TOWARDS LIMINALITY COMPETENCE: A MIGRANT'S TALENT IDENTITY NARRATIVES FOR RE-IMAGINING GLOBAL TALENT MANAGEMENT

Purpose:
The purpose of this paper is to answer two research questions: *How does a self-initiated migrant's talent identity work operate in relation to their culture, the societies in which they live, their interpersonal relationships and their tacit knowledge development?* and *How can global talent management be re-imagined in light of this?*

Design/methodology/approach
This co-constructed autoethnography is produced from reflexive, dyadic interviews and text 'conversations' with a self-initiated migrant doing 'global talent identity work' and uses narrative analysis to investigate how *liminal competence* is developed across the life cycle.

Findings
We show how talent identity work is rooted in the lived, meaningful experiences of individual talent, from childhood to adult life in a pandemic. We add to knowledge about Covid-19 experiences of self-initiated migrants, uncover poignant examples of the role of migrant ethnic and knowledge discrimination and identify lessons for managerial practice in engendering liminality competence by combining global talent management and knowledge management.

Originality
Examining the connection between *talent identity work* and *liminality competence*, we show how an individual's talent might be wasted through different forms of discrimination and highlight how ethnic discrimination during a pandemic points the way to positive changes in talent knowledge management initiatives. We suggest ways in which ethnic and knowledge discrimination might be addressed through talent management strategies.

Practical implications
Lessons are drawn for global talent management strategies that appreciate and support individual talent ethnic and knowledge inclusion of under-appreciated migrant talent.

Keywords: Global talent management; Liminality competence; Self-initiated migrant; Talent identity work; COVID-19, Narrative analysis, Knowledge discrimination, ethnic discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

With continuing challenges to the delivery of corporate strategic goals and an agenda driven by a global lack of key knowledge and skills, there is increasing interest in global talent management as a way of satisfying demand for talent (Scullion *et al*., 2020). Organizational talent is defined as those individuals who can demonstrate both high levels of performance alongside high potential for career development (Collings *et al*., 2018; p.545). Global talent management is defined as 'all organizational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles on a global scale' (Scullion *et al*., 2010; p.106).

In organisations with global connectivity, those recognised as 'global talent' are expected to demonstrate global knowledge competencies and work experience that enable knowledge creation, sharing and application across the enterprise (Tansley and Kirk, 2018). However, when designed mainly around corporate agendas with the aim of employing 'the best and the brightest', this can lead to both an imbalance of organizational and individual goals and make talent management elitist, normative and discriminatory (Farndale *et al.*, 2014).

Global talent operating in liminality

Organisational talent is said to be in an exciting yet unsettling liminal state, being betwixt-and-between stable career posts, sitting temporarily at each job level, always expected to progress in career terms and with an unclear perspective of what the next move will involve (Tansley and Tietze, 2013). Surviving in this state requires extensive identity work.

Global talent identity work is rooted in the context of an individual's cultural history, the societies in which they live(d), their work relationships and their interpersonal relationships. We examine this phenomenon using narrative analysis to analyse the states of liminality experienced by Robert, a Taiwanese self-initiated migrant (SiM), as he reaches final settlement in the UK. We uncover how having valuable tacit knowledge and therefore high career potential is not necessarily a guarantee to be recognised as organizational talent.

Next, we demonstrate how having a 'mistaken identity' during the COVID-19 pandemic can seriously stall a SiM's commitment to being seen as a global talent in their host country. Then we identify how building liminality competence with one's home country compatriots can ease the stress of a liminar in a host country organization. Finally, we provide lessons for global talent management practice.

We ask two questions: *How does a person's talent identity work operate in relation to their culture, the societies in which they live, their interpersonal relationships and their tacit knowledge development? How can global talent management be re-imagined in light of this?*

This study adds to the knowledge of, and extends the debates about, self-initiated migrants moving towards liminality competence and provides suggestions for a more inclusive approach to global talent management.

Reviewing the literatures on self-initiated migrants, talent identity work and global talent management

Our goals for the literature review were to consider how SiMs are defined in the management literature and to identify talent identity construction issues in relation to SiMs operating in liminality transition to a host country.

The literature on self-initiated migrants: an example process

Taking the SiM literature review as an example, keywords *self-initiated migrants; expatriates* and *migrant identity* were used to search in three databases (Proquest, Academic Search Premier and ABI/Inform), and also in Google Scholar and Google Academic Alerts. From this, we found 1,380 academic articles in peer-reviewed journals, then excluded articles not in journals cited in the AJG 2018 guide. Eighty-five journal articles remained and details such as: title, author(s), keywords and abstracts were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. A traffic light colour-coding system was then applied to the list of articles. This resulted in: 37 journal articles highlighted in green which were directly related to our goals, 33 amber for those of peripheral interest, and 15 red for those not relevant.

