

Shin, Ha Jung, Froese, Fabian and Pak, Yong Suhk (2026) From international experience to global mindset: The contingent role of organizational context. *Journal of International Management*, 32 (5). p. 101413.

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From international experience to global mindset: The contingent role of organizational context

Ha Jung Shin^a, Fabian Jintae Froese^{a,b,*}, Yong Suhk Pak^a

^a School of Business, Yonsei University, Republic of Korea

^b Department of Business Administration, University of Goettingen, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Global mindset
Cross-cultural competency
Geocentric staffing
International work experience
Expatriation

ABSTRACT

Global mindset is widely recognized as essential for navigating cultural diversity and strategic complexity in multinational enterprises (MNEs). While prior research has identified individual factors influencing its development, less is known about how individual and organizational factors jointly contribute to the development of global mindset. Drawing on social learning theory, we argue that international work experience fosters global mindset by exposing individuals to cross-cultural contradictions and triggering learning cycles of observation, retention, and reproduction. We further contend that organizational context influences how effectively global mindset gained through international work experience is reinforced upon return. Specifically, this study examines the moderating roles of two organizational factors: geocentric staffing policies and transnational corporate strategy. Using data from 1049 employees and 183 senior managers across 36 MNEs in South Korea, our multilevel analysis reveals that international work experience significantly predicts global mindset. Moreover, geocentric staffing policies strengthen this relationship, whereas transnational corporate strategy does not. These findings advance global mindset research by integrating individual and organizational perspectives and highlighting staffing policies as key contextual conditions.

1. Introduction

Globalization has intensified cross-border partnerships with suppliers, customers, and competitors, making cultural understanding and effective intercultural interaction vital for success. To stay competitive, multinational enterprises (MNEs) must cultivate leaders with a global mindset, i.e., the cognitive capacity to interpret, embrace, and integrate cultural diversity and strategic complexity (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Levy et al., 2007). Such a mindset enables individuals to span cultural boundaries, communicate effectively across differences, and exercise global leadership (Beechler and Javidan, 2007). Prior studies have shown that global mindset enhances MNE internationalization, performance, headquarters–subsidiary relations, and innovation (Agnihotri et al., 2023; Chang and Huang, 2022; Felício et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2021; Nummela et al., 2004).

Given its importance, researchers have explored the antecedents of global mindset. Individual characteristics such as risk tolerance, cultural knowledge, and multicultural experience have been identified as key predictors (Ananthram et al., 2012; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002). Among these, international work experience is considered one of the most influential (Gregersen et al., 1998), with several studies providing initial evidence of a positive association with global mindset (e.g., Arora et al., 2004; Kyvik

* Corresponding author at: Platz der Goettinger Sieben 5, 37073 Goettingen, Germany.

E-mail address: ffroese@uni-goettingen.de (F.J. Froese).

et al., 2013; Nummela et al., 2004). Although prior research has emphasized how direct cross-cultural exposure fosters psychological openness, integrative capacity, and effective intercultural functioning (Ananthram et al., 2012; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Pidduck et al., 2022), the role of organizational context in shaping global mindset development remains underexplored (Osland et al., 2006). Although expatriate assignments may enhance global mindset, their impact may also depend on contextual conditions, with prior research primarily proposing moderators at the individual level, such as cultural intelligence (Lovvorn and Chen, 2011). In response, this study investigates how organizational context moderates the relationship between international work experience and global mindset.

Global mindset is determined by reciprocal interactions between individual cognition, behavioral competence, and organizational context (Mathews, 2017). That is, the extent to which learning is transferred into individuals' actual capabilities depends not only on exposure to the international assignment itself, but also on other factors (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). We first argue that international work experience promotes experiential learning through repeated cultural modeling. Moreover, we propose that organizational context moderates this relationship by motivating employees to further strengthen their global competencies acquired from such experiences. We focus on two organizational-level factors that enhance the effectiveness of international work experience based on the following considerations. First, building on the two major foundations of global mindset, namely the ability to embrace 1) cultural diversity and manage 2) strategic complexity (Levy et al., 2007), this study examines two organizational factors that enable MNEs to address each of these dimensions: 1) geocentric staffing policies and 2) transnational corporate strategy (e.g., Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Collings and Scullion, 2006; Kobrin, 1994; Perlmutter, 1969). Second, drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and contingency perspective (Donaldson, 2001), we argue that organizational context shapes which behaviors and attitudes are observed, motivated, and reinforced. Specifically, the theory suggests that learning is the result of continuous reciprocal interactions among cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1977; Davis and Luthans, 1980). Organizational context presents different learning opportunities that allow individuals to apply and leverage their prior experiences by cognitively interpreting organizational priorities, selecting attractive role models, and appropriately reinforcing their learning. Considering the two learning mechanisms derived from this theory, we propose two contextual factors as moderating variables. On the one hand, geocentric staffing practices reflect a high degree of proximity, enabling individuals to learn through direct social interaction and participation in the organizational culture. On the other hand, transnational corporate strategy involves indirect learning, in which organizational members observe and interpret the organizations' structural orientation.

This study makes two primary contributions. First, by applying social learning theory and contingency perspective to identify cross-level boundary conditions, it advances a more contextualized understanding of global mindset development. Although global mindset is often described as a multilevel construct linking individual and organizational orientations (Levy et al., 2007; Felício et al., 2015), little is known about how these levels interact. We address this gap by developing a multilevel model and providing empirical evidence that organizational context shapes the relationship between international work experience and global mindset. Second, we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of the organizational context by theoretically distinguishing between proximal and distal learning mechanisms that influence the developmental potential of global mindset. Our empirical findings highlight asymmetric cross-level effects: culturally embedded, proximal mechanisms, operationalized as geocentric staffing, amplify employees' ability to manage diversity across borders, whereas more indirect, structurally embedded mechanisms, such as transnational corporate strategy, do not exert a significant moderating influence.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Global mindset

Global mindset refers to an openness and awareness of cultural and market diversity, along with the capacity to synthesize across such differences (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002). Individuals with a global mindset can independently view each region (differentiation) and effectively integrate these differences (integration; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Rhinesmith, 1992). Prior research offers various conceptualizations. For example, global mindset has been defined as conceptualization (i.e., seeing oneself as part of a global environment) and contextualization (i.e., adapting ideas or actions to local settings; Arora et al., 2004; Kefalas, 1998). Beechler and Javidan (2007) described it as a set of three capitals (i.e. psychological, social, and intellectual) that enable individuals to influence others across sociocultural systems. From a cognitive perspective, global mindset is also defined through cognitive process models such as attention–interpretation–action (Levy et al., 2007) and reflects the flexibility to shift between local and global orientations (Clapp-Smith and Lester, 2014).

