributes. The Japanese prefer to use an emotional approach to overcome different attributes (Nakane 1970). This can only be facilitated by continual human contact extending even into private and personal domains and relationships. Consequently, the power and influence of the parent company not only affects and enters into the expatriate manager's actions, but also their ideas and ways of thinking (Nakatani 1987).

Many of the expatriates explained that due to a fear of the 'out-of-sight and out-of-mind' syndrome, they perceived that even the best evaluations in the overseas assignment would rarely lead to significant career advancement. This can be related to the fact that Japanese rely more on face-to-face informal assessment in performance appraisal (Kuwahara 1993). The adherence to head office performance standards and evaluation norms had made many (more than half) Japanese expatriate interviewees consider that maintaining personal contact with colleagues in the Japanese head office is more important than making adjustment to the local environment in Hong Kong. A personnel manager at Chubuya said:

'International assignment is neither for international career development nor international organizational development. On the contrary, in evaluating employees' lifelong career performance in the parent company, international experience is usually treated as a hindrance to potential career advancement in the corporate career ladder of the company.'

A section manager at Chubuya reiterated this point: 'I try to find every opportunity to go back to Japan because I can keep up my contacts there. I understand that doing this is important to my career because my roots are in Japan'.

These factors show that the expatriate respondents maintained their community base and spirits with the parent company in Japan. It can be explained by the fact that the Japanese were socialized, seeing themselves to be part of the shared fate of the company (Dambmann 1986). Furthermore, when they were assigned to work overseas, they only needed to work in the overseas subsidiary for a few years. Therefore, the expatriates did not need to develop a shared fate with the overseas subsidiary in the same manner as that of the parent company. This reasoning explains why most Japanese expatriates had difficulty in acquiring cross-cultural adaptability at the double-loop learning level.

The Japanese expatriates' attachment to parent company spirit even when they were working overseas can also be attributed to the ideology of dependency. The head office manipulated and controlled Japanese managers through the creation of dependency via the lifetime employment system (Littler 1982). Under the lifetime employment system, Japanese expatriates do not have alternative employment opportunities in the external labour market because there is firm specificity of their skills. As the Japanese expatriates depended so much on their head office, they were more likely to accept and perform their role in international social control (Laurent 1986) rather than acquire cross-cultural adaptability.

Dozoku Inhabitants

Almost all (more than 90 percent) of the interviewees said that they would not like to be considered as 'deviants' from the mainstream Japanese system by the parent company. Therefore, they tended not to depart from the management practices they used in Japan during their overseas assignment. For example, a manager in the fashion department at Morioka said:

'I have not made much effort to adjust to the local management style. For example, when I ask my Hong Kong staff to place an order with the local garment manufacturers, I still use the compliance-gaining strategies to obtain consent from my subordinates to carry out the tasks. I know that it inevitably causes some local employees to perceive that I dislike them, which is detrimental to the establishment of a positive working relationship. I was told by my Hong Kong assistant manager that it may result in more resistance to their compliance with my requests. As a result, this may result in a vicious cycle. However, when I discussed this with my Japanese colleagues, they all advised me not to change my management tactics because the top Japanese management might not like me to do so. Therefore, I stick to what other Japanese do in order not to intimidate my boss even though the management practice is rather ineffective in Hong Kong.'

Such comments underscore the way in which managers were socially shaped as they were prohibited from attempting to become knowledgeable human agents. The major reason for such attribution lies within the framework of the traditional Japanese *dozoku* (clan) inhabitants' mentality. In order to make sure that the Japanese expatriate managers do not bring back any non-Japanese work habits to the parent company from their overseas assignments after repatriation, the head office preferred to select those who are less likely to deviate from the norms of the Japanese system, in particular the *dozoku* inhabitants. It shows that expatriate selection was a powerful form of managerial control (Winstanley 1991). A Japanese informant from Morioka explained:

'If the expatriates adapted to the local management practices, they might question the Japanese management practice when they go back to Japan, which could upset the balance of the Japanese management systems. We Japanese have the utmost fear of the deviants. As you may have heard a Japanese motto — a nail sticking out should be hammered down. Those who do not conform are considered dangers to the community.'

Therefore, those expatriates who had attempted to adapt cross-culturally were usually regarded by head office as 'harmful' and 'too opinionated' (one of the qualities of reflexivity). One of the major factors attributed to the development of reflexivity among expatriates has been their ability to see their workplace in Japan from outside Japanese society itself. They would depart from the norms of the *dozoku* inhabitants of the workplace, leading to the manifestation of practical questions, and de-institutionalization (Greenwood and Hinings 1996), both considered by the head office as 'contaminators' threatening the 'order' of Japanese systems. These open-minded expatriates usually needed to go through the process of 'decontamination' or *akaotoshi* ('cleansing dirt') when repatriated back to Japan. To many Japanese, the process of *akaotoshi* means punishment and hindrance to their career development. For example, a manager of the household department of Morioka who had experience of working in Malaysia for 6 years said:

'I had a difficult time adjusting to the local work culture, but managed to win the hearts of my Malaysian colleagues before I went back to Japan in my previous overseas assignment. However, when I returned Japan, I was assigned to the hardest kind of non-managerial position in a peripheral branch of a remote village, in *Sendai*

prefecture in Japan. I suddenly realized that I had to go through *akaotoshi*. Since then, I tell myself that I have to be more careful in future not to be dubbed as a “contaminator” by the head office so as to avoid a more severe punishment when I go back to Japan after this [Hong Kong] assignment.’

