'You've been framed': Framing Talent Mobility in Emerging Markets

Executive Summary

Businesses operating in emerging markets invariably require their talent to be geographically mobile but organizational and individual needs do not always coincide. Drawing on framing theory, we demonstrate how organizational talent engage in framing processes to negotiate their social order when organizational mobility requirements are invoked. Emerging from this study is a typology of four talent mobility frame positions: acceptance, adaptation, avoidance and abdication. Our contribution is threefold. Firstly, we illustrate the role that framing plays in global talent management mobility practices. Secondly, we extend contemporary studies on global talent mobility by demonstrating how individual choices are enacted through frame positions. Thirdly, we show how having a flexible approach to managing global talent can facilitate not only the management of existing operations, but also enable expansion into new and emerging markets.

Keywords: Emerging markets; global talent management; talent mobility; framing theory; meta-frames.

Introduction

Talent management was first presented as a new form of human resourcing over a decade ago by McKinsey consultants and has become a master frame (a relatively stable configuration of ideational elements and symbols (Benford & Snow, 2000), for innovative ways of recruiting, developing and managing elites within organizations (Al Ariss, Cascio & Paauwe, 2014) in order to sustain a competitive advantage in a volatile market place (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). This is particularly pertinent as multinational organizations compete to expand into emerging markets and utilise globally mobile talent to manage both existing and new operations (Collings, 2014).

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Talent management and emerging markets

There has been a sizeable shift in global commercial activity from developed to emerging markets. These include the better-known countries, such as those in BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China), as well as others, such as CIVET (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt and Turkey) and MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) (Horowicz & Budhwar, 2015). These new markets are expected to produce 70% of the world's gross domestic product growth, with equity market capitalization expected to reach US$ 80 trn (1.2 times more than the developed world) by 2026, greatly reducing the economic dominance of Western developed countries and, with 2.8 million people employed in developing and emerging markets, such developments will influence global employment, talent attraction/development/retention and issues such as diversity and inclusion (International Labour Organization report 2011 cited in Horowicz & Budhwar, 2015 cf. Connell, 2016; 444). Furthermore, in spite of 'lower capital inflows and higher capital outflows since 2010, emerging market economies have remained resilient' (http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2016/RES040616B.htm April 6 2016 Accessed 19.5.16.).

Whilst this makes good commercial news, such strategies have meant there is still a war in terms of talent attraction and retention, particularly in emerging markets where companies seek talent from developed nations to supplement their talent pools and train their locally-recruited talent (Cui, Khan & Tarba, 2016). A great deal of variability in HRM systems and processes has been reported among emerging markets in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and BRIC. Studies have addressed a number of specific challenges in areas such as: institutional approaches, employment relations, cross-cultural HRM, expatriate integration and performance and the role of HRM in international mergers and acquisitions and joint ventures (Horowicz & Budhwar, 2015).

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However, the little research conducted on talent management in multi-national organizations in emerging markets has been mainly to provide warnings and prescriptions for practice or have focused on one specific geographic location (see Ambrosius, 2016 for example).

The advantages of a globally mobile talent pool

Global mobility is increasing, not least because a globally mobile pool of talent provides the opportunity to develop staff, share good practice across global business units and obtain greater functional flexibility (Caven, Kirk & Wang-Cowham in Őzbilgin et al., 2014). However, there has also been a rise in employees *declining* international assignments due to mortgage concerns, family ties and dual career commitments (Froese, Jommersbach & Klautzsch, 2013). Attitudes to global mobility are not geographically uniform across emerging markets. For example, some Asian workers faced with global mobility opportunities are less likely to consider certain 'pull' factors (Baruch, 1995) such as family issues and spousal careers than their western counterparts are (Kim & Froese, 2012), making them potentially more willing to be mobile. On the other hand, in China and India a triangular talent flow known as 'brain circulation' (Tung, 2008) is favoured whereby senior talent are willing to take international assignments, but with the intention to return to their home country once the assignment is completed. This ensures the countries concerned retain their valued talent. Individuals are influenced by many aspects, including: cultural expectations, dominant social norms (Guo, Porschitz & Alvez, 2013), national identity (Harvey, 2011), the ebb and flow of organizational mobility requirements and their own life stages (Kirk, 2016).

The challenge in managing multinational operations is to try to balance these often conflicting demands through a flexible approach to global talent management.

In this paper we use frame analysis as a way of studying the cognition and interaction of organizational stakeholders as they seek to accept, resist or re-frame dominant management frames relating to global talent mobility. This enables an understanding of how managers can ensure that global mobility requirements are met, whilst still offering the flexibility demanded by individual talent whom they are seeking to retain and motivate (De Cieri, Sheehan, Costa, Fenwick & Cooper, 2009). In this way, talent management practices can facilitate entry into emerging markets where individuals' attitudes to global mobility may differ from those in the parent company.