A review of the global mindset literature identifies two main perspectives: cultural cosmopolitanism and strategic cognitive complexity (Levy et al., 2007; Osland et al., 2006). The cultural view emphasizes effectiveness in cross-cultural contexts and openness to transcend national boundaries (Froese et al., 2013; Kobrin, 1994; Perlmutter, 1969). The strategic perspective focuses on managers' cognitive ability to balance global integration with local responsiveness through flexible coordination (Murtha et al., 1998), consistent with Bartlett and Ghoshal's (1989) transnational approach.

At the organizational level, global mindset has also been treated as a collective orientation. Studies in this stream have focused on corporate principles and systems that support global strategic objectives (Andresen and Bergdolt, 2017). Begley and Boyd (2003) defined it as the ability to evaluate corporate performance without being constrained by national boundaries.

Drawing on prior literature, this paper defines global mindset as the ability to maintain a broad perspective in global business and the capacity to manage diversity and complexity. To understand its development, we adopt Javidan and Bowen's (2013) three-dimensional framework comprising psychological, social, and intellectual capital. This integrative model captures both

cosmopolitanism and cognitive complexity perspectives (Beechler and Javidan, 2007) and encompasses the three essential dimensions—attitude, skills, and cognition—highlighted in prior studies. Psychological capital reflects the emotional aspect of a manager's interest in collaborating with culturally diverse individuals. Social capital captures the behavioral dimension, the ability to build trust and maintain effective relationships across cultures. Intellectual capital represents the cognitive dimension, or managers' capacity to analyze and interpret information in global business contexts.

2.2. Social learning theory

Social learning theory views learning as a change in understanding that emerges from observation and experience (Bandura, 1977). Individuals choose their behavior in accordance with anticipated outcomes within a social context, drawing on expectations formed through both their own direct experiences and observations of others (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). Specifically, learning does not require direct imitation or reinforcement; individuals can acquire attitudes or behaviors by observing and cognitively processing models present in the external environment. Engagement within a given environment thus enables two learning processes: experiential learning, which occurs through direct imitation and feedback on one's own behavior (Kolb, 2014), and vicarious learning, which arises from observing the outcomes of others' actions (Manz and Sims Jr, 1981). Overall, the theory emphasizes that the social context in which individuals interact shapes their behavioral and psychological capital.

Social learning theory posits that learning unfolds through four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). In the attention stage, individuals selectively focus on models they wish to emulate, particularly when those models are perceived as attractive or influential. During retention, they internalize and encode the observed behavior through repeated cognitive rehearsal. The reproduction stage involves translating the retained behavior or skills into observable actions. Finally, in the motivation stage, individuals are driven to reinforce the behavior based on positive outcomes or self-reinforcement. Each stage is shaped by both the surrounding environment and self-evaluation, which together influence the overall learning process (Black and Mendenhall, 1990).

The theory highlights learning as the results of reciprocal interaction between internal cognition, environment, and behavior (Bandura, 1977; Davis and Luthans, 1980). First, social contexts can reinforce organizational participants to internalize and reinforce distinct patterns of learning depending on the experienced rewards and perceived consequences. That is, individual learning cannot be separated from the organization, but occurs through individuals' participation in organizational practices and social interactions (Brandt and Elkjaer, 2012; Gibson, 2004). The theory also posits that behavior arises from conscious self-regulation, which is later comprehensively theorized as social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Learning is affected not only by direct imitation and feedback, but also by active cognitive processes that mediate such learning. In other words, individuals self-manage their learning processes by assessing internal standards, selecting learning models, evaluating consequences, and modifying acquired models (Manz and Sims Jr, 1981).

Social learning theory has been widely applied to explain how individuals learn through cross-cultural interactions (e.g., Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Engle and Crowne, 2014; Koo Moon et al., 2012). As individuals accumulate cross-cultural experiences, they develop competencies such as cross-cultural adaptation by experiencing the process of modeling, imitation, and environmental feedback (i.e., interacting with diverse cultures and applying what they learn). Although social learning theory also emphasizes the role of the organizational context, as discussed below, prior studies on the development of individuals' cross-cultural competencies have paid limited attention to the organizational context in which individuals are embedded. For example, the theory explains how key organizational values are identified and subsequently translated into the perceptions or attitudes of its members (e.g., Boekhorst, 2015; Lam et al., 2010; Ikhide et al., 2024). In organizations, salient environmental cues are often conveyed through the observable behaviors of leaders, who serve as role models that motivate individuals to learn (Brown et al., 2005). In addition, by participating in social interactions, employees collectively form perceptions of organizational environments, policies, and procedures (e.g., Dumont et al., 2017). By sharing perceptions through daily social interactions, they construct a collective cognitive understanding of organizational values (Schneider and Reichers, 1983; Weiss, 1978). Overall, the theory emphasizes that individuals' learning outcomes are shaped by the social and work contexts in which distinct contextual opportunities are provided. Thus, organizational context is likely to shape not only what is learned and reinforced, but also which aspects of their capabilities they further develop or discard.