Many Japanese expatriates told the author that they tried to act more Japanese than their colleagues in Japan when they were repatriated back. Japanese employees climb up the corporate ladder for status within company through job rotation, and overseas assignment is one type of the job rotation. They are evaluated by numerous superiors and they cannot relax in any of the assignments including the overseas assignment. A critical mis-step on overseas assignment will mean that they are out of the race for status (Nakatani 1987; Ishida 1992). This explains why a majority (more than 75 percent) of interviewees worried that they would be appraised as somewhat inconsequential to the domestic mainstream in the worst case. Many managers said that during their Hong Kong assignment they did not intend to make any cross-cultural adjustment to local work practices, such as working on an individual basis and independently, largely because such initiatives would be considered as corrupting and contaminating to the organizational culture of the parent company. They emphasized that they would receive a more favourable evaluation by senior staff in the headquarters if they did not acquire any level of cultural adjustment and adaptation to the host country. Thus, the negation for reflexivity — bolstered by the attitude of head office staff — explains the decision made by many Japanese expatriates to avoid any attempts at double-loop learning.

Parent Company’s Translators

There were many instances of mis-assignment of individuals on international assignment. Many (more than half) expatriate managers said that they possessed little knowledge of Hong Kong and its work and business practices before they took up the assignment. Worse still, some (about a quarter) interviewees said that they did not understand why they were assigned to the functional areas in the Hong Kong operation because they only possessed superficial knowledge of their assigned tasks. When asked why this could happen, the managing director of Chubuya explained:

‘We [Japanese] are usually trained as generalists, focusing on communication and sense-making skills for the company, and thus we do not possess in-depth knowledge in any specialized areas. If you look at our Japanese managers here, a majority of them come from this category rather than from the professionals. The main purpose of the head office in assigning generalists overseas is to make sure that we [expatriates] can disseminate the parent company’s messages to the overseas operation, and interpret and report back information to the parent company.’

Therefore, it was generally found that many managers could not explain who they were, and what they could do in their areas of specialization in a logical and clear manner — except that they could only act as the parent company’s organizational translators. Although the managers were expert communicators and sense-makers for their parent company, most of them were clearly not proficient supervisors for local employees.

The major cause leading to this phenomenon is related to the head office of both case companies which legitimated the performance appraisal system for the expatriates based on the extent to which they could translate and disseminate the parent company's messages to and from the overseas operations, and the extent they sacrificed for the sake of the parent company rather than the overseas operation. The negative effect of selecting generalists for international assignments is that expatriates would tend to emphasize low-level organizational learning because the measure of learning competence was based on how much the expatriates had mastered the procedural validity — to interpret and follow the experience they learnt from the past in Japan in order to behave in a 'proper' manner in overseas operations. Therefore, the requirement for communication skills in procedural validity among the expatriates neither required their ability to articulate ideas nor the need to look for something new from, and adapt to, the host country's culture. This process severely constrains expatriates' ability to undertake double-loop learning.

This blocking mechanism can be traced to the head office ideology of international management. Japanese companies tend to adopt an ethnocentric strategy to maximize the control of head office in order to integrate overseas subsidiaries (Perlmutter and Heenan 1986). Head office used to place a large number of Japanese expatriates in overseas subsidiaries to exert strong but informal and indirect centralized coordination of their overseas operations (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Bartlett and Yoshihara 1988; Itami 1994; Johansson and Yip 1994; Kopp 1994; Tung 1982; Lincoln et al. 1995; Kujawa 1986; Tsurumi 1976). The expatriates were used as a form of 'cultural control' to initiate and regulate the conduct of activities in overseas subsidiaries so as to ensure a predictable level and performance, and to make their results accord with the goals and expectations of the parent company (Child 1984). The control function performed by the Japanese allows the head office to transfer and implement Japanese management practices to overseas subsidiaries and exert tight control over the overseas subsidiaries (Pucik 1994).

The major reason why Japanese expatriates were used to control the overseas operation is the Japanese distrust of non-Japanese local employees who were perceived as lacking understanding of the subtler aspects of Japanese interpersonal relationships (Yoshino 1975). Furthermore, the working habits of local employees also caused Japanese distrust since they tended to do what they were told, had a low sense of identification with the company, had low extra-role commitment and were not interested in helping others (Kono 1984). The establishment of an international network of Japanese expatriate managers and reliance on the expatriates' intensive communications with the head office constitutes an international version of the typical Japanese management processes of *nemawashi* (consensus-building) and *ringi* (shared decision-making) (Ferner 1997). The attempt to export a system inherently unsuited to the demands of international management led to growing problems in Japanese MNCs, especially in organizational learning.

