



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***FACTORS INFLUENCING KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND THE  
MEDIATING EFFECT OF SHARED VISION INVOLVING EXPATRIATES  
AND HOST COUNTRY NATIONALS IN THE KLANG VALLEY,  
MALAYSIA***

**NURUL AFIQAH BINTI ZULKIFLY**

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MALAYSIA**

By

**NURUL AFIQAH BINTI ZULKIFLY**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Science**

**July 2017**



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**July 2017**

**Chair : Maimunah Ismail, PhD**  
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Many past studies on knowledge transfer which focused on factors such as the behaviour of knowledge senders and organizational practice; however, they are limited in terms of considering individual factors such as cultural intelligence (CQ) and feedback-seeking behaviour (FSB) as well as shared vision as a mediator. In addition, there was a strong need for a study on bi-directional knowledge transfer involving both expatriates and host country nationals (HCNs) as most of the studies were conducted uni-directionally.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to find out relationships between CQ as well as FSB and knowledge transfer with shared vision as mediating variable from expatriate-HCN pairs, and also their perspective on predictors of knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs. Data were gathered from 104 expatriate-HCN pairs who work in various organizations such as multinational corporations and private companies in Malaysia by using self-administered questionnaire.

The results show that most of the expatriate and HCN respondents experience moderate level of knowledge transfer from their respective expatriate/HCN partners. However, both expatriates and HCNs have high level of shared vision, CQ as well as FSB. It was found that there is a significant difference in the level of CQ involving expatriates and HCNs. This study also revealed that there are significant positive relationships between CQ, FSB and shared vision on knowledge transfer. Meanwhile, the regression results show that shared vision significantly influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs.

Also, shared vision was found to significantly mediate the relationships between CQ and FSB with knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs.

This study concluded that both expatriates and HCNs are the source and receiver of knowledge. This study expands the literature on the role of CQ, FSB and shared vision as a mediating variable in knowledge transfer using an integration of the Resource-based Theory, Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory and the Social Capital Theory based on Malaysian context. This study suggests that future research should consider expatriate-HCN pair samples using other IVs such as trust, network and frequency of interaction, as well as looking at knowledge transfer research from a gender perspective as both men and women have been equally participating in expatriation as their global career option.

Abstrak yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Univeriti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

**FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI PEMINDAHAN PENGETAHUAN  
DAN KESAN MEDIASI WAWASAN BERSAMA MELIBATKAN  
EKSPATRIAT DAN PEGAWAI TEMPATAN DI LEMBAH KLANG,  
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Kajian-kajian pemindahan pengetahuan yang lepas berfokuskan faktor-faktor seperti kelakuan penghantar pengetahuan atau penerima, dan amalan organisasi; walau bagaimanapun, fokus kepada faktor individu seperti kecerdasan budaya (CQ) dan tingkah laku mencari maklum balas (FSB) dan juga wawasan bersama sebagai faktor pengantara adalah terhad. Kajian mengenai pemindahan pengetahuan secara dua halamenglibatkan ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan amat diperlukan kerana kebanyakan kajian lepas mengkajinya secara sehalu sahaja.

Oleh itu, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengetahui hubungan antara CQ serta FSB dan pemindahan pengetahuan serta wawasan bersama sebagai faktor pengantara melibatkan ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan. Data dikumpulkan daripada 104 pasang ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan yang bekerja dengan pelbagai organisasi seperti syarikat multinasional dan syarikat swasta melalui soal selidik yang ditadbir sendiri.

Sebahagian besar daripada ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan mempunyai tahap pemindahan pengetahuan yang sederhana. Namun, kedua-dua mereka mempunyai tahap wawasan bersama, CQ serta FSB yang tinggi. Terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara tahap CQ ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan, dan juga terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara CQ, FSB dan wawasan bersama dengan pemindahan pengetahuan. Wawasan bersama melibatkan ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan mempengaruhi pemindahan pengetahuan dengan signifikan. Wawasan bersama juga merupakan



pengantara hubungan CQ dan FSB dengan pemindahan pengetahuan melibatkan ekspatriat dan pegawai.

