



Edwards, Tony, Kim, Kyoungmi ORCID logoORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2697-6899>, Almond, Phil, Kern, Philipp,
Tregaskis, Olga and Zhang, Linn (2024) Forgotten globalizing
actors: towards an understanding of the range of individuals
involved in global norm formation in multinational companies.
Journal of International Business Studies, 56. pp. 273-299.

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Forgotten globalizing actors: towards an understanding of the range of individuals involved in global norm formation in multinational companies

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Received: 21 January 2022 / Revised: 27 July 2023 / Accepted: 27 August 2023
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Abstract

While there is substantial literature on global mobility, roles in the global integration of multinationals are not limited to internationally mobile staff. We focus on ‘globalizing actors’, defined as those within multinationals who are involved in global norm-making. Using interview-based qualitative data, we categorize individuals’ involvement in global norm-making according to the function within norm formation in which they are involved, their source of influence, and their geographical and organizational reach. We identify nine distinct types of globalizing actors. We demonstrate that many individuals play important roles in global norm-making without having formal hierarchical authority or being globally mobile. Our approach draws attention to the ways in which many globalizing actors use ‘social skill’ to further their aims. Our categorization of such ‘forgotten globalizing actors’ facilitates future research by allowing a fuller understanding of the ways in which individuals across multinationals contribute to global integration.

Keywords Global norms · Globalizing actors · Multinational companies · Cross-cultural management · Case theoretic approaches

Accepted by Rajneesh Narula, Guest Editor, 27 August 2023. This article has been with the authors for three revisions.

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Introduction

It is beyond doubt that multinational companies (MNCs) are becoming more internationally integrated. Many have moved towards stronger interdependencies in production across countries and greater standardization of products and technologies (Edwards et al., 2013), ever greater emphasis is placed on achieving global efficiency through scale (Mees-Buss et al., 2019), there are a growing number of forms of ‘global work’ in evidence (Reiche et al., 2019), and knowledge creation and transfer is commonly carried out through international ‘communities of practice’ (Grant & Phene, 2022). These various forms of international integration highlight the need for common reference points and shared understandings that reduce uncertainty between those who are dependent on one another. We refer to these shared understandings as ‘global norms’, which can be formalized and backed up with official sanctions, or can be enunciated ideas that lack formal status but nevertheless have a degree of governing force (Ferner et al., 2005).

This raises the question of who within MNCs will achieve global norm formation. While the focus of academic research in International Management (IM) is on those in

executive positions and globally mobile employees (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Conroy & Minbaeva, 2020), it seems unlikely that executives and globally mobile staff alone can create and maintain global norms at the very wide range of levels, groups, and communities within MNCs where common understandings are needed. This is a problem for management; are there enough individuals who are motivated and equipped to create and maintain norms across borders? Accordingly, we investigate the range of people involved in global norm formation processes, considering the aspect of norm formation they are involved in, the source of influence they exert, and the reach of their influence over others. We refer to those active in the process of global norm-making as ‘globalizing actors’ (Edwards et al., 2021).

Drawing on a view of the multinational as a ‘contested terrain’ in which multiple groups each have sources of influence within organizational forms comprising multiple cross-national structures and processes, we see global norms as emerging at a wide range of levels and places. Globalizing actors may therefore be found in many different roles and parts of the company. We contend that understanding the wide range of actors and how they engage in global norm formation requires an approach that does not assume that we know in advance where they are found but rather explores global norm formation processes flexibly. This approach goes beyond globally mobile people to include a wider range of MNC employees to understand patterns of global integration in general and forms of cross-national norm formation in particular.

We investigate the range of globalizing actors through analysis of a large dataset, comprising accounts of the role of individuals in global norm-making from 153 interviews in 17 MNCs. We follow norm formation processes flexibly, identifying a wide range of actors involved in global norm-making. Specifically, our research question is: who are the globalizing actors involved in global norm formation and how do they vary in the function they play within norm-making, the source of influence they draw on and their reach?

Many of those we categorize as globalizing actors differ markedly from those traditionally studied by IM scholars. We demonstrate that many such actors have slipped into being active in global norm formation as technologies and the nature of global work have changed. Many are not globally mobile; rather, their globalizing role stems from membership of global teams or international communities of practice (Grant & Phene, 2022), or simply from engaging in interactions with those in other countries on whom they are dependent. We demonstrate that some junior members of such groups, despite lacking authority and rarely travelling, can still find ways of exerting influence over global norm formation. Many globalizing actors are not so much interested in grand strategizing but rather have more immediate

and practical concerns in mind, such as using global norms to make their work more predictable. Many of these actors are crucial to the ability of MNCs to fully realize the benefits of international integration, and therefore to the performance of the firm, yet they have gone under the radar of academic research in IM. Adapting McNulty and Brewster’s (2020) analysis of the ‘forgotten majority’ when looking at internationally mobile staff—essentially ‘low status’ migrants—we term those who have not featured in previous accounts as ‘forgotten’ globalizing actors.

Literature review and theoretical framework

While few studies use the term globalizing actors, various strands of literature pertain to individuals involved in global norm formation. One strand concerns global mobility (Kraimer et al., 2016). The cross-border transfer of managers was initially introduced as a form of coordination and control (Edström & Galbraith, 1977). Since then, there have been marked changes in forms of global mobility (Caligiuri et al., 2020). For example, short-term assignees have grown as companies favor cheaper modes of expatriation (Collings et al., 2007) while ‘inpatriates’ have also received increasing scholarly recognition (Harzing et al., 2016). There are also studies of those who work across geographically distributed teams, such as ‘boundary spanners’ (Mäkelä et al., 2019), ‘bridge makers’ and ‘blenders’ that focus on intra-team dynamics (Zander et al., 2012), and of how such staff facilitate knowledge flows across borders (e.g., Reiche et al., 2009). There have also been studies of ‘self-initiated’ expatriates who move to a new country of their own volition (Suutari et al., 2018) and international skilled migrants (Barnard et al., 2019).

