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Career capital development of highly-skilled self-initiated expatriates

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Abstract

Existing literature and research on the career impacts of expatriation have focused on expatriates sent abroad by their employers. In turn, the career experiences of other types of global workers (e.g., migrants and self-initiate expatriates) are more limited in number. However, a growing number of individuals self-initiate their international professional journey and search for a job abroad without organizational support. Such experiences often offer similar developmental opportunities as expatriation within companies, but our evidence is still limited. Due to their developed international competencies, SIEs represent an attractive global staffing alternative for organizations assuming that they understand how expatriation develops individuals' competencies. Based on an internet survey and interviews with skilled self-initiated expatriate (SIE) members of two Finnish trade associations, this chapter investigates the career capital (CC) development of highly-skilled Finnish SIEs. The two associations identified individuals working abroad in 2015 and 2016, and they received our questionnaire in 2020. The present study's results support the view that SIEs generally develop their CC fairly extensively when working abroad. This view contrasts with previous studies that emphasize more negative views on the development of SIEs, who are described as facing challenges in finding suitable jobs abroad that fit their level of education and CC. Therefore, the context in which the SIEs work may impact their learning opportunities and perception of the value of such international work experience.

Introduction

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) usually expatriate themselves to a country of their preference to seek career development and personal interests (Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari, 2008), often with no definite duration in mind (Tharenou, 2013). Such international mobility shapes the life paths of individuals and impacts their careers both during expatriation and after they have returned home, moved on to another destination, or put their stay on a more permanent footing.

Although the immigration literature typically excludes a requirement to work from the definition of migrant (see Andresen, Bergdolt & Margenfeld, 2013), it does commonly use the terms skilled migrants (e.g., O’Conner, 2018) and SIEs (e.g., Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Dickmann, & Tornikoski, 2018) when individuals decide to live and work abroad (Mello, Suutari, Brewster & Dickmann, 2019, Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, 2013). Whether referred to as high-skilled immigrants or SIEs, the literature discusses the global mobility of highly-skilled people living and working overseas (Fitzsimmons, Minbaeva, Phene & Narula, 2021; Hajro, Caprar, Zikic, & Stahl, 2021). This chapter explores the developmental experiences of highly-skilled business and engineering professionals at the university level who have moved abroad to work on their own initiative.

Previous empirical studies have found work requirements are higher in global than domestic jobs (e.g., Shin, Morgeson & Campion, 2007). Consequently, international career scholars have defined global work as a *high-density* work experience that substantially affects individuals’ career trajectories, motivation, and competencies (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; Shaffer et al., 2012). Scholars have also argued that the learning and developments experience abroad is so meaningful to expatriates that they often consider such development as one aspect of career success (Mello, Suutari & Dickmann, 2021; Shen et al., 2015; Brisco et al.,

2021). Such an outcome may be assessed through their career capital (CC) developed abroad (Shaffer et al., 2012).

The conceptualization of CC assumes that people invest in their careers through three *ways of knowing*, broadly reflecting an individual's physiological capital (knowing-why), intellectual capital (knowing-how), and social capital (knowing-whom) (Parker, Khapova, & Arthur, 2009). This concept seems particularly suited to exploring the career of SIEs as it incorporates their motivation and identity, skills and expertise, and also their social networks (Mäkelä, Björkman, & Ehrnrooth, 2009; Parker, Khapova, & Arthur, 2009). All of the above add meaning to their experience abroad and are consequently perceived as an important aspect of career success. Accordingly, the CC concept is increasingly used in global-careers research (Dickmann et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2012). Understanding the CC of SIEs is important for employers because international mobile professionals offer an ever-expanding recruitment pool for international companies seeking internationally experienced talent. In addition, recruiting such people can reduce the costs typically associated with traditional expatriation (Dickmann, Suutari & Wurtz, 2018).

In light of this background, this chapter aims to assess the CC development of SIEs during expatriation. We asked the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates and the Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland to contact members who were SIEs working abroad or had done so recently. We received replies from 114 SIEs whose developmental experiences we analyze below. We support that analysis with illustrative quotations from interviews of SIEs representing those same associations.