We followed the same process to identify and analyse papers on identity work, talent and liminality transitions. Those categorised as 'green' in this set provided another 44 publications, amounting to 81 references in total which were subsequently used. At this stage it was clear there was limited research in the areas of SiMs' talent identity work.

Self-initiated migrants

Many studies focus on 'expatriates' (employees working in a host country) and their transition to different work practices and challenges within a multinational workforce and adjustment to their new life (Harrison and Michailova, 2012). Definitions of, and research focus on, self-initiated *migrants* are limited. However, there have recently been calls to fill this gap and widen research to skilled migrants (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2018). Self-initiated migrants (SiMs) have been defined more broadly than expatriates: as self-organised and living in the host country, perhaps students temporarily with an organisation (Maury, 2020), or someone who is employed, either permanently or temporarily. They may be supported by family, or a non-governmental organisation or by a host organization. Their intent is to be in the host country long-term (Przytuła, 2016).

There has been an examination of *self-initiated* expatriates (Vaiman and Haslberger, 2013), but here the focus is on the professional high flyers who are identified as organizational talent. In relation to talent management, we argue that self-initiated migrants, although having potential as talent, are not necessarily formally categorised as such in organizations.

With regard to reasons for migrants leaving their home country, studies show that they leave to work overseas for a number of reasons: economic/better salary package (Larsen et al, 2005), career prospects/progression (Kozhevnkiov, 2021; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011), to protest against erosion of social and human rights (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009) and 'to regain recognition and self-respect while also protesting the erosion of social and human rights in their home country' (Groutsis *et al*., 2019, p864).

There have been several studies on the adjustment and transition of migrants from the home country to a host country, focusing mainly on migrants' challenges, adaptability and adjustment at work (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2020, Anthias, 2002; Ramsey and Lorenz, 2020 and Kirk, 2020), adjustment at work and their identity struggles.(Harrison and Michailova, 2012; Ridgway and Kirk, 2021 and Pio, 2005), as well as the need for social support (Jiang and Korczynski, 2016).

However, in the transition and adjustment of SiM talent identity, there is little mention of SiM *talents*' rationale for leaving their home country, their career trajectory in talent management programmes or the subtle discrimination in the workplace through discounting professional knowledge. Also, at the time of the study, there was no literature on Asian talents' experience of ethnic discrimination during the time of Covid-19 (Although Bapuji *et al.* (2020) comment on the impact of the pandemic on societal inequality in management practices such as job design and the relationship between employment and migrant identity construction (Rydzik and Anitha, 2020; Maury, 2020).

Talent identity work

Identity work has been defined as engagement in 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p 1165) of the self. A person's identity is not a static phenomenon, but is in a process of continuous construction through identity work (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002), with identity work never being completed. Multiple factors influence migrants' adjustment and adaptability, including challenges at home and work which could ultimately impact their identity work (Essers *et al*., 2013, Pio, 2005, Liversage, 2009; van den Broek and Groutsis, 2017).

There are few studies on the concept of *talent* identity work (Tansley and Teitze, 2013; Kirk, 2020). Like work identity, talent identity relates to a person's sense of who they are, is a synthesis of 'various identities, including the person's organisational, professional and social identities' (Saayman and Crafford, 2011; p1) and is constituted through their 'positioning within the particular relations of power in the workplace' (Wallace, 2002, p2). Talent identity work forms in two specific contexts: at work when being recognised as talent (or not), and away from work, when engaged in life projects by drawing on personal capabilities and the desire to reach self-actualisation.

A SiM's talent identity work is also undertaken as they develop their social identity in transition between home and host country. Talent identity work can begin at school, when someone gets a sense of their gifts and talents, then develops as they work their way through life's challenges. These challenges can be turbulent, destabilizing and are a catalyst for identity work, leading to feelings of dissonance and incoherence (Saayman and Crafford, 2011). When conflicts occur, talent needs to negotiate tensions that impact on their identity, both at work and at home (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006).

Talent and knowledge

Little mention is made in the literature about the tacit knowledge that talent of any kind brings to their work environment.