Drawing on social learning theory and contingency perspective (Donaldson, 2001), our multilevel model of global mindset development examines how both individual- and organizational-level factors influence this construct. At the individual level, we hypothesize that international work experience enhances an individual's global mindset. However, organizations differ in the opportunities and motivation they provide for applying and strengthening these skills. The contingency perspective suggests that the effectiveness depends on the fit between individual characteristics and the organizational context (Gupta, 1984). Therefore, the effects of individual learning are likely to vary across organizations.

In this process, experiential learning as well as direct imitation and feedback are not necessarily the only conditions for learning (Bandura et al., 1963). Rather, by participating in a given social context, individuals can engage in cognitive processes of vicarious learning—interpreting which behaviors are recognized and valued—and thereby reinforce their specific skills (Bandura, 1977). Accordingly, we test two distinct types of organizational contexts: a proximal context (i.e., experiential learning, close interaction-based experiences including model imitation and direct feedback) and a distal context (i.e., vicarious learning, employees' cognitive interpretations of strategic orientations). First, through proximal learning, individuals learn by interacting and communicating with members within the organization. This form of learning occurs through close involvement in organizational activities and frequent social interactions with colleagues. As a result, individuals learn by imitating appropriate actions within the organizational environment and acquire knowledge directly by receiving feedback and adjusting their behaviors accordingly. Second, through distal

learning, individuals are influenced by the organization's strategies and structures. While this form of learning still occurs as individuals participate as members within an organizational context, it focuses less on direct experiences such as interpersonal interaction, but more on cognitive processing based on observation. Organizational strategies shape the types of tasks individuals perform in the workplace, and individuals structurally reinforce the behavioral patterns that are considered appropriate or desirable within the organization.

Specifically, we propose geocentric staffing policies and transnational corporate strategy as moderating variables that capture different contextual learning mechanisms. First, global staffing policies provide proximal learning environments where employees can directly interact with individuals from diverse national backgrounds, further enhancing cultural inclusiveness. In addition, such human resource management practices reflect organizational priorities and clearly communicate expected norms and behavioral patterns to employees (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Participating in a geocentric staffing environment encourages individuals to imitate appropriate behaviors learned through social interactions and to align their learning goals with the organization's goal of deemphasizing national origins. Second, transnational corporate strategy serves as a distal learning mechanism to strengthen the effectiveness of prior international work experience. Business orientations diffuse within organizations from top management to employees by modeling the formal and informal social referents (Lam et al., 2010). By working in MNEs that adopt such a strategy, individuals may observe the organization's structural orientation. Mainly, these may include balancing between cost effectiveness and local responsiveness via management of multidirectional knowledge flows and global networks to learn appropriate attitudes and behaviors. The following section develops these hypotheses in greater detail.

2.3. International work experience and global mindset

During international assignments, individuals often face discomfort when encountering social norms and institutional contexts that differ from their own. From a social learning perspective, such cross-cultural encounters are crucial because they offer opportunities to resolve cognitive dissonance through learning (Bandura, 1977). International work constitutes an experiential learning process in which individuals come into contact with a new culture and continuously adjust to the differences between themselves and the host culture by incorporating feedback on behaviors accepted within that cultural context. Indirectly, it also involves observing models that differ from the individual's own culture, developing an understanding of expected behaviors within different cultural contexts and adapting to such norms. In other words, greater exposure to cross-cultural work environments provides more opportunities to progress through the four stages of social learning—from attention to reproduction—thereby fostering the development of a global mindset (Black and Mendenhall, 1990).

We argue that international work experience enhances global mindset, which consists of three forms of global capital: psychological, intellectual, and social capital. First, international work experience frequently exposes individuals to gaps between local norms and their prior expectations (Engle and Crowne, 2014). When confronting cultural contradictions, modeling behaviors or skills of culturally different others enhances tolerance and the ability to manage dissonance. This process strengthens intercultural attitudes such as openness and receptivity (Sparkman et al., 2016).

Similarly, international work experience offers greater opportunities to integrate dispersed and complex global knowledge (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002) and to explore alternative approaches to problem-solving (Godart et al., 2015). This cognitive flexibility reduces reliance on prior knowledge and fosters a greater willingness to engage with uncertainty (Dheer and Lenartowicz, 2019), ultimately enhancing one's ability to interpret complex business information.

Encountering unfamiliar environments prompts individuals to develop new forms of social interaction to navigate cultural challenges. Working in multicultural contexts, in particular, creates opportunities for intensive communication and collaboration with culturally diverse colleagues. For example, frequent cross-cultural brainstorming during international assignments can heighten individuals' appreciation for diversity (Levine et al., 2004). Such experiences in managing cultural differences enhance cultural adaptability and strengthen interpersonal effectiveness in cross-cultural settings (Shannon and Begley, 2008).

Overall, experiences of adapting to unfamiliar cognitive and cultural contexts contribute to the development of a global mindset. By interacting with others and performing tasks within different cultural environments, individuals acquire new knowledge and learn behaviors considered appropriate within those contexts. Through such interactions and learning processes, individuals adjust their perspectives beyond their original cultural assumptions, thereby fostering the development of a global mindset.

Hypothesis 1. An individual's international work experience is positively related to global mindset.

2.4. Moderating effect of geocentric staffing policies

Drawing on contingency perspective (Donaldson, 2001), we argue that the impact of international work experience on global mindset development varies depending on its fit with organizational context. When the organizational context supports and values competencies such as managing cultural diversity and strategic complexity, individuals are motivated to further develop such global competencies obtained from international work experience.

From the social learning perspective, learning occurs through participation in social processes, identifying appropriate role models within the organization, and developing behaviors accordingly (Bandura, 1977; Brandi and Elkjaer, 2012). Individuals learn and internalize appropriate behavioral models by engaging in various organizational contexts. They observe managerial orientations across contexts, interact within social environments, and receive various forms of feedback through participation in communities (Gibson, 2004). Accordingly, standards of appropriate behavior may vary across organizational contexts, motivating individuals to

internalize and enact different learning models. In sum, the organizational context shapes the learning opportunities available, influences which role models and behavioral patterns are perceived as desirable, and conditions how individuals apply and leverage capabilities gained from prior experiences.