We need to complement this focus on mobility with examination of those who are less mobile. One such group is executives or directors of MNCs; while they may travel in their work, they can be active in global norm formation without being mobile. Some studies of MNC directors have examined the extent to which they exhibit a ‘global mindset’ (Levy et al., 2007). We might assume that the stronger the global mindset, the stronger their disposition towards actively creating global norms. In addition, studies of local managers have explored their role in implementing global approaches in a particular location (see Meyer et al., 2020). These analyses of both global directors and local managers suggest that the range of globalizing actors is likely to include those who do not travel.

Studies of ‘global work’ have taken this further. MNCs are increasingly structuring work around global virtual teams, international project groups and other forms of work agnostic to where employees are located. This growing area of research has highlighted the multiple interdependencies

between actors in different time zones and the ‘frictions’ that may arise from cultural, linguistic, and other differences between them (Reiche et al., 2019). This suggests that the establishment of global norms is an important element of how individuals can cope with its demands and that the range of people who create and maintain them might include those such as members of global teams with relatively little formal authority. Yet, with a small number of exceptions—such as Santistevan and Josserand’s (2019) analysis of various “teaming” modes in global teams—the global work literature has not shed light on who develops global norms.

Overall, the literature summarized here highlights three groups who are likely to feature in our analyses of global norm formation: those who are globally mobile through international assignments; directors with formal global responsibilities; and local managers who implement global policies. It has also suggested that the range of globalizing actors includes those who are not mobile, and those who are involved in a range of forms of global work which makes them interdependent with those in other countries, but it has not identified specific types of globalizing actor beyond the three identified above. The literature has provided only a partial answer to the question of who the globalizing actors are involved in processes of global norm formation in MNCs and how they vary in terms of the function they play within norm-making, the source of influence they draw on and their reach.

Our framework for analyzing globalizing actors has three main elements. First, the diffusion of ideas and practices across countries is complicated by national institutional differences (Chiang et al., 2017) and therefore entails numerous challenging steps (Björkman & Lervik, 2007). Once an idea or practice emerges as a potential global norm, there must be a process of dissemination across countries, and once absorbed the idea must be implemented into practice. Moreover, if the norm is to endure there must be a tending or monitoring process to ensure that it remains intact. The qualitatively different nature of these varied functions means that the range of actors involved is likely to be great. Second, multinationals are characterized by differing interests, and attempts at establishing global ways of working inevitably encounter intra-organizational, socio-political challenges (Dörrenbächer & Geppert, 2011; Ferner et al., 2012). Norms can be used to advance or protect the interests of certain actors, and they can challenge the interests of others who may resist them. Those seeking to globalize norms must therefore have a source, or ‘channel’, of influence (Ferner & Edwards, 1995) that enables them to achieve their aims. Third, most multinationals are characterized by complex, multi-layered, rapidly evolving structures. These certainly include wide-ranging structures, such as international divisions and functions, but the multiple forms of intersectionality that exist in contemporary MNCs also include those

with more limited reach, such as global virtual teams, cross-national working groups and international communities of practice in particular occupations (Mahnke et al., 2012; Reiche et al., 2019). Norms can therefore emerge at a range of levels and places and have quite varying coverage. Our analysis of globalizing actors is based on these three sources of variation: the *function within global norm formation* that they perform, the *source of influence* that they use, and the *reach* of their influence.

This suggests that there is a wide range of types of globalizing actor. Explaining this diversity requires an approach to norm-making that allows for norms to emerge in a range of domains, within the multiple forms of intersectionality referred to above, many of which are fluid, even transitory (Edwards et al., 2013). We conceive of a domain as a space within a multinational in which an idea or practice is spread and absorbed by enough actors to take on the status of a norm, which contributes to the establishment of social order. The boundaries of this domain are defined by the coverage of the norm. Viewed in this way, the many domains in a multinational—potentially hundreds—overlap with one another in myriad ways. Second, it must allow for global norm-making to be driven not only by those endowed with hierarchical authority, who initiate and maintain norms around vertical structures, but also by those who do not have authority and might form norms around operational interdependencies that are horizontal in nature. The emergence of norms entails several steps in which various actors are potentially involved. Some actors must see a motivation in *creating* a new norm and subsequently arrange for the idea to be *disseminated* by convincing others of the benefits from adopting it. It must then be *implemented* into practice by a wider group, who can ensure that the norm does not atrophy by *monitoring* the norms. Thus the dynamics of global norm formation are likely to involve processes of creation, dissemination, implementation, and monitoring. To the extent that these are distinct tasks they may well be conducted by different actors who occupy structurally different positions, particularly in large, complex MNCs.