Liminality

As they journey to their host country, migrants move away from their home base into a 'betwixt-and-between' social state (Turner, 1982). Studying cultural rituals as people moved from one set of social circumstances to another, anthropologist Arnold van Gennep called this state 'liminality' (van Gennep, 1909/1960). For a SiM, this involves addressing the challenges of moving (Neuhauser, 2018) to a particular society (Ramsey and Lorenz, 2020) or location (Anthias, 2002), making sense of complex social dynamics (van den Broek and Groutsis, 2017); dealing with influences of/on related family and friends (Essers *et al.*, 2013); considering career prospects (Kozhevnikov, 2021; Van Laer and Janssens, 2011); considering aspects of diversity and quality of working life (Timming, 2017), making adjustments at work (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2020) and dealing with identity struggles.

There are several ways to conceptualise liminality, but in this paper we frame it as a *perceptual* threshold (Larson, 2014, p347), where the SiM perceives and narrativises their experience in the limens, whilst being in a position of ambiguity and uncertainty (Beech, 2011, p3; Dorow and Jean, 2021).

Kirk (2020) has described how organisational talent construct and reconstruct their identities in an on-going cycle. We take her notion further in this study, using the framework of phases of liminality to explore how the paradoxical condition of identity in-betweenness can either prevent or enable individuals to change their old ways of being and begin to develop new identities as they reach the final phase - *liminality competence*.

RESEARCH METHODS

Co-constructed autoethnographic narrative inquiry and analysis

This paper comprises co-constructed autoethnographic accounts of Robert, a Taiwanese SiM to the UK. Autoethnography is 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience' (Ellis e*t al.*, 2011, p. 273). Autoethnography is appropriate for examining the identity work of a talent liminal like Robert through the collection of reflexive, narrative data of his embodied, meaningful experiences.

Co-constructed autoethnographic studies involve a 'situated individual' composing highly reflexive self-stories which are then open to dynamic inquiry (often with related theoretical lenses) by their co-author(s) in order to co-create meaningful, emerging narratives of social practice. Through this, the autoethnographer gains a critical perspective of their situation, and co-authors and readers gain 'a deep understanding of the situated practice under investigation' (see Kempster and Stewart, 2012, p320).

Because we see the self as narratively constructed (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000), we take talent identity work as narrative work composed of life stories with themes, plots and characters, each narrative serving 'as a primary way of fashioning personal identity' (Taylor and Cranton, 2012; p.426). Narratives evoke personal, experiential and emotional experiences in situated events (Fernando *et al*, 2020). Individuals use narratives in their social life to continually form, express and explain their identity (Brown *et al.*, 2008; Somers, 1994), because it is 'within these temporal and multi-layered narratives that identities are formed; hence narrative identity is processual and relational' (Somers and Gibson, 1993, p.37). The

continual construction of talent identity is an evolving development process (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) of on-going engagement of individuals in their identity formation work,within their context.

Background of Robert, a self-initiated migrant

Robert moved from Taiwan to the UK as a postgraduate student in 2009, with a university degree in pharmacy and a MSc in pharmacology, majoring in neuroscience. In the UK he gained a MSc in integrative neuroscience and a MPhil in Human Development (stem cell biology). His experience in the fields of anatomy, biochemistry and electrophysiology has led to work in the multidisciplinary field of scientific and clinical research in both research centres and government bodies. Robert is fluent in three languages, Mandarin, English and Japanese, and has interests in plant biology, gardening and history.

In focusing upon only one individual in this study, we posit that a co-constructed autoethnographic approach does not orient from 'capturing' facts and making generalisations, but rather in presenting the meanings inherent in lived experience. Studies using autoethnography demonstrate how the themes raised in the narratives construct and interpret individual experiences which are related to broader social structures (Watson, 2008; p.121 in Fernando *et al*, 2020; p.782). Equally importantly, co-constructed autoethnographic work of migration journey narratives such as Robert's enable and encourage those who are misidentified and disadvantaged to also tell their stories (Fernando *et al*., 2020, p.783).

This study began with regular conversations between friends [author 1 and 3] about life as Taiwanese migrant professionals in the UK and including the experiences and challenges of being a SiM during the period of Covid-19. These conversations initiated the idea for this paper which led to the subsequent research focus and related interviews and conversations, but they are not part of the narrative data we present here.

All of the authors of this paper are SiMs. Author 1 and author 3 were both born in Taiwan, have similar cultural backgrounds and live in the UK. British-born author 2 is now a SiM in Australia. These cultural similarities between researchers enabled rapport-building and facilitated authenticity in the narrative inquiry and analysis process. Clearly, there are serious ethical considerations when using friends as research subjects (Brewis, 2014). Throughout the study, Robert agreed with co-authors which data should be taken into the study and which should not, thus the sensitivity and confidentiality of personal information was maintained and vraisemblance ensured.