Geocentric staffing policies involve filling key managerial positions with the most qualified individuals, regardless of nationality (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1974). Under this approach, parent-country nationals, host-country nationals, and third-country nationals may all hold key roles if they can effectively address global challenges. Unlike ethnocentric staffing, where expatriation primarily transmits headquarters' culture and may limit advancement opportunities for capable host-country nationals, geocentric staffing promotes organizational integration by embracing diverse global talent irrespective of nationality (Collings and Scullion, 2006). Overall, such organizations actively seek diverse tacit local knowledge (Harvey et al., 1999) and stimulate innovation by drawing on diverse and unfamiliar information sources (Gong, 2003).

We argue that geocentric staffing organizations provide a proximal learning environment that strengthens individuals' global competencies acquired during international work experience for three main reasons. First, when HR policies emphasize cultural diversity through geocentric staffing, employees are more likely to develop willingness to engage in cross-cultural contexts. HR policies function as core and visible mechanisms for communicating how organizations manage human resources and prioritize values (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Under geocentric staffing approach, individuals frequently observe managers drawing from the global talent pool to fill key positions and providing employees with global career opportunities (Perlmutter, 1969). As individuals are embedded in organizations that promote multicultural teams and blur national origin boundaries, they become increasingly aware of the need to nurture attitudes that align with these values (Bandura, 1977; Black and Mendenhall, 1990). In addition, employees form shared understandings of HR practices through social interaction processes with managers and coworkers, encouraging employees under geocentric staffing to be motivated to develop global psychological capital (Jiang et al., 2017).

Second, employees in such organizations are motivated to further develop global social capital as they are continuously exposed to interpersonal interactions with individuals from diverse national backgrounds. The cultural diversity of members within an organization directly shapes the environment in which individuals interact. For example, cross-cultural collaboration within these work-places reduces nationality-based categorization and relationship conflict (Ayub and Jehn, 2018). Geocentric staffing also facilitates individuals' participation in active cross-border interactions and decision-making processes among diverse actors within multiple networks (Collings and Scullion, 2012). Accordingly, exposure to such environments enables individuals to observe how others engage in cross-cultural interactions and to participate in social interactions where embracing diversity is positively reinforced. Moreover, when differences in backgrounds are more salient, leaders' inclusive behaviors become more visible, which increases employees' opportunities for observational learning (Boekhorst, 2015). Thus, higher levels of diversity among organizational members create a context in which such multicultural behaviors are encouraged, imitated and reinforced.

Third, participation in capability-based staffing creates an environment that motivates individuals to acquire diverse global knowledge from multiple sources. Global human resource staffing serves as a mechanism for coordinating knowledge flows and aligning organizational strategies across MNEs (Harvey et al., 2001). Geocentric organizations place employees who can effectively absorb and share global knowledge across subsidiaries in key positions, while placing less emphasis on the origin of that knowledge. Thus, employees are likely to have greater opportunities to acquire diverse global information while culturally integrating and communicating with diverse coworkers, frequently being encouraged to adjust and expand their existing knowledge framework. Such organizations also value and reward employees who can deliver practical solutions to global challenges, particularly those with international work experience (Gowan, 2004). This context enables individuals to further develop their global knowledge by leveraging the intellectual capital accumulated through prior international experience.

Hypothesis 2. Geocentric staffing practices moderate the relationship between an individual's international work experience and global mindset, such that the relationship is stronger under higher levels of geocentric staffing.

2.5. Moderating effect of transnational corporate strategy

Transnational corporate strategy involves simultaneously pursuing high levels of global integration and local responsiveness (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Prahalad and Doz, 1987). Transnational MNEs do not operate as hierarchical, headquarters-centered structures; rather, they function as integrated networks of differentiated subsidiaries characterized by distributed capabilities and reciprocal interdependence. In this context, subsidiaries are not merely local implementers of headquarters' strategies, but assume specialized roles that reflect both local conditions and global integration needs, and can serve as contributors to innovation (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990). Skills, knowledge, and resources flow across units, which are granted varying degrees of autonomy (Kim et al., 2005; Leong and Tan, 1993). Building on the social learning perspective, we propose three reasons that transnational corporate strategy moderates the relationship between international work experience and global mindset by reinforcing more distal learning mechanisms.

First, organizations with transnational orientations are expected to further strengthen individuals' global psychological capital, particularly the willingness to explore strategic complexity. A firm's strategy does not exist at an abstract level; rather, it is enacted through the organizational routines and behavioral rules of the members (Cyert and March, 2020). MNEs adopting transnational strategies recognize diverse strategic options and stress integrating both similarities and differences across markets (Kedia and Mukherji, 1999; Prahalad and Doz, 1987). For example, these firms promote independent innovations across subsidiaries, with headquarters facilitating coordination (Gerybadze and Reger, 1999) and exchange (Harzing, 2000; Leong and Tan, 1993) of knowledge between subsidiaries. Thus, as employees observe and interpret managers' strategic behaviors, they are more likely to internalize

such aligned values as desirable (Lam et al., 2010), thereby choosing to foster openness to diverse strategic possibilities.

Second, working in organizations that adopt a transnational strategy also provides a more favorable context for the development of global intellectual capital. Firm strategy serves as an overarching framework that shapes how organizations interpret their environment, which also establishes guidelines for individual decision-making and appropriate behavior (Fiol and Lyles, 1985). Transnational organizations strategically leverage diverse knowledge from geographically dispersed units by incorporating multiple perspectives and recognizing contextual differences across global markets and institutions. In particular, due to their inherent structural complexity, such organizations strategically value employees' ability to address global challenges (Macro and Ott, 2024). Accordingly, as employees cognitively process the managerial orientation observed within the organization, they are more likely to learn from managers who can effectively analyze and assimilate diverse knowledge.