If norms serve the purpose of forming one type of control over others then they are far from neutral aspects of how MNCs operate, and there is likely to be a struggle over the nature and coverage of norms (Kristensen & Zeitlin, 2005). Thus, globalizing actors must be able to utilize one or more sources of influence (Ferner & Edwards, 1995). Norms are sometimes driven by those in senior hierarchical positions with authority across major business units. Other actors may not have a strong hierarchical position but rather can influence an emerging domain through control over a resource on which others are dependent, such as expertise or contacts with key intermediaries (Ferner & Edwards, 1995). Fligstein (1997) adds a further channel through which actors can exert influence, ‘social skill’, defined as ‘the ability to motivate

other actors by providing them with common meanings and identities' (1997: 397). Social skill provides a channel through which a wide range of actors, including those who are not in senior positions, can be active in global norm formation. Moreover, those in senior hierarchical positions may use their social skill as a 'softer' way of introducing a new norm than making orders. Thus, the way that actors use social skill is dependent on wider power structures, and multiple sources of influence may be used together.

The way in which globalizing actors exert influence may be interconnected with the extent of their influence. In establishing a new global norm, those with hierarchical authority may have the means to seek to establish a new domain across the entire company, or even beyond, through a code of conduct relating to working conditions in suppliers, for instance. They may also condition the nature of new domains that exist at other levels, such as divisions or functions, influencing the range of norms that are consistent with the expressed preferences of senior executives. Other actors may develop new norms in a very small international team or unit and have no aspirations to extend their influence beyond this. Therefore, the 'reach' of an actor can be broad (extending across the whole company or even sector) or narrow (restricted to a particular working group).

Overall, our assessment of the IB and IHRM literatures is that they do not provide the necessary conceptual apparatus and we have argued for an approach that allows us to analyze the diversity of globalizing actors and tease out empirically how global norm formation occurs. This approach has highlighted the different functions of norm-making (creation, dissemination, implementation, monitoring), the various sources of influence they might use (hierarchical position, resource-based power, and social skill) and their reach (broad or narrow). We supplement this framework with a methodology that is both theory-driven and exploratory, examining the material nature of the work of globalizing actors and the strategies they pursue in a flexible manner.

Methodology

Data

The paper is based on an extensive dataset comprised of 153 interviews that each lasted about an hour. The dataset covers individuals across 27 countries and 17 MNCs, incorporating respondents in senior positions, such as managing partners, founding owners and directors, through to those in junior roles, such as front-line service workers and graduate trainees. We sought organizations from multiple sectors, including those in which MNCs have a long-standing presence

such as business services, finance, food & drink and automotive components; those in which MNCs have moved towards internationally integrated forms of production in recent years, such as publishing and IT; growth areas for MNCs, including 'platform' business models (e.g., food delivery); and those where MNCs have not received scholarly attention, such as charities. We also sought MNCs of varying sizes, the organizations ranging from about 20 employees to those with over 100,000. To chart as wide a range of globalizing actors as possible, the interviewees were chosen using a maximal variation purposive method (Creswell, 2013) (see Table 1).

The interviews generated 146 cases. A 'case' was where an individual was active in the globalization of a particular norm. This means that one interview could generate more than one case; 24 interviews generated two cases of the same individual being active in the globalization of different norms, while one generated three cases. Alternatively, some other interviews did not generate a new case because the interviewee was not active in the formation of a global norm, but the interview data corroborated the accounts of others, allowing the construction of a 'contextualized explanation' (Welch et al., 2011) of the work of globalizing actors. We refer to these as contextual interviews. A corroborating account was a pre-condition for the inclusion of a case and allowed us to triangulate accounts of an individual's role in norm-making (Miles et al., 2014).

The interviews were structured around a set of questions (see Online Appendix, Table 1), covering in detail the operation of a particular norm and especially the individual's role in each one. We followed these questions flexibly to explore a range of accounts of those directly involved in the phenomenon of interest (Gioia et al., 2012). Given our contention that there was likely to be a wide range of globalizing actors, we sought to use interviews with globalizing actors to generate leads to others. In Welch et al.'s (2011) terms, the 'observation domain' was not well documented, requiring an 'intensive research strategy'. Thus we pursued processes of norm-making which informants led us towards, allowing us to 'follow the stories' of those involved in the norm-making processes. Some norms were global and covered thousands of employees. In some of these, the activity of the GA related to a norm-making space, such as a performance management system, in which there were multiple norms. In researching these, we were sometimes able to interview more than ten people about the same norm. Others covered just a handful of employees, taking the form of a quite specific norm. In some of these we had two or three accounts. Interviews were conducted by two researchers in English, transcribed, and coded using NVivo software.

Table 1 The organizations and respondents

Org.	Sector	Size	Number of respondents	Range of respondents
A	Business services	> 100,000	33	From managing partner of a division through to client-facing staff
B	Business services	200	6	HR Director plus a range of client-facing staff
C	Business services	> 100,000	4	Client-facing staff
D	Business services	> 100,000	11	Client-facing staff
E	Bank	5000	7	Operations Director, technical staff and analysts
F	Bank	> 100,000	3	Sustainability specialists plus a leader of a small global team
G	Charity	1000	12	Head of training through to many project leads
H	Charity	10,000	3	Project workers and head of evaluation
I	IT and comms	100,000	37	HR Director, Regional Leads, Heads of Global Project Groups and Teams
J	Food and drink	25,000	11	Head of public affairs and many regional/national leads in that function
K	Publishing	2000	6	HR Director through to editors and assistant editors
L	Fast-food delivery	3000	4	Finance and Operations Directors
M	Market research	20	3	Founding/Owner Managers and Regional Lead
N	Market research	2500	3	Journalists and Data Analysts
O	Advertising	25,000	2	Divisional Manager and Evaluation specialist
P	Automotive parts	> 100,000	5	A range of divisional leaders
Q	Pharma	10,000	3	Marketing and Sales

