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Perceptions of task cohesiveness and organizational support increase trust and information sharing between host country nationals and expatriate coworkers in Oman

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ABSTRACT

Information sharing between expatriate and host country national (HCN) employees is strategically significant. In a sample of Omani HCNs, we hypothesize and find that perceiving task cohesiveness is positively associated with HCNs' willingness to share information with expatriates and that trust mediates this association. In addition, perceiving organizational support strengthens the relationship between expatriates' task cohesiveness and HCNs' trust, whereas interpersonal similarity has no influence. This research highlights important ways in which trust and information sharing may be encouraged, and that HCN–expatriate interpersonal similarity is less important to building trust when more diagnostic cues are available.

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Despite the increasing recognition that host country nationals (HCNs) have a critical role to play in the socialization of expatriate coworkers, evidence for how this role may be facilitated remains scarce. An expatriate-centeredness prevails in much expatriate management research, focusing mainly on expatriates' leadership role in the multinational corporation (MNC), as well as their successful socialization to the host country (Paik, Vance, Gale, & McGrath, 2008). Expatriates are primarily seen as sent to control and transfer know-how and know-what to host units. The need to learn from HCN coworkers and those they were sent to manage tends to be secondary (Vance, Vaiman, & Andersen, 2009). The onus of success on the assignment, too, has mainly rested on the shoulders of expatriates. This meant that the potentially important contributions of other stakeholders in the MNC, such as that of HCNs, to both the MNC and the expatriate socialization process have been overlooked (see Takeuchi, 2010 for a review).

Evidence suggests that contact with, and social support from HCNs, are instrumental to expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri, 2000; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). HCNs can help expatriates feel accepted, offer friendship, and provide instrumental aid in times of need. Theory also suggests that ties with HCNs are useful for expatriates in alleviating informational and social uncertainty during their adjustment to the host unit (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). The unique information that HCNs have about the host unit organization and culture can distinctively aid expatriates in their understanding of their new role, and help them become adjusted more quickly. Without the cooperation of HCNs and the sharing of knowledge that expatriates do not possess, the effectiveness of expatriates and their ability to carry out their assignment can be severely threatened. Indeed, withholding of information can sometimes lead to disastrous consequences for the expatriate and the MNC (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Information sharing by HCNs with expatriates is, thus, an important process that influences both the success of expatriates and the MNC.

To date, expatriates' individual factors (e.g., personality), their social networks, and MNCs' pay practices have been offered as ways in which support and information sharing between expatriates and HCNs may be engendered or hindered (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Farh et al., 2010; Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Because sharing information with expatriates is unlikely to be specifically required as part of their jobs or formally rewarded, HCNs have to be otherwise motivated to do so. Even if they were required as part of their jobs to share information with expatriates, HCNs may not be as diligent in doing so as much as they could or should (Toh & DeNisi, 2007). Limited research exists that aims at understanding the problem of information sharing from the HCNs' perspective, and at identifying HCN-related factors associated with HCNs' willingness to share information (not the expatriate's willingness and ability to seek out information from HCNs). Some empirical evidence suggests that perceiving group difference and fair treatment by the organization, for example, can facilitate information sharing by HCNs (Leonardelli & Toh, 2011). However, the mechanisms underlying this process are not yet elucidated or

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supported by evidence. In other words, why might the perceptions HCNs have about the expatriate coworker and the treatment they receive from the organization lead to greater or lower willingness to share information? Hence, it is necessary to understand the factors and underlying mechanisms associated with HCNs' willingness to share information that expatriates may need.

The main objectives of the present research are to identify important individual, social, and organizational factors that affect HCNs' decision to share information, and propose a mechanism by which those factors may lead to greater willingness for HCNs to share information with expatriates. We focus on the perceptions of HCNs about expatriates' task cohesiveness, interpersonal similarity, and about the organization's supportiveness. We propose trust as an important mechanism by which HCNs' perceptions are linked to HCNs' willingness to share information with expatriate coworkers. Trust has long been established as a social lubricant that can smooth social interactions (Arrow, 1974) and enable cooperation. Anecdotal evidence suggest that HCNs may trust or distrust expatriates based on their perceptions of them as "watchdogs" for headquarters, or as experts sent to help the host unit (Harvey, Speier, & Novecevic, 2001). Even though the antecedents and benefits of trust have been intensively studied over the past few decades (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007), the building of trust and trust as a mechanism for increasing HCNs' willing to share information with expatriates have not been currently tested. In addition, this process has hardly been systematically examined in a non-Euro-American setting, or in a cross-cultural context.

We examine a sample of Omani HCNs in the present study. The Middle East has been, and continues to be, a significant destination for MNCs and expatriates, and interest in these populations are growing (Aycan, Al-Hamadi, Davis, & Budhwar, 2007). Countries in the Gulf, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, rely heavily on expatriates in many industries (e.g., banking, education, and health services) and job sectors (Janardhan, 2006; Winckler, 2000). Yet, research on populations from the Middle East is scarce. Culture has been suggested to influence the relevance of different pieces of information upon which people base their trust (e.g., interpersonal similarity, trustworthy behavior), as well as people's propensity to trust others (e.g., Huff & Kelley, 2003; Levin, Whitener, & Cross, 2006; Schoorman et al., 2007).