Kesimpulannya, kedua-dua ekspatriat dan pegawai tempatan merupakan sumber dan juga penerima ilmu. Kajian ini berjaya mengembangkan peranan CQ, FSB serta wawasan bersama sebagai faktor pengantara dalam pemindahan pengetahuan menggunakan integrasi Teori Sumber Asas, Teori Pengurusan Kebimbangan dan Ketidakpastian dan Teori Modal Sosial berdasarkan konteks Malaysia. Kajian akan datang perlu mengambil kira peramal lain seperti rangkaian sosial, kekerapan interaksi, lokasi ibu pejabat syarikat, serta melihat penyelidikan pemindahan pengetahuan dari perspektif gender kerana lelaki dan wanita sama-sama menyertai tugas ekspatriasi sebagai pilihan kerjaya global mereka.

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Finally, to Ahmad Shakir Bin Roslan, thank you for being one of the sources of my strength, support and experiences throughout this meaningful journey. Thank you for staying close and available.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on (date of viva voce) to conduct the final examination of Nurul Afiqah Binti Zulkifly on her thesis entitled "Factors Influencing Knowledge Transfer between Expatriates and Host Country Nationals" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCM	Companies Commission of Malaysia
CQ	Cultural intelligence
FSB	Feedback-seeking behaviour
HCN	Host country national
HCNs	Host country nationals
HR	Human resources
HRD	Human resource development
MNC	Multinational corporation
MNCs	Multinational corporations
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes background and overview of the study in relation to transfer of knowledge between expatriates and host country nationals (HCNs). This chapter explains the background of the study, identifies the research gap, indicates the statement of the problem and states the research objectives. This chapter further includes the significance of the study, hypotheses involved, scope and limitations of the research, assumptions of the study, as well as conceptual and operational definitions of the terms used in this research.

#### 1.1 Background of the study

Knowledge transfer is a process where one unit such as a group, department or division within an organization is affected by the experience of another (Argote & Ingram, 2000) and it is one of fundamental elements to organizational performance (van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008). A research by Singley and Anderson (1989, p. 1) illustrates that knowledge transfer carries the meaning of how a certain situation can be acquired and applied to another situation by individuals. To date, organizational knowledge has become an essential yet crucial element of competitive advantage within organizations (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Moreover, transfer of knowledge plays a significant part in the assurance of organizational effectiveness and overall success (Okunoye & Karsten, 2002). In relation to international organizations, thus, knowledge transfer might take place between the cooperation of expatriates and host country nationals (HCNs). Corresponding with corporate reputation and brand identity, knowledge has been considered as an organizational asset as well (Pascarella, 1997).

Despite this importance, Blackler (1995) asserts that knowledge is complex and knowledge transfer is multidimensional in terms of its predictors and functions. In the assurance of a sustainable competitive advantage, organizations, which includes multinational corporations (MNCs), international enterprises and private companies, seek to successfully transfer knowledge among its geographically dispersed and diverse locations (Ordóñez de Pablos, 2006; Kogut & Zander, 1993). Organizations inertly rely on expatriate assignments to transfer tacit knowledge as it is important in sustaining a durable competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Similarly, researchers revealed that assessing local knowledge can improve organizational performance (Makino & Delios, 1996) which highlights the importance of knowledge transfer from HCNs to expatriates.

Parallel with another definition of knowledge transfer, which is an interchange practice between the transmitter and the recipient in unidirectional and bi-directional means (Szulanski, Cappetta, & Jensen, 2004; Rogers, 2003), tacit knowledge however, is difficult to transfer without in person communication (Hsu, 2012). Bi-directional communication requires two persons of which: (1) each gives out signs; and (2) each assigns meaning to other's signs (Wilmot, 1987, p. 9; Liu, Chua & Stahl, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, relationship qualities between closely-worked expatriates and HCNs are crucial in facilitating knowledge transfer (Bonache & Zárraga-Oberty, 2008) since tacit knowledge is best transferred through direct social interaction (Hsu, 2012). As employees engage and work with each other, retention of talent in an organization can be achieved (Bhatnagar, 2007; Glen, 2006). Therefore, the prominence of social capital for learning and knowledge transmission has been renowned (Kostova & Roth, 2002).

