

RESEARCH SEMINAR

TOPIC: “Idiosyncratic knowledge: A strategic frame for the study of expatriation”

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DATE: Friday 10th, Oct 2008

TIME: 12 noon – 1pm

VENUE: SRS 04, Executive Meeting Room Social Sciences Building, Callaghan

Abstract - This paper argues that theory clarifying the importance of knowledge in multinational enterprises (MNEs) provides a strategic context in which expatriate assignments can be studied. The proposition is forwarded that while expatriate assignments are presented in the literature as a mechanism for the transfer of knowledge within the MNE, the literature has not adequately confronted the critical issue of defining the types of knowledge held by expatriates in line with appropriate theory. This paper explains why a greater consideration of the firm-specific characteristics of the knowledge transferred by expatriates is required when defining the knowledge transferred during assignments. Two propositions are argued as means by which this could be achieved; by a closer examination of the role of expatriates in replicating the MNEs idiosyncratic applications of generic technical knowledge and by examining expatriates roles in transferring intra-organizational knowledge across the distant units of the MNE. This approach to the study of assignments not only demonstrates that assignments invariably facilitate the transfer of idiosyncratic knowledge, but also provides a theoretical framework for the study of assignments guided by, and integrated with, core internal strategic issues for the MNE, as defined by the resource-based view of the firm.

ALL WELCOME