Theory section

The developmental nature of global work

Many studies on expatriates' career development are theoretically grounded in the boundaryless career paradigm (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). That stresses developmental opportunities arising from moving across organizational and national borders. Such transitions offer SIEs opportunities to engage in various forms of learning to develop new career competencies (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995). However, such changes in job duties, social relations, and work environments also incur various costs and risks that might adversely impact career development (Guan et al., 2019; Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015). Given this context, global work is described as high-density work involving international relocation and a need to *adjust thought patterns and scripts to effectively interact with people and adapt to situational demands across cultures* (Shaffer et al., 2012, p. 1300). The work role requirements also disrupt or interfere with employees' usual activities and routines outside work and affect the whole family. Expatriates are also often reported to be responsible for a wider variety of tasks than in their previous jobs and to have more autonomy (Mello et al., 2022). However, this may be more typical among assigned expatriates (AEs) than among SIEs. The SIE population includes groups such as young people heading abroad, while companies typically only send highly-skilled professionals and managers abroad. In any case, expatriate work is highly developmental, and the experience can have major career implications for expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012). In turn, expatriates might face problems finding what they perceive to be sufficiently challenging and interesting jobs after the expatriation (Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

Existing research on characteristics of SIEs

The experiences of AEs have received the most attention in the literature on international human resource management. However, the body of research on SIEs is gradually increasing (Brewster, Suutari & Waxin, 2022). Consequently, we are starting to understand how SIEs differ from traditional AEs and the characteristics of those SIEs. It is well-known that SIEs are motivated by different factors than AEs (Doherty et al., 2011), that their career paths (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) and psychological contracts are different (Casado & Caspersz, 2021), and their commitment to their current employer also seems to differ (Casado & Caspersz, 2021; Lapointe et al., 2020; Linder, 2019). Furthermore, AEs usually have managerial or senior technical roles that make them more likely to work than the SIE group as a whole. The AE is also, by definition, more likely to work for a sizable multinational enterprise than an SIE (Meuer et al., 2019; Andresen et al., 2015). In turn, they get more organizational and financial support from their employer, while SIEs rely more on their own resources (Hussain & Deery, 2018).

An AE must learn to work in a new country, in a new division of their employer, and an SIE must adjust to working in a new organization. While AEs are often enthusiastic about the opportunity to move abroad, most will follow their employer's suggestion. The assignment process often means they have little time to prepare for the move (Doherty et al., 2011). In contrast, SIEs decide independently to go to a certain country. The limitations in the choice of host country and restricted preparation time mean AEs may experience greater adjustment gaps and have a more significant cognitive difference from people in the host country (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009)

Finally, SIEs tend to be abroad longer than AEs (Farcas & Gonsalves, 2017), have more interest in considering more permanent international careers (Doherty et al., 2011), and have a higher degree of on-the-job embeddedness in the host country than AEs (Meuer et al., 2019).

As SIEs have also, by definition, looked for a new job abroad when expatriating, they have no repatriation agreement like SIEs and typically no organization to return to back at home, which may cause them to face greater repatriation challenges than AEs (Begley et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it has recently been reported that SIEs' repatriation adjustment may not always be as difficult as commonly thought (Ellis et al., 2020).

The brief discussion above indicates SIEs have various work and career-related characteristics that differentiate them from AEs. Consequently, their developmental experiences may differ somewhat from those of AEs, who have been studied more than SIEs (Dickmann et al., 2016). We will next discuss the limited evidence we have on the development of SIEs during their expatriation.

Career capital and its development during self-initiated expatriation

Expatriates' high-density work abroad means they are in a constant state of learning. Researchers have recently used the CC framework to analyze such developments (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). The conceptualization and operationalization of CC are built on the concept of the intelligent career rooted in this literature (Dickmann et al., 2018; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). Intelligent career theory was first developed by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) and revised by Arthur, Claman, and DeFillippi (1995). The theory suggests that people invest in their careers through three *ways of knowing* that broadly reflect an individual's values, motivation, and identity (knowing-why), skills and expertise (knowing-how) and relationships and reputation (knowing-whom) (Mäkelä, Björkman, & Ehrnrooth, 2009; Parker, Khapova, & Arthur, 2009). This theory has been used in different studies, including those focusing on the CC of knowledge workers in the global economy (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) on CC needed by business leaders to facilitate their organizational role transition (Brown et al.,

2020), and on senior women managers' CC development during the transition to entrepreneurship (Terjesen, 2005).