Analysis

Our analysis comprised two stages. The first involved the establishment of theoretically driven codes. Our starting point—that global norm formation is likely to involve a wider range of people than the literature assumes—led to the establishment of a framework that allowed us to distinguish between actors according to the three axes of variation. Accordingly, we developed an initial coding structure based on these axes. Three coders explored the utility of these codes and discussed coding disagreements in the very small number of cases where there was a difference of view, thereby improving the clarity of the codes and consistency in their application. This exercise led us to some reworking of the codes. For instance, concerning reach, we began by identifying how the various ‘platforms’ that actors used and operated within could give rise to different extents of reach. During the early stages of analysis it became clear that, while this captured the ‘organizational’ reach well, it did not capture the way in which actors varied in the range of countries that they covered. Thus we introduced the notion of ‘geographical’ reach alongside ‘organizational’ reach. Overall, through working iteratively and engaging in a ‘constant comparison’ between data and concepts (Doz, 2011), we integrated pre-defined codes arising from the project’s conceptual framework with revised codes based on themes emerging from the data, helping us to develop ‘logical explanations’ for the patterns of action we observed (Gehman et al., 2018).

Table 2 demonstrates the primary and secondary codes that were derived from the theory, together with some further sub-codes, in the first three columns. The fourth column provides interview excerpts that relate to the codes. The final set of codes—those that were amended in the light of the data analysis—are evident in the fifth column of Table 2 and are in three categories. First, whether the individual’s role in norm-making was to create, disseminate, implement or monitor a global norm, or some combination of these. Second, whether the source of influence that they used was their hierarchical position, resources, or social skill, allowing for multiple sources. Third, whether the reach was broad or narrow. One aspect of reach is geographical, for which we recorded the number of countries that the individual had influence over, and placed individuals into narrow reach (a single country or part of that country), medium (a region) or high (multiple regions/global). The other is organizational reach, for which we estimated the number of employees influenced by the norm, using narrow (10 or fewer), medium (between 11 and 100) and high (100+). (The exception was the multinational which only employed 20 people, for which we recorded ‘high’ as influence across the whole company).

The second step in the analysis examined ways in which the cases clustered together, allowing ‘types’ of globalizing actor to emerge; in other words, were there groups of cases that exhibited the same combination of these ‘axes of variation’? Two researchers categorized each case along these three sources of variation. A small number of discrepancies were resolved through discussion involving these two coders

