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研究課題名(和文) An Empirical Investigation of Bridge Individuals and Bridging Roles in Multinational Companies

研究課題名(英文) An Empirical Investigation of Bridge Individuals and Bridging Roles in Multinational Companies

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研究成果の概要(和文)：本研究では、組織とグループ間のコミュニケーションを媒介する「ブリッジ人材」の組織行動を理解するため、国際人的資源管理における「ブリッジ人材」とそのブリッジングの役割を中心として調査を行った。さらに、新型コロナウイルス危機下において、各国で生活している外国人従業員のブリッジ機能の変化、そして現地語能力と彼らの心理的ストレスや、仕事に対する満足度や、ジョブ・クラフティングジョブなど行動的な変化とその結果についても調査した。これらの成果を踏まえ、多国籍企業の国際人的資源管理における人材マネジメントの理論枠組みを提示した。研究成果は国内外の主要な学会で発表した上で、国際ジャーナルに投稿した。

研究成果の学術的意義や社会的意義

本研究は、多国籍企業の国際人的資源管理戦略において、複数の文化や言語に精通した人材のマネジメントに焦点を当て、学術的に新たな理論構築と発見を提示した。学問分野の発展のためにも、そして今後さらに国際化を推進する日本企業の言語戦略と人材活用のあり方を考える上でも非常に重要である。新型コロナウイルス危機下において、国際比較研究を通じ、ブリッジ人材と呼ばれる人材は新型コロナウイルスの危機下における行動的な変化を分る上で、新型コロナウイルスの危機が終息してから会社がどのようなサポートを提供すべきかを明らかにする意義もある。

研究成果の概要(英文)：This research project investigated bridge individuals and their bridging roles in multinational companies (MNCs). This project focused on developing the framework, test the affecting factors, and gather the potential consequences of bridging roles. By integrating interdisciplinary areas, this study uncovered if and how language skills and/or cultural skills can be utilized as resources that influence bridging roles. Due to the influence of COVID-19, this project also explored how expatriates with different host country language proficiencies have used different mechanisms to improve their virtual work adaptivity during COVID-19. Main findings from this research project have been presented at several international and domestic academic conferences and submitted to English academic journals and a Japanese book.

研究分野：国際人的資源管理論・組織行動論

キーワード：bridge individuals bridging roles headquarter & subsidiary language skills cultural skills expatriates virtual work

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1. 研究開始当初の背景

Multinational Companies (MNCs) increasingly recognize the significant role of individuals who internalize and identify with multiple cultures and/or languages. Bridge individuals include expatriates, inpatriates, and various bilingual or multilingual employees, especially individuals who act in bridging roles between different cultural and/or language groups in MNCs. Because of their multidimensional activities, bridge individuals were seen as gatekeepers, conduits for resource acquisition, and knowledge-transferring nodes. However, the concept of bridging roles and bridge individuals in the international business context had not received much attention from international business researchers. The current research proposal aimed to fill the prevailing gap and shape the foundation of bridging roles performed by bridge individuals by testing the underlying dimensions of bridging roles, the factors affecting bridging activities, and the potential positive and negative consequences of bridging roles.

2. 研究の目的

Because the way bridge individuals interact with others when serving in their bridging role was not well developed, the identities, attitudes, behaviors, and cognitive and affective characteristics of bridge individuals were high-potential research topics for future studies. Bridge individuals are expected to act in bridging roles not only among different team members and functional teams, but also among different linguistic and cultural groups. Accordingly, language skills and cultural skills are both valuable resources for bridge individuals. Considering the close relationship between language and culture, the framework of bridging roles can stimulate new research on multiculturalism and multilingualism. This research was highly original by shedding light on the complex nature of bridging roles in MNCs. The research objectives for this two-year project were described below.

- ① To develop the framework by which to understand bridge individuals and bridging roles.
- ② To find the potential factors that affect bridge individuals' bridging roles.
- ③ To gather the potential consequences of bridging roles in changing intergroup relationships and personal outcomes.
- ④ To test if and how language skills and cultural skills can be resources in improving bridging roles.

3. 研究の方法

Utilizing the quantitative method, based on the preliminary qualitative study, this research project developed and tested the theoretical model of the factors affecting bridging roles and the consequences of bridging roles both from bridge individuals' perspective and home-country co-workers' perspective. This research also theorized and empirically demonstrated the mechanisms of foreign language competence and cultural identity as resources in effecting bridging activities. In addition, this research project explored how expatriates as one type of bridge individuals with different host country language (HCL) proficiencies have used different mechanisms to improve their virtual work adaptivity during COVID-19.

(1) Qualitative method: bridge individuals working in the Japanese foreign subsidiaries

I collected data with semi-structured interviews with 60 employees in 13 Japanese subsidiaries in Germany and the Netherlands. The samples included manufacturing, chemical, financial, and hospitality industries. The final data came from seven heads of subsidiaries, 25 directors/senior managers/managers, and 28 staff members.

(2) Quantitative method: bridge individuals working in the Japanese foreign subsidiaries

I then conducted survey research based on 200 Japanese employees working in overseas Japanese subsidiaries. They worked in a variety of countries such as China, Korea, North America, Central and South America, etc. All of the participants were of Japanese nationality.

(3) Quantitative method: bridge individuals' co-workers working in Japan

I contacted 483 full-time employees through a third-part online survey administration company in Japan. I requested the company to collect data from subsidiaries of foreign MNCs in Japan, and all the participants must having an expatriate co-worker in the same functional department and having experience working together with those expatriates.