In the context of expatriation, scholars have used the intelligent career framework to understand the development of expatriates' CC (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Stahl et al., 2002; Suutari et al., 2018; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) and also on CC development among expatriate partners (Kasnrén & Suutari, 2021; McNulty et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the few studies to address CC development among SIEs offer apparently contradictory results.

Knowing-why career capital

Knowing-why CC supplies SIEs with energy, self-assurance, and a sense of purpose and identification with work (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005; Dickmann et al., 2016; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). It relates to a person's self-concept, personal dispositions, values, and interests (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Parker et al., 2009). The existing research indicates that during their global careers, expatriates develop their knowing-why CC as they encounter new issues and constantly have to put their career development at risk due to the uncertainty of international careers (Jokinen et al., 2008). This is even more relevant for SIEs as they need to look for a job abroad in a new environment and start working in a new organization. Simultaneously, a lack of organizational support and training increases the probability of their facing unexpected challenges. Coping with such experiences involves constant self-analysis, learning, paying attention to personal growth, and bolstering self-confidence. Accordingly, identity shifts can be linked to knowing-why CC (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Kohonen, 2005).

There is some evidence that SIEs appear to develop their knowing-why CC quite extensively during expatriation. Dickmann et al. (2016) and Jokinen et al. (2008) reported a very high level of development (a mean of 4.94 on a 7-point scale in the first study and a mean

of 5.03 in the second). Expatriation also helps SIEs to develop an openness to change and new experiences (Andresen, 2018). Interestingly, Jokinen et al. (2008) found that overall knowing-why CC increased equally among both AEs and SIEs, while Dickmann et al. (2016) reported AEs acquire even more knowing-why CC than SIEs. So, the findings are inconclusive regarding whether the extent of development differs between expatriate types.

Knowing-how career capital

Knowing-how CC relates to the competencies, knowledge and insights that global careerists develop to undertake international work (Harvey, Novicevic, & Speier, 2000). Accordingly, scholars have addressed the value of international assignments as a developmental tool in competency training with future MNC leaders (Kohonen, 2005; Stahl, Miler & Tung, 2002). Owing to SIEs operating in a high-density work environment with no organizational support (Mello et al., 2022), they accumulate skills such as general social skills, change management skills, and global leadership skills (Jokinen et al., 2008). However, as they are individuals who need to find jobs alone, some SIEs may work in lower hierarchical positions than AEs. That situation naturally limits the learning of knowing-whom CC among such SIEs.

A few quantitative studies report that, on average, SIEs developed considerable knowing-how CC during their expatriation experiences (Dickmann et al., 2016 reported a mean of 4.77 and Jokinen et al., 2008 a mean of 4.76 on a 7-point scale knowing-how scale). In addition, it has been reported that expatriation helps SIEs develop general and job-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (Andresen, 2018; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). Furthermore, Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) found that SIEs tend to develop their international competencies as a consequence of acquiring awareness of the dualities between globalization and localization. In their study of Irish repatriates, Begley et al. (2009) included some SIE accounts of how expatriation had developed skills, business knowledge, and cross-cultural awareness when

working in high-level positions abroad. Unfortunately for those SIEs, the same study reported that the Irish job market did not value such issues following repatriation.

Makkonen (2015) reported on the perceived employability of SIEs in China. Some SIEs felt that the experience did not develop their expertise that much. Instead, they felt they were exploited to benefit local co-workers or superiors; thus, their perceived employability declined. Similarly, scholars reported SIEs' temporary de-skilling process due to career breaks when there was a mismatch between their educational background and local labor market demand. (Mendonza, 2022; Begley et al., 2008). These perceived career outcomes were connected with limited organizational support and development opportunities offered to SIEs in host country. Similarly, Felker (2011) reported that the experiences of well-educated Eastern European SIEs indicated the situation was not very positive as they experienced down-skilling, meaning the SIEs worked in positions below their levels of education and capability. Consequently, fewer development opportunities were available to those SIEs, and they feared losing their competencies and struggled to maintain them. Such findings indicate that the expatriation context may have important impacts on the extent of the development of knowing-how CC when abroad.