Gathering research material through narrative inquiry

In this study, narratives were formed, created and generated through interactive and reflexive discussions, interactive dialogue and self-reflection (Fernando *et al*, 2020). Multiple methods were adopted in generating and analysing the reflective self-written narratives (Fernando *et al*, 2020), including: interviews (Beech, 2011, Callagher *et al*, 2021) and use of technological platforms (Brewis, 2014), such as emails and WhatsApp text messages. Such interactive connections allowed additional time and space for Robert to reflect on his experiences and for all three collaborative autoethnographers to frame co-constructed narratives (Callagher *et al* 2021).

In June, 2020, Robert agreed to join the study and provide his authoethnographic accounts. He initially produced two reflexive narrative accounts, chronologically recording his SiM

journey, starting with his childhood memories and ending with his recent life/work experiences. Two 2-hour, recorded, in-depth interviews were then conducted, one by author 1 in Mandarin, translated by her and verified by Robert for accuracy (Brewis, 2014). Robert's second interview was jointly conducted in English by authors 1 and 2 and comprised follow-up questions drawn from the previously told self- reflexive narratives. Both interviews were transcribed.

Over 600 WhatsApp text messages between Robert and Author 1 over a period of 28 days from July 2020 to February 2021 allowed the instant capture of currently happening events, clarification of the narratives and enabled a first check on the efficacy of the whole life story.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis was used by [Author 1] and [Author 2] to meta-analyse all the qualitative research material and identify themes and narrative threads running through and across Robert's stories. A final collection of narrative vignettes was created and each vignette produced was discussed with Robert for accuracy at all stages of the analysis and writing up. Robert reviewed the vignettes and commented on any misinterpretations of experiences and revisions were made. He then accepted, provided further clarification or re-wrote elements that did not reflect the true situation. These stories were then iteratively interrogated [by author 1], immersively analysed and a series of 'plots' created by combining and ordering essential elements into a temporally organized whole (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.5). The result was a set of co-constructed autoethnographic narratives majoring on how one person engages with the meaning they give to their liminal life experiences during talent identity work.

In the next section we present the narratives relating to Robert's three phases towards liminality competence.

TOWARDS LIMINALITY COMPETENCE IN A TALENT IDENTITY WORK

In Phase 1, we see Robert transitioning from Taiwanese citizen to becoming a SiM in the UK. In Phase 2, Robert experiences the shock of the limens, but slowly begins to develop liminality competence. In phase 3, as Robert's orientation towards work and a career wanes, he shifts to deepening his connection with his new UK home whilst also finding a re-connection to his home country, thereby developing his liminality competence in a way that enables him to cope and thrive.

Phase 1: Moving towards liminality

Robert's separation from his home context occurred over time as his ethnic and self identities formed and interacted to create a growing talent identity awareness:

> *I was born and nurtured in Taiwan, I have no connection, belief or sense of belonging to China like my parents do. We have very different views and values in life.*

Robert's parents were teachers in senior positions in Taiwanese educational institutions and had high expectations of Robert's academic performance. Robert's self-regulation process

entailed reproducing, normalising and internalising social norms (Esser *et al.*, 2013) and he found this highly stressful:

> *My daily schedule was planned and given to me by my parents. ... I had little or no room to express my view or opinions, I cannot challenge their decision...*
>
> *At the school, there was little concern about our welfare, just about examination results and how engaged we were in lessons and exam preparation. It was all about academic performance.*

For Robert's parents, their son achieving a high level of academic achievement was a way to generate parental trust and confidence in what they wanted his talents to be. This pressure continued as he moved to university studies:

> *In my generation… it is all about our career and about how successful our life is going to be.*
>
> *A medical-related discipline has better career prospects than any other subject, but I did not reach the required standard and instead I got the score for a pharmacy course in the medical school. I spent one year as a research assistant and another 2.5 years preparing for a Master course entry exam. I was in the top six percent to gain a place in the course.*

Robert's talent identity began to blossom when he went to university. After finishing his studies, Robert gained employment in Taiwan, but his frustration was growing:

> *Academically, I'd achieved what my parents would be proud of. Their son was admitted to the best university in Taiwan. But this did not free me from the 'who am I?' struggle. Instead, our relationship was getting worse (different political views). ...At this point, I knew the only way out is to leave and go somewhere as far away as possible.*

Robert felt pushed from his family environment and pulled towards another life abroad where his talents could be celebrated, so he planned an exit strategy. It was time for him to move away from home. In 2009 he moved to Edinburgh to study neuroscience.