Since the 1970s, Oman addressed its labor shortage by welcoming expatriates representing all levels of the economy (Winckler, 2000). Omanis are no strangers to working alongside expatriates. They tend to be welcoming of foreigners and enjoy positive working relations with expatriates. Omanis, thus, have a high propensity to trust foreigners (Winckler, 2000). Given this unique social backdrop, understanding how Omani HCNs interact with expatriates, build trust, and share information with expatriates is useful for improving the effectiveness of the organizations that employ them, and for advancing both the expatriate and trust literatures. We expect that our model may be constrained to the unique cultural context of Oman and the Omanis' favorable disposition towards foreigners. Particularly, the relevance of the bases of trust we examine here may differ in host countries where HCNs hold different cultural values, and differ in their propensity to trust and differentiate between foreigners and locals (e.g., China; Child & Möllering, 2003; Varma, Budhwar, & Pichler, 2011).

Having provided a theoretical and practical context for our study, we turn our attention to our research model and hypotheses next. We begin with a working definition of trust. This is followed by a discussion of the cognitive process of arriving at a state of trust, and how the perceptions of HCNs about expatriates and the organization influence trust and HCNs' willingness to share information.

1. A trust model of HCN–expatriate information sharing

An accepted definition of trust is "the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). Commonly conceptualized as cognition-based or cognitive trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), trust is, in part, based on a cognitive process involving a rational appraisal of "good reasons" to choose whom we will trust (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). It may be viewed as the positive expectation that another individual will make the effort to fulfill commitments, is honest, and will not act opportunistically (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). It is also the expectation that this person will perform her/his role sufficiently, and will protect and support, or at least not act against, the interest of others (Levin et al., 2006). Cognition-based trust also tends to precede affect-based or more emotional bases of trust, and acts as an important social lubricant in interpersonal relationships in the organizational context (McAllister, 1995). Consistent with our definition of trust, we conceptualize and operationalize trust and distrust as bipolar opposites on the same dimension, i.e., very low levels of trust represent distrust.

Trust grows with increased evidence of trustees' qualities, and declines when positive expectations are disconfirmed (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). Trustors base their evaluations of others on with the information that they gather, observe, and/or infer (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Trust is often affected by multiple pieces of information simultaneously, and the context in which the relationship exists (Earle & Siegrist, 2006). According to Messick and Kramer's (2001) shallowness hypothesis, people often rely on "cues and economical schemas – sets of beliefs or knowledge structures that organize and guide memory of past events and expectations regarding future events" to manage multiple sources of information when making trust judgments (Lount, 2010, p. 421). Levin et al. (2006), for example, argue that trustors use information like demographic similarity, shared values, and trustworthy behavior of trustees to arrive at their evaluations of trust. They found that perceived trustworthiness is associated with demographic similarity in newer relationships, with trustworthy behavior in relationships that are neither brand new, nor old, but in-between, and with shared perspective in older relationships. Their findings suggest that these pieces of information are important bases for trust and that the context may vary their importance. In addition, salient and ostensible pieces of information are more likely to inform trust evaluations than would

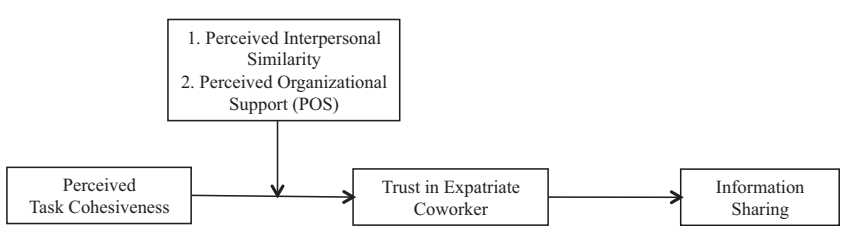

Fig. 1. Proposed model of trust in expatriate coworkers.

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information that is inaccessible. With the acquisition of new information about the trustee or the situation, trustors may make adjustments to their trust evaluations and to their actions towards the trustee.

Building on these basic conclusions, we argue that for HCNs to share useful information with expatriates that could potentially aid in their work and their adjustment, trust is an important mechanism, although it is often challenging to develop (Bjorkman & Schaap, 1994). In our model (see Fig. 1), we hypothesize that HCNs base their trust in expatriates on perceptions regarding expatriates' commitment to the tasks in which both the HCN and the expatriate coworker have a stake. This form of commitment has been labeled in the organizational literature as task cohesiveness (Zaccaro, 1990). Perceiving task cohesiveness should be associated with greater trust in expatriate coworkers, and trust, in turn, facilitates information sharing. Furthermore, because trust is often affected simultaneously by multiple pieces of information and the context in which the relationship exists, we further hypothesize that the relationship between perceived task cohesiveness and trust may be moderated by perceptions of interpersonal similarity (in terms of both demographics and values) in the HCN–expatriate dyad, and the extent to which the organization is perceived as supportive (perceived organizational support: POS). We elaborate on these perceptions as relevant bases of trust next. We begin with our rationale for the importance of task cohesiveness in developing trust. This is followed by a discussion of interpersonal similarity and POS as moderators of the task cohesiveness–trust relationship, and trust as a mediator of HCNs' willingness to share information with expatriate coworkers.

1.1. Perceived expatriate task cohesiveness as a basis of trust

Task cohesiveness has been defined as members' shared orientation to work tasks and unity in accomplishing them (Zaccaro, 1990). It is distinguished from social or interpersonal cohesion, which reflects the origins of the construct of group cohesion – the attraction or liking that members have for their work group (Cota, Longman, Evans, Dion, & Kilik, 1995). The focus of task cohesiveness is on shared work-related goals and aspirations, and the commitment of individuals to them. Recent clarifications of the construct suggest that task cohesion can be conceptualized as a group-level phenomenon (i.e., how the cohesive the collective is). It is also conceptualized as an individual-level construct, focused on an individual member and his/her commitment to shared work goals (Zaccaro, 1990). We adopt the individual-level conception in the current study. Specifically, we are concerned with HCNs' perception or evaluation of how cohesive a specific expatriate coworker is, and how this perception influences their trust in and willingness to share information with the coworker.