Regarding expatriate types, it is interesting to observe that, on a general level, the accumulation of knowing-how CC does not differ significantly between SIEs and AEs (Jokinen et al., 2008; Dickmann et al., 2016), there are a few observable distinctions. For example, AEs experience more learning in terms of organizational knowledge (Jokinen et al., 2008; Dickmann et al., 2016). That may relate to the type of jobs AEs have and also to their role as representatives of the whole organization in the host unit (e.g., integration and coordination responsibilities across borders).

Knowing-whom career capital

Knowing-whom CC concerns the social networks SIEs develop during expatriation and their abilities to build and utilize such networks in their work and career. Mäkelä and Suutari (2009) argue that the real challenge lies in knowing whether such networks can be utilized after repatriation or when moving to other countries. The networks of expatriates in their home country typically weaken during expatriation, which adversely affects employability. Those SIEs who do not have good networks in their home country can thus find securing suitable employment problematic (Begley et al., 2008). Owing to a lack of long-term organizational attachment, SIEs have less internal social capital than AEs, who leverage stronger internal ties within MNCs due to their work roles (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009; Suutari et al., 2018). Before being sent abroad, AEs typically also have considerable experience working in the same company and have thus created good internal connections in the home country. For their part, SIEs move to a new organization abroad and lack broader networks. They typically develop closer contacts with locals through working in local organizations and are more interested in integrating into a local community than AEs. The latter rely more on their internal connections with the idea of repatriation back to their home country in a few years (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013). Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) observed that SIEs still tend to perceive weak social and professional integration with locals owing to encountering cultural and gender differences. Furthermore, SIEs tend to stay abroad longer than AEs and often even consider more permanent stays. That attitude facilitates the integration with locals in the longer term.

The evidence on SIEs is quite limited, but it has been reported that SIEs develop their knowing-whom CC during expatriation (Dickmann et al., 2016 reported a mean of 4.57 and Jokinen et al., 2008 a mean of 4.62 in a 7-point knowing-whom scale). It is noteworthy that the available SIE studies tend to focus on SIEs developing the ability to build networks rather than

on the extent of the networks ultimately acquired. In addition, it has been reported that SIEs perceive a certain degree of social recognition after their expatriate experiences, as peers in new jobs seem to value such experiences (Andresen, 2018). Nevertheless, as SIEs can face periods of unemployment after repatriation, that perception was not as common among SIEs as among AEs (Andresen, 2018). Jokinen et al. (2018) and Dickmann et al. (2016) reported significant differences between SIEs and AEs in terms of their overall knowing-whom capital acquisition, as AEs reported acquiring more social capital than SIEs. That may have important effects as a high stock of knowing-whom CC offers expatriates access to future career opportunities and the critical job-related information required to succeed internationally (Burt, 2005; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009).

In summary, the number of studies on the development of CC among SIEs remains limited, and some present quite a negative view of the topic (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Makkonen, 2015), while a few others offer a more positive view (Jokinen et al., 2008; Dickmann et al., 2016). Accordingly, it can be concluded that more research is needed. We will next describe the methods of our study before presenting our findings.

Methods

We used an internet survey to collect data from expatriate members of two Finnish trade associations to investigate the CC development of Finnish SIEs. Because trade association membership figures in Nordic countries are high, the sample provided by the Business School Graduates association and the association of Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland (TEK) is likely to represent almost all Finnish university level graduates working abroad in these fields (Suutari et al., 2018). The two associations identified individuals working abroad in 2015 and 2016, and they received our questionnaire in 2020. The present study is informed by the questionnaire responses of 114 SIEs, which were analyzed using SPSS to describe the

development experiences of the respondents. Table 1 below presents the sample. The sample of highly-skilled SIEs includes men and women of various ages, most of whom worked in Europe. Reflecting their high level of education, they also worked typically in higher organizational levels. A surprisingly large proportion of the SIEs in our sample had decided to continue their international career after their initial SIE experience.

Table 1. Sample characteristics (survey)

Sample characteristics	
Gender	n
Men	68
Women	46
Age	
From 27 to 40	45
From 41 to 60	56
Over 60	13
Country	
Europe	83
Asia	19
America	10
Oceania	2
Repatriates vs. expatriates	
Repatriates	31
Re-expatriates	83
Organizational position	
Mean	6.7
Standard deviation	1.4
Educational background	
M.Sc. (Econ.)	53
M.Sc. (Techn.)	61
Total	114

** scale from 1 (lowest level) to 10 (highest level)*

We used the CC scale devised by Dickmann et al. (2018) to measure CC development. Participants were asked: “To what extent did your international work experience (2015/16) develop the following abilities in you?” All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale

anchored with *did not improve/ increase at all* (1) and *improved/ increased very much* (7). The scale consists of 28 items measuring expatriates' development on three dimensions of CC: knowing-how CC (18 items), knowing-why CC (4 items), and knowing-whom CC (6 items) while working abroad (see Dickmann et al., 2018 for the items). Cronbach's alphas were 0.930 for knowing-how CC, 0.864 for knowing-why CC, and 0.905 for knowing-whom CC.

In addition to the quantitative analysis and reporting of CC development, we used data from semi-structured interviews of expatriates to illustrate their developmental experiences in key areas. That input was elicited via a qualitative extension of the survey in the form of interviews addressing the overall developmental and career experiences of expatriate members. In the survey, the respondents were asked if they are willing to participate to further interviews. Invitations to such interviews were sent by e-mails. As an outcome overall 20 interviewees were reached for further interviews. In the present chapter, we use only the qualitative data from the interviews with SIEs (n=8). The sample size is very small and thus there are clear limitations with regard to generalizability of these findings. In turn, we have above reported quantitative evidence with broader sample and this qualitative evidence is used just to illustrate the key developments that SIEs have reported in the survey. Thus, instead of doing systematic analysis of few qualitative interviews, we looked for interview quotations to illustrate how development in the three areas of career capital were verbally described during interviews. The sample characteristics of these SIEs are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample characteristics (interviews)

Sample characteristics				
Gender	Age	Education	Location	Profession
1. Male	48	M.Sc (Econ.)	Netherlands	Controller
2. Male	55	M.Sc (Econ.)	USA	General manager
3. Male	38	M.Sc (Econ.)	Austria	Entrepreneur

4. Male	52	M.Sc (Econ.)	Switzerland	General manager
5. Female	34	M.Sc (Econ.)	China	Project manager
6. Female	62	M.Sc (Econ.)	Germany	Sales manager
7. Male	42	M.Sc (Econ.)	Germany	International sales repr.
8. Male	50	M.Sc (Econ.)	China	Unit manager

Results

Overall, the survey data (n=114) suggested that SIEs develop CC quite extensively when working abroad. As can be seen from Table 2, the development of CC was seen to be high across all three dimensions of CC. In turn, the data also indicated that SIEs accumulated, to some extent, higher “stock” of knowing-how and knowing-why CC than knowing-whom CC. Table 2 shows SIEs’ perceptions of how much they believe they accumulated knowing-how CC.

Table 2. SIEs’ development abroad across three aspects of CC

Aspect of CC	Mean	Std. dev.
Knowing-how	4.9137	1.14966
Knowing-why	4.8990	1.29054
Knowing-whom	4.6301	1.60647

A similar view on the extensive development opportunities that living and working abroad offered also appeared during the interviews of SIEs as it was commented like this:

I think that starting to live and work abroad on your own is probably the most extensive learning opportunity that one can face... The first half of years are always the most difficult ones when you have to learn everything from the beginning... You will for sure face some conflicts and challenges. Those offer the best situations for personal growth... Finally, you experience that you can win the challenges and always ‘land on your feet’... When such positive experiences emerge, it develops you and gives you self-confidence (Interviewee 1)

Development of knowing-why career capital.

With regard to knowing-why CC, both knowing self and personal development orientation are perceived as equally important areas of development in the eyes of SIEs. Table 3 shows SIEs' perceptions of how much they believe they accumulated knowing-how CC.

Table 3. SIEs' development abroad across subdimensions of knowing-why CC

	Mean	Std. dev.
Knowing self	4,88	297
I am able to recognize my own strengths and weaknesses, needs and motives	5,21	1,347
I understand what other people think about me	4,51	1,483
I acknowledge my personal values and beliefs	4,92	1,559
Personal development	4,91	1,539
I set goals for personal development	4,96	1,644
I undertake activities to enhance my skills and competencies	4,92	1,621
I want to know more than is required for task accomplishment	5,35	1,644

Knowing-why-related developments were also raised in interviews. It was argued that challenging experiences were perceived as transitional experiences, which increased the self-understanding:

“Definitely, I am now more aware of my strengths and weaknesses. I have sometimes been in personal profile analyses, and I am now really good now in describing what kind of person I am... I would say that international experiences have developed my strengths further. With regard to my weaknesses, I have done my best to develop myself in those areas as well.” (Interviewee 2)

“Through your international experiences, one is almost forced to think about their own values... Through such situations, one also starts to better understand oneself. As an outcome, I also aim to behave more consciously on the basis of my values.”(Interviewee 3)

These transitional experiences have also increased their understanding of constant learning and also their interest in future development and personal growth:

I have become more open-minded, and the experiences have increased my willingness to grow as a person and learn new issues. I see that no one is ever 'ready' as a person. (Interviewee 4)

When there have been career options to choose from after my international experiences, I have typically chosen the options that involve the best changes to try new issues and to develop something new and also to develop myself. I am always in favor of new adventures and development opportunities (Interviewee 3)

At the same time, such experiences have typically given confidence that one is able to handle challenging experiences also in the future and thus able to take on even more responsibilities in the future career:

This experience has given me self-confidence; I don't get so easily scared if all doesn't go as expected... It gives you perseverance when all doesn't happen as quickly as you expect. (Interviewee 5)

You learn to tolerate uncertainty as the international work environment is more uncertain when you can never know what to expect, how people react in different situations and so on. (Interviewee 1).

Development of knowing-how career capital.

The data presented in Table 4 on knowing-how CC shows that the most extensive development concerns the development of social skills and social judgment skills. In addition, more general cognitive ability development increased when working in more complex and uncertain international work environments. A new job in a new cultural context also offered a very good starting point for learning new job-related and cross-cultural skills.

Table 4. SIEs' development abroad across subdimensions of knowing-how CC

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social skills	5.94	1.273
Ability to interact socially with people from diverse cultural backgrounds	6.06	1.241
Ability to make yourself understood in multicultural environments	5.87	1.334
Cognitive ability	5.20	1.364
Ability to separate relevant knowledge from irrelevant	5.18	1.436
Ability to switch the target of concentration quickly	5.27	1.518
Social judgment skills	5.14	1.295
Recognizing the principles of social functioning/interaction	5.13	1.360
Understanding your own role in social organization	5.18	1.364
Task knowledge	5.06	1.302
Knowledge of norms central to your own tasks	4.97	1.379
Professional/functional knowledge/expertise central to your own tasks	5.33	1.455
Knowledge of the trends and latest achievements of professional development in your area of responsibility	4.86	1.558
People knowledge	5.03	1.453
Understanding factors causing variety in the needs of different people	4.96	1,649
Understanding how behavior may reflect different values	5,14	1.580

Understanding different factors differentiating cultures	5.25	1.632
Knowledge of general factors guiding human behavior	4.84	1.596
Organization knowledge	4.67	1.711
Understanding the strategic roles of different units of the international organization	5.11	1.797
Understanding the components of the organization's international competitive advantage	4.58	1.824
Knowledge of international management systems of the organization	4.33	2.011
Business knowledge	3.27	1.914
Understanding financial options typical for the business area	3.25	1.976
Understanding shareholders' interests	3.30	2.137

Among the seven dimensions measured, the development of organizational knowledge regarding how international organizations operate and business knowledge scored the lowest. The lower level of learning in these areas may reflect the type of jobs that SIEs have, as some work in lower-level positions in local, less-international companies. Accordingly, in terms of such tasks, there is less to learn about how international companies operate. However, all SIEs share a general level of learning on cross-cultural issues when working abroad.

Our quantitative findings indicate that the social aspects of learning were the most emphasized.

This aspect encompasses general social skills and also cross-cultural skills:

The competence that I developed the most abroad relates to how to interact with people... I overall learned how important relationships are. You also need to find out who are the important persons in the organization. (Interviewee 6).

This experience has expanded my thinking. If someone behaves in a different way, it is easier to accept that some people have very different values and culture-based behavioral styles... You can still succeed when interacting with them. (Interviewee 7)

As SIEs learned different ways of working abroad and saw how international organizations operate, they acquired learning on task-related knowledge and skills and organizational knowledge:

When you work abroad, you see different working cultures, and through that, you start questioning your ways of working, and thus you learn task-related skills... You also learn to watch issues from different and broader angles. (Interviewee 7)

Important learning aspects also relate to technical issues; those have progressed so quickly over the last ten years... Working abroad also helped to understand the different views and relationships between national units and HQ (Interviewee 4)

Development of knowing-whom career capital.