Frames and framing in talent management

A *frame* is 'a quality of communication that causes others to accept one meaning over another' (Fairhurst & Sarr 1996: xi). Conceptually, we define frames in this context as value-laden rhetorical resources (Hamilton & Bean, 2005) which are adopted and enacted in organizational innovations such as global talent management, not least by senior leaders attempting to refine, justify, legitimate and gain support of all stakeholders for their ideas on managing talent within their organizational context. In this context, organizational 'talent' have generally been framed in organizational practice as high performers with high potential to develop further in their career (Tansley *et al.,* 2007).

At the individual level, *frames* are interpretive schemes deriving from individuals' experiences which enable someone to make sense of and interpret (Weick 1995; DiSanza 1993) the complex problems and solutions of everyday life (Goffman 1974; Benford & Snow 2000, Chreim, 2006), both for themselves and for others. *Framing* is the means by which individuals 'make sense of ambiguous information from their

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environments' (Kaplan, 2008) by utilising the frame as a sense-making device, thus helping to identify what is important about an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989 in Brewer & Gross, 2005). Framing a subject is the process by which an individual determines what that issue means (to them) in order for them to be able to select which particular meaning (or set of meanings) they will choose to believe from the range of frames 'on offer' (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996 in Hamilton & Bean, 2005).

Managers are not only exposed to frames, they also construct frames from their own intrepretations of events (Kahneman & Tversky, 2000), they constitute both a definition to 'what is going on' or 'should be going on'' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.164) as well as acting as the 'templates that guide understanding of events' (Chreim, 2006, p.1261), In this case in relation to global mobility issues, a manager may construct a frame about a particular project which suggests that talented individuals need to be relocated to the country concerned, rather than be allowed to commute to take part in the venture, for example.

In global talent management literature, consultants, professional advisors and management scholars (Tansley *et al.,* 2007, 2008; Tansley, 2011) are the 'frame articulators' (Spicer & Sewell, 2010), producing a variety of frames to inform practitioners' design and implementation of talent management initiatives. These frames are designed to enable managers to overcome the additional challenges faced by organizations operating on a global scale, key amongst which is the need to enable top talent mobility (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013).

The meta-frames of global talent mobility policies

Whilst frames are a useful way of 'simplifying and condensing aspects of the 'world out there' for interpretive purposes (Goffman, 1974), particularly in the practices of agenda setting and subsequent implementation of critical strategic projects such as

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talent management, there is also a need to examine the ways in which managers intend 'to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists' (Snow & Benford 1988, p.198). At an organizational level such frames are partly constructed by practitioners of innovations such as talent management as they negotiate their shared understanding of change management in, for example, structure and culture, however individuals can and do resist such framing attempts as the arguments presented in this paper illustrate. So, whilst senior practitioners in the organization will: develop strategies for enabling change and seek to identify and articulate what will need to change and who should be responsible for effecting the change, these activities are not unproblematically enacted. Thus the aggregating of individual frames into a collective, corporate 'mind' is, as Lamprinakis and Fulton describe; 'as a meta-frame that filters all incoming information' (2011, p.2), but does not preclude individual agency in seeking to resist or change such frames.

Encouraging talented individuals to be internationally mobile remains a key problem for organizations in the face of rising demand for globally mobile talent (Collings, 2014), despite the supposed rise of so-called 'free-ranging capital' (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010) implying an infinitely mobile pool of talent. Global mobility can be defined as 'movements of people across international borders for any length of time or purpose' (Koslowski, 2011: preface) and there are different dimensions of global mobility such as: the intensity of the international contact, the duration of the assignment and the primary instigator (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman & Bournois, 2013). Despite the strategic push factors for increasing numbers of globally mobile talent, and arguments that individuals are becoming more globally mobile, integrated and more willing and able to interact in all spheres of social life in a so-called 'boundaryless world' (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), for the majority, their society is more 'boundaried' (King, 2004;

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Baruch & Reis, 2015). There are many different individual responses to organizational demands to be mobile. Some are willing and able to engage in globally mobile lifestyles to some extent, some seek to reduce their mobility levels by looking to engage in alternative ways of connecting with other global citizens, and others are not willing at all (Kirk, 2016).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how higher-level, meta-frames of management and individual-level frame positions of talented individuals relate when enacting global mobility choices. We do this by identifying how the meta-frame of talent mobility is interpreted and employed by actors in a case study of a global talent management initiative of a North American multi-national organization which is currently expanding into emerging market geographies. According to the strategy within this case organisation, talent management is defined as 'the selection, development and retention of the right people, in alignment with the current and future organisational goals' The positions adopted by talent in this case organization illustrate how dominant managerial frames may be accepted, modified or rejected by individuals. Through an exploration of this process, we highlight the implications of these findings for the development of more realistic and integrated global mobility strategies.