Third, working in a transnational environment enables employees to further develop interpersonal competencies in global contexts, particularly as they are expected to perform boundary-spanning roles across multiple units and navigate strategic boundaries. Transnational corporations must coordinate diverse partnerships within global value chains and exhibit high levels of cross-site knowledge sharing among international firms (Kasper et al., 2009) to achieve the balance between decentralization and centralization. Such organizational structure emphasizes communication skills for engaging with culturally diverse colleagues (Grandys and Grandys, 2010) and respecting the identities of different organizational units (Šilenskytė et al., 2022). As a result, employees learn through such interactions and further develop their social skills to maintain positive relationships across markets by leveraging their prior international work experience.

Hypothesis 3. Transnational corporate strategy moderates the relationship between an individual's international work experience and global mindset, such that the relationship is stronger under higher levels of transnational strategy.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

To test the hypotheses, we developed two separate surveys and collected data from two sources: senior managers and employees within the same MNEs. Questionnaires were distributed to 80 randomly selected MNEs in South Korea listed in the KIS-Value, a database providing financial and stock disclosures for firms meeting external audit requirements. South Korea offers an ideal context for this study because its MNEs are deeply embedded in global business while maintaining distinct cultural characteristics (Froese et al., 2020). Responses were received from 48 MNEs; 12 were excluded due to missing organizational-level data, resulting in a final sample of 36 MNEs. The final dataset includes responses from 183 senior managers and 1049 employees nested within these 36 firms.

Descriptive statistics and correlation tables are reported in Table 1 (individual-level) and Table 2 (organizational-level). The sample spans multiple industries, including manufacturing, electronics/information technology, retail, shipping, and finance, and comprises both Korean MNEs and foreign subsidiaries of non-Korean firms. On average, the MNEs employed 10,524 people, reported annual revenues of USD 10.4B, and held total assets averaging USD 42.8B. The mean age of individual respondents was 37.9 years ($SD = 6.91$), with 59% male. Reflecting the high educational attainment of MNE employees in South Korea, 97% held at least a bachelor's degree.

3.2. Measures

All questionnaire items were adapted from established scales in prior studies, and most variables were measured using a six-point Likert scale. Individual-level constructs, including international work experience and global mindset, were assessed through the employee survey. Organizational-level variables, such as staffing policy and corporate strategy, were obtained from the senior manager survey, including HR managers. Combining individual- and organizational-level data in the research design helps mitigate common method bias.

Table 1
Individual variables: descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.40	0.49									
2. Age	37.95	6.91	−0.28**								
3. Educational Background	2.26	0.52	−0.07*	0.23**							
4. Sales/Marketing	0.37	0.48	−0.05	0.05	−0.03						
5. Strategy	0.10	0.29	−0.02	0.01	0.14**	−0.25**					
6. IT/MIS	0.04	0.20	−0.01	−0.02	−0.02	−0.16**	−0.07*				
7. Tenure	3.16	1.40	−0.13**	0.71**	0.18**	0.09**	−0.01	−0.10**			
8. Position	3.06	1.45	−0.19**	0.79**	0.31**	0.11**	0.07*	−0.11**	0.72**		
9. International Work Experience	1.46	1.01	−0.13**	0.25**	0.15**	−0.00	0.07*	−0.03	0.24**	0.27**	
10. Global Mindset	4.12	0.76	−0.07*	0.07*	0.15**	0.12**	0.11**	−0.10**	0.11**	0.19**	0.27**

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, and ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

Table 2

Organizational-level variables: descriptive statistics.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Sales	5.44	1.05				
2. Company Type (Subsidiary - HQ)	0.68	0.46	0.35**			
3. Foreign Sales Ratio	3.31	1.46	0.38**	0.20**		
4. Geocentric Staffing Policies	4.11	0.63	0.18**	−0.12**	−0.08*	
5. Transnational Corporate Strategy	−3.33	0.40	0.17**	−0.03	0.34**	0.17**

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, and ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

3.2.1. International work experience

International work experience was measured using a single objective item: “How long have you worked abroad?” Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert scale ranging from less than 1 year to 11 years or more (1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1–2 years, 3 = 3–4 years, 4 = 5–7 years, 5 = 8–10 years, 6 = 11 years or more).

3.2.2. Global mindset

Employees' global mindset was assessed using 10 items from Global Mindset Inventory, which encompasses three constructs: psychological, social, and intellectual capital (Javidan et al., 2010a; Javidan and Bowen, 2013). Following Javidan et al. (2010b), all items were combined into a single index. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.88.

3.2.3. Geocentric staffing policies

Geocentric staffing policies were measured using four items adapted from Caligiuri and Stroh (1995) focusing on selection and recruitment practices. A sample item is: “Regardless of the position, we always seek candidates who possess a global perspective.” The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.72.

3.2.4. Transnational corporate strategy

The degree of transnational corporate strategy was measured using questionnaire items from Harzing (2000). Harzing's instrument classifies firms according to the Global Integration (GI)–Local Responsiveness (LR) Framework developed by Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989). We used a single item to measure each subdimension of global integration and local responsiveness. Local responsiveness was calculated as the average of domestic competition and national responsiveness, while global integration was computed as the average of global competition and economies of scale (Swoboda et al., 2014).

Sample firms were plotted on the GI–LR grid by assigning the mean scores of local responsiveness and global integration to the x- and y-axes, respectively, enabling classification of corporate strategy types. Deviation from the ideal transnational position was measured as the distance from the upper-right corner (6, 6) (Wasilewski, 2002). A smaller distance indicates a closer alignment with the ideal transnational state. For interpretability, we used the negative of this distance, such that higher scores reflect a stronger transnational corporate strategy. The variable was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Transnational Corporate Strategy} = -\text{Distance}, \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Distance} = \sqrt{(6 - \text{Global Integration})^2 + (6 - \text{Local Responsiveness})^2}. \quad (2)$$

3.2.5. Control variables

Following prior studies (Felfcio et al., 2012; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Nummela et al., 2004; Story et al., 2014), we controlled for several organizational- and individual-level variables.