Cues about the task cohesiveness of the expatriate coworker are pertinent for trust beliefs and subsequent behavior. HCNs may have the opportunity to determine how cohesive the coworker really is through the course of their work. Even in the absence of direct observation, or visible behavioral cues, intentions of the expatriate to be committed to shared tasks may be inferred through verbal cues or labels – by the expatriate conveying explicitly his/her intentions to act cohesively, or through the reputation and information passed on by significant others (e.g., leaders, other coworkers who have interacted with the expatriate). Because task cohesiveness speaks directly to how expatriates will perform in their tasks, and is thus diagnostic of their trustworthiness, perceiving expatriate coworkers' cohesive behavior may be particularly salient to HCNs' trust judgments (Thomas & Ravlin, 1995). Hence, perceptions of task cohesiveness could be a relevant basis for HCN coworkers to trust in the expatriate coworker (McAllister, 1995). For expatriates who are perceived as low in task cohesiveness, i.e., not committed to the goals of the group, HCNs' trust in them will be low. Conversely, if HCNs perceive expatriate coworkers to be high in task cohesiveness, they will have greater trust in them.

Hypothesis 1. Perception of an expatriate's task cohesiveness is positively related to the HCN coworker's trust in the expatriate.

1.2. Moderating role of perceived interpersonal similarity

At the most basic level, trust may be based on social attributes such as observable demographic and psychological characteristics of the target. These include gender, ethnicity, and personal and work values (Levin et al., 2006). The extent to which the HCN perceives the expatriate to be similar on such characteristics is collectively termed here as perceived interpersonal similarity (Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004). In a MNC setting, domains that are potentially relevant in perceptions of interpersonal similarity include ethnicity, personal values, and work values (Toh & DeNisi, 2007). These have been considered as surface- and deep-level characteristics, where surface-level similarities are easily observable, like ethnicity, and deep-level similarities concern traits such as basic values (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). HCNs may perceive expatriates to have different skin, eye, and hair color, dress norms, physical build (e.g., height, bone structure, facial features), and spoken language, thus highlighting ethnic differences. They may also perceive expatriates to be similar or different in basic values from them (Van Vianen et al., 2004).

In general, people are less willing to trust or be attracted to others who are different from them than others who are socially similar to them (Byrne, 1971). Apparent physical cues, such as skin and hair color, cue the presence of ingroup–outgroup membership, and form salient, though not always relevant, bases of an individual's assessment of how much to trust a given target. In the absence of behavioral evidence or personal history with the target of trust, easily observable or inferred interpersonal information based on social categories are relied upon in trust evaluations. High levels of interpersonal similarity should reinforce or at least allow for the positive impressions formed with other pieces of information (e.g., the task cohesiveness of the expatriate) such that it increases trust.

On the other hand, low levels of perceived interpersonal similarity, indicating potentially incompatible values, should depress the influence of other pieces of available information. This is because negative information has been found to be more salient than positive information in judgments (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998). Negative information is elaborated more than positive information and tends to elicit more attention than the latter. Individuals also tend to be more certain of negative information about others than they are of positive information (Ybarra, Schaberg, & Keiper, 1999). This asymmetry of importance, attention, and uncertainty in differently valenced information is more likely to occur in situations where the consequences of negative events are more pertinent than positive ones (Smith et al., 2006). The consequences of misplaced trust are potentially great in workplace relationships and thus, negative information may have a more significant influence on trust. Combined with other information, negative information in one domain may serve to attenuate the effects of positive information in another domain on trust.

To this connection, HCNs may perceive expatriates to be more or less interpersonally similar to them. Perceptions of interpersonal similarity can reinforce task cohesiveness perceptions to lead to greater levels of trust. On the other hand, when expatriates are

perceived as low in interpersonal similarity, the relationship between task cohesiveness and trust may be attenuated.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between a HCN's perception of the expatriate coworker's task cohesiveness and the HCN's trust in the expatriate coworker is moderated by the extent to which both parties are interpersonally similar; when interpersonal similarity is low, the relationship is weakened.

In addition to cues derived from the targets of trust, cues informing HCNs about how much to trust expatriates may also be derived from the organizational context in which the HCN–expatriate relationship is embedded. We deal with this next, specifically the moderating influence of POS on the relationship between perceived task cohesiveness and HCNs' trust judgments.

1.3. Moderating role of POS

Studies show that human resource management practices influence trust in the organization and in one's supervisors (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Whitener, 1997). When organizations show themselves to be trustworthy, such that employees expect that the organization's authorities care, are honest and fair, and will not act opportunistically against them, employees reciprocate. They reciprocate with greater trust in the organization, trust among the employees, and behaviors that advance the interests of the organization (Korsgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Whitener (1997) theorizes that, "HR activities and employee trust interact across levels. Employee trust at one level affects employee trust at another (for example, trust-in-supervisor has at least some effect on trust-in-organization)" (p. 394). The lack of trust in one's organization and its authorities, instead, negatively affects job satisfaction (Chang & Bordia, 2001), and leads to a host of undesirable antisocial and counterproductive work behaviors (Thau, Crossley, Bennett, & Sczesny, 2007).

The trustworthiness of the organization can be demonstrated by its support towards its employees. Chen, Aryee, and Lee (2005) state that, "The favorable treatment that employees receive from the organization constitutes an opportunity for the organization not only to initiate a social exchange relationship with its employees, but also to demonstrate its trustworthiness in the eyes of employees" (p. 465). Employees develop global beliefs about how much their employer cares about their personal well-being and values their contribution to the organization, also known as perceived organizational support (POS) in organizational research (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Perceiving organizational support can play an important role in increasing trust in the organization.