Phase 2: Living in liminality

Moving to a new country heralds a challenging liminal phase and a SiM has to find their place in the limens of a new society. Socialisation plays an important part in migrants' adjustment and their transition to the new country.

Ethnic discrimination narratives

Language is important in the process of socialisation (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009) and the quality of life and work that an individual migrant might experience (Lawson *et al.*, 2019; Tharenou and Kulik, 2020). Robert found that, whatever the level of language competence, language prejudice can still exist as a subtle form of ethnic discrimination:

Language to me is the major challenge as an immigrant in the UK. English is not my first language, but I am fluent in English and have no issue in understanding others or making others understand me...

In my work I have been the only non-EU citizen in the team and department (not only in my current job). Managers and colleagues have often made jokes about the cultural difference between them and I. To me, it has merely been a beautiful and elaborate lie to cover up their xenophobia.

When I made a grammatical mistake, they would pick on me and focus on it. They would often ignore my contributions to the work I do and the efforts I put into the project. I also received inappropriate comments about my work. In my view, this was a form of ethnic bullying.

Banter and joking has a place at work, but not if discrimination is at its heart. For migrants, challenges about linguistic proficiency is a factor in individual adjustment and settlement (Tharenou and Kulik, 2020).

Ethnic discrimination during Covid-19

When the Covid pandemic was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, UK lockdown restrictions were introduced and strict rules of limited outdoor activity applied. People who had experienced SARS, or those from East Asia, would commonly wear a mask as protection.

In the UK colleagues I have worked mainly with European or American biomedical scientists. Several thought COVID-19 was merely a new type of flu and the Far East Asian countries were exaggerating the situation. People even said that they would like to punch the faces of Asians who were walking on the streets with facial masks.

During the early days of the pandemic, several incidents were reported by the media of individuals being racially attacked on the street (BBC, 2020, D'Angelo *et al.*, 2020). Robert experienced six such incidents and felt unaccepted by the community based on his Asian physical appearance and wearing a mask:

Four times car drivers rolled down the window and showed their two fingers or the middle finger at me and once I had a full can of beer thrown at me. One guy on the street called me 'China Virus' and then swore at me for 20 minutes. He followed me for six traffic lights close to my flat. I had to go to a shop and pretend to buy something. He just wouldn't let me go!

Another time, as I took a bin out one evening, a large-built guy shouted at me 'Wuhan' 'Wuhan''Wuhan'.

I feel the attacks were because of my ethnic background, the way I look, and in particular, that I wore a mask. The terrifying experience of being attacked, without anyone standing up to support and help, made me feel so vulnerable.

Robert had left his home country to escape from social pressure and expectation. This was not just about his career prospects, nor earning greater financial incentives, but about being

free in a safe environment to be himself (Prasad, 2014; Groutsis *et al.*, 2019) and have his talents and knowledge recognised and justly rewarded.

Knowledge discrimination narratives

Robert attempted many times to raise concerns at work about the link between SARS and COVID-19, but his tacit and professional knowledge and experience were repeatedly discounted.

> *When Severe Respiratory Acute Syndrome (SARS) broke out in Taiwan in 2003, I was a Pharmacist in an Ear Nose and Throat Clinic. I followed the progression of the disease to test my view that there was a possibility of a pandemic occurring. I raised this topic several times.*
>
> *…the Europeans and Americans simply ignored how dangerous it would be. I had the impression that if a pandemic broke out in Europe or America, those countries would be hit harshly. And this turned out to be the case. People have not been prepared to deal with COVID-19 at all.*

With the street and work experiences, by now Robert was feeling demoralized that his knowledge was unappreciated by both his employer and his adopted compatriots in his host country:

> *All of this made me decide I would never contribute to this community, I have got nothing to do with these people [local community], people who have no cultural awareness.*

Phase 3: Developing liminality competence

As Robert begins to acclimatise to life in a permanent state of liminality, he was reaching a form of 'incorporation' (van Gennep, 1960), a gradual process of 'dawning', when someone realises they are different from who they used to be and begin to change into someone who is better fitted to the new life (Beech, 2011). In essence, they are developing *liminality competence* to address challenges in their transient work mobility (Sturdy *et al.*, 2009, p636 in Borg and Söderlund, 2015, p263). Gaining liminality competence can provide possibilities 'for greater opportunities to transfer lessons learned and knowledge across organizational contexts' (Borg and Söderlund, 2015; p263).