Research Questions for the Study

Our research questions in this study are as follows;

RQ1: How is the dominant meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile' a push factor for acceptance by organizational talent?

RQ2: What are the pull factors influencing individual talent's response to the dominant meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile'

RQ3: What are the implications of such push and pull factors for the management of globally mobile talent in emerging markets?

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Our findings provide three contributions. Firstly, we add to the global talent management literature through our theorizing about the frames used by those involved in the legitimation, diffusion and adoption of contemporary organizational practices (Kaplan, 2008). Secondly we highlight how frame authorship influences talent management engagement practices and impacts on prescriptions and permissions with regard to global mobility in relation to talented individuals. Thirdly, we demonstrate how by enabling individuals, to some extent, to negotiate the forms and amount of global mobility they engage in through framing practices, multinational firms will be in a stronger position to expand their operations into emerging markets by retaining the scarce talent needed to run those businesses.

Methods and data

A case study multi-national corporation (MNC) ('Agricultura') has net earnings in 2015 of c$1.58 billion and c149,000 employees in 70 countries, including USA and Europe emerging markets in Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRIC); Africa; Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Ukraine, Belgium, Poland, Czech Republic etc. Business activities in emerging market countries are impressive. For example, they overcame the US/Cuban trade embargo and opened up opportunities for US farmers and improved the lives of Cubans people, they are building transparent sustainable supply chains in emerging markets and they sent their emerging leadership talent on an 'African Learning Journey' to identify the challenges for Africa by meeting with farmers, scientists and company personnel.

Data Collection

This qualitative study involved undertaking 38 semi-structured interviews with those identified as talent in Agricultura. This sample also comprised of 10 HR professionals who themselves had been identified as talent, giving a unique insight into the careers

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of globally mobile HR talent as well as other senior managers. The sampling approach was a theoretical one (Huberman & Miles, 2002) designed to purposively select individuals from the senior talent pool who had experience of the range of forms of global mobility operating across the organisation. We transcribed all interviews and assigned pseudonyms to all participants. Through the data collected in these interviews, we explore the extent to which such meta-frames are appropriated, re-framed or resisted in the pursuit of personal interests and the implications this has for the development of a flexible but strategic and integrated approach to global talent management. By attending to the narratives that actors tell about their engagement with global talent mobility initiatives and by analysing the motivational frames used in their discursive practices, we demonstrate the ways in which organizational frames can influence an individual's life career (Hughes, 1937).

All notes, transcripts and documents were analysed focusing on the dominant themes in respondents' talk that emerged through an in-depth scrutiny of the interview transcripts. This involves the two closely-related phases of a search for patterns in the data, and the identification of functions and effects. The patterns took the form of variability (differences in either the content or form of accounts) and consistency (the identification of features shared by accounts). These were then examined for contextual influences (Elliott, 1996, p.68).

We began by examining the collected data by using Benford and Snow's (2000) definitions of frame and framing, identifying concepts relevant to global talent mobility management, such as willingness, unwillingness, reluctance etc. At this coding stage we identified four distinct frame positions in global talent mobility: *acceptance; adaptation, avoidance and abdication.* Through a process of comparing the frequency of occurrence of different codes across transcripts, we were able to narrow down the

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number of codes and become much more focused in terms of how we categorised different global mobility experiences. Before reaching theoretical saturation, we also examined prior studies of global talent management and through theory comparison and iteration (Orlikowski, 1993), we were able to identify and highlight the uniqueness of our new theorizing and how it related to the 'frame talk' of talent management stakeholders. So in this paper we study the meta-frame; 'Talent must be mobile' inherent in the global talent management strategy in Agricultura. We then explore the motivational framing of individual talent in their geographical mobility activities.

The Case Study: Mobilising Global Talent in Emerging Economies

Engaging in the Agricultura case study of global talent mobility enabled us to operationalise our three research questions.

RQ1: How is the dominant meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile' a push factor for acceptance by organizational talent?