Table 4 illustrates that SIEs report developing their knowing-whom competencies quite considerably during expatriation. The most extensive development occurs in the area of being competent in building inter-organizational networks and teams across borders. The information clearly reflects the experiences of SIEs working in international work environments as expatriates. The slightly lower scores on the extent to which SIEs had learned to know the important people in the organization or their ability to develop external networks may again reflect the work roles of SIEs. That is because many SIEs do not work in the most senior roles, and those roles involve less external representation than those typically held by AEs. Furthermore, as organizational newcomers and also as foreigners in a new country, they may not have easy access to people at the highest levels of the organization. Because SIEs tend not to have international roles and are more likely to work in local organizations that are not particularly internally oriented, their international abilities concerning knowing-whom CC may not be developed extensively.

Table 4. SIEs' development abroad in terms of knowing-whom career capital

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Knowing- whom CC, In total	4.63	1.606
Ability to build inter-organizational networks and teams across boundaries	4.96	1.867
Knowledge of people with influential power within organizations	4.65	1.875
Ability to build and maintain the external network	4.46	1.810
Ability to link resources and activities internationally	4.45	1.885

During the interviews, SIEs stressed how important networks are in international work environments, how they have developed their skills in networking, and how they use such networks to succeed in their work.

I have developed strong networks internationally when I have been moving around. I can find connections to almost any work situation that I face and need to find out how to handle

the situation. Both in Finland and abroad. It has huge benefits for my work and also for any personal challenges I face abroad. (Interviewee 8)

In turn, it was also recognized that networks are, to some extent, national; thus, it is sometimes difficult to maintain or use them in future careers.

I have learned to use my networks. Which ones depend on the situation as networks are, to some extent, country-specific, but I have managed to utilize those. Those have given me concrete help in my work and career. (Interviewee 1)

Conclusions

The present study's findings support the view that SIEs generally develop their CC fairly extensively when working abroad. These findings thus confirm those described in a few earlier quantitative studies (Dickmann et al., 2016; Jokinen et al., 2008). This view contrasts with findings from other studies that emphasize more negative views on the development of SIEs, who are described as facing challenges in finding suitable jobs abroad that fit their level of education and CC (Begley et al., 2008; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Makkonen, 2015). Therefore, the context in which the SIEs work may impact their learning opportunities and perception of the value of such international work experience. For example, Makkonen (2015) studied the experiences of SIEs in China and found that the development and career opportunities for SIEs were limited in that context. In contrast, the average SIE contributing to the present study and previous larger surveys (Dickmann et al., 2016; Jokinen et al., 2008) may have more commonly chosen to move to developed European countries. Accordingly, there may be better development opportunities for them. Therefore, studies addressing SIEs should consider the context in which SIEs work when reporting and interpreting the findings (Andresen, Brewster & Suutari, 2021). It is also important to note that there are different kinds of SIEs, from top managers in MNCs to young graduates heading abroad to gain international experience (e.g., Selmer et al., 2022). Consequently, findings reported from a particular group

of SIEs may differ extensively from those derived from other groups and from more general samples of quite different types of SIEs.

Examining our findings across three distinct aspects of CC first revealed the extensive accumulation of knowing-why CC. Such development has been reported among all expatriates, but it may be even higher among SIEs due to the highly boundaryless nature of the careers of SIEs (Biemann and Andresen 2010). Those SIEs find themselves in a more vulnerable position and exposed to different risks, such as being able to adjust to a new country, organization, and role during international career transitions. At the same time, they lack organizational support. However, in line with modern career theories, SIEs may grasp the opportunity to learn from such a challenging context (Mello et al., 2022). Experienced global careerists also view the opportunities for constant development in an international career context as among the best sides of an international career while acknowledging that the working environment is challenging (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). In addition, SIEs face a similar transition stage after expatriation when they typically need to find a new job and employer upon repatriation (Andresen et al., 2013) or re-expatriation (Mello et al., 2022).