Globalization has increased the number of MNCs and private companies (international and local) (Bonache & Brewster, 2001, p. 145), which consequently has increased the number of employees assigned to work abroad. Consequently, critical positions in foreign subsidiaries demand to be filled with staffs or individuals from home country or the HCNs (Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006, p. 112). Malaysia is no exception to be a destination of organizations such as MNCs and private companies from abroad.

As this study focuses on knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs, it is crucial at this outset to elaborate on expatriates and their significance in this country, specifically, in relation to knowledge transfer. Based on the Economic Report 2010/2011 (Kok, 2011), the number of expatriates in Malaysia is 31,371 as of July 2011. A majority of 64.8% of them work in the services sector and 22.2% in the manufacturing sector. In 2012, the statistics of expatriates in Malaysia dramatically increased to 61,113 based on those who are applying for the employment pass in the country. Twenty-one percent of them are from India, 11.9% from ASEAN countries, 10.4% from China, 6.4% from Japan while 5.2% from the United Kingdom. The remaining are from the Republic of Korea (3.7%), Australia and New Zealand (3.4%), the United States of America (2.6%), Continental Europe (2.2%) and Taiwan (1.6%). Through these statistics, it is evident that Asian expatriates (55.1%) are more than those from Western countries in the Europe, North America, as well as other non-Asian regions (44.9%). In 2014, the number of expatriates working in Malaysia reported by the Department of Immigrant, Malaysia is 90,000. Again, the number of expatriates working in Malaysia has significantly increased.

Expatriation is important in ensuring business success as it provides a variety of experiences that complement employees' existing knowledge. HCNs play significant roles as socializing agents, source of social support and friendship

from the perspective of expatriates (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). HCNs are as much important as expatriates and they do in a way, complement each other in the process of bi-directional knowledge transfer.

Expatriates are conventionally sent abroad for various purposes such as providing direct supervisory control in the context of international operations, management as well as organizational development (Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977). To effectively merge into a culturally diverse setting, expatriates as well as their HCN colleagues are required to possess certain individual traits, which play an important role in enhancing the occurrence of knowledge transfer between them. The Anxiety and Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1998) suggests that cultural intelligence (CQ) and feedback-seeking behaviour (FSB) play vital roles in enhancing individual engagement in experiential learning (Ng, Van Dyne & Ang, 2009), more specifically, in knowledge transfer.

Hsu (2012) on the other hand, explained that knowledge transfer is also enhanced through the mobilization of social capital factor, which is shared vision. Shared vision is a fundamental mechanism that links the antecedents (CQ and FSB) with knowledge transfer (Roueche, Baker & Rose, 2014). The social capital theory highlights that shared vision, which is a social capital dimension, helps to accomplish desirable outcome through knowledge transfer (Hsu, 2012). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the mediating role of shared vision in the relationship between the antecedents (CQ and FSB) with knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as this aims to respond to one of the research gaps.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Past researchers (e.g. Rhodes, Hung, Lok, Lien, & Wu, 2008; Cummings & Teng, 2003; Bonache & Brewster, 2001) have conducted many research on direct relationship regarding the influence of various variables towards knowledge transfer. However, very few of them considers investigating social capital variable of shared vision as mediator in their research. Although shared vision was argued to be influenced by individual factors of CQ (Imai & Gelfand, 2000) and FSB (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy & Quinn, 2005), which eventually influence knowledge transfer process, past studies have been silent on the mediation effect of shared vision specifically between CQ and FSB with knowledge transfer. Research on organization's knowledge transfer continuously argued that the behaviour of knowledge senders determines knowledge transfer success (Hsu, 2012). Nonetheless, previous studies have been focusing on disseminative capacity on employees in organizations (e.g. Parent, Roy, & Jacques, 2007; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004) as one of the factors



influencing knowledge transfer; however, a more substantial evidence is required to support this claim (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004).