Substituting work narratives for volunteering narratives

As Robert's commitment to work faded, he sought instead to apply his knowledge and talents by volunteering at the Taiwanese Scotland Association, a charity supporting cross-cultural activities and business collaborations, thus re-connecting through a sense of belonging in the host country (Jiang and Korczynski, 2016). This connection renewed Robert's Taiwanese identity, broadened his social network to provide emotional support and helped him develop a sense of acceptance and belonging to the two places:

> *At last, I am doing something meaningful. ..During Covid-19, we Taiwanese donated 4,500 surgical facial masks to various Scottish [charity and care home] organisations.*

Developing liminality competence through re-connection with the home country

Robert began to develop a love of cooking Taiwanese meals and this helped him maintain a link with the home country and to also introduce Taiwanese values and culture to new friends in the host country. Connection to home is an important part of migrant talent identity adjustment and transition, so they retain valuable memories. Robert embraced the concept of home in two ways: by home-making and by reviving memories of his home country. An individual can then revive their emotional attachment to home through personal interests and thereby manage their liminal identity (Ridgway and Kirk, 2021).

In the incorporation phase, connection with the home country is multidimensional, contributing to the construction of an individual's place identity which helps with their adjustment and settlement where they live/work (Rojas Gaviria, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2019).

DISCUSSION

In this paper we have studied the nexus between talent identity work and the growing liminality competence of Robert, a self-initiated migrant, through our first research question, *How does a self-initiated migrant's talent identity work operate in relation to their culture, the societies in which they live, their interpersonal relationships and their tacit knowledge development?* From our literature review and Robert's autoethnography, we can see how different challenges might occur for self initiated migrants across the three phases of liminality (see Figure 1, below):

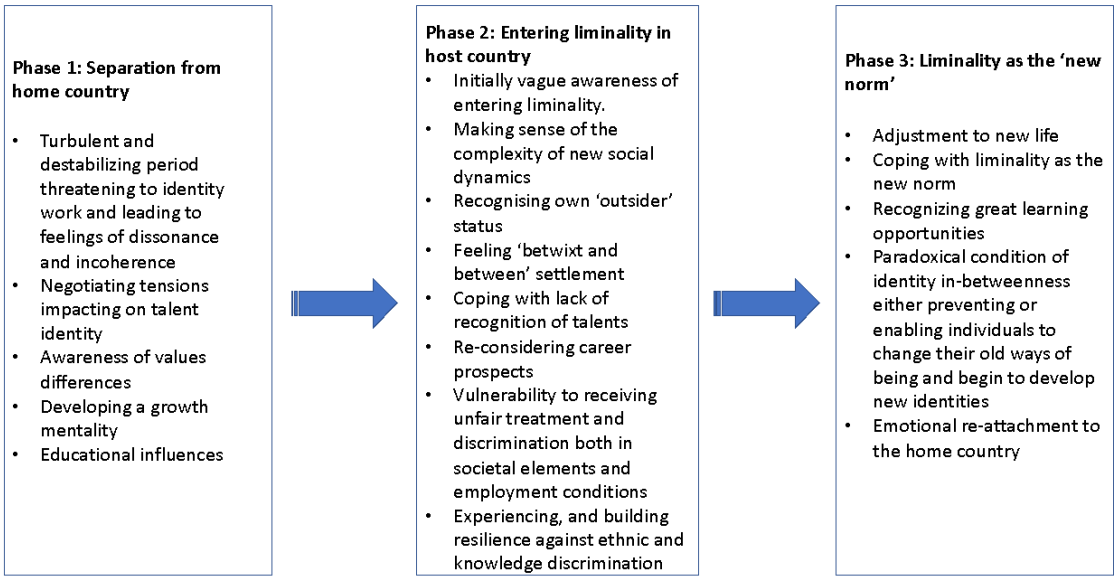

Figure 1: Developing liminality competence in SiM talent identity work

Phase 1 – Separation from home country can be a tense, turbulent period of separation from all that is known in the home country, with several push and pull factors encouraging the

migrant to emigrate. Our identity builds upon our upbringing and our relationships, and our narratives are a concomitant part of navigating our identity formation in work and home life (Rafferty, 2020). A migrant's talent identity is therefore significantly influenced by parents, education and work. At this stage, talent identity work is impacted both by the position talent takes in each self-narrative, and by identity being 'held in repertoires of co-existing self-narratives that are selectively used in response to the context and purpose of particular practices and interactions' (Garcia-Lorenzo *et al.*, 2020; p3). Gradually, Robert began to realise that his developing talents could take him to new life, so he moved into liminality.