Desire for Normality

When asked why they did not want to be considered as 'deviants' who could be constructive to the company by advancing different ideas for the betterment of the company, many interviewees explained that they wanted to be considered as 'normal'. The homogenization of knowledge protects Japanese from uncertainty (Pollner 1974, 1987) and provides them with a sense of perceived normality (Garfinkel 1963). Therefore, Japanese generally have an obsession with living and working as normal citizens.

For white-collar employees with a university degree, being a 'normal citizen' means that they just want to spend the rest of their lives in the same corporation until retirement without causing trouble to the company (Clark 1991). Disruptions to perceived normality render those who interfere as unpredictable and incompatible (Sacks 1984), a label which could lead to penalties in Japanese companies. A manager of Chubuya explained how he witnessed his Japanese colleague who had recently graduated from America being punished:

'I saw the miserable destiny of my friend — a Japanese trainee who questioned my *bucho* [department manager] how the department should be run when he just came to our Hong Kong operation a year ago. The consequence was that all other Japanese (not only the managers, but also his trainee colleagues) tried to boycott him by scolding him first for what he had done. This is a tactic to exhaust him by reprimanding him severely as we [Japanese] think that since we had all suffered, so it is necessary for him to suffer like us. Then, all of us [Japanese] and even some local Chinese managers were told not to talk to him and isolate him by totally ignoring his existence. I felt sorry for him (as a friend of his) because he had to bear with this situation for the whole period of his training in Hong Kong for a year. However, I had to protect myself to avoid the punishment from them.'

The structure of punishment described above was used to maintain the norm of Japanese society. The obsessive tendency to be perceived as normal dominates both corporate-level and individual-level reasoning. To be a normal company, the management of Japanese MNCs want to follow the ethnocentric management approach practised by their Japanese predecessors who were accepted within the majority of Japanese communities (Wilkins 1993), albeit not necessarily within international business circles.

This incident shows that expatriate managers did not want to change their modes or frames of reasoning as they judged the appropriateness of their attitudes and behaviours based on their past knowledge in Japan. They needed to conform to a sense of shared reality and wanted to be perceived as normal Japanese. Only by doing this could they fit into the institution in order to survive. As a result, they did not dare to take the risk of challenging Japanese ways of thinking by adapting to the local culture and thinking, lest they were regarded as 'abnormal' which would lead to being expelled from the corporate group of the parent company. This is because belonging to a group is very important for the Japanese, which supports their social identity, self-esteem and social face (Lebra 1976). This explains why many expatriates tried not to question or challenge the institutions and the existing and dominant ways of thinking in the parent company. This also implies that it is difficult for