The adoption and discursive use of talent management frames by senior executives and corporate HQ HR practitioners is happening in the dynamic global business environment of emerging market development:

> I would say … Geneva, [Belgium], Singapore and China is evolving, you know. Ultimately China is going to be a hub, and there's been some discussion, not officially but unofficially, of Singapore. Places like Singapore and Hong Kong were always headquarters points when China was developing that outpost simply because there's infrastructure in Singapore and Hong Kong. (Senior Vice-President)

The company meta-frame 'talent must be mobile' is required to be *performative* by the *frame articulators* responsible for developing Agricultura's talent management strategy

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(CEO, senior management team and corporate HR) and their powerful rhetorical framing (and re-framing) is a vital aspect of developing and defending the legitimacy of the talent management scheme, particularly in growing, emerging markets:

> Then we re-wrote our [talent management] strategy and set off again on a spectacular growth spurt and with that comes businesses acquired in different parts of the world and businesses growing in different parts of the world and so with that came expats. (Organisational Effectiveness Manager).

Successful frame articulation is a push factor for acceptance by talent and Agricultura's HR and business managers worked hard to construct frames which 'have a persuasive force that provides the rhetorical resources and linguistic–cognitive schemas associated with institutional logics' (Spicer & Sewell, 2010, p.920-921). Some senior executives were themselves willing to engage beyond this by becoming expatriates themselves in emerging market countries:

> I wrote the strategy and said "OK, we're going to expand in Asia and Latin America and I'm going to Asia", people were just shocked…A year ago I then became an expat based in …Asia-Pacific as we realised growing regions, because they can bring the corporate culture with them. …can accelerate the development of local people by having expats be located over there. ..So our policy [and] principles are set up; to reflect the way we anticipate the company needs to grow. (Organisational Effectiveness Manager).

In Agricultura each of their key geographies in emerging markets had particular contextual challenges. For example, in China the so-called 'cultural revolution' has created a 'missing generation of talent aged 45-55' which has forced companies to

utilise expatriates to run local operations (Ready, Hill & Conger, 2008:5). The corporate challenge is therefore to grow young talent from China through international secondments who will eventually address this gap, bearing in mind one of the key motivators for Chinese talent is good career prospects (Cui, Khan & Tarba, 2016). One executive highlighted issues in talent mobility in other emerging economies:

> When it comes to developing countries, we have operations in Ghana and the Ivory Coast ..it's difficult to get people to go there because you get issued your AK47 when you get off the plane so…and there are stories of [Agricultura] people defending themselves ..as riots go on outside..so…Malawi was a place like that I remember…So some of those African countries are difficult, you have to be a real pioneer to go there. ..we have a ..plantation business in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea – those are the most beautiful but remote places you can ever imagine [but} a little challenging to get people to go to. …some places that are more attractive than others. People don't tend to want to go to Japan..erm but .. quite happy to come to Singapore for a year. Brazil is popular, although a little challenging sometimes on the security. Mexico..you can get people to go to Mexico but security is a challenge. We can't get anyone to go to Venezuela, .. the Americans seem to go to Canada easily. Erm… I guess there are some flows like there are trade flows. (Organisational Effectiveness Manager)

Another issue was that Agricultura's 'Talent Declaration' global mobility meta-frame was not adopted by all individual talent within Agricultura:

> That's what I'm saying when you move from paper to reality. They [the Talent Declarations] look good on paper but I can tell you it's not happening in reality. (Business Unit HR Manager)

This was also recognised by Corporate HR:

> So do I think about that, yes I think, but within Agricultura even though it's a Talent Declaration … it's not practiced. We have [talent] that have never left their business unit or the country. (Head of HR)

Almost half of Agricultura's CEOs predicted future problems in talent overseas deployment, so awareness was high that 'promises made are kept' when competing for, and retaining, talent in emerging markets.

RQ2: What are the pull factors influencing individual talent's response to the dominant meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile'?

In China being able to make a contribution to their economy is a key driver for many Chinese workers, therefore having the opportunity to repatriate to their own country after taking an international assignment would be a way of attracting such talent (Ready, Hill & Conger, 2008). However, this is not necessarily the case for talent from other existing and emerging markets, so it is important to be clear about mobility requirements at the outset. As Anna Brown, Site Accountancy Manager for one of the UK food processing sites told us, 'Recently, with the candidate that we've just taken on, we did actually make mobility one of the things that we needed to know, that they were going to be mobile, otherwise they're not going to get the chance to progress…'. This example of a *career script* (Cappellen & Janessens, 2010) illustrates how employers seek to offer interpretive schemas or frames within which those building

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their careers are 'guided' in the career choices. Some senior executives were more pessimistic:

> People say (they are) mobile, but I'd say 90% aren't really mobile. [But] they
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> don't want to put that out there, they want to put out that they're mobile.