We hypothesize that POS could also support the increase of trust among employees, and more specifically, support the increase of HCNs' trust in expatriate coworkers. HCNs who feel that they are supported by their organization are more likely to reciprocate the trust from the organization's authorities with greater trust in fellow coworkers in the organization. HCNs are assured that their trust in their coworkers would not be misplaced and their efforts and good acts will continue to be noticed, supported, and rewarded (Stinglhamber, De Cremer, & Mercken, 2006, p. 449). On the other hand, employees who do not feel that they are being supported by the organization may be less willing to trust other organizational members. The lack of support from the organization could offset positive and cooperative signals sent by expatriates to their HCN coworkers that they are trustworthy. It potentially becomes a piece of negative information that looms large in the HCNs' assessment of whether or not to trust expatriates—even if the expatriates act cohesively. In effect, because negative information weighs in more heavily on trust than positive information, low organizational support for employees could jeopardize the efforts of expatriates to build trust with HCNs (Smith et al., 2006). Consequently, POS should support the positive impact that perceived task cohesiveness has on HCNs' trust in expatriate coworkers. On the other hand, low POS would weaken the relationship between task cohesiveness and trust.

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between a HCN's perception of the expatriate coworker's task cohesiveness and the HCN's trust in the expatriate coworker is moderated by the organizational support perceived by the HCN; when POS is low, the relationship is weakened.

Up until now, we have presented the theoretical rationale and hypotheses for how perceptions of task cohesiveness interact with interpersonal similarity and POS as bases for HCNs' trust in expatriates. Next, we turn to how HCNs' perceived task cohesiveness influences their willingness to share information with their expatriate coworkers, and the role of trust as a mediator in the process.

1.4. Coworker trust as a mediator of information sharing

Information sharing from HCN employees to expatriates in the MNC can facilitate the prompt and successful socialization of newcomer expatriates (e.g., Toh & DeNisi, 2007). The unique information and resources that organizational insiders possess can provide support, insight and assistance to newcomers that secondary sources of information cannot (Morrison, 2002). As organizational insiders, HCNs can help expatriates understand the norms of the organization as well as learn their work roles. This could potentially speed up learning and decrease the amount of time needed for newcomer expatriates to achieve proficiency in their tasks (Pinder & Schroeder, 1987). As cultural insiders, HCNs possess intimate knowledge of the cultural mores and accepted norms that expatriates may not be aware of. This information can help expatriates become aware of what is socially accepted and avoid committing potentially serious cultural faux pas (Toh & DeNisi, 2005), as well as lead to increases in organizational knowledge, organizational knowledge-sharing, job performance, and the promotability of expatriates (Carraher, Sullivan, & Crocitto, 2008). Yet, despite the potential benefits of information sharing, HCNs may sometimes choose not to do so with their expatriate coworkers, and may jeopardize expatriates' effective performance when they withhold critical information (Toh & DeNisi, 2005).

Task cohesiveness can lead to greater cooperation and communication between coworkers because of reciprocity, as well as the trust it produces (Carless & de Paola, 2000). First, the social exchange principle (Blau, 1964) suggests that task cohesiveness by coworkers should be reciprocated with prosocial acts. Evidence supports this. It finds that in teams, the higher the level of team cohesiveness, the more likely team members share knowledge (Bakker, Leenders, Gabbay, Kratzer, & Van Engelen, 2006). Accordingly, in the context of the HCN–expatriate relationship, expatriate task cohesiveness may be more likely reciprocated by HCNs with a greater willingness to share useful information. Second, task cohesiveness could also increase information sharing through the trust it engenders. Cooperative behavior, and other forms of spontaneous sociability, are possible responses resulting from trust (Jones & George, 1998). As hypothesized earlier, cooperative perceptions of coworkers help create trust, a necessary condition for information sharing in dyadic and team levels (c.f., Wang & Noe, 2010). Trusting that others will not harm us, we feel safe and relaxed, and more likely to help. When we do not trust, we experience fear and withdraw from the threatening situation (Grovier, 1998). In the organizational

context, this fear may cause employees to withhold citizenship behaviors that could be beneficial to the organization (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Applied to the HCN–expatriate relationship, we expect that HCNs who see their expatriate coworkers as task cohesive will be more willing to offer work-related information to them because they are trusted more.

Hypothesis 4. The effect of HCNs' perception of the expatriate coworkers' task cohesiveness on their willingness to share information is mediated by HCNs' trust in the expatriate coworker.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Sample and procedures

Respondents were 174 local Omani nationals enrolled in an executive management program conducted by the second author in Muscat, the capital city of Oman. The sample identified themselves as local employees and as currently working with at least one expatriate coworker. Our sample represented a range of industries such as finance, insurance, and banking (62.3%), oil (16.9%), and information/high technology (6.5%). Most of them (84.6%) held at least middle to senior level positions in the organization. Sixty-one percent of the sample was male and 80.8% of our sample also reported having worked previously with expatriates. Thirty percent of the sample was also involved in some form of mentoring or orientation program for expatriates in their organizations. In answering questions about an expatriate coworker, respondents were instructed to refer to an expatriate coworker whom they work with the most in the current organization.

2.2. Measures

Perceived task cohesiveness was measured using the 5-item task cohesion scale (Chang & Bordia, 2001) assessing the HCNs' perceived shared commitment and cooperation of the expatriate coworker whom they worked with the most. Items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree). Sample items include, "We are united in trying to reach our work goals," "We share responsibility for any mistakes that occurs in the course of our work," and "We have conflicting aspirations for our work goals" (reverse coded).