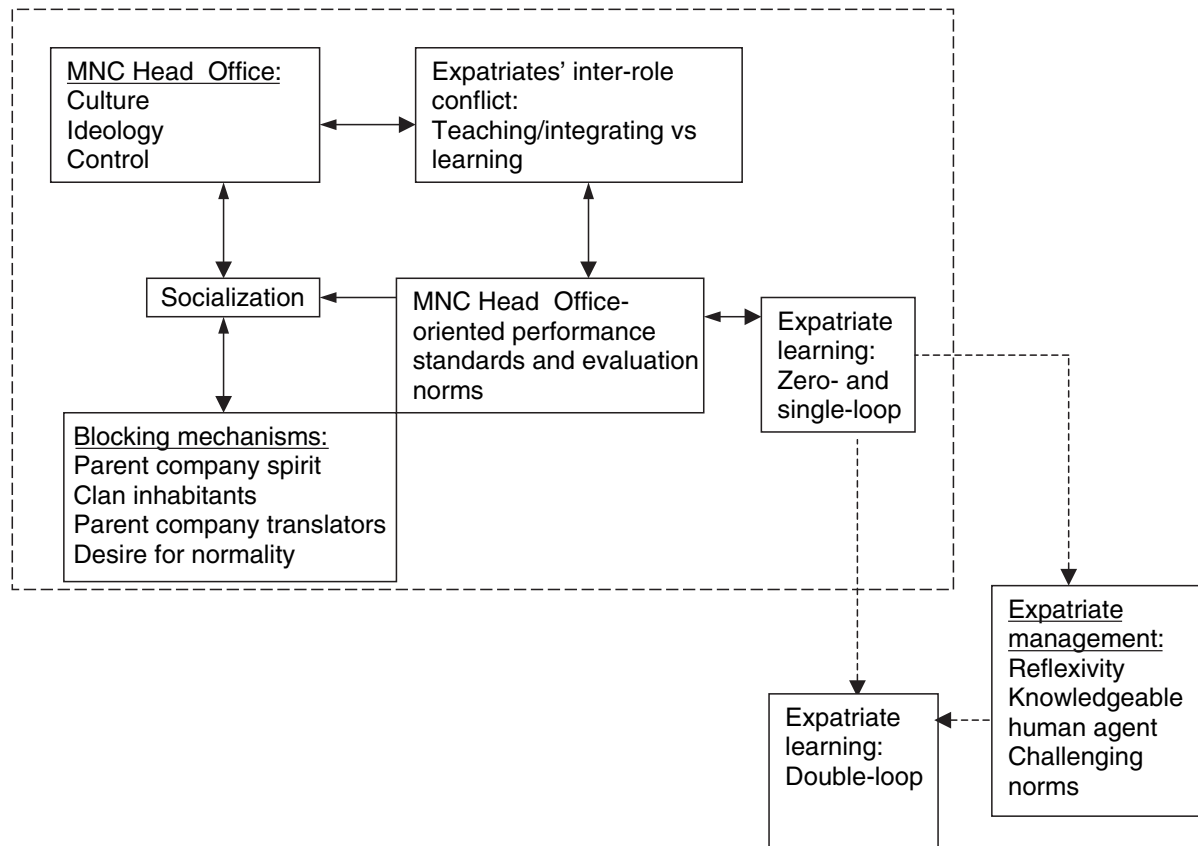


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Expatriate Learning and Blocking Mechanisms

expatriates to acquire double-loop learning during international assignments as they have tended to stick to the same mental modes and values as those of the parent company (Elkington et al. 1991).

Discussion

This study is crucially significant to areas such as strategic international human resource management. The findings show that the case MNCs attempt to maintain the dominance of the parent culture in their overseas subsidiaries, such that conformity to the ideology of the head office is unquestionable, and control is typically influenced by ethnocentric attitudes (Torbiorn 1995). Yet, on the other hand, future MNC competitiveness is thought to stem from an ability to learn faster than one's competitors; and an important way of improving organizational learning by expatriates is by international assignments. The expatriate managers were used to bridge not only a physical distance, but also a cultural distance in terms of communication and control of subsidiaries. Yet expatriate managers, at least in these Japanese cases, neither bridged the cultural divide nor learned, for a variety of reasons.

A number of socio-cultural and political-ideological factors underpin this perceived failure to learn. The MNC head office, in these Japanese cases, exerted tremendous influence on the expatriates in terms of culture, ideology and control (as shown in Figure 1). Personal work experiences shape individual work values (Feldman 1981), such that the individual learns the normative behaviours, attitudes and values expected as a member of the organization (Schein 1968). Expatriates' norms and values, in this study, tended to conform to the ongoing institution of the head office rather than undergoing much modification during international assignments. MNCs use expatriate managers to exert parent cultural control in order to coordinate and integrate parent company and overseas subsidiaries (Schneider 1988).

The task of expatriate managers, however, was simultaneously contradictory or paradoxical in nature as they needed to teach and learn at the same time (Brewster 1995). As demonstrated in this investigation, their teaching role hampered their learning ability because they were socialized into accepting the dominance of the parent culture (as shown in Figure 1). Expatriate managers had to suppress, unlearn, or not learn at all, in order not to be judged as contaminator by the 'powers-that-be' in the head office. It explains why the expatriates could only achieve zero- and single-loop learning. The use of cultural control indirectly contributes to the MNCs' failure to learn. Along with collective myopia, these have engendered the formation and enduring influence of blocking mechanisms to organizational learning among the Japanese expatriate managers. This does not bode well for Japanese MNCs in an era of increased global competition.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, namely, the small number of managers, the limited number of case companies, the single sector, and the inclusion of only Japanese MNCs. Notwithstanding these limitations, this

study advances the documentation of collective myopia for organizational learning in a specific cultural context. It is hoped that such empirical extension will increase opportunities for further comparative analysis.

Future research might formally assess MNCs of other national origins, such as North American and European countries, and other sectors, together with other Japanese MNCs, to obtain more generalizable results. Furthermore, research using quantitative methods to test how the concept of collective myopia affects organizational learning can be conducted to provide more generalizable results in MNCs.

Implications

This paper has relevance and implications for several areas. First, there is the area of globalization in terms of its impacts on the possible convergence of management practices, such as human resource management (Rowley 1998). This work indicates some of the restraints on this, not only between West and East, but also in terms of intra-Asian contexts (Bae and Rowley 2001; Rowley and Benson 2002).

Second, implications can be drawn for expatriate management. The analysis of blocking mechanisms shows that the capacity to learn is conditioned by values and attitudes that predominate among organizational members in the parent company. Expatriates show little motivation to be reflexive in learning as their reasoning and judgement were constrained by the parent culture. Four blocking mechanisms, indicated in Figure 1, lead to collective myopia impeding their learning during international assignments.