Table 2 The coding process

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised codes—axis of variation I
Norm-making	Creation	Providing a rationale Negotiation Dealing with resistance	<p>"So we all have a common platform and a common language and a common way of understanding, what we don't have is a common way of doing things. So we have tried to develop processes and systems lying outside that technology." (case 97)</p> <p>"[...] we created this plan everybody in the management team brought into it so we executed the plan. And it was around a leadership of safety, employee behavior and workplace management. So those are the 3 things that we felt were really important. And so we created systems on that basis" (case 130)</p>	<p>The categories of creation and dissemination were confirmed by the data, but the analysis suggested that the aspect of monitoring within '(post)-implementation' had become a specialist function within its own right. In other words, some individuals were involved in monitoring but not any other element of implementation</p> <p>The function that a GA plays within norm-making takes four forms:</p> <p>Creation</p> <p>Dissemination</p> <p>Implementation</p> <p>Monitoring</p>
	Dissemination	Info and cons processes Negotiation Dealing with resistance	<p>"It was definitely presented as this is something that could be of value in your work, definitely not 'this is the new gospel and this is how you are going to do things'. A sort of informative approach and a sort of by participating there is, they selected who could and couldn't join, so I think there was a certain sort of strategic dimension to that" (case 41)</p> <p>"the first challenge is trying to convince people at a senior level that what I think we should do is what we should do. [...] And the next challenge is getting people on the ground, so the partners aren't the ones doing the initiative that I'm asking, it's actually probably people, lower grades, and the challenge was convincing them that what it is that I'm trying to get them to do is actually going to help them in the long run" (case 107)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised codes—axis of variation 1
	(Post)-Implementation	<p>Imposition</p> <p>Info and cons processes</p> <p>Monitoring</p> <p>Negotiation</p> <p>Resistance</p> <p>Sanctions/rewards</p> <p>Tolerance of local exceptions</p>	<p>"when I went to Indonesia there'd been bits and pieces of that (the client engagement model) that had been communicated but not in any great depth. So actually that was one of the big priorities quite early on [...] So it was about really embedding and pushing that through different training initiatives and focus." (case 81)</p> <p>"a group instruction would really be data needs to be managed, and entitlements to view data need to be managed, to an appropriate level for the job that it needs to be done for [...] we would interpret that as we need to basically take that message, apply it also with the regional laws of the regions in which we're operating [...]" (case 61)</p> <p>"it's more related to specific programs and projects [...]. So if I'm evaluating a project on a food security program, it doesn't matter for which organizations, there is some common indicators of, you know, what does it mean improvement in the sense of this project." (case 3)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 2
Channel of Influence	Hierarchical position		<p>"I was the HR Director that flew from office to office and actually I did it as the UK and Rest of World Director. When I went to Singapore for the first time and I did training on coaching, on performance management, on appraisal and development, and then someone turned to me and they said you're trying to make us more Western." (case 137)</p> <p>"one of the first things we did we then spent a few months we surveyed everybody just simple monkey survey, we spoke to a lot of people and then we came up with some plans of what we wanted to do to pull everything together and then we pulled our key leaders. So that would be 18 people plus we have other people who have gravitas or experience within our community and we'd spoke to their line managers and we got them altogether in a room for 2 days and we had a very open session" (case 65)</p> <p>"So the push comes from I guess me and I have responsibility for global business development markets and I have a core team of people who work for me, about half a dozen people, and I obviously sit as part of the leadership team. And all they do is markets and business development for me. So they have responsibility for the European business development champions network so one person will run the calls or two or three because again I've tried to encourage them, so somebody in Spain, somebody in the UK, two people in the US, somebody in Asia. We've basically tried to get that group, because we're quite a difficult network to manage as well because we're spread around the world, to work closely together but then they take responsibility for a region". (case 97)</p>	<p>The analysis confirmed the utility of the initial codes</p> <p>The channel of influence that an actor may use includes:</p> <p>Authority stemming from the hierarchical position</p> <p>Use of resources on which others are dependent</p> <p>Social skill</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 2
	Resources	Networks	<p>"So 100% of effort went in there, entrepreneurship was sort of put on that back burner until I thought that looks quite a cool piece of work so I started through my network trying to understand what entrepreneurship is, what are our entrepreneur clients, how is sort of working in an entrepreneurial way different to maybe you know how we work compared to like a Unilever. So I did a lot of internal meetings, external meetings so a little bit of fact finding, I put a business case to then the global head of sustainable networks and entrepreneurship." (case 58)</p>	
		Knowledge	<p>"this role that I have now is kind of perfect for me because it's still within a professional services environment, it still has that global aspect to it, but it's more focused on relationships and it's focused on sort of selling the business, promoting what we do. So it's kind of the softer edge of tax" (case 86)</p> <p>"for the most part it was just stuff that I have learned over the years and because of the amount of time I had worked at BT and worked in the global environment I think I had those skills to bring to the role that I was in". (case 33)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 2
	Social Skill	Establishing Relationships	<p>"I went out there to basically do a lot of training [...] But really to also just again getting to know everybody. It's very difficult for them when a manager suddenly comes in that to date you've not really spoken to at all and who just suddenly says right, you're reporting to me [...] So at that point it was kind of building those relationships really from the base level" (case 138)</p> <p>"I think we would never as a small group have had the influence and power to deliver, to use that management chain. So I worked quite hard to kind of go where we can influence and we can work with the organization to change. So we need to have relationships with the managers and with the directors and have these conversations to set out the particular conversational points." (case 46)</p> <p>"the relationships are the most important thing, well I think they are the more important thing throughout these processes. So yes building relationships with all the heads of research globally was really important and I have definitely had to put a lot of effort into those". (case 126)</p>	
		Framing	<p>Another thing that helps is how I then communicate with people. So I would say things like how can I help you here. That tends to get people who have, you know, who are a bit bristly to calm a bit, that I'm like I'm helping you." (case 107)</p> <p>"So it was a presentation I delivered to our global leadership team and if I was to summarize the presentation it was a description of (my previous organization's) strategy [...] to explain why (our firm) needs to have a globally consistent approach [...] But rather than having slides that just have those headings I had to deliver the story and the perspective of my experience (elsewhere)" (case 90)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 2
		Issue selling	<p>“what we are asked to do on top of this is we help people with proposals, so what we have really tried to do is encourage people to use us because they don't pay for us. I am a coach so we will fly out to them and sit down with them and say these are your strategic messages”. (case 87)</p> <p>“I know that you need to come with a pretty clear explanation of why, the value proposition for them, how it's going to make their life easier. And why it's so simple. So when I presented just a naming convention the company was like guys are you sick of looking for files are you sick of this, don't you wish you could do this, it takes you so long to do this guess what, I have a solution” (case 142)</p>	
		Other comms skills	<p>“[...] by blog which I write quite frequently talking about changes and talking about what the agenda is and strategy is and just ensuring that we have a great deal of visibility on the departmental priorities that we're talking about those like frequently.” (case 139)</p> <p>“Ours tend to be very much the persuasion. [...] When I go out into the individual territories, [...] I can usually be pretty successful talking about the upside of the team ups of the collaboration and putting that in front of people.” (case 95)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 3
Reach through Platforms	Hierarchical structures	Business Divisions	<p>“Number one what helps is getting the partners to say that this initiative is running. So that client relationship management tool, that was sent by the senior partner (of the division) to everyone, that helps”. (case 107)</p> <p>“I know who all the direct reports are but what I am talking about is who really influences that person. So our head of (division) here I know her well I have direct access to her when I need to we talk all the time. I know who her deputies are and they actually influence the way she thinks. [...] I think that in a network structure the ability to influence others, you have to influence someone to influence someone else by making it in their best interest as well.” (case 84)</p> <p>“So I think it’s developed at a regional level in the learning department but they will invite partners (of the divisions), it’s part of a partner’s job to support that event, I don’t know, every 2 or 3 years. So they need to go and deliver this three and a half day session.” (case 54)</p>	<p>The analysis led to a revision of the codes to take account of the distinction between the extent to which GAs were involved in norm formation that affected large numbers of others or just a few other people on the one hand, and the geographical range of the norm on the other.</p> <p>Reach takes the form of: ‘<i>organizational</i>’, which ranges from company wide (wide) to just a few people (narrow) ‘<i>geographical</i>’ which ranges from one country (narrow) to global (wide)</p>
		International HR Structures	<p>“My boss is in Vienna so I have a European or there is a VP of Europe for HR so I report in to him. But he started the role the day I did and he was based in North America, he is Austrian he was based in North America as a global lead with that group of people that sit in the corporate office. And he has a very open way of accepting different ideas and approaches. And I think he recognizes the difference so that helped.” (case 128)</p> <p>“We have an EMEA structure and we have a global structure. Right now the project, it’s a global project so we have teams from the global and people from the EMEA teams in the project”. (case 113)</p>	