(4) Quantitative method: expatriating bridge individuals in virtual work (telework) during COVID-19

Due to the challenges that COVID-19 brought to the research, I expanded my research subject and conducted a cross-country survey study in eight countries with 994 expatriates recruited through an online survey panel in Japan. Participants were full-time expatriates working in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, service, finance, and IT.

4. 研究成果

(1) The Double-Edged Effect of Bridging Roles in multinational companies

Through one qualitative study and two quantitative studies, I inductively theorized and tested the double-edged effect of bridging role in MNCs and the moderating influence of multiculturalism. In Study 1, based on the findings from the qualitative study with 60 bridge individuals, the study theorized that the functional and linguistic bridging activities by bridge individuals in MNCs could nurture good relationships with their co-workers and stimulated home-country employees' dual identification; these activities also caused emotional exhaustion; and the level of cultural identity integration or culture switching of the bridge individuals moderates the above relationships. We tested our predictions using two separate samples of 200 bridge individuals working in Japanese foreign subsidiaries and 483 Japanese co-workers who worked with bridge individuals. I elaborated and theoretically strengthened the emergent findings from the qualitative study with the help of the existing theories, namely, social capital theory, JD-R theory, and the cultural identity perspective.

The new theoretical perspective suggested that for bridge individuals, performing bridging roles does not always produce desirable outcomes for them. Indeed, performing functional and linguistic bridging resulted in enriching the social capital of the bridge individuals, which promoted building a good relationship with their co-workers and indirectly fosters host country co-workers' dual identification. At the same time, however, performing bridging roles produced the perception of role conflict among bridge individuals, which tended to result in a high level of emotional exhaustion among them.

(2) Bridging roles and cultural skills impact

I delineated and empirically demonstrated the moderating role of cultural identity on the relationship between bridging roles and subsequent individual outcomes. Related to the view that cultural skills can be the resources in promoting boundary spanning activities, this research suggested that, when the cultural identity integration is low, bridge individuals are able to switch their different cultural identity according to the groups they communicate with, which enables them to bridge different cultural and possibly linguistic groups. Specifically, the findings suggested that bridge individuals can have an extensive social network, supplementary social capital, and less role conflict when they can straddle between different cultural identities. These resources could help bridge individuals in interpersonal relationship-building, and in reducing the emotional exhaustion. These findings advanced toward the understanding of cultural skills as resources in bridging roles, and provided further evidence on the argument that the straddling of cultures plays a determinant role in bridging inter-organizational clusters.

(3) Locally recruited parent country nationals (PCNLs) in multinational companies

Rather than traditionally classifying employees working in multinational companies into parent country nationals (PCNs), host country nationals (HCNs), and third country nationals (TCNs), this study investigated a particular group of bridge individuals called PCNLs (locally recruited parent country nationals) and their bridging roles. This study opened a new debate on PCNLs, unpacking the dimensions of PCNLs' bridging roles, and explored the affecting factors on the dark sides of their bridging consequences. By integrating interdisciplinary areas, this study also uncovered if and how language skills and cultural skills can be utilized as resources that influence PCNLs' bridging roles.

This study first defined a unique group in MNCs' subsidiaries, PCNLs. They are the bridge individuals with the most potential because they can handle the language of the parent and host countries, as well as the lingua franca, English. However, due to their special position, role conflict, role ambiguity, and identification dissonance, their advantage inevitably leads to status loss. This study shed light on the negative effect of language skills and bridging functions on status. I portrayed this negative influence on a special hidden group called PCNLs and highlight the underlined impact of their ambiguous group identification, role conflict and role ambiguity.

(4) Expatriating bridge individuals' telework adaptivity during COVID-19

During COVID-19, the large amount of virtual work (telework) makes communication an increasingly essential working skill. Especially for expatriates who are second language speakers, language proficiency determines whether they can clearly express themselves in their virtual work. Our study explored how expatriates with different HCL proficiencies have used different mechanisms to improve their virtual work adaptivity during COVID-19. I further revealed how human resource (HR) practices in improving language skills can influence these mechanisms. Drawing on the conservation of resources (COR) theory, I argued that employees with higher HCL proficiency are inclined to adopt the approach crafting method to increase adaptivity, whereas employees with lower HCL proficiency tend to use avoidance crafting. Additionally, organizational change could influence the job crafting mechanisms, such as language-related HR practice ameliorates the tendency of employees with lower HCL proficiency in choosing the avoidance crafting. Data were collected from 994 expatriates working in eight countries during

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the COVID-19 virtual work period.

Based on the data collected from eight countries during the COVID-19 period, this study showed that HCL proficiency is an important workplace resource for expatriate. Expatriates' HCL proficiency determined not only how well they can adapt to the pandemic, but also which approaches they would use to adapt to the pandemic. Approach crafting behaviors and voidance crafting behaviors were respectively used by expatriates with high and low HCL proficiencies, but they both led to increased virtual work adaptivity. Moreover, this study also found that HR practices moderate the avoidance mechanism for low HCL proficiency employees more than the approach mechanism for high HCL proficiency employees.

All the findings stated above shed light on the complex nature and consequences of bridge individuals and bridging roles in MNCs.

5. 主な発表論文等

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〔産業財産権〕

〔その他〕

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6. 研究組織

氏名 (ローマ字氏名) (研究者番号)	所属研究機関・部局・職 (機関番号)	備考

7. 科研費を使用して開催した国際研究集会

〔国際研究集会〕 計0件

8. 本研究に関連して実施した国際共同研究の実施状況

共同研究相手国	相手方研究機関			
中国	湖南大学			
中国	華東師範大学			