At the organizational level, we controlled for the MNE's country of origin (dummy: 1 = Korea, 0 = other), firm size, and international exposure. Firm size was measured by sales volume (1 = below KRW 10B, 2 = KRW 10.1–50B, 3 = KRW 50.1–100B, 4 = KRW 100.1–200B, 5 = KRW 200.1–300B, 6 = above KRW 500B). The proportion of foreign sales was calculated as the percentage of overseas revenue relative to total annual sales, categorized as 0%, 1–20%, 21–40%, 41–60%, 61–80%, and over 80%.

At the individual level, we controlled for demographic characteristics including gender (dummy: 0 = male, 1 = female), age (in years), education, tenure, position, and department. Education was coded as 1 = high school, 2 = undergraduate, 3 = master's, 4 = PhD. Tenure was coded as 1 = less than 2 years, 2 = 3–5 years, 3 = 6–10 years, 4 = 11–15 years, 5 = 16–20 years, 6 = over 21 years. Position was coded as 1 = staff, 2 = lower manager, 3 = manager, 4 = senior manager, 5 = director/executive (top management team). Department was represented by three dummies (1 = yes, 0 = other) for sales/marketing, strategy, and information technology and management.

3.3. Preliminary analyses

Given the hierarchical structure of the data (individuals nested within organizations), we first assessed the appropriateness of multilevel analysis by estimating a null model (i.e., a model without predictors). The intraclass correlation (ICC[1]), which represents the proportion of variance attributable to between-group differences, was 0.09 for global mindset, supporting the use of multilevel

modeling (Heck and Thomas, 2009). We further compared the random-intercept and fixed-intercept models. The likelihood ratio test showed that the random-intercept model provided a significantly better fit ($\chi^2 = 50.35, p < 0.001$).

We also assessed whether aggregating responses from HR managers and executives to represent organizational-level constructs was appropriate. The ICC[2] values were 0.75 for geocentric staffing policies, 0.73 for global integration, and 0.62 for local responsiveness—all above the 0.60 threshold (Glick, 1985), indicating acceptable reliability of group-level mean differences. Interrater agreement, measured using rwg.j, was 0.61 for geocentric staffing, 0.68 for global integration, and 0.72 for local responsiveness, supporting data aggregation (LeBreton and Senter, 2008; Woehr et al., 2015).

Given the nested data structure and inclusion of cross-level interactions, we employed random-coefficient modeling (Bliese, 2002; Heisig and Schaeffer, 2019). We applied group-mean centering for the individual-level predictor, international work experience, and grand-mean centering for the organizational-level variables, geocentric staffing policies and international corporate strategy, when constructing the interaction terms (Aguinis et al., 2013).

4. Results

Our dataset comprised 1049 individuals nested within 36 organizations. Given this multilevel structure, we used random-coefficient modeling in R to test cross-level interactions, following Aguinis et al. (2013).

Table 3 presents the full results for the multi-level analysis. Hypothesis 1 proposed that international work experience positively affects global mindset. As shown in Model 2 in Table 3, the results supported this relationship ($B = 0.174, p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 and 3 examined cross-level interactions. For Hypothesis 2, we posited that the positive relationship between international work experience and global mindset would be stronger under geocentric staffing practices. Model 3 in Table 3 shows that this hypothesis was supported ($B = 0.072, p = 0.034$), indicating that implementing geocentric staffing policies amplifies the effect of international work experience on global mindset. As shown in Fig. 1, when geocentric staffing policies were high (+1 SD), international work experience had a greater effect on global mindset than when these policies were low (−1 SD). Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between international work experience and global mindset would be stronger among employees in MNEs with a transnational corporate strategy. Model 4 in Table 3 shows that this hypothesis was not supported ($B = -0.026, p = 0.691$), suggesting that the influence of international work experience on global mindset does not depend on the degree of transnational strategy.

4.1. Additional tests

Given the non-significant findings for transnational corporate strategy, we verified the construct and tested an alternative measure. To ensure that firms' positions on the GI-LR grid accurately reflected their transnational design, we validated the classification using a self-reported measure. Firms were categorized into three strategic clusters—global, multinational, and transnational—based on global

Table 3
Model comparison results.

Predictors	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Estimates	p	Estimates	p	Estimates	p	Estimates	p	Estimates	p
(Intercept)	3.929 ***	<0.001	4.092 ***	<0.001	4.115 ***	<0.001	4.068 ***	<0.001	4.091 ***	<0.001
Gender	−0.102 *	0.044	−0.092	0.064	−0.091	0.065	−0.094	0.057	−0.095	0.055
Age	−0.022 ***	<0.001	−0.023 ***	<0.001	−0.023 ***	<0.001	−0.023 ***	<0.001	−0.023 ***	<0.001
Educational Background	0.133 **	0.004	0.114 *	0.011	0.107 *	0.018	0.116 **	0.010	0.109 *	0.015
Sales/Marketing	0.197 ***	<0.001	0.201 ***	<0.001	0.206 ***	<0.001	0.199 ***	<0.001	0.204 ***	<0.001
Strategy	0.295 ***	<0.001	0.277 ***	<0.001	0.272 ***	0.001	0.277 ***	<0.001	0.270 ***	0.001
Information Technology / Management Information Systems	−0.014	0.908	−0.002	0.989	0.010	0.935	0.006	0.962	0.017	0.888
Tenure	0.021	0.403	0.011	0.657	0.010	0.688	0.012	0.620	0.012	0.611
Position	0.122 ***	<0.001	0.102 ***	<0.001	0.106 ***	<0.001	0.101 ***	0.001	0.104 ***	<0.001
Company Type (Sub-HQ)	−0.141	0.086	−0.150	0.079	−0.147	0.085	−0.159	0.064	−0.157	0.069
Sales	0.050	0.163	0.053	0.151	0.052	0.177	0.056	0.132	0.053	0.166
Foreign Sales Ratio	0.042	0.108	0.040	0.140	0.042	0.133	0.046	0.105	0.049	0.096
International Work Experience			0.174 ***	<0.001	0.176 ***	<0.001	0.174 ***	<0.001	0.176 ***	<0.001
Geocentric Staffing Policies					0.008	0.888			0.017	0.774
International Work Experience × Geocentric Staffing Policies					0.072 *	0.034			0.080 *	0.023
Transnational Corporate Strategy							−0.068	0.467	−0.073	0.442
International Work Experience × Transnational Corporate Strategy							−0.026	0.691	−0.062	0.364
Pseudo R ²	0.106		0.146		0.150		0.147		0.152	

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$, and ** indicates $p < 0.01$.