<p style="text-align:right">(Vice President, Diversity)</p>

As the study progressed, it became clear that the situation was not simply that talent were refusing to be geographically mobile to emerging economies. Rather, talent responded in subtler ways to these scripts or frames by taking what we are calling *frame positions.* These were response positions which linked directly to personal circumstances and/or views. As Anna Brown told us: 'From a personal viewpoint, the thing that holds me back from mobility is my family, because my husband wouldn't want to move, so we can't move, I have to stay within one area'.

As the interviews progressed, we identified several different kinds of frame positions taken by talent in reacting to, and (re-)framing such opportunities in their mobility choices. We detail these in the next section.

Talent mobility acceptance frame position

The first frame position we found was where there was *acceptance* of the metaframe 'talent must be mobile'. Georgia Gwok, a young, single Chinese woman, accepted a 3-year expatriate assignment to move from China to the USA. She explained why she agreed to the assignment:

> There is a story in China about a frog … always staying in its own well, so this
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> frog can only see one of the piece of the sky..but if you cannot go out of the well
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> you won't have the kind of experiences to see the whole sky [laughs]'… I was
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> wondering why the company kind of chose me, but there were reasons given so
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> I thought…they do have serious discussion, consideration, so why I myself

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cannot give myself a chance to try. …So if you say a company is a global company and with the aspiration of growing further in different geographies you will have to…speed up yourself if you want to make more contribution. In that sense, that's why international exposure is very important to me. (ERP project HR specialist)

Georgia was happy to the assignment as it seemed to show she was regarded as future corporate talent. In other cases, the opportunity to engage in global mobility was self-initiated, some doing this as a way of leading by example:

Now, as it happened, I had always wanted to live here because I had worked here over 10 years and I was fascinated with the culture and … we were living in the suburbs of Minnesota and my kids were coming to school age and so it made sense – it fitted with our plan to come here and work out of here. (Organisational Effectiveness Manager)

So taking an acceptance frame position can involve either *push* factors from the organization or *pull* responses from organizational talent to global mobility requirements by organizational talent.

Talent mobility adaptancepo frame position

Oliver is a French supply chain manager who is married with children. He joined Agricultura nine years ago and currently commutes from The Netherlands to Belgium on a weekly basis. He recently refused an opportunity to expatriate to the US for 3 years to work on a project known as 'ERP', but offered an alternative, thereby adopting what we have termed an *adaptance frame position*:

.. in ERP the number one rule of that project is you have to be based in [Corporate HQ]. .. I said, "I'm sorry I can't move". I have lived in [Corporate HQ town] before so for me it's not a big deal. But for family reasons etc. that

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was not going to happen, so I said I will help but not in the way you wanted me, which is to be part of the leadership team and be permanent. Then they came back and said, "Okay, what *can* you do?". [Agricultura] knows how to negotiate, we're all traders somewhere, so I knew that there was negotiation time open.

Other respondents also demonstrated adaptance framing positions by describing how they negotiated alternatives and 'struck deals'. For example, Tim Graham, a South African organizational consultant, currently faces a choice to either remain in the USA in his current role, or, as he put it, 'to ramp up the business' in emerging markets in Europe and justify a move there for himself. In negotiating his choice to stay in the USA, Tim's decision has been influenced by pull factors such as his children's education and his wife's career, and being able to flex his global mobility to meet these life demands is essential to him.

Another respondent described commuting within emerging markets as an alternative to expatriation:

So probably, if you like to work for Asia but don't want to live in Vietnam, probably you can live in Singapore and travel to Vietnam…[If] moving to Latin America, Brazil is quite dangerous but living in Chile is very safe, so living in Chile and flying to Sao Paulo to Rio, it's easy. (ERP Manager)

This seemed to be both a pragmatic but also an overly-positive view, as another executive told us:

Our palm plantations in Indonesia, for example, it takes you about – even after you get to Singapore – it takes you a flight, a drive, a boat ride to get there and you're very isolated. I think that would be very challenging. (Global Mobility Manager)

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Taking an adaptance frame position therefore means that talent might be willing or unwilling to be globally mobile but are able to frame alternative scenarios and successfully navigate the employment relationship to fulfil their requirements.

Talent mobility avoidance frame position

The avoidance of global mobility moves was also common. This was where individuals would either offering to engage in an alternative form of mobility or to defer the opportunity to be mobile until a later (unspecified) date. Some Westerners were uncomfortable with particular regions in Asia, whilst other regions were found to be attractive. For example:

> Singapore it's okay, but if you go to China… coming from China I don't have any issue, but the western world you will feel "wow this is very much… the water is so polluted" (Head of HR Singapore).