Figure 1, the conceptual framework of failure to learn, has several practical implications for head office to use in the design of international assignments with respect to more effective organizational learning. When the factors influencing the learning of expatriates are analysed, one needs to include elements such as expatriates' conflicting roles in teaching and integrating/learning, their socialization to head office performance standards and evaluation norms, and the culture, ideology and control of the head office. This study finds that the major reason why Japanese expatriate managers cannot move from the lower (zero- and single-loop) to the higher (double-loop) level of organizational learning is attributed to their strong inbuilt attitudes, values, beliefs and responses, many of which they are often not aware of. And the head office is the major restraining force making the expatriates strongly adhere to their past knowledge in Japan rather than adjusting to the local environment. These responses may be the direct result of organizational conditioning, i.e. by the 'taught' learning systems in the parent company. In this respect, it is clear that expatriates will only move through the higher levels of organizational learning if the driving forces exceed the restraining forces, otherwise they will become 'stuck' if forces are matched (Lewin 1958).

Since internationalization requires the parent company to be able to adapt to its international business environment, and deconstruct institutions from inside by accepting various values outside (Perlmutter and Heenan 1986), the existing practice of international assignment of Japanese MNCs appears to be inadequate to achieve this role. It implies that the Japanese head office

needs to change expatriate management, as indicated in Figure 1, in such a way as to facilitate the Japanese mode or frame of reasoning to become more reflexive. In order to help expatriates to be knowledgeable human agents, the head office needs to create an organizational culture which encourages questioning, challenging and examining the legitimacy of the ongoing institutionalized standards within the parent company. This in turn allows and encourages self-confrontation among expatriates.

Due to the prevalence of the 'desire for normality' within Japanese culture, it may be difficult for individual expatriates to tackle the blocking mechanisms which are found, largely originated from the parent company. This implies that changes should be initiated from the parent company in Japan. The parent company can make use of individual efforts from expatriates to act as knowledgeable human agents in order to depart from the state of collective myopia currently in evidence in Japanese MNCs. To depart from collective myopia, expatriate managers need to go through an 'unlearning' phase during which existing cognitive structures comprising beliefs and values, especially those of top managers, are challenged (Hedberg 1981; Nystrom and Starbuck 1984).

However, the effectiveness of the use of expatriate managers as knowledgeable human agents depends to a large extent on how internationalized the given expatriate managers are, which in turn appears to be subject to the myopia of Japanese corporations (Laurent 1986). It requires that management echelons at the parent company make changes first through various international HRM initiatives, such as encouraging the expatriates to discard their 'steady-state' mentality by rewarding them according to the standards of the overseas subsidiary, and placing them in key positions for change in the parent company after repatriation (Wong 2001). This sort of initiative will directly respond to those expatriates who currently realize that their fortunes and prospects are not tied to their performance in the overseas subsidiaries but to the parent company. Thus, the changes stemming from the parent company should eventually lead to the learning of cross-cultural sensitivity and adaptability skills by the expatriates needing to adjust to the local environment, and thus organizational learning at a higher level. Once they find out what values work, their values change only slowly. Of critical concern is that they do care about how people in the parent company behave towards them. Values have to be rooted in day-to-day practice. Behaviours have, therefore, to change before a new or modified value system can become a reality (Hendry 1996).

An international assignment represents an opportunity to learn. If expatriate managers are unable or prevented from challenging norms and being reflexive in learning, their involvement not only wastes a learning experience, but also causes the expatriates to acquire cynical and potentially damaging views about international assignments in general, thus creating attitudinal barriers to learning. A manager who has an unsuccessful and stressful time abroad is prone to develop and spread negative sentiments about working in a particular country or the career prospects of international assignments (Wong 2001). This may also happen when expatriates feel neglected by the parent company

while experiencing difficulties abroad, or when they are not prepared sufficiently for the international assignment. Such personal crises may discourage others from accepting foreign postings. When such potentially damaging experiences and values are acquired and diffused through the parent organization, the scope for learning could be wasted or substantially curtailed. Therefore, the head office needs to change the corporate culture to encourage expatriates in their questioning and cross-cultural learning.

Conclusion

This paper sheds light and empirical evidence on organizational learning via MNC assignments and expatriate management. Expatriation offers the opportunity to acquire knowledge from international assignments; repatriation offers the opportunity to transfer this knowledge and utilize it within the organization (Black and Gregersen 1991; Black et al. 1992). Yet, the issue of using international assignments to achieve organizational learning remains a matter of contention for future competitive advantage and the success of MNCs, as indicated in the data. As a consequence, departing from collective myopia so as to overcome blocking mechanisms for organizational learning is considered to be an important issue for expatriate management. To maintain competitiveness, MNCs need to disengage expatriates from collective myopia. While performing teaching and integrating roles, expatriates need to be knowledgeable human agents with logical reasoning and judgement to challenge established and assumed practices and norms. This is a challenge for many MNCs.

Note

The author is very grateful to the Editor, *OS* reviewers, Dr Robin Snell and Dr Chris Rowley for critical commentary.