In such transitions, SIEs may need to act proactively and take the initiative to acquire the resources necessary to adapt their career to the challenges of international career transitions (Adam et al., 2019; Adam et al., 2019; Andresen et al., 2020). Due to such career uncertainties and transitions, SIEs might face periods of unemployment (an employment gap) or underemployment (where they have to take a job that does not match their skills or abilities). Nevertheless, SIEs may still develop their knowing-why CC while experiencing different career transitions.

Regarding the development of knowing-how CC, the findings show that the foreign sojourns of SIEs substantially increase it. In most of the subdimensions of knowing-how, the

means were very high (i.e., over five on a 7-point scale). The exceptions were organizational and business knowledge. This finding is similar to those of Jokinen et al. (2008) and Dickmann et al. (2016). Those studies reported that the real gain from international career transitions relates to intellectual capital aspects that transcend the limits of one single organization, such as social skills and cognitive abilities. An SIE's career is characterized by being less dependent on organizations, which justifies a lower accumulation of knowledge connected with a specific organization or specific business. Hence, SIEs tend to accumulate more knowing-how CC that allows them to use it in multiple contexts, as SIEs tend to be exposed to various contexts during their career.

Finally, our findings on knowing-whom CC indicate that even though SIEs do improve their stock of it during international career transitions, less development is reported in that area than in the two other aspects of CC. As discussed earlier, this may partly relate to the type of jobs some SIEs have and the type of organizations in which they work. An SIE may also find themselves in a context where the development of abilities to build social networks across countries suffers from the lack of organizational support for building and maintaining ties across countries. As an AE, one may already have internal connections before moving to the host country, or at least they have their established company network to draw on, whereas SIEs do know no one in the organization when starting. It may also be challenging for SIEs to maintain and leverage these connections during international career transitions as they move across organizational and national borders and also to bridge individuals from different social groups across countries (Known & Adler, 2014). During expatriation, international social ties expand while home-country connections typically weaken (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009).

Overall, our findings across all aspects of CC reinforce the idea that SIEs may acquire less knowing-whom CC than other expatriates because they are on their own (Suutari et

al., 2018). As an SIE's career is more boundaryless than that of an AE, the concept of the boundaryless career can help understand the dynamics of the SIE career. The boundaryless nature of international careers refers to the freedom to earn work experience in global environments across national and often also across organizations. (Guan et al., 2019). Unlike the accumulation of knowing-why and knowing-how CC, knowing-whom CC depends exclusively on a single individual's learning process. Knowing-whom CC is limited to relationships with other social actors, where individuals leverage resources through such relationships (Dickmann et al., 2016). Hence, SIEs' greater boundarylessness (more freedom and less dependence on organizational support) can challenge the accumulation of knowing-whom CC because they do not have the internal professional network of an organization during transitions across countries.

While providing some new evidence on the development of SIEs, the present study also has some limitations. First, like most expatriation research (e.g., Ren et al., 2013; Breitenmoser et al., 2018), the study relies on cross-sectional data. Accordingly, longitudinal studies on the development process for SIEs abroad would help improve our understanding of CC development among that group. Because SIEs work in quite different jobs and societal contexts, it would be good to investigate the antecedents of CC development in the future. That line of research could provide a more comprehensive view of why some experiences are more developmental than others.

Furthermore, all SIEs contributing to the present study were university-educated engineers and business professionals. The career benefits of an international assignment could manifest differently among less educated people with different career expectations and realities. All expatriates were also Finnish and different cultures might value IA experiences differently (Andresen, Pattie & Hippler, 2020).

In terms of practical implications, our findings show that organizations would benefit from recognizing that the SIE group represents an important pool of talent that could aid organizations' globalization efforts. The SIE cohort offers an interesting recruitment pool for MNCs and could also offer cheaper recruitment solutions than using assigned expatriates. As SIEs are usually recruited from the local labor market and invariably managed as part of the local labor force, they add knowledge gained from living in other countries, including language skills and internationalization experience that would be difficult to match among local employees. So, SIEs not only accumulate CC but also add value to the local learning environment. In turn, an increasing number of businesses are starting to view SIEs as boundary-spanners: People able to speak the local language, understand the local culture and have good local connections (Furusawa and Brewster, 2018; Brewster et al., 2022). There is clearly scope for far more research focused on the employers of SIEs.

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