Career Development of Talent in Different Cultural Contexts - Implications for the Internationalization of SMEs
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The literature on Global Talent Management (GTM) and Global Career Management has so far largely ignored cultural and gender diversity as factors influencing career decisions. Nevertheless, there is evidence from the practice implying that careers of men and women show different patterns. Moreover, it seems that careers of individuals in different national contexts are influenced by distinct (cultural and institutional) factors. The Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) proposes that individual career patterns change over time as individuals, based on their current life-stage, place varying focus on authenticity, balance, and challenge.

These focuses may be further influenced by institutional factors as well as gender. The study of international careers within a multi-national context usually refers to two distinct but related themes, namely international career developments of employees and self-initiated international careers. While the early literature on international careers focused on the benefits organizations and individuals can draw from successful expatriate missions, recent studies concentrated on examining how people adapt to today’s fast-changing and increasingly globalized environment when building their careers (Tams & Arthur, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Even though the classical expatriate assignment is still a common practice in international businesses, the increase in mobility and the emergence of boundaryless, individual driven careers prompt more and more people to embark on self-initiated international careers. Hence, they expatriate themselves voluntarily to other countries (Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005). Such moves can have various motives such as gaining international experiences, seeking personal development or striving for economic or political improvement.

The phenomena of international careers and the global flow of talent – stimulated by both expatriate assignments and self-initiated international moves – cause various challenges for internationally acting organizations as they have to cope with more competition for highly qualified individuals worldwide (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Generally, firms seek to attract, retain, and develop these young and talented workers through talent management practices (Iles; Preece, & Chuai, 2010). Yet, with an accelerating globalization, international talent becomes increasingly valuable, while at the same time, there is an acute talent shortage on labor markets in both developed and emerging economies (Scullion & Collings, 2011). Consequently, the development and adoption of strategic GTM practices become of crucial importance for organizations (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). In response to calls for research by various scholars [e.g., Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2016; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Suutari, Tornikoski, & Mäkelä, 2012; Tams & Arthur, 2007], we adopted a cross-cultural approach and examine how successful careers of international knowledge workers in three countries, namely India, Italy, and Germany, develop over time. We intend to find out if there are culture based differences in their career patterns. In addition, we investigate the influence of gender on career paths in and between the country samples.

Considering the key features and advantages of a qualitative research approach [e.g., Bryman, 2016; Denscombe, 2010], an inductive qualitative research design was selected. Curriculum vitae (CV) analysis was chosen as the primary method for data collection as it is regarded as an adequate instrument to examine career trajectories and mobility as well as the impact of such mobility on people’s career progress [Bawazeer & Gunter, 2016]. For the analysis of the qualitative data, we decided to use the content analysis approach (Mayring, 2014). Our final research sample consisted of 74 male and female professionals originating from three diverse cultural contexts, namely India, Germany, and Italy.

Our study contributes to the literature on international careers as it lacks in empirical examination of international careers of knowledge workers, especially culture comparisons are rare. We extend the literature comparing career patterns of international knowledge workers in three different cultural contexts. Within the career literature, only few studies have used CV analysis as primary data collection method. Therefore, the present study also contributes to the existing empirical research on career patterns from a methodological perspective. Our findings reveal significant differences in the career paths of male and female international knowledge workers in distinct institutional environments, especially regarding the two dimensions of mobility and career patterns. Hence, international talent seems to develop differently in distinct cultural contexts. The vast variety of influencing factors affecting
people’s career decisions may also have a significant impact on organizations employing international knowledge workers and the way in which they manage their workforce (Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2010). Internationally acting SMEs must be aware of this complexity of contextual impact factors and should adopt a context-specific approach. They need to align their HRM practices with the many identities and goals to which their employees aspire (Shen et al., 2015). In line with Böhmer and Schinnenburg [2016], we encourage SMEs to implement efficient and tailor-made GTM measures that aim to successfully attract, retain, and develop talent to secure survival in today’s increasingly global, dynamic, and competitive world.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS