An Exploratory Study of Challenges Faced by Expatriates in Knowledge Transfer while Working in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research focuses on identifying the challenges faced by expatriates during knowledge transfer. Further it investigates the tools employed by these expatriates in facilitating knowledge transfer to the host country nationals. Fifteen challenges identified by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) that expatriates face and which affect their work (including knowledge transfer) in Thailand, have been taken for relevance to expatriates in Pakistan. Knowledge transfer tools identified by Smith (2004) have been taken for the purpose of this study to assess if these factors also apply to Pakistan. Data was collected from 26 respondents of four nationalities. Ranking method was employed using mean and standard deviation to rank the knowledge transfer tools and challenges faced by expatriates. Results demonstrate that restrictions on work permit were the biggest challenge faced by expatriates while working here in Pakistan. Verbal communication was found as the highly ranked knowledge transfer tool employed by expatriates through which host country nationals learn. This applied exploratory study contributes to the literature on knowledge management for Pakistan that will enable future in depth research in this area.

Keywords: knowledge, knowledge transfer, challenges of knowledge transfer, tools of knowledge transfer

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The cultural setting of this study is Pakistan where communities of faiths live harmoniously, yet any unexpected situation disrupts this balance. Volatile groups with extremist views *(on both spectrums of extremism)* and a silent peaceful minority with balanced views are one its characteristics – the diversity of the country pose its challenges as well as offer a learning environment. Being a developing country, Pakistan relies on expertise from developed nations on projects and assignments of high value to the organizations. In a global economy, Pakistani organizations need to remain competitive with other organizations of the world; hence these skilled human resources are coming to be seen more and more as a valuable asset as well as affecting their bottom line. Expatriate workforce is considered as an integral part of human resource that provides the firms an access to experienced and specialised knowledge (Matherly & Al Nahyan, 2015). The focus of research therefore is the expatriate human resources, the knowledge that they possess and how can Pakistani organizations benefit from them in the long run to maintain a competitive advantage.

Despite the growing interest in knowledge management and sharing, there is diminutive reference to regional contexts outside of the developing countries (Youssef, Haak-Saheem, & Youssef, 2017). Negligible research has been done in this area within the context of Pakistan. This exploratory study on expatriates working in Pakistan will contribute to the literature and pave way for future work.

Miranda (2009), in "An exploratory research on learning styles of expatriates in Malaysia" recognizes the growing trend of expatriation assignment, especially in rapidly-developing countries, resulting in high recruitment and staff costs. The said research identifies a need for improved placement of human resources to increase knowledge transfer efficiency. Expatriates working on projects and in organizations in Pakistan is also a well known and well accepted phenomenon, but with little attention to benefit from this global temporary transition of skills from more developed countries to lesser developed countries. Expatriates working in corporate and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan,

introduce improved work methods and techniques during their tenure.

Some of these expatriates have extended work assignments while others have shorter periods of stay. Their engagement in an assignment at a developing country such as Pakistan is to ensure certain expertise and skills to be brought onto the assignment which was not readily available in the professional local market. Different models of organizations benefit from such an arrangement but this process of knowledge sharing is not an easy task. International labor shifting to a new country and working in a local firm has to adapt to a completely new setting and understanding what type of behavior is expected from them is totally unpredictable (Bjørge, Sandvik, & Whittaker, 2017).

These expatriates in Pakistan work mostly with respective embassies, armed forces, corporate sector and the development sector. For the purpose of this applied exploratory study, expatriates working with the development sector were interviewed. As the number of expatriates in a typical organization would not be more than 4 or 5, we would be focusing on all development focused International Non-government Organizations (INGOs). These expatriates are from varied nationalities, cultures, religions, ethnic orientation and educational backgrounds, bringing with them their specific *management styles, interactions, life styles* and *approaches* – thus posing then with the challenge of adjustment to their projects as well as to those who work with them. These include expatriates *managing locals, being managed by locals,* and/or *managing projects independently.*

The by-product of engaging an expatriate is the knowledge transferred from the expatriate to the local workforce. How many of the expatriates actually transfer their work methods, expertise, knowledge and skills to the local staff and/or organization is the basis of this research paper. This exploratory study will help to understand the context within which expatriates work in a developing country such as Pakistan, the challenges faced in effective knowledge transfer, and the knowledge transfer tools adopted to overcome them. The findings of this study may be applied to address challenges faced by expatriates in knowledge transfer, with the objective to enhance the knowledge transferred to local resources.

Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) identified fifteen (15) challenges that expatriates face, which have been taken for this study; these generic challenges affect their work products including the knowledge transferred. Application of these challenges to the cultural setting of Pakistan will be explored.

The exploration into 'challenges' that these highly skilled expatriates face, will be analyzed, and subsequent research work may then focus on addressing these challenges and suggest how to facilitate knowledge transfer. Although there is existing research on the drivers of knowledge transfer and the challenges faced during the knowledge transfer process, there is still a lot that needs to be explored within the specific cultural context of Pakistan. Achieving high rate of knowledge transfer and its stickiness would be a step towards self-reliance and building a sustained knowledge economy for a developing country like Pakistan.

Organizational units of human resources, hardware and software tools and the organization's goals are where knowledge resides (Argote & Ingram, 2000) for the purpose of this research we will focus on knowledge residing with the human resources of an organization.

1.2 Research Gaps

In a global economy, expatriate assignments are a reality which will grow further with time. Pakistan needs to be geared up to face up to the challenges of globalization and play a vital role in the global economy. The knowledge from the expatriates who come to Pakistan on short and long term assignments can be used to bridge the gap in the existing knowledge and skills of its workforce. Since, existing research on challenges faced by expatriates working in Pakistan is very scarce, it is very difficult to propose drivers to facilitate knowledge transfer.

Research conducted in similar cultural settings i.e. as South Asia was taken into consideration during literature review for this research paper. (Idrees, Javed, & Ahmed, 2011), evaluated the performance of expatriates and their training in international assignments. However their research focused on Pakistani's who are sent on international projects, rather than expatriates who come to Pakistan on projects.

1.3 Research Objectives

The significance of this research is to identify the specific obstacles faced and the knowledge transfer tools used by expatriates working in Pakistan, during the process of their knowledge transfer. It builds on previous research conducted in a different but similar context. This paper also contributes towards building knowledge around this important topic.

Two important issues related to knowledge transfer namely key knowledge transfer tools employed and challenges faced by expatriates have been investigated in detail in this research. It also assesses their applicability in Pakistan's context.

Knowledge is of three types: *external, informal internal* (implicit or **tacit**) and *structured internal* (explicit). Tacit Expert Knowledge, as defined by Davenport, De Long, and Beers (1998), will be the focus of this study on knowledge transfer, and simply referred to as "Knowledge".

Tacit knowledge is more valuable to an organization, as it makes up the majority (90%) of knowledge held by employees (Smith, 2001) and due to difficulties faced in transferable (Nonaka, 1994). While explicit knowledge, "book smart", can be easily collected, presented, absorbed, and thus transferred; tacit or "street smart" knowledge is based on practical experience and can't easily be codified (Smith, 2001).

In 2000, Horvath further divided tacit knowledge into embodied and embedded – knowledge contained within the person, and the processes, respectively. Horvath also summarizes how tacit knowledge's inherent difficulties in transferable can be a business's strength, making it harder to leak out, and the analysis of this knowledge can make it easier to develop "best practices" for use within the organization. He also pointed out that tacit knowledge and innovation go hand in hand.

Argote and Ingram (2000) noted that the creation and transfer of knowledge are a basis for competitive advantage in firms, for organizations in Pakistan to remain competitive in the global market, there needs to be a mechanism for effective knowledge transfer is essential. This exploratory work will pave way for future research in the area that would positively contribute towards

Pakistani organizations gaining competitive advantage in the global economy. In conclusion key challenges and tools for knowledge transfer are identified that impede and facilitate knowledge transfer (respectively) from expatriates working in Pakistan. This will contribute to research on knowledge transfer in Pakistan and pave way for future research.

Based on literature review, key research questions explored through this study are:

(Q1): What are the challenges faced by expatriates during their foreign assignment in the context of Pakistan?

(Q2): What tools are employed by these expatriates in facilitating knowledge transfer?

The key assumptions of this study are:

a. **Knowledge** means gaining an understanding of how things work and how to complete tasks.
b. **Knowledge transfer** refers to the process by which knowledge moves (tacit and explicit knowledge) from expatriates to host country professional workers, as a result of which it raises the level of awareness and expertise of the resource receiving the knowledge.
c. **Expatriate** means an employee/professional who is not a citizen of the host country; this would include volunteer and professional workers.
d. **Purpose of hiring expatriates** stands for a job/ role within the organization to acquire skilled resources which are not available in the host country, additionally, by hiring such scarce skilled professionals the objective is also to meet the project objectives and to transfer some of their knowledge during their tenure.
e. **Host country** means Pakistan for the purpose of this research work.

This study excludes *personal challenges* faced by expatriates during their stay and work at Pakistan.

1.4 Structure of the paper

First this paper introduces the concepts, provides a background to the research, identifies the gaps and outlines the objectives of conducting this research work. Second it reviews the literature and provides a background for the research on key concepts explored. Further, describes methodology and presents the data analysis and

research findings. Finally it discusses the findings and limitations and suggests further work.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This section introduces different topics related to the main topic of knowledge management and transfer.

2.2 Knowledge

Davenport et al. (1998) have identified knowledge as an asset by including it in its closing sales the 'amount of knowledge it reuses' and 'contributions of its knowledge repository'.

Knowledge has been defined as "…information combined with experience, context, interpretation and reflection… a high value form of information ready to apply to decisions and action" (Davenport et al., 1998). And knowledge transfer is the communication of this knowledge.

Knowledge is of three types: external, informal internal (implicit) and structured internal (explicit). Tacit knowledge is defined as *"..a form of knowledge that is highly personal and context specific and deeply rooted in individual experiences, ideas, values and emotions"* (Gourlay, 2002) cited in Irick (2007). Chen, Liang, and Lin (2010), built on the process and resource based views to present an alternative view that studies 'knowledge' and 'organizational performance' and the relation between them from an ecological perspective.

Massey, Montoya-Weiss, and O'Driscoll (2002) investigated the transformation at Nortel and identified knowledge management as a process-oriented strategy and termed capitalization of knowledge assets as one of the factors contributing to becoming a profitable and innovative organization.

2.3 Knowledge Management

According to Alavi and Leidner (2001), *"Objective of Knowledge Management Systems is to support creation, transfer, and application of knowledge in organizations"* and that "*knowledge is an abstract and complex notion and provide a view of the process 'organizational knowledge management".*

Inkpen and Dinur (1998) in their work based on North American-based joint ventures, researched the access and use of

knowledge based on alliances. While focusing on processes and identifying organizations as '*dynamic system of processes***,** their findings pointed out the lack of efforts to systematically establish how firms acquire and manage new knowledge.

Trust is an important factor in knowledge management. Edwards and Kidd (2003) noted knowledge management as a process rather than a system or technology used by an organization and that it crosses all boundaries of culture, geography and organizations etc. They introduced the concept of '*triangles of trust*', where 'quality of information' is represented as the base and 'perceived compatibility' is the height of the triangle, area within the triangle is the 'trust' between them. For effective knowledge management, boundaries between people, organizations, and cultures etc need to be bridged.

Davenport et al. (1998) through their study identified eight factors of a typical successful project and concluded that senior management's commitment to knowledge and acknowledging it as integral to business contributed to effective knowledge management. Velde (2010) called for a new knowledge management framework for knowledge transfer in expatriates due to the specific nature of expatriation.

2.4 Knowledge Management Strategies

Huang, Chang, and Henderson (2008) study was based on Taiwanese Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SMEs) and explored barriers to the transfer of knowledge from provider to seeker. They concluded that knowledge transfer barriers were reduced by '*processual strategy*' in planning stages, and also that the 'classical strategy' only had a positive effect during the marketing stage and a combination of both in real time could facilitate transfer of knowledge from provider to seeker.

Russell and Dickie (2007) studied and interpreted experiences of Canadian expatriate working for non-government organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia. They concluded with the recommendation that HRM practices and strategies needed to be supportive of expatriate assignments.

Lazarova and Tarique (2005), work focuses on reverse knowledge transfer, where resources are sent to international assignments and upon their return to the parent organization are

required to bring in the knowledge acquired. They conclude that the individual needs to be ready to transfer knowledge as well as the organization should have a need to use and repeat the knowledge for the transfer to be effective. They outline practical issues to consider for knowledge management processes to capture, retain, and integrate such knowledge. This finding might also be true for the case where expatriates are required to transfer knowledge to the individual/organization at the international assignment.

Guthridge and Komm (2008) conducted McKinsey Survey on multinationals and found that a strong relation existed between 'profit per employee' and 'global talent management practices' of the organization. They suggest HR practices should be developed to make the most of talent distributed across the globe of these multinational companies.

2.5 Knowledge Transfer

Argote and Ingram (2000) defined knowledge transfer as "….is the process through which one unit (e.g., group, department, or division) is affected by the experience of another". Since differences exist between individual and organizational learning, the organizations need to create a supportive framework for knowledge transfer based on learning needs of the organization (Berthoin Antal, Stroo, & Willems, 2000).

Tseng, Chang, Lou, Tan, and Chiu (2012), investigated 'concept mapping'- knowledge transfer tool - and concluded that concept mapping tool for knowledge transfer is important in five learning stages: acquisition, communication, application, acceptance, and assimilation. Gray and Schubert (2011) identified knowledge transfer to be as important as knowledge production and concluded that 'evidence-based practice' is being adopted by social work practitioners, which supported the idea that there had to be a strong relationship between the units of knowledge transfer. They also attempted to bridge the gap between tacit and explicit knowledge with specific reference to the context of social work.

According to Jasimuddin and Zhang (2009), soft and hard mechanisms were being employed for knowledge transfer and suggested conceptual strategies that recognized the interplay between the soft and hard mechanisms. The paper also studied the

economics of knowledge transfer cost, by aligning individual's effort with that of the organization's.

Barry Hocking, Brown, and Harzing (2004) adopted a knowledge transfer perspective to analyze outcomes and the purpose of expatriate assignments. They redefined the principal assignment purpose categories of Edström and Galbraith (1977) as business applications, organization applications and expatriate learning. They conclude that "*knowledge acquisition or learning by expatriates is an underestimated strategic assignment outcome*".

On one hand, Riusala and Suutari (2004) analyzed knowledge types transferred and the role of expatriates in MNCs and proposed a theoretical framework on stickiness factors. While on the other hand, Li (2004) affirmed that knowledge transfer is critical for the creation and renewal of competitive advantage of the firm and that knowledge transfer within the MNC is neither frictionless nor entirely sticky. Riusala and Suutari (2004) analyzed knowledge types transferred and the role of expatriates in MNCs and proposed a theoretical framework on stickiness factors. Similarly, according to Matherly and Al Nahyan (2015), expatriate labor is considered as an essential factor that offers the firms access to skilled and expert knowledge.

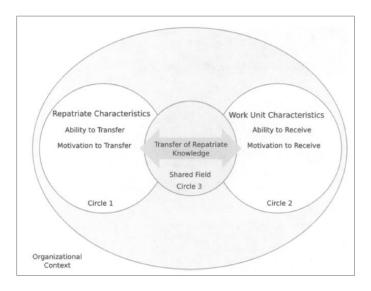## 2.6 Knowledge Transfer tools

Selmer (2006), focused on the importance of language in knowledge transfer in China. They proposed proficiency in the (local) Chinese language as an alternative to communicating in English, to promote adjustment of expatriates in China, and found a positive association with their sociocultural adjustment.
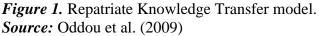
2.7 Challenges in Knowledge Transfer

Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) investigated fifteen challenges (personal and professional) faced by expatriates in Thailand. They concluded that the top five challenges were cultural differences, communication styles, relationships with subordinates, supervisory difficulties and inability to empower. Jastroch and Marlowe (2010) acknowledged that tacit knowledge was easier to code and transfer, however the implicit knowledge gained by practical experience was also required to be transferred as effectively.

Research work titled "Evaluation of expatriates performance and their training in International Assignments" conducted by

Idrees, Javed, and Ahmed (2011), was based on Pakistanis on international assignments and their adjustments to foreign cultures, causes of their failures and effects of culture. They also explored what MNEs and institutions could do to facilitate their adjustments to foreign cultures.

Oddou, Osland, and Blakeney (2009) proposed a knowledge transfer mode *(Figure 1)* for people working on international assignments and then returning with newly acquired knowledge and skills to their home base. This model enforced the view that the human resource's capabilities and the task, needed to be closely aligned and overlap for the transfer of knowledge to be efficient and effective. They also re-iterated the importance of global economy and the position of knowledge transfer in such an economy.

Figure 1. Repatriate Knowledge Transfer model.
Source: Oddou et al. (2009)

Tahir and Ismail (2007) research based on expatriates working in Malaysia examined adjustments and challenges faced by expatriates. Psychological, socio-cultural and work challenges were the focus of this study. Qin, Ramburuth, and Wang (2008) research on multinational corporations (MNCs) in China focused on how to manage knowledge transfer between headquarters and subsidiaries located in dissimilar cultural contexts. They investigated the relation

of 'cultural distance' and 'subsidiary roles' in impacting knowledge flow. They proposed an 'environment-strategy-performance' framework and concluded that knowledge transfer within the MNCs was dependent on cultural distance and subsidiary roles, while strategic role of the subsidiary set the direction and magnitude of knowledge flow. The work also explored linkages between culture and knowledge transfer, cultural distance and subsidiary roles, knowledge transfer and subsidiary roles.

2.8 Drivers of Knowledge Transfer

Davenport et al. (1998) in their exploratory work, identified eight (8) success criterion for successful change management in knowledge based projects in addition to the generic critical success factors. The success factors are hypothesized as: (1) Link to economic performance or industry value, (2) Technical and organizational infrastructure, (3) Standard, flexible knowledge structure, (4) Knowledge-friendly culture, (5) Clear purpose and language, (6) Change in motivational practices, (7) Multiple channels for knowledge transfer, and (8) Senior management support.

Smith (2004) based her research on American expatriates to examine the relation between personal characteristics, successful experience and knowledge transfer; and concluded in her findings that there was a strong positive relation between the three. Although noted that knowledge transfer was fraught with difficulties, Davenport et al. (1998) identified eight (8) key factors which facilitated knowledge transfer for organizations to create, share and to use knowledge effectively.

Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey, and Park (2003) examined the relationship between the application of specific HRM practices and the level of the absorptive capacity. They stated that, "absorptive capacity is comprised of employees' ability and motivation" and are needed to facilitate transfer of knowledge.

Tsai (2001) advocated for a central knowledge repository that depended on the knowledge absorptive capacity of the organizational unit. Tsai's research was based on two organizations and their distributed units. The paper concluded that absorptive capacity and network position of the unit affected the knowledge

transfer which in turn affects innovation and performance of the business unit.

Argote and Ingram (2000) emphasized in their research that the creation and transfer of knowledge form basis for competitive advantage in firms. It also concluded that incompatibility of resources moving to other organizational units can create challenges unless they learn to adapt. Hence expatriates need to adjust to the new cultural surroundings in order to effectively transfer the knowledge.

Anne Crowne (2009) proposed a theoretical model explaining how feedback-seeking behaviors and social networks can enhance knowledge transfer in expatriates, repatriates and top management teams. He concluded that global performance depended on how effectively expatriates transferred knowledge and suggested formal and informal mechanisms to aid expatriation-repatriation process.

2.9 Knowledge Transfer Process

Szulanski (2000) surveyed eight firms and based on their knowledge transfer of organizational practices to suggest a model and recognized transfer as a process. His model linked factors affecting knowledge transfer to each stage (Initiation Stickiness, Implementation Stickiness, Ramp-Up Stickiness and Integration Stickiness) within the process of transfer and gave an empirical evolution of knowledge transfer difficulty.

Inkpen and Dinur (1998) identified four key processes that facilitate knowledge transfer within an alliance: processes-technology sharing, alliance-parent interaction, personnel transfers, and strategic integration. Based on various assumptions, types of knowledge associated with each process were identified and then linked with the organizational level affected by the transfer process.

Chen, Liang and Lin (2010) use the ecological perspective to conclude that for successful Knowledge Management DICE (*distribution, interaction, competition* and *evolution*) interaction is needed. They have attributed success of knowledge management to the success of a healthy ecology.

2.10 Expatriates

Expatriates can play an important role in knowledge transfer process. Miranda (2009) recognized the growing trend of expatriation assignment, especially in rapidly-developing countries,

resulting in high recruitment and staff costs. The research identified a need for improved placement of human resources to increase knowledge transfer efficiency. Learning style impacts an expatriate's ability to relate with team members, which in turn impacts the transfer of knowledge and technology.

Caligiuri (1997) theory of expatriate performance is based on their completion of foreign assignment, their evaluation and adjustment to the culture. He also iterated the need for human resource systems in the new global economy scenario and to hire people with 'global competence'.

Hailey (1993) investigated the role of expatriates in developing countries, and the effectiveness of localization strategies. He concluded with the suggestion that for the expatriates to be effective in their roles, the HR Professionals need to focus on localization strategies.

Ralston, Terpstra, Cunniff, and Gustafson (1995) focused on eastern and western cultures work differences with special focus on how subordinates influence their superiors when both are from different culture and for them to be effective in mixed work cultures.

Claus, Lungu, and Bhattacharjee (2011) research identified predictors of expatriate job performance and integrate the individual, organizational and societal level of research and their theoretical explanations to arrive at a conceptual framework that looks at multiple predictors of expatriate adjustment and job performance. The paper proposes further research in human resource management.

In 2007, Bhandari researched into the experiences of expatriates in India. The author explored how globalization made expatriation important for a developing country like India. The author notes that monetary compensation is a motivation for expatriates to take assignments in developing countries and focused her research on how organizations can help in making the experience even better.

Collings, Scullion, and Morley (2007) advocated a strategic view to staffing in international assignments. Their work explored the need, the resource availability and cost involved in international assignments, with a focus on developing the HR policies keeping the specific and unique dynamics involved with becoming expatriate and delivering successful projects.

3. Methodology

This section explains the research methodology, giving details into data collection and subsequent analysis.

3.1 Approach & Justification

In order to assess the usefulness of the study, informal interviews were taken of expatriates working in Pakistan, and of lead managers at these organizations who engage expatriates for value added work were taken. A general consensus existed that such an exploratory work would be of immense value to the future research on the subject, to bridge the knowledge divide and to facilitate in knowledge transfer. In depth literature review supported the observation that very little work had been done on challenges faced by expatriate in knowledge transfer in Pakistan.

Using a set of fifteen challenges identified by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) and research articles published over the last 30 years in around 30 journals, dissertations, working paper, and conferences, six key concepts of knowledge transfer by expatriates were shortlisted for this research. Initial findings through observations and preparatory reading, on knowledge transfer by expatriates in Pakistan, it was discovered that not much research and exploration into the subject existed and particularly none for Pakistan's context. Detailed interviews were taken for fact finding, taking the representative (sample) of the expatriate population in Pakistan. It helped in gathering opinions and their behavior in knowledge transfer. Qualitative approach has been used in the previous exploratory research undertaken in a similar context (Qureshi & Jalbani, 2017; Santamaria-Alvarez & Śliwa, 2016). A phenomenological research approach was adopted with the aim to look for challenges to expatriates in knowledge transfer in Pakistan and that would form basis for future research. Through ethnography, expatriates were closely observed while the researcher worked alongside expatriates on foreign funded social sector projects. Moore (2016) has also used ethnography to explore the use of the flexible ethnic identity to facilitate the use of transnational knowledge networks. In this study, the challenges, cultural adjustments and knowledge sharing mechanisms of expatriates in Pakistan were observed. The observation was covert for the purpose of not affecting their behavior in knowledge sharing.

Additionally, research in similar cultural context like South Asia and Asia was studied in detail that covered the subject of knowledge transfer by expatriates. These findings were then verified in light of data collected through survey, and by observations.

Data was gathered through survey questionnaires, and MS Excel was used to record data. The data collected from the respondents was analyzed with Statistical Data for Social Sciences 17 (SPSS). Ranking method was employed using mean and standard deviation to rank the knowledge transfer tools and issue factors faced by expatriates. This method has been used in previous research as well to identify and rate various factors (Qasim, 2015).

The questionnaire was designed to investigate the formulated research questions, and consisted of three segments.

(1) The first segment deals with demographic characteristics of the respondents - questions regarding age, education, and management level of the respondents were asked.

(2) In the second segment, respondents were asked to list knowledge transfer systems and tools in place at their workplace and to rank the knowledge transfer tools used by them, as done previously by Smith (2004). For example:

Verbal Knowledge Transfer Tool: *I used telephone to communicate with coworkers who were the host -country nationals.*
Observation Knowledge Transfer Tool: *The host-country nationals who worked with me learned from what I did as well as what I said.*

(3) And in the third segment, respondents were asked to rank the challenges faced during foreign assignment. These questions were derived from the study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008).

Survey was carried out through email, as it offered the flexibility of time. It also overcame the issue of restricted access to expatriates, and the fact that their terms were finishing at different times.

3.2 Sampling Technique

Non-probability judgmental sampling was employed for the purpose of data collection. The researchers used their knowledge and professional judgment to select the respondents. Time dimension for

this study is cross-sectional. The research is conducted is a non-contrived setting.

The population for the purpose of data collection was expatriates who are working or have worked recently in Pakistan. Consultants and full time employees both would qualify for this data collection. Further organizations engaging these expatriates may be corporates, non-government organizations or donor agencies. Majority of the population resided and worked in four major cities of Pakistan: Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. Caligiuri (1997) proposed a theory of expatriate performance where expatriates completing their term were taken as success criteria, and a positive correlation was found between success and completion of term. Building on this finding, we included in our research those expatriates who had completed their assignments in Pakistan or who had a strong desire to complete their assignments.

The respondents chosen for this survey were mature professionals, and who were working at senior positions of the organizations or were lead consultants. They were assigned various assignments in Pakistan and were from different nationalities and cultures. All of them had good command over English language and so did the local work force in Pakistan thus communicating to them was not a problem. The unit of observation is the individual expatriate non-government employees working in organizations of Islamabad in Pakistan.

The questionnaire was distributed to 100 expatriates of various nationalities and of both genders, out of which the response rate was 26%. Thus the sample size for this research consisted of 26 expatriates working in various organizations that were operating in Pakistan. This sample size was found sufficient in light of previous research in this area (Santamaria-Alvarez & Śliwa, 2016).

With respect to nationality, the sample consisted of 7.7% Australians, 46.2 % Chinese, 7.7 % Jordanian and 35.8% Americans. Out of 26 respondents the gender balance was: 46.2 % male and 53.8% female. Educational level composition of the sample size was of 30.8 % graduates and 30.8 % post graduate degree holders. Further, 53.8% middle management professionals participated in the survey, 30.2% senior management professionals and % 7.7 entry level professionals. Complete characteristics of the respondents are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Characteristics of Respondents

Sample Characteristics	No.	%
Gender		
Male	12	46.2
Female	14	53.8
Education		
High school or equivalent	4	15.4
Bachelor degree	8	30.8
Masters degree	8	30.8
Ph.D.	2	7.7
Post-doctoral work	2	7.7
Management level		
Executive	0	0
Senior Manager	8	30.2
Middle Manager	14	53.8
Entry level	2	7.7
Volunteer	0	0
Country		
Australia	2	7.7
China	12	46.2
Jordan	2	7.7
USA	10	38.5

3.3 Measures

The measure for key knowledge transfer tools employed was adopted from the study of Smith (2004) and challenges faced by expatriates were taken from Santamaria-Alvarez and Śliwa (2016).

Though the research of Smith (2004) was based on American expatriates, however, the preliminary survey showed that these tools were equally applicable to Pakistan's environment. Hence the same set of tools was used to rank the knowledge transfer tools employed by the expatriates. On the other hand, based on some of the recent literature (Fong Boh, Nguyen, & Xu, 2013) and informal discussions with expatriates and observations made in the field, trust was added as an additional challenge faced by expatriates while working on foreign assignments in Pakistan.

Fifteen "Challenges Faced by Expatriates" were measured using 5 point Likert scale; where 1 represented very little frequency and 5 represented utmost frequency.

Similarly, seven "Knowledge Transfer Tools" were measured using 5 point Likert scale; where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 was for strongly agree.

4. Findings

4.1 Observation (derived from interview results)

Though substantial research was found on challenges to, drivers of and process of knowledge transfer, none related to Pakistan. This provided justification to proceed with in-depth research on the subject. Literature was reviewed on the subject in similar cultural context of Asia and South Asia. Information and opinions were gathered from expatriates working in Pakistan and their experience in knowledge transfer.

It was observed that expatriates in Pakistan are engaged for short to mid-term durations and were often required to revisit for the same task or similar task at a later time. Engaging such expensive resources affected the bottom line of the organization on the one hand and on the other hand it also showed that they were not effective in transferring knowledge to the local work force and hence had to always be recalled for the same task, assuming that there was a will to transfer knowledge.

4.2 Data Analysis

The survey results were transferred into the statistical software, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the two main variables, i.e. Knowledge Transfer Tools and Challenges faced by expatriates. Finally, ranking method (ranking based on the mean and standard deviation score) was used to identify the most important and relatively less important tools of knowledge transfer and challenges faced by expatriates.

Both the variables were tested in order to assess their reliabilities. Both scales had acceptable reliabilities, with their alphas above 0.70 criterions Nunnally and Bernstein (1978). Reliabilities were: Knowledge Transfer Tools, $\alpha = 0.75$ and Challenges faced by expatriates $\alpha = 0.80$ thereby indicating high internal construct consistency and reliability.