Phase 2 sees Robert entering liminality in the host country, the UK. Identity in liminality is defined as 'a state of being betwixt and between social roles and/or identities' and is 'the hallmark of an increasingly precarious and fluctuating career landscape' (Ibarra and Obadaru, 2016; p. 47). Migrant transition and adjustment experiences vary and have an impact on new life and work opportunities (Ramsey and Lorenz, 2020). Some will integrate into society, whereas others never manage to feel at home.

A person positioning themselves as having particular talents is not a lone act, for not only is the 'self' they construct a particular one (Davies and Harré, 1990), it is also saturated with both the context in which the identity is being created and the influences of others. For Robert, the context in this phase comprised painful experiences of ethnic and knowledge discrimination.

Ethnic discrimination narratives

Migrants and their families are vulnerable to receiving unfair treatment and discrimination both in societal elements and employment conditions (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). Migrants are highly likely to accept precarious jobs (Bloch and McKay, 2015), experience poor career progression and gain few training opportunities (Rafferty, 2020). Reasons for this include: racial discrimination and unrecognised professional experience, lack of academic qualifications and poor language proficiency (Timming, 2017). Language proficiency is a common issue raised when discussing the work capability of migrants (Lawson *et al.*, 2019).

The role of language proficiency in ethnic discrimination

Talent with well-developed multicultural identities can make worthy knowledge contributions to their host country (Lee *et al*., 2018), and their host country language proficiency can help them adjust to profound local relationships (Zhang and Peltokorpi, 2015). In the globalization of work, language is central to relationships, processes and structures (Reiche *et al*., 2019) and adroitness in language use can empower individuals (Tietze, 2008). For global talent, a high command of corporate language is a prerequisite to be allowed a voice in organisational life. Those who cannot master organisational language can find themselves marginalised (Neeley, 2017).

For Robert, adept at several languages, unjust negative comments about his language proficiency seemed like ethnic discrimination. Such subtle discrimination is shaped by an individual's societal context (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011) and a feeling of being singled out and having a sense of ethno-cultural stigma (Doldor and Atewologun, 2020). The threat of inequality has been highlighted by the recent pandemic, and it is anticipated that more

inequality issues will emerge in the future at individual and societal levels (Bapuji *et al*., 2020).

As Robert found, this was not the only way discrimination occurred during liminality.

Knowledge discrimination narratives

Organisations recruit talent for valuable, difficult-to-imitate skills and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966), and retain their competitive edge by exploiting and exploring local knowledge and encouraging its flow throughout the enterprise. But local knowledge is frequently supplemented by knowledge provided by talent from other geographies. Knowledge discrimination took place at every stage of Robert's life journey. *Knowledge discrimination involves discrimination in favour of knowledge based on where it is learned rather than how well an individual knows it and can apply it.* Such discrimination has a negative impact on society economically, socially and civically, because it robs the society of talent and capacity (Smith, 2018).

Not being recognised for their competence and ability is common for skilled migrants (Conrad and Meyer-Ohle, 2020). This is shown during their socialisation at work and on migrants' adjustment to the workplace (Tharenou and Kulki, 2020). Robert felt he had worked very hard to integrate with colleagues in the workplace and with the community, but he had been shabbily treated. Underemployment is feature of knowledge discrimination of migrants, where migrant overqualification in the labour market can mean underutilisation of their skills (van den Broek, 2008; Simola, 2018). This impacts on talent identity because it can affect a migrant's confidence level and cause them to question their motivation, their orientation to work (Zhang *et al.*, 2019), job suitability or even whether or not they have made the right choice to leave their home country in the first place.

Developing liminality competence

Betwixt-and-between home and host country values and norms (Grabowska, 2018), migrants are often seen as outsiders in the host country workplace and, like Robert, can experience both blatant and subtle forms of discrimination from different social groups which can affect their emotions and wellbeing (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011). But coping with such challenges helps them refocus and reposition their social (Doldor and Atewologun, 2020) and talent identities and begin to develop *liminality competence*, defined here as 'a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community' (Beech, 2011; pp. 296-297). Robert does this in phase three, by making connections back to his home country and by substituting orientation to an increasingly alienating workplace with orientation to home passions. He thereby accepts his location on the margins by finding a place of internal creative freedom from his many out-of-work activities like pharmacology and culinary activities.