Interpersonal similarity was measured by having respondents rate the extent to which they agreed (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree) that the respondent was similar with his/her expatriate coworker in terms of three facets – ethnicity, personal values, and work values. These facets were examined because they represent ostensible and important attributes that people consider in trust judgments and making sense of their social environments (Liladhar, 1999). They have also been identified in previous research to influence HCNs' perceptions and reactions to expatriates (Toh & DeNisi, 2007).

Perceived organizational support (POS) was measured using the eight-item short form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1: strongly disagree, 7: strongly agree). Sample items included, "My organization cares about my opinions," "My organization strongly considers my goals and values," and "If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me."

Trust was measured using McAllister's (1995) 6-item measure of cognitive trust to assess the extent to which HCNs trust their expatriate coworker to perform the task competently and dependably. Sample items included, "My coworker approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication," "I can rely on my coworker not to make my job more difficult by careless work," and "Other work associates of mine who must interact with my coworker consider him/her to be trustworthy."

Information sharing was measured using a 5-item measure assessing the extent to which HCNs were willing (1: very unwilling, 7: very willing) to share with their expatriate coworker on five major types of role information identified by Morrison (1993) as important to organizational newcomers. Sample information types included, information on the behaviors and attitudes valued and expected by the organization, information on how to perform specific aspects of the job, and information on the appropriateness of the expatriate's social behavior at work.

To control for the influence of variables known to be associated with the level of trust and how much individuals engage in prosocial behavior, such as willingness to share information, the length of the relationship between the respondent and the expatriate coworker and liking were measured. We measured the *length of relationship* by asking respondents how long (in months) they have worked with their expatriate coworker. Consistent with previous research (Levin et al., 2006), we calculated the logarithm of the number of months (plus 1) that the respondent reported having worked with the expatriate. Log transformations better reflect how people perceive the length of a relationship. For example, knowing the expatriate an extra month after only a 1-month relationship may be viewed as a more significant difference than knowing the expatriate an extra month after, say 10 years. Log transforming also reduces skewness and makes this type of variable more normally distributed (Levin et al., 2006). We measured *liking* by HCNs of their expatriate coworkers with two items. The items were, "I rather go out on my own than with my coworker," and "I rarely socialize with my coworker."

3. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures are presented in Table 1. The Cronbach alphas for the measures are

Table 1
Correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alphas.[a,b,c]

Study variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Task cohesiveness	(.77)					
2. Interpersonal similarity	.46	(.68)				
3. Perceived organizational support (POS)	.44	.38	(.80)			
4. Coworker trust	.57	.54	.46	(.76)		
5. Information sharing	.49	.25	.37	.38	(.79)	
Control variables						
6. Liking	.68	.50	.38	.57	.46	(.83)
7. Length of relationship	.00	.04	.11	.16	−.04	.00

[a] $N = 143–174$ due to missing data.
[b] Alphas are in parentheses on the diagonal.
[c] Correlations with absolute values greater than or equal .25 are significant at $p < .01$.

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Table 2
Results of multiple regression tests of moderation on trust.[a]

Predictors	Hypothesis 1		Hypothesis 2		Hypothesis 3	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Length of relationship	.32*	.33*	.31*	.27*	.29*	.26
Liking	.33**	.19**	.10	.11*	.17**	.17**
Task cohesiveness		.32**	.26**	.25**	.26**	.28**
Interpersonal similarity			.24**	.25**		
Perceived organizational support (POS)					.17*	.12
Task cohesiveness × interpersonal similarity				.07		
Task cohesiveness × POS						.14*
ΔR^2		.06**		.01		.03*
Total R^2	.33**	.40**	.48**	.50**	.42**	.45**

[a] Beta weights are shown.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

indicated in boldface on the diagonal. The scale internal consistency reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .68$ (interpersonal similarity) to $\alpha = .83$ (liking). The somewhat lower internal consistency reliability for interpersonal similarity is consistent with studies that show that demographic (e.g., ethnicity) factors do not always have a strong correlation with basic values (Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008; Van Vianen et al., 2004). The sample sizes in our analyses ranged from 143 to 170 due to missing data. Task cohesiveness is significantly related to trust ($r = .57$, $p < .01$) and information sharing ($r = .49$, $p < .01$). Consistent with previous research (Levin et al., 2006), the correlation between length of the relationship and the level of trust is weak ($r = .16$, n.s.).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that task cohesiveness would be positively related to trust. Trust scores were submitted to a hierarchical regression analysis. The control variables were submitted in the first step of the analysis and task cohesiveness was entered next. A summary of the analysis is provided in Table 2, Model 1, which revealed a significant relationship between task cohesiveness and trust even after the effects of the control variables were accounted for. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted an interaction between task cohesiveness and interpersonal similarity on trust scores. Following standard procedures (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) for testing interaction effects using hierarchical regression analyses, variables were centered before they were submitted in the analysis. Again, control variables were entered into the first step, followed by task cohesiveness and interpersonal similarity, and finally the interaction of the two variables. A summary of the analysis is included in Table 2, Model 2, which revealed no significant interaction. Hence, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

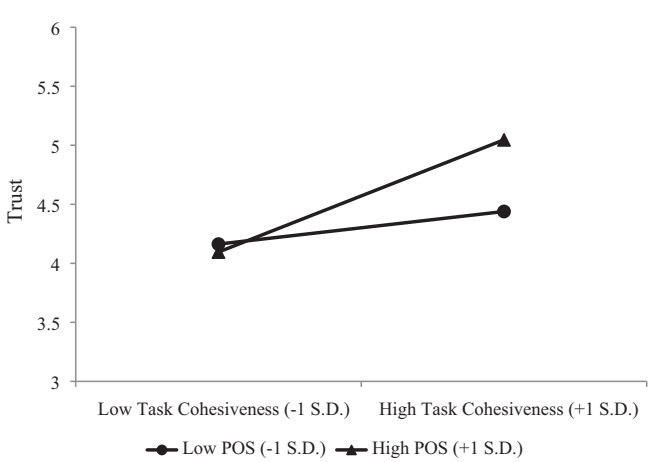

Fig. 2. The moderating effect of perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between task cohesiveness and trust.