4.3 Ranking of Knowledge Transfer Tool and Challenge Faced by Expatriates

Using mean and standard deviation, knowledge transfer tools and challenges faced by expatriates during their assignments were ranked as shown in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3
Ranking of Knowledge Transfer Tools used by Expatriates

Rank	Knowledge transfer tools	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank of American expatriates survey
1	Verbal Communication	4.15	.543	2
2	Observation	3.85	.967	1
3	Coaching	3.77	.587	3
4	Openness	3.46	1.104	5
5	Relationship with subordinates	2.85	1.084	4
6	Support from employer	2.77	.765	7
7	Communication style	2.46	1.029	6

Note. No. of respondents, N =26

The first highly ranked factor for knowledge transfer tool employed by expatriates through which host country nationals learn was 'what the expatriate said and did'. For American expatriates survey, it stood at the second place. 'Communication through telephone' came at second for expatriates working here in Pakistan whereas it stood at the first place for American expatriates. The third knowledge transfer tool 'coaching' ranked same for both the surveys.

Table 4 shows that 'Restrictions on work permits' had the highest mean value (4). It was the biggest challenge faced by expatriates while working here in Pakistan. However, it stood sixth in the Thailand survey of expatriates. 'Trust' (3.65) came at second. 'Career advancement' (3.38) was the third factor for expatriates whereas it was at the eighth place in the Thailand survey. 'Career satisfaction' was the fourth factor in our research while it was at the twelfth place in Thailand survey.

Table 4
Ranking of Expatriates Issue Factors

Rank	Expatriate Issue Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank of Thailand expatriate survey
1	Restrictions on work permits	4.00	1.131	6
2	Trust	3.65	.846	X
3	Career Advancement	3.38	1.235	8
4	Career Satisfaction	3.35	1.056	12
5	Stress Handle Competence	3.31	1.350	13
6	Negotiation Styles	3.23	.815	14
7	Supervision	3.19	1.059	4
8	Health Condition	3.00	1.058	15
9	Work Autonomy	3.00	1.200	11
10	Adaptation of Living Styles	3.00	.693	9
11	Opportunity to Acquire New Management and Business Skills	2.81	1.297	7
12	Communication	2.65	.797	2
13	Work & National Culture	2.62	1.098	1
14	Empowerment	2.62	1.098	5
15	Appraisals	2.54	.948	10
16	Interaction with Subordinates	2.12	1.071	3

Note. No. of respondents, N =26

5. Discussion and Implications

The previous research work based on the practices of expatriates and knowledge transfer methodologies helped formulate our research questions and subsequent survey. These include Riusala and Suutari (2004) who explored the type of knowledge transferred and the role of expatriates in the transfer of this knowledge. Russell and Dickie (2007) identified that when Canadian expatriates are immersed in NGOs in Indonesia, they faced challenges that affected their work results, and success was not only attributable to their individual capability. Barry Hocking et al. (2004) suggested that expatriate assignments should be considered in light of the strategic purposes and the outcomes. Davenport et al. (1998) identified eight key factors for creating and sharing knowledge.

Smith (2004) attributed transfer of knowledge to *language, observation, imitation and practice* and noted the *importance of networks* for exchange of knowledge. These factors of success have been included in our survey to evaluate the success of knowledge transmittal. She further noted that successful expatriate experience is attributed to favorable personal evaluations. Levin and Cross (2004) surveyed three companies and proposed a knowledge exchange model based on trust and concluded that competence-based trust facilitated tacit knowledge.

Relevance to Pakistan's context was found in the study by Russell and Dickie (2007) where they elaborated on Powerfulness (*due to their positioning as a foreigner*) and Powerlessness (*due to their awareness of minority status and large cultural differences*). The study further identified that Human Resource (HR) department invariably leaves expats to their designs after expatriation; they suggest that to help organizations and expatriates through this dilemma of paradoxes, their experiences, feelings and thoughts need to be explored.

These key research questions were derived from the reviewed literature. The key knowledge transfer tools employed were further explored and the challenges faced by expatriates were explored. Furthermore, their applicability within the context of Pakistan was assessed. Furthering Riusala and Suutari (2004) work, where the kind of knowledge transferred, the role and challenges faced by expatriate managers were identified; this research work

will focus on its applicability within the cultural context of Pakistan.

Fifteen personal and work related issues experienced by expatriates were investigated. Our research focused on these fifteen obstacles and a comparative analysis was conducted between this research work and the one conducted within the context of Pakistan. Out of the 15, the five obstacles that were rated highest and most common and applicable to our culture were *cultural differences, communication styles, relationships with subordinates, supervisory difficulties and inability to empower*.

"Knowledge Transfer Challenges"

The challenges identified by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) were found to be true within the context of Pakistan; however the ranking for each challenge varied. Further 'trust' was a challenge found to be true for Pakistan's context, but was not taken into account in the aforementioned study.

As an outcome of the survey, the five (5) top-ranked challenges in the context of Pakistan were:

"Restrictions on work permits"

Restrictions on work permits were termed as the most important challenge by expatriates in Pakistan, as they would get visas for durations much shorter than their assignments and for renewal, they would have to go back to their country of origin to re-apply. The entire process could take between a few weeks to a few months. Not only disrupting their work product, they found it to impede the smooth knowledge transfer process as well. This challenge ranked sixth in the study of Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) which was specific to Thailand. The difference is attributed to the different visa policies in the two countries.

"Trust"

The second highly ranked factor for Pakistan through this study was trust; this was not investigated into by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). This finding supports the observation that due to the political and security issues to expatriates in Pakistan, they were advised to maintain a distance from local people as well as to avoid exposure to crowded areas. That instilled a fear factor and enhanced the need to build trust before knowledge transfer is conducted. Further, all expatriates working in Pakistan were shadowed by

government intelligence agencies; which stopped the creation of a mutual relationship of trust between the nationals and the expatriates.

"Career Advancement"

Career advancement was applicable to Pakistan's context and ranked third during this survey, while it was ranked eighth for expatriates working in Thailand by the study conducted by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). This made it clear that expatriates value their career highly which supports the point that human resource management needs to play an effective role in expatriate's selection and career development so that it facilitates their work product - knowledge transfer being one such work product.