References

- | | |
|--|---|
| Abolafia, Mitchel Y., and Martin Kilduff 1988 'Enacting market crisis: The social construction of a speculative bubble'. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> 23: 177–193. | Adler, Nancy J., and Susan Bartholomew 1992 'Managing globally competent people'. <i>Academy of Management Executive</i> 6/3: 52–65. |
| Abrams, Dominic, and Michael A. Hogg 1990 <i>Social identity theory: Constructive and critical advances</i> . New York: Springer-Verlag. | Allison, Brian 1993 <i>Research methods</i> . UK: De Montfort. |
| Adler, Nancy J. 1994 <i>International dimensions of organizational behaviour</i> . Boston: PWS-Kent. | Argyris, Chris 1993 <i>On organizational learning</i> . Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. |
| | Argyris, Chris 1994 'Good communication that blocks learning'. <i>Harvard Business Reviews</i> July/August: 7–85. |

- Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schon
1974 *Theory in practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Argyris, Chris, and Donald A. Schon
1978 *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bae, Johnseok, and Chris Rowley
2001 'The impact of globalization on HRM: The case of South Korea'. *Journal of World Business* 36/4: 402–428.
- Bartlett, Christopher, and Sumantra Ghoshal
1989 *Managing across borders*. London: Hutchinson.
- Bartlett, Christopher, and Sumantra Ghoshal
2000 *Transnational management*, 3rd edn. Singapore: McGraw-Hill.
- Bartlett, Christopher, and Hideki Yoshihara
1988 'New challenges for Japanese multinationals: Is organization adapting their achilles heel?' *Human Resource Management* 27/1: 19–43.
- Bateson, Gregory
1973 *Steps to an ecology of mind*. London: Palladin.
- Beck, Ulrich
1994 'The reinvention of politics: Toward a theory of reflexive modernization' in *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order*. U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash (eds), 24–51. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Black, Stewart J.
1990 'The relationship of personal characteristics with the adjustment of Japanese expatriate managers'. *Management International Review* 30: 119–134.
- Black, Stewart J., and Hal B. Gregersen
1991 'Antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment for expatriates in Pacific Rim assignments'. *Human Relations* 44/5: 497–515.
- Black, Stewart J., Hal B. Gregersen, and Mark Mendenhall
1992 *Global assignment: Successfully expatriating and repatriating international managers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Black, Stewart J., and G. Stephens
1989 'The influence of the spouse on the American expatriate adjustment in overseas assignments'. *Journal of Management* 15: 529–544.
- Bontis, Nick, and Mary M. Crossan
1999 'Managing an organizational learning system by aligning stocks and flows of knowledge' in *Proceedings of the 3rd international conference on organizational learning*. Vol.1, 150–190. Lancaster: Lancaster University, 6–8 June.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant
1992 *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brewster, Chris
1993 'The paradox of adjustment: UK and Swedish expatriates in Sweden and the UK'. *Human Resource Management Journal* 4/1: 49–62.
- Brewster, Chris
1995 'The paradox of expatriate adjustment' in *Expatriate management: New ideas for international business*. J. Selmer (ed.), 56–71. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Child, John
1984 *Organization: A guide to problems and practice*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Child, John
1995 'Changes in the structure and prediction of earnings in Chinese state enterprises during the economic reform'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 6/1: 1–30.
- Clark, Ronald
1991 *The Japanese company*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Cohen, Wesley M., and Daniel A. Levinthal
1990 'Absorptive capacity: A new perspective on learning and innovation'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5: 554–568.
- Coopey, John
1996 'Crucial gaps in the learning organization: Power, politics and ideology' in *How organizations learn*. K. Starkey (ed.), 36–49. London: International Thomson Business Press.
- Czegledy, Andre P.
1996 'New directions for organizational learning in Eastern Europe'. *Organization Studies* 17/2: 327–341.
- Dalton, Melville
1959 *Men who manage: Fusion of feeling and theory in administration*. New York: Wiley.
- Dambmann, George
1986 *Japan: Weltmacht als Einzelgänger*. Munchen: R. Piper GmbH.
- Dore, Ronald
1973 *British factory–Japanese factory*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Elkington, John, Peter Knight, and Julia Hailes
1991 *The green business guide*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- Feldman, Daniel C.
1981 'The multiple socialization of organization members'. *Academy of Management Review* 62: 309–318.
- Ferner, Anthony
1997 'Country of origin effects and HRM in multinational companies'. *Human Resource Management Journal* 7/1: 19–37.
- Fiol, C. Marlene, and Marjorie A. Lyles
1985 'Organizational learning'. *Academy of Management Review* 10: 803–813.
- Forster, Nick
1992 'International managers and mobile families: The professional and personal dynamics of trans-national career pathing and job mobility in the 1990s'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 3: 605–624.
- Forster, Nick
1994 'The forgotten employees? The experience of expatriate staff returning to the UK'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 5: 405–426.
- Galunic, Charles D., and Steward Rodan
1998 'Resource recombination of the firm: Knowledge structures and the potential for schumpeterian innovation'. *Strategic Management Journal* 19: 1193–1201.
- Gannan, M. John, and K. Lawrence Newman, editors
2002 *The Blackwell handbook of cross-cultural management*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Garfinkel, Harold
1963 'A conception of, and experiments with, "trust" as a condition of stable concerned actions' in *Motivation and social interaction*. O.J. Harvey (ed.), 12–33. New York: Ronald Press.
- Giddens, Anthony
1984 *The constitution of sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glaser, Barney G.
1978 *Theoretical sensitivity*. CA, Mill Valley: The Sociology Press.
- Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss
1967 *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Greenwood, Royston, and Calvin R. Hinings
1996 'Understanding radical organizational change: Bridging together the old and the new institutionalism'. *Academy of Management Review* 21/4: 1022–1054.