Table 2 (continued)

Primary code	Secondary code	Relevant sub-codes	Illustrative interview excerpts	Arriving at the finalised code—axis of variation 3
	Emergent structures	Ad-Hoc Project Groups and Teams	<p>“we said right, we need to get us all pulling in the same way what are the 10 core things in terms of customer service that we need to pull out. And so that wasn’t the leadership team, we asked for volunteers from the network to come together and then do that, so create those 10 things (case 97)</p> <p>“we formed a group of trustees from the governance space into the global partnership working group which reports directly to the board on what governance changes need to accompany this management change.” (case 46)</p>	
		Networks	<p>The network champions is ongoing because the world is continuing to change and we can always support in our business development activity. So what I would like to see is every region having a really strong core with the global team in the middle but that the knowledge base and the sharing happens just automatically on an ongoing basis”. (case 86)</p> <p>“For our residential meeting I wanted a much more global set of actors in that conference, drawing people from Africa and Asia, the Middle East and Latin America into the conversation about what do we mean by global partnership and doing that in the style of an open space conference. So getting from there was actually an organizational change” (case 46)</p>	

and other team members. This exercise involved a painstaking examination of all 146 cases (with the categorizations evident in Table 3 in the following section).

This table allowed us to assess the range of combinations of these ‘axes of variation’ across the cases. On the basis of the literature, we anticipated that some particular ‘types’ would emerge—principally, the executives with global reach, those on international assignments and those with a remit to implement global policies in a particular country—but this was largely an exploratory exercise in which it was likely that many more than these three types would emerge. Indeed, the exercise produced various types that we describe in detail in the next section. Conceivably, other combinations of these three constructs might have emerged from the analysis, giving rise to other ‘types’, an issue we return to in the discussion.

In sum, the two phases of analysis performed different functions. The first phase was largely theory driven, but also involved revisions to the codes through interrogation of the data. The second phase, in contrast, was largely exploratory since we deliberately allowed a range of combinations of the characteristics of globalizing actors to emerge from the data, though it also drew on the lessons of our literature review in that we looked for some particular ‘types’ that have featured in previous research.

Globalizing actors: An emergent categorization

The details of each case according to the three axes of variation appear in Table 3. By examining the way in which these factors clustered in the individuals, we identified nine types.

Some who play a creating role occupy a senior position within the hierarchy and have high reach, both geographically and organizationally. They shape global norms through influencing the parameters in which they emerge and tend to have strong authority over appointments and resources. They tend to work at corporate HQ and travel fairly frequently on very short trips. We term them *globalizing directors* and the dynamic of norm-making is top-down. The significance of the term ‘director’ is not just that they have this in their job title, though some did, but rather that they direct the nature of global norms.

One illustration of a globalizing director was the move towards a ‘shared purpose’ in the publishing multinational in which the International HR Director used the authority that stemmed from her position in the hierarchy to create and disseminate this initiative across the whole organization (case 136). As she put it:

So we’ve gathered feedback from focus groups internally [...] So stage one has been done, stage two

(involves) surveys as well as focus groups, poster sessions, and then we’re going to come to three or four that we can say these are our global values for a global organization.

There is an extensive literature relating to those that occupy senior positions and have a wide reach across organizations (e.g., Levy et al., 2007), some of which sheds light on how they create global norms (e.g., Reiche et al., 2017). We can add new insights relating to this group, however. Perhaps most striking was the finding that many globalizing directors needed, or preferred, to use social skill to supplement the influence that stemmed from their authority. In several cases (65, 76, 97, 98) a reliance on social skill to supplement hierarchical position was seen as a way of generating proper buy-in to the intended norm, and of creating an ongoing coalition of those committed to the norm. One illustration was the gradual moves towards regional integration within the ‘People and Organization’ section of a professional services firm, a norm that was instigated by the Managing Partner of the division who ‘gave the direction’ for what became a global norm (case 98). Within the federal, ‘partnership’ structure, the authority stemming from this role was fractured by national authority structures. The Managing Partner used social skill to build a coalition of those who became convinced of the logic of the initiative and could ‘sell’ it further.

Indeed, this reliance on a coalition of globalizing actors within top-down processes draws attention to the other types of globalizing actor that directors rely on. One such group is those who, like globalizing directors, play a creating role and have high reach geographically and organizationally, but instead of relying on hierarchical position, depend on a source of expertise or strong contacts with others to exert influence. This commonly took the form of a director making commitments to create norms and needing others to enact these plans, particularly through creating the detail around a broad idea and to generate buy-in from a wider group through disseminating. Generally, those in this group did not need to travel to conduct their role within global norm formation. We refer to those who play a creating and disseminating role in which they use their control over resources (expertise or contacts) or social skill and have quite high reach as *globalizing specialists*.