Hypothesis 3 predicted an interaction between task cohesiveness and POS on trust scores. Adopting the same procedure described previously for testing interaction effects, control variables were entered into the first step, followed by task cohesiveness and interpersonal similarity, and the interaction of the two variables in the final step. A summary of the analysis is included in Table 2, Model 3, which revealed a significant task-cohesiveness × POS interaction. Following standard procedures for plotting interactions (Cohen et al., 2003), mean trust scores were calculated using the regression equation at one standard deviation below and above the means on the task cohesiveness and POS measures (see Fig. 2). Simple slopes tests (Cohen et al., 2003) indicated a positive relation between task cohesiveness and trust when POS was high ($B = .44$, $p < .001$), but no significant relationship when POS was low ($B = .14$, $p = .16$). That is, task cohesiveness was associated with higher levels of trust when POS was high, but not when POS was low. Hence, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that HCNs' trust in their expatriate coworkers will be positively related to their willingness to share information with the expatriate and that this relationship is mediated by trust. We tested this hypothesis by adopting causal steps approach recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), controlling for the effects of length of relationship and liking. All four steps in this approach were passed (see Table 3). A Sobel test confirmed that the influence of perceived task cohesion on information sharing via trust was significant (Sobel $z = 1.97$, $p < .05$). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was supported – task cohesiveness was positively related to willingness to share information and this relationship was mediated by trust.

It is possible that because perceived task cohesiveness significantly interacts with POS to influence trust, trust may also mediate a conditional indirect effect of perceived task cohesiveness on HCNs' willingness to share information. To test this possibility, we adopted the mediated moderation analysis, Model 2, suggested by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), and a bootstrapping procedure of 5000 samples to test for significant conditional indirect effects of task cohesion. The results suggest that the moderation effects predicted in H2 and H3 were not mediated by trust to affect information sharing – the moderation was not mediated for the effects of interpersonal similarity

Table 3
Results of test for trust as a mediator.[a]

Steps	Estimate	Beta	95% CI	*P*-Value
Step 1: b(YX)	.24	.23	.03 to .46	.03
Step 2: b(MX)	.32	.34	.15 to .48	.00
Step 3: b(YM)	.22	.19	.01 to .42	.04
Step 4: b(YX·M)	.19	.18	−.03 to .42	.09

[a] Y: information sharing; X: task cohesiveness; M: trust.

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(coefficient = .06, n.s.) or POS (coefficient = .08, n.s.). The indirect effect of task cohesiveness on information sharing was higher when interpersonal similarity (*conditional indirect effect* = .07) and POS (*conditional indirect effect* = .04) were 1 SD above the mean than when interpersonal similarity (*conditional indirect effect* = .03) and POS (*conditional indirect effect* = .01) were 1 SD below the mean. None of these effects were significantly different from zero; all corresponding bootstrap 95% confidence intervals included zero, indicating that the conditional indirect effects of task cohesion at 1 SD above and below the mean of interpersonal similarity and POS is not significantly different from zero at $\alpha < .05$. Hence, trust mediates a main effect of task cohesiveness on information sharing and the mediation is not contingent on levels of interpersonal similarity or POS.

4. Discussion

The integration and success of expatriate employees have been significant concerns of MNCs that employ expatriates. When expatriates fail, stakeholders – the sending and host organizations, the expatriate (and his/her family), and the HCN – potentially incur substantial personal and economic costs. Whereas there has been significant advancement in the past few decades, research and organizational measures aimed at improving the success of expatriates have largely neglected the perceptions and reactions of HCNs (Takeuchi, 2010).

The present research answers calls for adopting the HCNs' perspective in understanding the expatriate socialization and knowledge exchange process between HCNs and expatriates (Aycan, 1997; Vance et al., 2009). It suggests an intuitive yet relatively unexplored potential mechanism – trust – in the HCN–expatriate dyad as an important mechanism. It also suggests that HCNs should be an active player in the expatriate adjustment process. The willingness of HCNs to act as socializing agents is a function of both the MNC and the expatriates' actions – or at least how they are perceived by HCNs. Our study corroborates previous speculations that HCNs need to trust expatriates for them to be willing to act as socializing agents for expatriates. Furthermore, in addition to perceiving expatriates' task cohesiveness, perceiving support from one's organization is also beneficial. Supportive organizations create a climate for trust, whereas organizations seen as unsupportive of HCNs could potentially offset the efforts of expatriates to build trust with HCNs. Hence, our study highlights the importance of paying attention to HCNs' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior, in addition to that of the expatriates. Not doing so may inadvertently counter the efforts of expatriates and the effectiveness of other international management practices adopted for enhancing the success of expatriates and the organization.