In the next section we will provide lessons from this study for re-imagining global talent management.

RE-IMAGINING GLOBAL TALENT MANAGEMENT

The main aim of global talent management is to develop those employees demonstrating high potential and high performance, and aligning these with the organisation's strategic imperatives, so the organisation can survive and grow. In the following section we identify some areas for re-imagining global talent interventions.

With regard to *ethnic discrimination*, an 'exclusive' form of talent management policy could be moved away from one that only considers high leadership potential and performance and extended to include knowledge workers with specialist knowledge management skills. Key roles here are knowledge creators and innovation stimulators to capitalise on both exploitation of current organisational knowledge and exploration of innovation capabilities (Birkinshaw and Sheehan, 2002). Such widening inclusion in talent pool recruitment can ensure fairer occupational practices for marginalised groups (Le *et al*., 2021).

Secondly, joining knowledge management and talent management policies can address *knowledge discrimination*. This is known as 'smart talent management', defined as, ''the smart or effective management of all human resources, who embody an organization's knowledge capital and capability in generating, acquiring, storing, transferring and applying knowledge in support of company goals and objectives' (Vance and Vaiman, (2008) in Whelan and Carcary (2011; p. 677)). Such conjoining enables us to ask: Do we have the right talent at the right place at the right time with the needed knowledge, competencies and motivation at all levels and locations of the organisation? How do we codify talents' tacit knowledge for the benefit of strategic goals? To what extent are we under-employing our talent? Do we have talent in key knowledge network positions (e.g. the central connector, broker, and peripheral expert) (Cross and Parker, 2004)? Do we have talent role positioning in key knowledge network positions? Is tacit knowledge discrimination at work creating poor orientation to work by talent? Is there a clear definition of what we mean by talent performance? (i.e. the underlying knowledge, skills and abilities needed to carry out an organizational role? (see Whelan and Carcary, 2011).

Thirdly, talent can gain *liminality competence* via targeted talent development interventions. These could include mobility opportunities to enable talent to share/exploit their knowledge and creativity across internal and external networks of the organisation. Also, talent mentoring initiatives can promote transfer of critical tacit knowledge from mentor to protégé and increase talent's social capital through exposure to the mentor's social network. In addition, setting up a 'reverse mentorship' programme where knowledge workers guide senior leadership can help (Whelan and Carcary, 2011; p.679); and finally, providing training interventions to improve talent's language skills.

LIMITATIONS

This study is not without limitations. For example, given that autoethnographic narratives are collections of self-reflexive ruminations and writings, the gathering of qualitative research material remotely via texts and emails can prevent the co-authors from gaining a full picture of the lived experience of the research subject. This applies particularly to gaining an understanding of the emotional elements of their experience.

Another limitation is that of attempting to access the reflexive, (not reflection) processes of one of us. Reflection has been called 'learning from experience – a cognitive process that seeks to give structure and order to sense-making of events, while reflexivity is an essentially

dialogic and relational activity that explores taken-for-granted aspects of conventional practices' (Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2012, pp. 320-321).

Finally, addressing topics that are cross-discipline can be challenging at every stage of the research process. For example, there will be different ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches to transcend. Also, because literature searches are widened to encompass several fields of study, this can result in high levels of initial articles and much time spent on winnowing out those papers not relevant to the focus of the study.

CONCLUSIONS

Our paper provides a number of research contributions. Firstly, we provide lessons for global talent management strategies, policies and practices in the area of migrant inclusion by using narrative analysis as a tool to examine talent identity development across time. Through the narratives of migrants, we can share highly personal, experiential and emotional experiences and gain a clear picture of identity change and transition (Fernando *et al.*, 2020).

Secondly, we make a novel empirical connection between SiM talent identity work and liminality competence. Next, we add to the scholarly conceptual fusion of talent management and knowledge management, as well as the global talent management practice literature, by encouraging the consideration of knowledge-based approaches to managing migrant talent. This is important because knowledge shared across global domains is the key to organizational survival and growth.

Finally, we add to the extant body of knowledge about Covid-19 experiences of global talent. In such times of crisis, global talent management strategies, processes and practices can increase organizational cumulative expertise, support human capital growth, secure renewal of organizational business processes and enhance organizational performance (Latukha, 2020).

Future questions for global talent management could be: Can we map a clear connection between our talent's strengths and their task performance at work? Are we able to spot when talent begins to feel demotivated and turns instead towards engagement in job and leisure crafting? Do we have well-being packages tailored to individual groups, such as migrant talent during major world events, such as Covid-19?

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