Previous literature showed that there are many research regarding knowledge transfer, which focus on factors such as the behaviour of knowledge senders and organizational practice but, to date, there is only one study that includes individual factors (such as CQ and FSB) and social capital factors as contributors to knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs by Hsu (2012). However, Hsu's (2012) study consisted more variables including CQ, networking, collaborative-based HR configuration, frequency of interaction, trust as well as shared vision. Hsu's (2012) study, furthermore, covered many countries such as China, Taiwan, Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, India, as well as the United States.

Past research has also been dominantly focusing on expatriates, failing to consider the vital contributions made by HCNs in order to advocate an effective bi-directional knowledge transfer process within organizations (e.g., Smale & Suutari, 2011; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004). Tahir and Ismail's (2007) study among expatriates in Malaysia, however specifically looked at their work adjustment in this country. In addition, previous studies mostly dwell on general research on expatriations and knowledge transfer of one-way direction from expatriates to HCNs or from headquarters to company subsidiaries abroad (Smale & Suutari, 2011; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004).

To date, not many of the previous studies have integrated the three theories *viz.* the Resource-based Theory, the Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory and the Social Capital Theory in their knowledge transfer research. This is an important theoretical gap. Therefore, by integrating the three theories mentioned above, this study aims to investigate knowledge transfer in a bi-directional approach *viz.* understanding knowledge transfer from the perspective of both expatriates and HCNs with a special focus on the role of CQ and FSB as well as shared vision as the mediator between the determinants and knowledge transfer.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This research generally aims to examine the factors influencing knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs who work in organizations such as MNCs and private sector companies in Malaysia, in a bi-directional approach. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the level of knowledge transfer, CQ, FSB, and shared vision of expatriates and HCNs.

2. To compare the differences in the level of knowledge transfer, CQ, FSB and shared vision of expatriates and HCNs.
3. To determine the relationships between CQ, FSB, as well as shared vision and knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs.
4. To determine the factors influencing knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs.
5. To determine the mediating effect of shared vision in the relationships between CQ and FSB with knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs.

#### **1.4 Hypotheses**

##### ***H1: Cultural intelligence and knowledge transfer***

- *H1a: Cultural intelligence influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by expatriates.*
- *H1b: Cultural intelligence influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by HCNs.*

##### ***H2: Feedback-seeking behavior and knowledge transfer***

- *H2a: Feedback-seeking behavior influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by expatriates.*
- *H2b: Feedback-seeking behavior influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by HCNs.*

##### ***H3: Shared vision and knowledge transfer***

- *H3a: Shared vision influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by expatriates.*
- *H3b: Shared vision influences knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by HCNs.*

##### ***H4: Shared vision mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and knowledge transfer***

- *H4a: Shared vision mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by expatriates.*
- *H4b: Shared vision mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by HCNs.*

***H5: Shared vision mediates the relationship between feedback-seeking behaviour and knowledge transfer***

- *H5a: Shared vision mediates the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by expatriates.*
- *H5b: Shared vision mediates the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs as perceived by HCNs.*

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study offers several distinct theoretical and practical significance to the field of human resource development (HRD), specifically to expatriation involving expatriates and HCNs, as well as the knowledge management of the relevant organizations.

Theoretically, this study enhances knowledge based on the framework of knowledge transfer that consists of CQ and FSB as its determinant as well as shared vision as a mediator. Next, this study offers a framework in which bi-directional knowledge transfer is investigated (i.e. knowledge transfer from the perspective of expatriates and HCNs, vice versa). Additionally, this study adopts three theories *viz.* the Resource-based Theory, the Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory, and the Social Capital Theory, in an integrated manner. The results of this study bring about the understanding of expatriates and their HCN partners on the importance of inculcating CQ and FSB within expatriates and HCNs as factors that influence knowledge transfer between them. Many previous research has shown that CQ (e.g., Abdul Malek & Budhwar, 2013; Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012) and FSB (Kumar, 2013; Crown, 2009) enhance the likelihood of knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs as they are significant predictors of knowledge transfer. Nonetheless, this study will also increase the understanding of expatriates and their HCN partners that shared vision is vital in assisting the process of knowledge transfer between them.