As Ging Zhoo, a Chinese national, went on to explain how despite the attraction of a better standard of living in what he termed 'developed' countries, he preferred his own country, and recently refused an expatriate assignment:

> I said no, first of all because you know, I have two young children, one is 12 years old, the other is 7. … the younger one has started school and the older one has finished the primary school. So I'm from China, I want to make sure my children get some education in Chinese environment and learn the Chinese language. But if you go for assignment you know you have to put your children in a special school to give them chance to learn their native language. So the disruption for the education you know, can be one downside.

Ging was able to negotiate around his refusal by offering to spend 30-40% of his time engaged in business travel, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, offering consultancy guidance to Agricultura businesses in the area. This aligned with the current trend of

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firms growing local talent (Smedley, 2012), rather than flying in expatriates. Ging was therefore able to strike a deal that suited both him and the business at the time. However, this example does show that despite what we think we understand about cultural 'norms' in relation to global mobility, individual push/pull can override these.

Other individuals gave different reasons for avoidance frame positions:

> I have some people who say, listen (Angus), I can't move for two years until my kids are at college but then I want to move. (Organisational Effectiveness Manager)

> …actually I have asked three times now a female in Switzerland, if she would want her name at the top of the list at the business unit leader's position, which would be a big promotion for her, but it's relocating to Miami Florida. She was "okay, let me think about it". Gone silent. And I had the manager come back and say, "I need to know in the next 2-6 months" and then the answer came back (from her) saying "well, if it was closer to 9 months". Okay, now I got my final answer. (Corporate Vice President)

Managers interviewed in the main seemed to view such intransigence quite pragmatically, expressing the view that the individuals concerned might become more globally mobile as their circumstances changed.

Talent mobility abdication frame position

Some managers described how they attempt to 'push' individuals to be globally mobile. But this can have negative consequences for both the individual, their family and the organization.

> Well [Agricultura] asked me to go to two [emerging market] locations that I declined to go, one was in Asia and one was in South America. It was nothing to do with cultural affinity it was just that I had one international move in my

family's blood and I just couldn't push one more after that, we had to repatriate. Even though I love Asia, love Singapore etc, love South America, can survive down there, from a personal safety standpoint I would not have taken my family down to, in this case, Brazil. So actually the personal safety situation would weigh far more than necessarily the affinity. I mean that's part of the culture, you know. Do I love it in Asia? Yes. But would I live there? No. Personal safety, disaster, I mean you just don't want that. I mean if you move to Brazil now in xxxx you live in a gated community, you have armed guards, you have a guard for your house and that's the environment you're in. For some people they just… they really don't want that. (Corporate Vice President)

In one extreme case, an interviewee disclosed how he had opted to leave the organization rather than accept an expatriate assignment to the US:

I was offered a promotion which blew me away at the beginning of this year. It's a project that could be anywhere in the region of $5-7 *billion* – 'b' not 'm' – and I was offered a job to lead change in that, which would have been a move to the US for 2 or 3 years. I don't know what I would have then done when I came back – other than being a commuter to [Corporate HQ] because my wife and I, we wanted to then come back to this country. Anyway, ...in this new chapter of my life, kind of becoming a father of double-digit children. I'm not prepared to be distant...I don't negotiate on my core values. I've had a great career, but in August I'm going to be heading off to do ...I haven't really figured out what I'm going to do yet. (Organizational Effectiveness Consultant)

It can be seen that a failure to enable framing and re-framing in response to a dominant organizational meta-frame can result in what we have called *abdication* i.e. a complete rejection of the dominant meta-frame by the individual. This can result in the individual

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having to leave the organisation altogether or perhaps seek another role that does not require global mobility, which may not be in the talent pool. For multinational organizations, allowing opportunities for individuals to adopt different talent mobility framing positions is key to being able to operate successfully in both existing and emerging global markets. It is through this framing process that they are able to negotiate alternative forms of global mobility to accommodate their life projects.

Discussion

RQ1: Talent mobility meta-frame as a push factor for acceptance by organizational talent

Organizational requirements for mobility are often generated by key initiatives, such as expansion into emerging markets, which are vital to the health and survival of a global business and this acts as a push factor in enforcing company policies such as 'talent must be geographically mobile'. The push 'movement agents' (Chreim, 2006, p.1264) are the senior Agricultura managers acting as 'frame articulators' (Spicer & Sewell, 2010), 'building on their core values and beliefs' (in this case about the benefits of moving talent into emerging market countries), as well as drawing on the organization's vision, mission and goals.