It may be concluded that if knowledge transfer was clear objective of the work product then career progression incentives would facilitate in knowledge transfer by expatriates at their international assignments.

"Career Satisfaction"

Career satisfaction was ranked in the first five percentile by expatriates working in Pakistan, while in Thailand, study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) it was ranked 12th. For Thailand, both career related challenges to work were not ranked high. While in this study for Pakistan both career related challenges ranked high in the list for knowledge transfer as a work product.

It may be concluded that it was important for expatriates to value their work and gain a job satisfaction for them to deliver their work product, for the purpose of this study their work product being knowledge transfer.

Stress handling competence ranked fifth (5) for Pakistan in this study, while it was insignificant and ranked 13th for Thailand in the study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). It showed that stress while working in Pakistan was significant while it was low comparatively in Thailand hence expatriates found it a challenge to transfer knowledge if stress handling competency was low. This is an obvious outcome of the security issues for expatriates in Pakistan.

It may be concluded that a stress free environment and the capacity to handle stress is an important factor for effective work

products – such as knowledge transfer, especially in the case of international assignments.

The middle tier i.e. the next five highly ranked challenges surveyed in this study were:

"Negotiation Styles"

Negotiation style was ranked sixth in the list for Pakistan. This confirms the challenges specific to cultural differences where expatriates found the difference in negotiation styles a challenge to their work (knowledge transfer being an outcome of their work), the same challenge was ranked lowest at level fourteen for Thailand in the study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). For Pakistan, personal relations is important even at work, and that affects their negotiation style which is misunderstood by other cultures.

"Supervision"

Supervision of tasks was not highly ranked in the list of challenges for Pakistan while in Thailand expatriates found supervisory issues a major impediment to knowledge transfer and ranked it fourth (4) in the study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). As noted in their study, Thai's reactive working style needed supervision and expatriates found it a major challenge during work, while Pakistanis are known to prefer team work, the expatriates too ranked need for supervision to be not an issue and didn't find it a challenge to the work product.

"Health Condition"

For Pakistan, health seemed to be an issue for the expatriates although not ranked very high in the list, they did attribute work outcome (knowledge transfer in this case) challenges to health issues, while in the comparative study for Thailand by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008), it was the least significant. One reason for this difference could be the sample size for Pakistan to have been taken for Islamabad which has very high pollen count in 2 seasons and many residents suffer from pollen allergies and hence they found health to be an important issue.

"Work Autonomy"

Work autonomy was ranked ninth (9) and eleventh (11) for Pakistan and Thailand (Singhapong & Muenjohn, 2008) for their respective studies, which shows that expatriates found delivering

their work (knowledge transfer in this case) not an issue if worked in groups or worked independently .

"Adaptation of Living Styles"

Adaptation to living styles was also not an issue and did not affect knowledge transfer for both the countries. It was observed as the sample size was drawn from Islamabad which being the capital of Pakistan offers a very cosmopolitan living style; hence expatriates did not find it affecting knowledge transfer. Similar is the case for Thailand, by the nature of city life there, expatriates did not find the adaptation much of an issue as observed by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008).

"Opportunity to Acquire New Management and Business Skills"

Expatriates working in Thailand according to study by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) found opportunities to acquire new management and business skills a bigger challenge than expatriates in Pakistan. Good communication skills in English language by locals in Pakistan attributes to the acquisition of new skills not a challenge and hence not impeding knowledge transfer.

The least challenging factors to delivering work products (knowledge transfer being one of them) that were ranked lowest for Pakistan's context were found to have been ranked much differently for Thailand in the study of Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008):

"Communication"

Communication was the second highly ranked challenge faced by expatriates in Thailand whereas for expatriates working in Pakistan, it stands at twelfth rank. This supports the observation that English is the medium of instruction in Pakistan and used in official work, hence the workforce is well versed in the English language and as such it did not pose to be a barrier to transferring knowledge.

"Work and national culture"

Work and national culture were highly ranked by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) in their survey of expatriates in Thailand, where as it ranked at the thirteenth place for expatriates in Pakistan.

"Empowerment"

Empowerment ranked at fifth place by expatriates in Thailand in the study conducted by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) while it was not viewed much as a major challenge (ranked fourteenth) to knowledge transfer in Pakistan by this study. There could be two reasons for this – either the expatriates were already sufficiently empowered and did not understand how the lack of empowerment could affect knowledge transfer, or else in their opinion and experience knowledge transfer was independent of the fact that the employee was empowered to carry out a task. This needed to be explored further for clarity by taking mixed sample of empowered and less empowered knowledge workers.

"Appraisals"

Appraisals although ranked tenth and low in Thailand by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008), it also fared one of the least important (ranked fifteenth) for this study conducted for Pakistan. This shows that knowledge transfer by expatriates is not dependent on their appraisals, and they did not find appraisals as a means of control mechanism to knowledge transfer.

"Interactions with subordinates"

This challenge was ranked as the least important at sixteenth place in this study for Pakistan, whereas it was ranked as the third biggest challenge faced by the expatriates in Thailand by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008). This can be attributed to the ease of communication in the English language by the locals in Pakistan, which made interaction with the locals comparatively easier and hence was not viewed as a challenge to transfer knowledge.

Some contrasting and complimenting findings of this research to that conducted by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008), were:

The following challenges ranked high for this study on Pakistan and low for Thailand by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008): "Career Advancement", "Career Satisfaction", "Health Conditions", "Stress Handling Competence" and "Negotiation Styles".

The challenges ranked low for Pakistan in this study and high for Thailand by Singhapong and Muenjohn (2008) were: "Communication", "Work & National Culture", "Empowerment" and "Interactions with Subordinates".

The challenges ranked in the middle by expatriated in both countries were: "Adaptation of Living Styles", and "Opportunity to Acquire New Management & Business Skills".

Comparable importance was placed to the following challenges "Work Autonomy", "Restrictions on work permits", and "Supervision".

Knowledge Transfer Tools

For investigating the tools used for knowledge transfer, the measure was adopted by Smith (2004). Additionally open ended questions were used to capture their opinions and existing tools and systems in place. The findings of our research are very close to the findings by Smith (2004).