- Gregersen, Hal B., and Stewart J. Black
1990 'A multifaceted approach to expatriate retention in international assignments'. *Group and Organization Studies* 15: 461–485.
- Gupta, Anil K., and Vijay Govindarajan
2000 'Knowledge flows within multinational corporations'. *Strategic Management Journal* 21: 473–496.
- Habermas, Jürgen
1973 *Theory and practice*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen
1984 *The theory of communication action: Reason and the rationalization of society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen
1992 *Postmetaphysical thinking*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Harris, Linda M., and Vernon E. Cronen
1979 'A rule-based model for the analysis and evaluation of organizational communication'. *Communication Quarterly* 27/1: 12–28.
- Hedberg, Bo
1981 'How organizations learn and unlearn' in *Handbook of organizational design*. Vol. 1. P.C. Nystrom and W.H. Starbuck (eds), 211–235. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hendry, Chris
1994 *Human resource strategies for international growth*. London: Routledge.
- Hendry, Chris
1996 'Understanding and creating whole organizational change through learning theory'. *Human Relations* 49/5: 621–627.
- Hofstede, Geerte
1980 *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Huber, George P.
1991 'Organizational learning: The contributing process and the literature'. *Organization Science* 2: 88–155.
- Husserl, Edmund
1973 *Experience and judgment*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Inkpen, Andrew C.
1995 *The management of international joint ventures: An organizational learning perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Ishida, Eiichiro
1992 '*Nihon kigyō no gurōbaruka to jinzaikanri no furōntea*' (The globalization of Japanese enterprise and the frontier of human resource management). *Keio Keiei Ronshu* 10/1: 1–14.
- Itami, Hiromi
1994 'The globalization of Japanese firms' in *Japanese multinationals: Strategies and management in the global kaisha*. N. Campbell and F. Burton (eds), 57–71. London: Routledge.
- Johansson, Johnny K., and George Yip
1994 'Exploiting globalization potential: US and Japanese strategies'. *Strategic Management Journal* 15/8: 579–601.
- Kamoche, Ken
1997 'Knowledge creation and learning in international HRM'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 8/3: 213–223.
- Kamoche, Ken
2001 *Understanding human resource management*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- King, Nigel
1995 'The qualitative research interview' in *Qualitative methods in organizational research*. C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), 41–55. London: Sage.
- Kono, Toyohiro
1984 *Strategy and structure of Japanese management*. London: Macmillan.
- Kopp, Rochelle
1994 'International human resource policies and practices in Japanese, European, and United States multinational'. *Human Resource Management* 33/4: 581–599.

- Kujawa, Duane
1986 *Japanese multinationals in the United States: Case studies*. New York: Praeger.
- Kuwahara, Yasuo
1993 'New developments in human resource management in Japan'. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 31/2: 3–11.
- Laurent, Andre
1986 'The cross-cultural puzzle of international human resource management'. *Human Resource Management* 25/1: 91–102.
- Lebra, Takie Sugiyama
1976 *Japanese patterns of behaviour*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lewin, Kurt
1958 *Group decision and social change: Readings in social psychology*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Lincoln, James R., Harold R. Kerbo, and E. Wittenhagen
1995 'Japanese companies in Germany: A case study in cross-cultural management'. *Industrial Relations* 34/3: 417–440.
- Littler, Craig
1982 *Japan and China: The Chinese economic reforms*. London: Croom Helm.
- Louis, Meryl R., and Robert I. Sutton
1991 'Switching cognitive gears: From habits of mind to active thinking'. *Human Relations* 44/1: 55–76.
- Mannheim, Karl
1956 *Essay on the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- May, Tim
1993 *Social research*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Mendenhall, Mark, and Gary Oddou
1985 'The dimensions of expatriate acculturation: A review'. *Academy of Management Review* 10: 39–47.
- Mendenhall, Mark, and Gary Oddou
1986 'Acculturation profiles of expatriate managers: Implications for cross-cultural training programmes'. *Columbia Journal of World Business* 21/4: 73–79.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman
1994 *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.
- Moingeon, Bertrand, and Amy Edmondson
1997 *Organizational learning and competitive advantage*. London: Sage.
- Nakane, Chie
1970 *Japanese society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Nakatani, Ichio
The Japanese firm in transition. Tokyo: Asian Productivity Organization.
- Nicholson, Nigel
1984 'A theory of work role transitions'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29: 172–191.
- Nonaka, Ikujiro, and Hirotaka Takeuchi
1995 *The knowledge creating company*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nystrom, Paul, and William H. Starbuck
1984 'To avoid organizational crises, unlearn'. *Organizational Dynamics* 12/4: 53–65.
- Oliver, Caroline
1992 'The antecedents of deinstitutionalization'. *Organization Studies* 13: 563–588.
- O'Sullivan, Tim, James Rice, and Catherine Saunders
1995 *Research interviews*. UK: De Montfort.
- Ouchi, William G.
1981 *Theory Z*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Perlmutter, Howard V., and David A. Heenan
1986 'Cooperate to compete globally'. *Harvard Business Review* 64/2: 78–86.