One instance was a sustainability manager in a major bank who was accorded the role of collaborating with specialist external organizations to develop initiatives relating to the bank’s role in combatting climate change, something that directors had committed the organization to achieve (case 59). This individual, who rarely traveled, described his role in terms of engaging and inspiring leaders:

My team started developing our leadership program, engaging senior leaders and helping them understand

Table 3 Summary of cases

Case	Organization	Function				Source of influence			Reach		Type of globalizing actor
		Creating	Disseminating	Implementing	Monitoring	Social skill	Hierar- chical position	Resource: expertise contacts	Geo- graphical reach	Organi- zational reach	
1	H	✓		✓		✓		✓	●●	●	Globalizing specialist/ leader
2	H		✓			✓		✓	●●	●	Globalizing specialist
3	H				✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing monitor
4	I						✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
5	I		✓			✓	✓		●●	●	Globalizing disseminator
6	I		✓			✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
7	I				✓	✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing monitor
8	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
9	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●	Globalizing specialist
10	I	✓				✓	✓	✓	●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
11	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
12	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
13	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
14	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
15	I	✓				✓	✓	✓	●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
16	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
17	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
18	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
19	I	✓				✓	✓		●●	●	Globalizing specialist
20	I	✓		✓		✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist/ leader
21	I	✓	✓			✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing director
22	I	✓	✓			✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing director
23	I	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing director
24	I	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing director
25	I	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
26	I	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
27	I	✓		✓		✓	✓		●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
28	I	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
29	I	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
30	I	✓		✓		✓	✓		●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
31	I	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		●●	●●	Globalizing unit leader

Table 3 (continued)

Case	Organization	Function		Source of influence				Reach		Type of globalizing actor
		Creating	Disseminating	Implementing	Monitoring	Social skill	Hierar- chical position	Resource: expertise contacts	Geo- graphical reach	
32	I			✓			✓	●●	●●	Globalizing unit leader
33	I	✓				✓		●●	●	Self-initiated globalizing actors
34	I		✓	✓				●	●	Local managerial implementer
35	I		✓	✓				●	●	Local managerial implementer
36	I		✓	✓				●	●	Local managerial implementer
37	I			✓				●	●	Local managerial implementer
38	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●	Globalizing disseminator
39	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●	Globalizing disseminator
40	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
41	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
42	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
43	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
44	G	✓	✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
45	G	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
46	G	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●●	●●	Globalizing specialist/Globalizing dis- seminator
47	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
48	G		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Local champion/Local managerial imple- menter
49	G		✓	✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
50	G		✓	✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
51	C			✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
52	C			✓		✓	✓	●	●	Local managerial implementer
53	D			✓		✓		●●	●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
54	D			✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
55	D			✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
56	N			✓		✓		●	●	Local managerial implementer
57	N		✓	✓		✓		●●	●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
58	F		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator
59	F		✓	✓		✓		●●	●●	Globalizing specialist
60	F			✓		✓		●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
61	F			✓		✓		●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
62	J		✓	✓		✓		●●	●	Globalizing disseminator

Table 3 (continued)

Case	Organization	Function		Source of influence				Reach		Type of globalizing actor	
		Creating	Disseminating	Implementing	Monitoring	Social skill	Hierarchical position	Resource: expertise	Resource: contacts		Geo-graphical reach
63	J	✓		✓		✓	✓		•••	•	Globalizing disseminator
64	J	✓		✓		✓	✓		•••	•	Globalizing specialist/Globalizing disseminator
65	J	✓		✓		✓			•••	•	Globalizing director
66	J				✓			✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
67	J			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
68	J			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
69	J			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
70	J			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
71	J					✓		✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
72	J			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
73	L			✓					•••	•	Globalizing unit leader
74	L			✓					•••	•	Globalizing specialist
75	L	✓		✓					•••	•	Globalizing specialist
76	L	✓		✓					•••	••	Globalizing director
77	L	✓		✓					•••	•••	Globalizing director/Globalizing unit leader
78	L			✓					•••	•	Globalizing unit leader
79	L			✓					•••	•••	Globalizing unit leader
80	L			✓					•••	•	Globalizing unit leader
81	O			✓					•	•	International assignee
82	O						✓		•••	•••	Globalizing monitor
83	Q	✓						✓	•••	•	Self-initiated globalizing actor
84	Q	✓						✓	•••	•	Self-initiated globalizing actor
85	Q	✓						✓	•••	•	Self-initiated globalizing actor
86	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
87	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
88	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
89	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
90	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
91	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
92	A	✓						✓	•••	••	Globalizing specialist
93	A			✓				✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer

Table 3 (continued)

Case	Organization	Function		Source of influence			Reach		Type of globalizing actor	
		Creating	Disseminating	Implementing	Monitoring	Social skill	Hierar- chical position	Resource: expertise contacts		Geo- graphical reach
94	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
95	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
96	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
97	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing director
98	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing director
99	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
100	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
101	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
102	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
103	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
104	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
105	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
106	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
107	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
108	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
109	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
110	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
111	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
112	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
113	A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
114	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing disseminator
115	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing disseminator
116	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
117	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
118	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
119	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
120	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing unit leader
121	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•••	•••	Globalizing specialist
122	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local champion
123	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
124	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
125	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer
126	E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	•	•	Local managerial implementer

Table 3 (continued)