The four out of seven knowledge transfer tools that were ranked highest during this study were:

"Verbal Communication"

During the survey, expatriates chose telephone as the highest used means of communication with coworkers who were host country nationals.

"Observation"

The second approach was the observation method. According to them, the host country worker observed how they performed and learned through observation.

"Coaching"

Expatriates considered the coaching and teaching as a good mechanism to transfer knowledge and thus it was ranked third in a list of seven tools.

"Openness"

Expatriates responded that they shared openly the relevant news and information with their co-workers in host country, and ranked their openness also a means to transfer knowledge effectively.

Following tools were ranked lower as compared to the others.

"Relationship with subordinates"

Expatriates confirmed from their responses that friendly relationships with the co-workers also helped in knowledge transfer, although it was not an important and highly rated tool.

"Support from employer"

Support from employer was recognized by some of the respondents; however they didn't use the support of employer to transfer knowledge in most of the cases.

"Communication style"

Communication was recognized as an important tool, however, they didn't encounter problems on the job because they couldn't or found it difficult to explain how to do things to the host country coworkers. This is because of the reason that English is the medium of instruction at most of the institutions in Pakistan and is also the official language for organizations and government.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of the present study have implications for both theory and practice. First, it shows as to how to ensure smooth transition of knowledge transfer from the expatriates to the locals. It provides an insight to what are the biggest challenges faced by expatriates in knowledge transfer. It also maintains that facilitation sessions should be conducted in order to make these expatriates feel at home. Further, training should be provided to expatriates to prepare them for what is expected from them during the knowledge transfer process. The research also concludes that the use of effective knowledge transfer tools should be ensured and the expatriates should become aware of them. This research has laid the ground work for future investigations into this field of knowledge transfer in Pakistan. As outlined above, it provides an insight into the expatriate environment of Pakistan, and for the first time provides an in-depth look at the challenges faced and tools used to overcome them involved in knowledge transfer within this unique environment.

There are also practical implications of this research for HR and operations managers. HR managers can work on reducing the

tensions that arise due to the challenges faced by these expatriates. They can also arrange awareness sessions for these expatriates to improve their communication and build strong relationship with their co-workers. Furthermore, trainings can be arranged to address these issues and for the acceptance of the tools. Through these techniques the managers can improve the knowledge transfer between the expatriates and the local workers.

6.   Conclusions, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The objectives of the present study were (1) to in depth analyze the challenges faced by expatriates in knowledge transfer and (2) the tools that facilitate knowledge transfer. In this study, expatriates are defined as professionals who are working or have worked in Pakistan recently. This study also forms basis for future in depth study to enhance knowledge transfer and improve knowledge management practices to provide competitive advantage to organizations operating in Pakistan.

Very little existing research on knowledge transfer by expatriates in Pakistan was not available; this document will also contribute towards building knowledge around this important topic. This exploratory research contributed to enhancing the knowledge in this field, and increased awareness around the subject amongst the respondents and also paved way for future research within the Pakistan context.

Based on results, the following conclusions were drawn:

First, this research suggested that the knowledge that resides with expatriates is of immense importance and needs to be shared and transferred across boundaries while on international assignment as well as when they repatriate.

Additionally as tacit knowledge is difficult to measure and record, and the fact that knowledge transfer itself is not an easy quantitative subject, questionnaire was based on similar studies carried out for similar context societies (Asia/ South Asia).

"Verbal Communication", "Observation", "Coaching", and "Openness" were identified as the four highly ranked knowledge transfer tools used by Expatriates in Pakistan. High importance to verbal communication as a tool is in line with how Pakistan's culture depends on personal relations and face-to-face interactions. Further, due to the fact that English language competency is high for

knowledge workers in Pakistan, hence the ease in verbal communication in English contributed to this being a chosen and preferred knowledge transfer tool.

Amongst the fifteen challenges to knowledge transfer five top ranked challenges to Pakistan's context were: "Restrictions on work permits", "Trust", "Career Advancement", "Career Satisfaction", and "Stress Handling Competence". It is concluded that culture and government policies are very important factors to expatriates working in Pakistan. It may also be concluded that a stress free environment and the capacity to handle stress is an important factor for effective work products – such as knowledge transfer, especially in the case of international assignments.

It could be concluded that if knowledge transfer was a clear objective of the work product then career progression incentives would facilitate in knowledge transfer by expatriates at their international assignments. Further it may be concluded that it was important for expatriates to value their work in order to deliver their work product more efficiently; their work product being knowledge transfer in this research.

Although majority of the challenges faced by expatriates in Pakistan were similar to those faced by expats in Thailand, but they differed in their ranking. This re-enforced the suggestion that additional work needs to be done specific to Pakistan as the political, social and cultural variations do exist within similar high context societies.

"Communication", "Work and national culture", "Empowerment", "Appraisals", and "Interactions with subordinates" were ranked among the least important challenges to knowledge transfer by expatriates in Pakistan.

6.1 Challenges and Limitations

This exploratory study does not cover personal challenges faced by expatriates while working in Pakistan.

The first limitation of this research was accessibility to expatriate managers as they lived and worked in a closed circle. Most of them worked on assignments for a year or two and hence the network established for the purpose of this research did not sustain the life of the research work.

The second limitation of this research was the scarcity of existing literature and research around the subject for Pakistan.

The challenge faced during this exploratory study was the political environment that made access to expatriates difficult, the level of expatriates who came to Pakistan was affected and in some cases their term working on-site had to be changed to off-site consultations due to the prevailing situation.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

The variables were measured at the individual level – measure at team and organizational level could be further explored in another research. It is suggested that the survey could be extended to include more respondents. Future work could also investigate institutional and structural impediments to knowledge transfer.

Existing work could be further extended to include personal challenges faced by expatriates while working in Pakistan, which may indirectly affect their work and knowledge transfer objectives. Additional variables which could be explored are:

- Role and position of co-workers as drivers or challengers of knowledge transfer.
- Benchmarking the knowledge capability required to be transferred.
- Communication barriers.
- Perceptions, attitudes and behavioral responses of locals as receivers of knowledge

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