- Pollner, Melvin
1974 'Mandane reasoning'. *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 4: 35–54.
- Pollner, Melvin
1987 *Mandane reason: Reality in everyday and sociological discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prahalad, Coimbatore K., and Gary Hamel
1990 'The core competence of the corporation'. *Harvard Business Review* 68/3: 79–91.
- Pucik, Vladimir
1994 'The challenges of globalisation: The strategic role of local managers in Japanese-owned US subsidiaries' in *Japanese multinationals: strategies and management in the global kaisha*. N. Campbell and F. Burton (eds), 42–66. London: Routledge.
- Punnett, Betty J.
1998 'Cross-national culture' in *Handbook of human resource management*. M. Poole and M. Warner (eds), 77–89. London: Thomson Business Press.
- Rowley, Chris
1998 *Human resource management in the Asia Pacific region: Convergence questioned*. London: Frank Cass.
- Rowley, Chris, and Jo Lewis
1996 'Greater China at the crossroads? Convergence, culture and competitiveness'. *Asia Pacific Business Review* 2/3: 1–22.
- Rowley, Chris, and John Benson
2002 'Convergence and divergence in Asian human resource management'. *California Management Review* 44/2: 90–109.
- Sacks, Harvey
1984 'On doing being ordinary' in *Structure of social action*. J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), 95–111. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sano, Yoshihiro
1998 'HRM in Japan' in *Handbook of human resource management*. M. Poole and M. Warner (eds), 120–139. London: Thomson Business Press.
- Schein, Edgar H.
1968 'Organizational socialization and the profession of management'. *Industrial Management Review* 9: 1–15.
- Scheler, Max
1980 *Problem of a sociology of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Schneider, Saunder C.
1988 'National vs corporate culture: Implications for human resource management'. *Human Resource Management* 272: 231–246.
- Schutz, Albert
1967 *The phenomenology of the social world*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Sparrow, Paul R., and Jean M. Hiltrop
1994 *European human resource management in transition*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Torbiorn, Ingemar
1995 'New markets, new firms — new expatriates?' in *Expatriate management: New ideas for international business*. J. Selmer (ed.), 63–80. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Triandis, Harry C.
2002 'Generic individualism and collectivism' in *Handbook of cross-cultural management*. M.J. Gannon and M.K.L. Newman (eds), 156–177. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tsurumi, Yoshino
1976 *The Japanese are coming: A multinational interaction of firms and politics*. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.
- Tung, Rosalie
1982 'Selection and training procedures of US, European and Japanese multinationals'. *California Management Review* 25: 57–71.
- Wilkins, Mira
1993 'Japanese multinational enterprise before 1914' in *Transnational corporations: A historical perspective*. G. Jones (ed.), 22–45. London: Routledge.

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Winstanley, Diana 1991 'Recruitment strategies and managerial control of technological staff' in <i>Skill and occupational change</i>. R. Penn and M. Rose (eds), 58–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Wong, May M.L. 2001 'Internationalizing Japanese expatriate managers: Organizational learning through international assignment'. <i>Management Learning</i> 32/2: 237–251.</p> | | <p>Yin, Robert K. 1989 <i>Case study research: Design and methods</i>. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.</p> <p>Yoshino, Michael Y. 1975 'Emerging Japanese multinational enterprise' in <i>Modern Japanese organization and decision making</i>. E. Vogel (ed.), 90–113. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.</p> |
|--|--|---|

May M. L. Wong May M. L. Wong (BA Hong Kong, MA Hitotsubashi, PhD Cass Business School [former City Business School]) is an Associate Professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Her industrial experience was gained in the service sector in Japanese, British and American multinational companies in Hong Kong. She researches in international human resource management, cross-cultural management and Japanese management.

Address: Department of Management, Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong.
E-mail: wongml@ln.edu.hk