Practically, this study is of significance in the practice of organizations as the human resource department will be able to have a valuable knowledge about the factors contributing to the two-way transfer of knowledge between expatriates and HCNs. In the effort of encouraging a fruitful knowledge transfer practices between expatriates and HCNs, the results of this study are able to provide a specific insight to achieve such knowledge transfer regularity. Knowledge transfer as agreed by many scholars, will bring loads of benefit to organizations if it is managed appropriately.

This research sheds new insight to enhance CQ and FSB and shared vision as mediator on bi-directional knowledge transfer involving expatriates and HCNs. Human resource department is the one responsible to provide human resource development activities such as training need analysis and training for employees, which include expatriates in organizations. Therefore, the result of this study would contribute to a comprehensive training, which stresses on the importance of CQ, FSB as well as shared vision in enhancing knowledge transfer involving the two groups of human resources.

The fact that expatriates and HCNs are professionals who act as sources and receivers of knowledge, this brings to the significance of HCNs in the transfer process, which past research primarily focussed on one-way transfer from expatriates. Thus, the significance of this research is to understand the process of knowledge transfer from the perspective of expatriate and HCN pairs.

#### **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Research**

In spite having significant strengths, this study also has certain limitations. Nonetheless, approaching both expatriate and HCN professionals is difficult given their nature of work that consumes hefty loads of time. Therefore, most of them find it difficult to spend time participating in this research as respondents, which probably due to their less understanding on the importance of knowledge transfer studies. Furthermore, MNCs and private companies are business-oriented organizations that are very difficult to penetrate. It requires a long time to get each organization to agree and cooperate to this research. Due to these reasons, this research consumed a long time in data collection process, which in turn led to a small number of expatriate-HCN pair sample.

#### **1.7 Assumptions of the Study**

Throughout the study, it is assumed that the adaptations of the Resource-based Theory, the Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Theory and the Social Capital Theory are applicable in the Malaysian setting and to the study of knowledge transfer between expatriates and HCNs with the existence of shared vision as mediating variable. The instruments used in this study is assumed to fit the cultural context of the respondents (expatriates and HCNs working in MNCs and private companies in Malaysia) involved in this study. Despite challenges in the data collection, it was assumed that the subjects of this study have necessary knowledge and experience on research area, responded to the survey independently, cooperated fully, provided honest responses, and also clearly understood the questionnaire.

## 1.8 Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Terms

### *Knowledge Transfer*

Knowledge transfer carries the meaning of a learning process through which one unit such as a firm, division, department, group or individual, is affected by the experience (knowledge and skill) of another (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Operationally, knowledge transfer is about the possession of experience (knowledge, skill and behaviour) by an individual (e.g., expatriate) in learning of which will bring about change to another person (e.g., HCN), and vice versa.

### *Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*

Conceptually, CQ is the ability to cope commendably in diverse cultural setting (Rockstuhl Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011). Operationally, CQ is the extent to which an individual (e.g., expatriate) is able to adapt and manage himself effectively while dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., HCN), and vice versa.

### *Feedback Seeking Behaviour (FSB)*

According to Cherami (2004), FSB is to have a main feedback source giving information pertaining to the effectiveness of an individual's behaviour. It is also a "conscious devotion of effort toward determining the correctness and adequacy of behaviours for attaining valued end states" (Ashford, 1986). Operationally, FSB is the behaviour of either expatriate or HCN that constantly sought after feedbacks, comments and opinions from his/her respective expatriate or HCN partner in order to improve their learning and performance, which then results in knowledge transfer occurrence.

### *Shared Vision*

Shared vision is a common mental model of the forthcoming state of a team or its tasks that provide fundamental action within the team (Pearce & Ensley, 2004). Operationally, shared vision is defined as a collectively agreed and anticipated idea or knowledge that expatriates share with their HCN colleagues in order to achieve common sets of organizational goals.

### *Bi-directional Knowledge Transfer*

Conceptually, bi-directional knowledge transfer in this study refers to the movement of knowledge from two usually opposite directions (Szulanski, 2000). Operationally, bi-directional knowledge transfer, in this study context, refers to the transference of knowledge as perceived from expatriates to HCNs, and vice versa.



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