Our study also found that interpersonal similarity or difference might not be important in trust evaluations in light of more task-diagnostic behaviors displayed by the target expatriate employee. We speculate that task cohesiveness information is more directly diagnostic of the expatriate's trustworthiness than more ostensible interpersonal attributes and perceived values, as these only suggest possible but not actual behavioral intent. Work-related information is also more pertinent to work-related trust than more basic personal information. This reasoning can also be applied to explain why interpersonal similarity may not always be associated with greater levels of trust between parties – information in other domains may be more influential and negate its influence (Levin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2006). An important implication of this finding is that expatriates who are interpersonally different from their HCN counterparts are not doomed to fail but can still gain the trust of and information from HCNs if they are able to demonstrate to HCNs that they are task cohesive. This corroborates recent work that suggests that perceiving difference is not necessarily harmful to cooperation but can actually aid information sharing, because it identifies a potential information asymmetry, and the parties in need of information as well as those who are uniquely able to provide it (Leonardelli & Toh, 2011).

As noted earlier, Omani HCNs are somewhat unique. Omanis have been described as "culturally diverse, but this diversity has encouraged comfort with otherness and a tolerance of foreign behavior" (Neal, 2010, p. 258). Omanis tend to have friendly relationships with their expatriate counterparts. Furthermore, the expatriates who are in Oman are predominantly Asian (more than 90%), particularly Asians from India (Winckler, 2000). These expatriates do not necessarily enjoy the higher status and privileges that potentially create rifts between expatriates and HCNs. In fact, inequity pervades in Oman with the advantage awarded to HCNs instead of the expatriates, and Omanis tend not to feel threatened by expatriate presence (Neal, 2010). It is possible then that given the familiarity of Omanis with expatriates from Asia, Omani HCNs give less weight to interpersonal characteristics and base their evaluations of their expatriate counterparts more in terms of work-related behaviors. This may not be true in other contexts where expatriates are not as familiar to or welcomed by the locals. However, more evidence in other contexts is needed to substantiate this claim.

4.1. Theoretical contributions and implications

The present study contributes to research in at least three ways: First, we advance research on expatriate management by explicitly examining the potential socializing role of the HCN in the expatriate socialization process. The HCN perspective urges expatriate management researchers to broaden the scope of study to include HCNs as a key factor affecting the expatriate adjustment process (Aycan, 1997). This is a relatively new avenue of research and still warrants much development and empirical support. The current study empirically tests propositions put forward by researchers and focuses on the potential role of HCNs in expatriate management. Specifically, it focuses on the perceptions of HCNs and how they might influence HCNs' interactions with expatriate coworkers.

Second, we identify the mechanisms that lead HCNs to more likely perform the socializing role by sharing information with expatriate coworkers. Sharing information, often an extra-role behavior that is not formally or explicitly required or rewarded, needs to be otherwise induced (Organ, 1988) and understanding what these inducements are is necessary. We show that the perception that expatriates are task cohesive can induce trust and lead to greater willingness of HCNs to share valuable work-related information. The role of trust has been alluded to but not empirically tested (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Despite the suggested importance of trust, current research lacks empirical evidence demonstrating the factors that induce HCNs' willingness to trust and consequently help expatriate coworkers who are in need (see Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006 for an exception). The current study fills this gap.

Third, this study also adds to the research on knowledge sharing, diversity, and trust. Currently, there is a lack of consideration of how the organizational and interpersonal contexts, along with individual characteristics, influence knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010). Interest in this subject in the context of MNCs has erupted recently with a growing body of research examining how knowledge is transferred within and across units of MNCs (e.g., Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009; Vance et al., 2009). Diversity scholars have also called for research to shed some light on the "black box" of organizational demography by examining the intervening individual, interpersonal, and organi-

zational factors and processes that explain how organizational demography influence work-related attitudes and behaviors (Lawrence, 1997). Our study examined the interaction between interpersonal similarity and task cohesiveness on trust. It finds that diversity becomes far less important in influencing trust when more diagnostic information is available. A context in which HCNs have a high propensity to trust expatriates, such as in the case of Oman, may mitigate the significance of diversity.

Finally, a review of the literature on organizational trust also reveals that there is a dearth of research examining the development of trust between coworker dyads and the consequence of that trust in non-experimental settings. Despite its importance to various individual and team processes and outcomes, coworker trust and how it is developed have been relatively neglected in the management literature. The antecedents and consequences of trust between coworkers, particularly between coworkers of different national origins, are relatively unexplored (Becerra & Gupta, 2003; Whitener et al., 1998). Hence, the current study contributes to a nascent stream of studies focused on elucidating the antecedents and consequences of coworker trust.

4.2. Managerial relevance

Our study also has practical relevance for managing a multinational workforce. First, our study shows that MNCs need to pay attention to the impression expatriates create in the eyes of HCNs. It also implies that the expatriate may actively influence the evaluation of trustworthiness by adopting certain strategies to "minimize or eliminate counterparts' perceptions that one's actions are likely to have a negative impact on their goals, concerns, or well-being" (Williams, 2007, p. 596). Expatriates should endeavor to demonstrate their own commitment to the organization and its goals. These behaviors increase the likelihood that HCNs will trust them. Sending organizations, too, can do their part in ensuring that their expatriates are committed and well-prepared for the overseas assignment. Selecting suitable candidates for expatriation has been a significant challenge for MNCs (Sinangil & Ones, 2001). Consistent with previous research that warns of selecting expatriates solely based on technical skills, our findings suggest that selecting expatriates on job- and organizational-related attitudes are also important in facilitating cooperative HCN–expatriate relations. MNCs need to be sensitive to how expatriates might be perceived by HCNs, and support expatriates in developing the needed skills and breeding commitment to the MNCs' overseas mission. Our findings also suggest that effort should be made in increasing the legitimacy of expatriates in host units by making known the commitment, qualifications, capabilities, purpose, and the dependability of the expatriates to the HCNs who will be working with them. In practical terms, organizations can achieve this with pre-arrival orientation sessions for HCNs, where HCNs can find out the goals of the expatriate assignment and the assignee's background, and offer input on increasing the likelihood of success for the assignment and effective HCN–expatriate working relations.