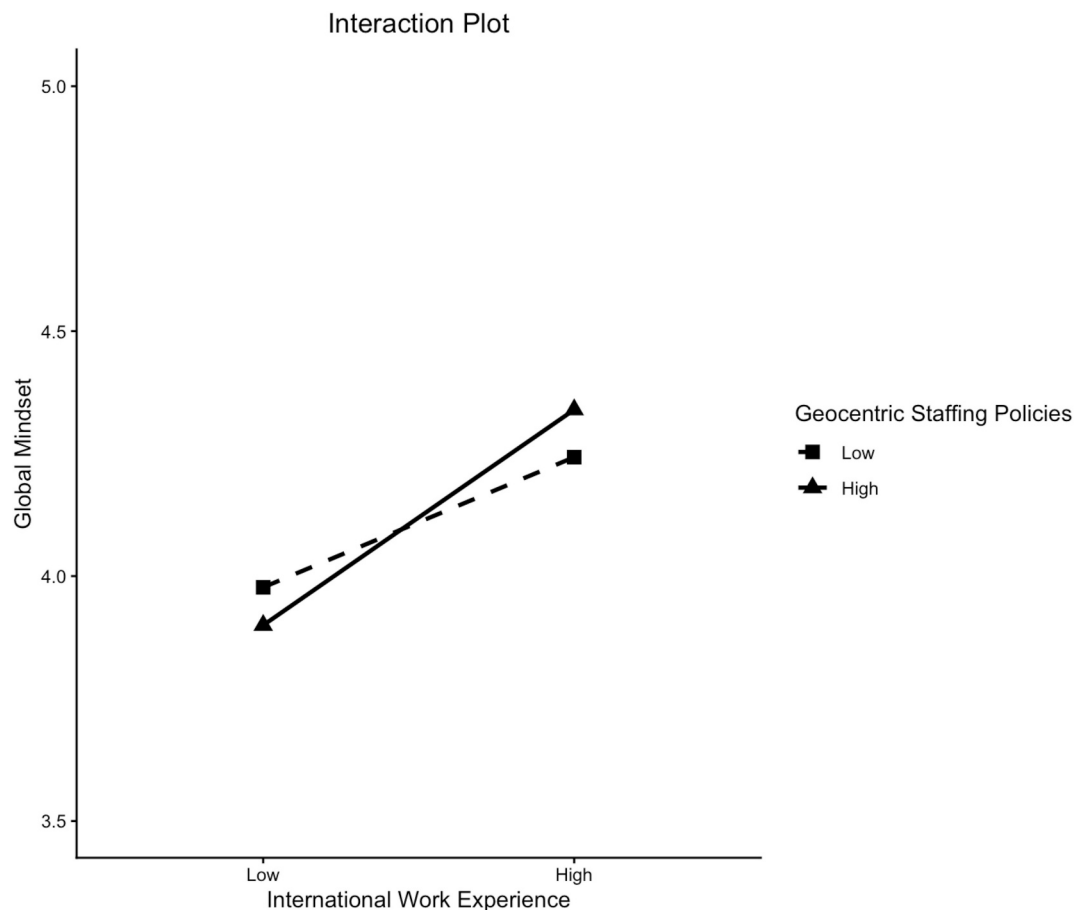


Fig. 1. Interaction plot.

integration and local responsiveness via Ward's hierarchical clustering (Harzing, 2000). Respondents rated two items from Harzing (2000) capturing transnational organizational design ($\alpha = 0.82$). Analysis of variance results ($F = 57.69$, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that transnational firms scored highest, followed by multinational and global firms.

Robustness tests using a transnational-cluster dummy variable again showed that transnational corporate strategy did not significantly moderate the relationship between international experience and global mindset ($B = -0.023$, $p = 0.649$).

5. Discussion

Social learning theory suggests that individuals' participation in social contexts shapes their learning. Learning outcomes depend not only on individual factors, but also on contextual characteristics. In this sense, learning emerges from the interaction between individual and organizational-level factors (Koutroubas and Galanakis, 2022). Grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), this study investigated how global mindset develops through the interaction between individual international work experience and organizational context. Our findings show that international work experience enhances global mindset. This relationship is strengthened by geocentric staffing practices, which represents a proximal learning environment. In contrast, transnational corporate strategy, as a more distal learning environment, did not moderate the relationship. Overall, these findings highlight the joint influence of individual learning and organizational context in fostering a global mindset among employees in MNEs.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes two primary contributions to the global mindset literature. First, by drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), we advance a more contextualized, cross-level understanding of global mindset development. While prior research has established that international work experience fosters global mindset by enhancing openness and integrative complexity (e.g., Andresen and Bergdolt, 2021; Garcia et al., 2023), it has paid limited attention to how organizational context shapes this relationship. Our findings reaffirm the positive link between international work experience and global mindset (Ananthram et al., 2012; Nummela et al., 2004; Story et al., 2014). Moving beyond this direct relationship, we draw on contingency perspective (Donaldson, 2001) and

examine two organizational contingency variables to investigate whether competencies acquired through international work experience are differentially reinforced across organizational contexts. In particular, we demonstrate that global competencies acquired through international exposure are more likely to translate into a global mindset when organizational environments provide salient behavioral models and reinforcing cues. In doing so, this study highlights the cross-level boundary conditions under which international experience contributes to global mindset development.