In this study, we can see how senior managers generated global mobility vision statements and policies ('the Talent Declarations') as powerful rhetorical and managerial mechanisms to enable the enterprise-wide enactment of global talent mobility. Some even became self-initiated expatriates themselves in order to act as role models to encourage other talent in accepting mobility moves to emerging market countries. Producing a talent management meta-frame can therefore be theorised as an attempt by senior managers to invoke the desired action of the other stakeholders. Because this is a mutually-created process between talent and management, it is fraught

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with difficulties, primarily due to the different motivations and personal goals of those involved, which leads to different responses to such framing initiatives, including outright rejection. Attempts at mobilisation of such action in the case study organization resulted in a range of *framing positions* of actors, some of which resulted in non-compliance with the dominant meta-frame.

In seeking to frame/re-frame the socio-cultural system of the talent global mobility policy for emerging markets, senior managers can either fail to check on the congruent frame positioning of those talented individuals whom they were seeking to influence, or simply over-estimate the degree to which these dominant meta-frames can *resonate* (Benford & Snow, 2000) with the frame position adopted by the individuals concerned at any one point in time. Account must therefore be taken of talent mobility pull factors generated from their frame positions.

RQ2: What are the pull factors influencing individual talent's response to the dominant meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile'

In the case study talent took one of four different 'frame positions' as a way of negotiating a preferred outcome for their careers (and their families). We show this as a typology of talent mobility frame positions in Table 1, below:

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Some Agricultura talent were seen to take an *acceptance framing position* to the meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile' However, whilst being formally identified as 'talent' within an organization has been shown to lead to more positive behaviours, including an increasing propensity to support strategic initiatives (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale & Sumelius, 2013), acceptance of a move does not necessarily mean there is a commitment to the action and talent may feel they have no power to refuse.

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Talent taking an *adaptation framing position* find that organizational frames fail to fully resonate with their own cognitive schemas about a decision (Kaplan, 2008). Such individuals may seek to influence the outcomes in their favour, thus entering into a process of *counter-framing* (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626). In the case study, a senior manager possessed the power to make new interpretations of organizational situations and was able to negotiate to be allowed to commute across time zones in preference to relocating. In this way the frame was *transformed* (Benford & Snow, 2000) by offering an acceptance of an alternative. Another example is an Agricultura organizational development consultant who was able to present an alternative frame which could, if he chose to, allow him to 'side-step' the frame being proffered and present a completely different counter-frame i.e. that his skills could be just as effectively deployed within Europe as within the US.

For others whose frames did not resonate with the meta-frame (Kaplan, 2008; Cornelissen, Holt & Zundel, 2011), by dint of being able to make a contribution elsewhere they were able to take an *avoidance framing position* by avoiding or deferring an expatriate assignment. Their counter-proposal frame was that the contribution they were able to make in their current position was at least as good, if not better, than the one they would be able to make elsewhere. For example, an HR manager explained how she declined an expatriate assignment as she 'found a way to contribute without the travel I guess'. In some cases, though, managerial attempts to impose a dominant frame provoked a more severe reaction, resulting in *abdication* from both making the decision and being part of the organization's demands for global mobility. For these individuals, because there were no perceived alternative options within the firm to accepting or rejecting the dominant meta-frame the result was their resignation, resulting in the loss of scarce talent for the firm. Such responses we termed *abdication*

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frame position. Figure 1, below, shows the relational aspects between push and pull frame positions:

[INSERT FIGURE ONE HERE]

As it can be seen here, the meta-frame 'Talent must be mobile', may exert a pull on a talented individual, who is willing to be mobile in some form or not willing at that particular stage to be mobile at all, to adopt either a frame adaptation position or a frame avoidance position. If an individual is willing to mobile in the form that is required of them, then the meta-frame acts as a push for them to take an acceptance position. However, should the individual not wish to be mobile at that point, but also is unable to avoid or negotiate an alternative, then abdication can result. At best this can result in sideways or even downwards move within the hierarchy, or at worst, cause the individual to leave the organisation.

As we have shown in this paper, organizational talent negotiate their environments by producing long-term aims and constructing plans to achieve these aims. Strategies at all levels of the business are therefore the mechanisms for shaping such organizational endeavours in the short, medium and long term and global talent management is no exception to this.

RQ3: What are the implications of push and pull factors for the management of globally mobile talent in emerging markets?

Talent management is a growing endeavor in MNCs operating in emerging markets, particularly with push factors such as globalization and demographic change. In this paper we posit that MNCs will be in a much stronger competitive position to expand

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their operations into emerging markets by enabling individual talent to negotiate the forms and amount of global mobility they engaging in through framing practices.