Second, our study shows that the socializing role of HCNs in the expatriate adjustment process is more likely realized when organizations are also seen to be supportive. It is important to cultivate trusting relationships between expatriates and HCNs, as it creates the conditions for information sharing to occur and potentially sets the stage for greater information exchange between expatriates and HCNs. POS among HCNs may be enhanced by involving HCNs in the selection and socialization process of expatriates, keeping them informed of and prepared for impending changes, being clear on how the arrival of the expatriate will impact existing HCNs. It can also be demonstrated by supporting HCNs in their day-to-day work, long-term development, and any challenges they may face while working with expatriates (Vance & Paik, 2002). The assignment of competent and committed expatriates also demonstrates concern and due diligence on the organization's part with respect to the selection and preparation of these expatriates, who can have a significant impact on the HCNs' interests and particularly, their ability to perform their own jobs. Certainly, this is a reinforcing phenomenon in that trusted organizations, in turn, further enable HCNs to trust that the expatriates they work with will support work-related goals and interests, or at least not jeopardize them. To the extent that organizations can alleviate uncertainty and doubt, and help HCNs feel secure and supported in the organization, the HCN, the organization, and the expatriate will benefit from greater trust and cooperation. This, as evinced in our sample, was a more important moderator of the relationship between task cohesiveness and trust than interpersonal similarity between HCNs and expatriates.

4.3. Limitations of study and future research

Our respondents represented HCNs of one country in the Gulf region, namely Oman. As such, the results of this study may have limited generalizability to HCN–expatriate interactions in other countries. Given that all our variables were reported by the HCN, there is significant potential for common-method bias effects. The intercorrelations among the variables (with the exception of length of relationship) were significant ($p < .01$) and above $r = .25$ with the correlation between liking and task cohesiveness peaking at $r = .68$. This is potentially a concern because perceptions and self-report were solely relied upon. Nevertheless, the high correlation of liking with the study variables is not surprising and should not necessarily be viewed as a bias, but as an indication of positive past performance (Varma, Denisi, & Peters, 1996; Varma, Pichler, & Srinivas, 2005). Relational perceptions are important for study as they predict the future course of a relationship and influence beliefs about future relationships (c.f., Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004)—a prediction that is the main thrust of our study.

In addition, we found a significant interaction in our analyses, thus indicating that the respondents did not answer the questions thoughtlessly as all high or low (Chattopadhyay, 2003; Levin et al., 2006). The more complex moderated regression model makes it unlikely that respondents could be guided by a cognitive map in responding to the scales (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010) – a claim substantiated by others who show that interaction effects cannot be artifacts of common method variance and in fact can be severely deflated by common method variance, making interaction effects more difficult to detect (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010). Others have also suggested that common method variance do not necessarily result in an upward bias in relationships and advise against post hoc statistical control strategies as some reveal poor empirical results (Conway & Lance, 2010). Our own post hoc statistical probing of the presence of common method bias conducted according to current recommendations (Chang et al., 2010; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) corroborates these claims. We adopted the partial correlations procedure. All the study variables were entered into an exploratory factor analysis, and the effects of the first un-rotated factor from the exploratory factor analysis were partialled out in our moderated analyses (see Conway & Lance, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003 for the advantages and limitations of this procedure). Our findings did not change – a significant task cohesiveness × POS effect remained. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the data collected. Viewing these findings as a causal process among the variables should be done so with caution. It is plausible that trust influences perceptions of task cohesiveness and POS, or that the act

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of sharing information itself offers opportunities to increase one's trust and positive perception of one's coworker.

Future work should address these shortcomings with multi-source data, a longitudinal design, and a sampling of HCNs and expatriates representing a wider range of nationalities. Obtaining multi-source data in HCN–expatriate dyads is challenging, not to mention that collected over a period of time for a longitudinal study. However, this is data that is sorely needed for the field to advance significantly. Future research could also consider aspects of the HCN–expatriate relationship such as the interaction intensity or frequency, as well as explore other theoretical perspectives, such as social identity theory (Graf & Harland, 2005). Other forms of behaviors and competence relevant in the multinational setting, such as interpersonal and intercultural competence that could be salient to HCNs (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998), and their influence on continued trust and information exchange may also be examined. On the other side of the coin, researchers suggest that HCNs need also to be seen by their expatriate counterparts, subordinates, and leaders, as credible and trustworthy in order for them to seek and utilize the knowledge and information shared by HCNs (Vance et al., 2009). Hence, understanding the knowledge sharing and trust-building process through the eyes of the expatriate is also needed. Finally, recent trust conceptualizations have suggested that trust and distrust may be viewed as orthogonal construct with different meaning (Lewicki et al., 2006). Future research would benefit from investigating distrust as a separate outcome, and trust and distrust in the expatriate (or HCN) on different facets (e.g., trust in the expatriate's competence, and distrust in the expatriate's commitment). Clearly, much remains to be investigated in this important stream of expatriate management research.

5. Conclusion

As the globalization of the world's economies continues unabated, it is important to understand how HCNs and expatriates can cooperate effectively such that the goals and interests of the MNC and its members are protected. Currently, empirical evidence adopting the HCNs' perspective has lagged behind theoretical models – particularly with respect to their strategic role in multinational organizations, and their behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes. The current study helps to fill this gap by providing evidence that the perceptions and trust of HCNs are important components of building cooperative relations between HCNs and expatriates, and does so in a relatively unexplored host country context. It also demonstrates that expatriates can expect to earn HCNs' trust and support if they are seen as cooperative and committed, and the organization is viewed as supportive.

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