Second, we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of organizational context by theoretically and empirically distinguishing between proximal and distal learning mechanisms. Consistent with a social learning perspective (e.g., Bandura et al., 1963; Weiss, 1978), contextual factors differ in their proximity to observable modeling and reinforcement processes. Our findings reveal asymmetric cross-level effects: proximal, culturally embedded mechanisms, captured by geocentric staffing policies, significantly strengthen the relationship between international work experience and global mindset. Consistent with prior research, global mindset development is more closely related to international HRM policies than to a firm's multinational strategy (Kobrin, 1994). This suggests that global mindset is developed more through aligning one's attitudes and behaviors with organizational practices through direct engagement in culturally diverse interactions than through exposure to structurally integrated organizational arrangements. In other words, direct interaction opportunities and feedback received in a social context that deemphasizes national boundaries are critical for effectively developing global mindset, whereas mere observation and interpretation of managerial strategic orientations have a limited influence. Our findings also support prior HR literature, suggesting that individuals develop behaviors in accordance with organizational emphases reflected in HR practices (Dumont et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017). In contrast, distal, structurally embedded mechanisms, such as transnational corporate strategy, do not exert a significant moderating influence. This distinction suggests that contextual features that directly shape employees' day-to-day interactions and make organizational values visible play a more central role in facilitating learning than those that operate at a more abstract or structural level.

Together, these findings show that global mindset development is not only a function of individual international exposure, but also depends on how organizational environments structure learning opportunities. In particular, they highlight the central role of organizational practices, especially staffing policies, in shaping how individuals internalize and apply global competencies.

5.2. Managerial implications

This study offers several managerial implications. First, it provides guidance for MNEs' recruitment and staffing practices. HR managers should prioritize attracting and selecting candidates with prior international experience and a well-developed global mindset (Froese et al., 2013; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002; Javidan and Walker, 2012). This allows organizations to build a workforce that values cultural diversity and actively seeks global knowledge. HR managers should also evaluate candidates' openness to international assignments, as this trait signals readiness for global roles and willingness to engage in cross-cultural learning. MNEs can thus foster talent with adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills, and risk tolerance in international contexts. Additionally, staffing decisions that transcend nationality further globalize human resources. Our findings suggest that such geocentric staffing policies create a learning environment that enables employees with prior international experience to internalize and strengthen a global mindset, extending beyond the mere selection of globally oriented candidates.

This study also provides practical implications for training and developing global talent at MNEs. Firms should offer international assignment opportunities that expose employees to cross-cultural environments. Such investments not only facilitate cross-border knowledge sharing (Froese et al., 2021; Peltokorpi et al., 2022) but also strengthen a global mindset that fosters innovation (Chang and Huang, 2022). Moreover, rewarding international work experience, for example, through career advancement after overseas assignments (Sarabi et al., 2017), helps retain globally minded employees as valuable human capital (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001).

It is vital to institutionalize geocentrism as a core organizational value and make it visible through geocentric staffing policies (Gowan, 2004). Rather than treating geocentric staffing as aspirational or relying solely on expatriation to manage foreign subsidiaries, MNEs should adopt HR practices that downplay national boundaries. Valuing and leveraging employees from diverse backgrounds promotes knowledge transfer across units (Kobrin, 1994). Beyond globalizing the workforce, integrating a corporate culture grounded in communication and shared identity among multinational employees enhances cross-cultural interaction and long-term organizational performance.

5.3. Limitations and future research suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, the data were drawn from employees of MNEs operating in South Korea. To improve the generalizability of our findings, future studies could include broader industry and country contexts. Future studies may also examine additional contextual factors, such as role complexity (Story et al., 2014) or the required degree of cross-site knowledge sharing (Kobrin, 1994).

Second, while our results confirm an association between international work experience and global mindset, the actual learning mechanism underlying this relationship was not investigated. Murtha et al. (1998) suggested that global mindset evolves through ongoing interaction with an organization's strategic context and internal processes. A manager's ability to transcend national boundaries and manage complexity can, over time, reshape both organizational strategy and individual cognition. Future research could therefore explore the dynamic development of global mindset through a process perspective, ideally using longitudinal designs with pre- and post-assessments to capture change over time.

Third, this study did not include control variables for individuals' global mindset prior to international work experience. This raises the possibility of reverse causality, as individuals with a stronger pre-existing global mindset may be more likely to pursue

international assignments. Although we controlled for factors such as position and employing organization, future research could examine how prior global mindset influences both participation in international work experiences and subsequent global mindset development.

Fourth, this study has limitations regarding the quality of international experiences. For instance, assignments in culturally distant countries may have a greater impact on global mindset development than experiences in culturally similar settings (Dragoni et al., 2014). Prior research also suggests that international work experience does not directly lead to the development of global competencies; rather, the social interactions and experiences individuals encounter during international work experience play a critical role in such development (Michailova and Ott, 2018). Future research could therefore examine the qualitative characteristics of international experience, rather than focusing solely on its duration. Moreover, when measuring global mindset, scholars could adopt a dynamic perspective that captures the ability to shift flexibly between differentiation and integration depending on situational demands (Clapp-Smith and Lester, 2014).

Finally, while this study highlights the importance of organizational context in developing global mindset, the proposed model does not address whether cross-level moderators enhance the ultimate outcomes associated with global mindset, such as organizational commitment, creativity, performance, and international innovation (Clapp-Smith and Lester, 2014; Raman et al., 2013; Story and Barbuto Jr, 2011). Future research could integrate these outcome variables to provide deeper insights into how contextual factors strengthen the effectiveness of international experience in cultivating global mindset.

During the preparation of this work the authors used Grammarly in order to copy edit the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ha Jung Shin: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Fabian Jintae Froese:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Yong Suhk Pak:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Investigation, Data curation.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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