In terms of global mobility, although it is undoubtedly true that the frequency of international mobility is increasing, the propensity and willingness to be mobile varies from individual to individual and is linked, amongst other factors, to the push and pull factors inherent in being prepared to be globally mobile (see Kirk, 2016). The notion of push/pull refers to the factors that attract or deter an individual or organisation from accepting/offering global mobility opportunities (for example, family commitments might deter individuals). Managers need to appreciate that responses to attempts to gain acceptance of the dominant meta-frame 'talent must be mobile' are governed by individual perceptions of the meaning of that frame and the degree to which it *resonates,* (Benford & Snow, 2000) at any one point in time, with their own global mobility frames. Managers need to be responsive and open to alternative frames presented by the talent they wish to retain, especially as they are dependent on such talent to develop in emerging markets. To retain and grow such scarce talent, managers need to be prepared to negotiate over these interpretations and reach shared understandings (Gamson, 1992) that accommodate perceived needs through a flexible approach to managing global mobility.

Whilst senior leaders continue to justify, legitimate and gain support of stakeholders for their talent management strategies (Cappelli, 2008; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Scullion, Collings & Caligiuri, 2010), there still needs to be a flexible approach to managing global talent in either developed or emerging markets to accommodate the work-life issues that such a career presents.

Where organizations are seeking to retain scarce talent it may be politic to enable some degree of agency in their career crafting (Tams & Arthur, 2010) and associated global

mobility choices. The degree to which an individual might need to exercise agency in responding to global mobility demands depends on a number of factors. For instance, whether or not they have dependents, what the dominant cultural norms are in their country with respect to mobility, how much they feel they are able to influence the dominant meta-frame etc.

Conclusions and implications

In this paper it has been proposed that the notions of frame and frame positions are useful tools for the analysis of the connection between individual-level framing activities and meta-level frames that enable and constrain such activities. This analysis firstly contributes to the existing research on talent management by demonstrating that frames as rhetorical language (Huang & Tansley, 2012) embedded in talent mobility practices has strategic implications for organizational survival, innovation and growth, as well as for individual's life careers (Hughes, 1937). This rhetoric-in-use in the discursive practices of actors enables or constrains their participation in global talent mobility in certain ways. Firstly, individuals in different parts of the organization around the world engage with talent mobility meta-frames to advance their own personal interests. Secondly, contemporary global mobility innovations are legitimated or otherwise by practitioners with particular personal agendas and can impinge on the types of mobility practices that they engage in, how they deploy them and the consequences of that deployment.

Our second contribution is to add to our understanding of the particularities of talent mobility in emerging economies and, given research on talent management in emerging markets is limited (Latukha, 2016), provides a new explanation for how talent mobility programmes might succeed in such contexts. Finally, our findings contribute to the study of the talent mobility phenomenon by showing how managers need to learn how

to recognise and respond to alternative global mobility frames if they wish to retain and motivate talent.

In essence, all of those engaging in global talent mobility practices must attempt to establish their own legitimacy, make meanings for others involved with the innovation and persuade them to do as they wish. However, as performative actors existing in this political arena, these managers are also attempting to develop their roles; both in talent mobility and in their 'day job' as well as being individuals who are also developing their notion of who and what they are, that is, manage their self-identity and shape their personal projects in life. In their *strategic exchange* processes (that is the intentionality of these people to develop both organizational and personal projects *and* design strategies that are successful) they must take account of the structurally conditioned settings and the contextual resources that can either constrain or enable their work and life projects.

Practical contribution of this study

The practical contribution of this study is to highlight some of the constraints in seeking to develop global talent management strategies that seek to promote mobility. The key lesson for strategists and practitioners engaged in global talent management is that there is a need for flexibility in responding to talented individuals' reactions to the dominant meta-frame. This is because cultural, national identity *and* individual factors all influence global mobility choices, so assumptions must not be able about an individual's willingness to be mobile, regardless of the geographic region they come from or are required to go to. Managers need to ensure that both the *purpose* of the organization (in terms of its mission) appeals to stakeholders in all regions, but also the *opportunities* to engage in global mobility are able to be adapted to suit different needs.

This is particularly pertinent in the light of the on-going, so-called 'war for talent', the increasing demands for global mobility and the drive to expand into emerging markets.

Implications for future research in emerging markets

In this paper we focus on individual responses to a meta-frame. It would have been useful to also examine in more depth the extent to which managers responsible for this design and articulation of this frame feel that their approach to encouraging global mobility has proved successful for the business. For future studies of global talent mobility, researchers could further explore questions related to the development of global mobility policies that are flexible and designed to take account of differing individual needs and motives. Possible questions could include: 'How might managers facilitate global mobility choices, for instance, through the use of technology, to provide alternative solutions and accommodate different life stages of those who are globally mobile?' Finally, we suggest that the time is right to set a research agenda for the future of globally mobile talent, exploring how talent in organizations construct personal frames related to their identity, life career and orientation to work and how this impacts on their global mobility choices.

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