Case	Organization	Function			Source of influence			Reach		Type of globalizing actor	
		Creating	Disseminating	Implementing	Monitoring	Social skill	Hierarchical position	Resource: expertise	Resource: contacts		Geo-graphical reach
127	P	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		●	●	Local champion and implementer
128	P	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		●	●	Local champion, Local managerial implementer
129	P	✓	✓	✓		✓			●	●	Local champion, Local managerial implementer
130	P	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	●●●	●●●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
131	M	✓			✓				●●	●●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
132	M	✓	✓	✓					●●●	●●●	Globalizing director/Globalizing unit leader/Globalizing monitor
133	M	✓	✓	✓		✓			●●●	●●●	Globalizing director/Globalizing unit leader/Globalizing monitor
134	K	✓				✓		✓	●●●	●	Globalizing disseminator
135	K	✓				✓		✓	●●●	●●●	Globalizing specialist/Global disseminator
136	K	✓							●●●	●●●	Globalizing director
137	K	✓							●●●	●●●	Globalizing director
138	K			✓		✓			●●●	●	Globalizing unit leader
139	K			✓		✓			●	●	International Assignee
140	K	✓		✓		✓			●●●	●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
141	B	✓		✓					●●	●●	Globalizing disseminator/Local managerial implementer
142	B	✓				✓		✓	●●●	●●●	Self-initiated globalizing actor
143	B			✓					●	●	Local managerial implementer
144	B			✓		✓			●	●	Local managerial implementer
145	B			✓					●	●	Local managerial implementer
146	B	✓		✓					●	●●	Local managerial implementer

the challenges that we face and try and educate, inspire them to become advocates and I guess create agency within themselves to try and lead the slow embedding of sustainability within the organization.

While some globalizing specialists are acting on a brief set by directors, some of those we studied had not been invited to do so but rather had advocated a particular norm that differed from the pre-existing *modus operandi*. One example was in one of the charities, where two of our respondents (cases 43 and 44) who were responsible for evaluating projects had sought to establish a new methodology. During a prolonged period of lobbying for change, they convinced those above them of the merits of their approach, utilizing not only their expertise as a resource but also the social skill of framing a case for change in terms that resonated with the evolving strategy of the organization. The new methodology became established within a formal training program across the organization. The intended norm originated not with the directors but with those in the center just below directors and was disseminated with support from the top of the organization.

Both globalizing directors and specialists were commonly dependent on others to help them disseminate the intended norm. Some of those responsible for dissemination are mobile across borders through long term postings and operate on a brief set by directors; they play a disseminating role, their source of influence stems from their appointment to a position in the corporate hierarchy and their reach extends over a geographically limited area. There is a big literature on this sort of actor (see above), for whom we use the well-established term *international assignees*.

One example of a long-term assignee was a manager in an advertising MNC who spent 5 years in Indonesia with the task of implementing the ‘client engagement model’ (case 81), which was described as follows:

When I went to Indonesia there’d been bits and pieces of (the client engagement model) that had been communicated but not in any great depth. So one of the big priorities (was) appointing a champion for it, really focusing on a couple of the key stages, embedding and pushing that through different training initiatives and focus.

The other was in the publishing MNC in which a UK manager “was given the role really of trying to bring the US business into closer alignment with the UK business”, with the greater use of outsourcing and offshoring being primary ways of achieving this. In both cases, these individuals played a disseminating and implementing role given to them by directors as part of a top-down norm-making process, utilized their role in the hierarchy to oversee these aspects

of norm-making and had a reach that was geographically limited, essentially by country.

There were many others who performed a disseminating function who were not mobile. They were reasonably senior but not senior enough to rely only on this source of influence, so supplemented it with a resource such as expertise or social skill. Some only rarely left their location but established a global network through which they exerted influence on a particular issue, sometimes formally through training and sometimes informally through virtual networking, resulting in high geographical reach. We call these actors—who had a disseminating role, supplementing limited authority with social skill as their source of influence and had high reach—*globalizing disseminators*.

In our IT and communications MNC there were many examples of this type of globalizing actor, where several of our respondents had responsibility for disseminating a division-wide norm that specified that at least 70% of any product must be from a standardized template, meaning that no more than 30% could be tailored to clients’ requirements. This ‘70-30 rule’ had become established as a global norm through the disseminating role of leads of global units. We interviewed a ‘Project and Program Manager’ for Latin America (case 4) who disseminated the firm’s approach to this issue from a global ‘center of excellence’. In seeking to achieve cost reduction through a standardized methodology he argued that:

we are able to do that, or to achieve that better, (through) a center of excellence where everyone is located in the same place and we can teach everyone how to do things better, the methodology that we use, etcetera.

However, he did not have full line management responsibilities for those within their unit; for example, the performance assessment of members of the unit was done by someone else. Consequently, such globalizing disseminators needed to supplement whatever influence stemmed from their hierarchical position with the social skills of framing the case for, and demonstrating the benefits of, the norm in question, as well as negotiating with other actors concerning adaptations. With the implementation of the norm in the hands of others, the influence that these globalizing disseminators exerted was fluid and negotiated.

The other group of those playing a disseminating role but who are not globally mobile is those who spread norms within their locality. Working within top-down processes of global norm formation, many in this category ‘sell’ the intended norm, using their social skills to convince others of its merits. These who play this type of disseminating role tend to use expertise as a resource and social skill to influence others within a geographically constrained area (often

particular countries), so their reach is quite low. We call these *local champions* of global norms.

An excellent illustration is those who undertook the virtual training program in a global charity which was seeking to establish a new methodology for evaluating projects. Some of these individuals could influence the practice of evaluating projects through their own work, but their disseminating role primarily took the form of ‘selling’ it to their peers (cases 49 and 50). One described the process of convincing the organizers of the program that they would be effective in this championing role:

So you had to convince them that you were sitting at a point of influence in terms of how would that skill when you get it influence other people or staff, or influence practice within where you’re working or within the team you’re working with.

They could not rely on the influence that stems from seniority and instead needed to carefully frame the case for the new norm. This was normally a temporary role in addition to their ‘day job’, did not involve them being globally mobile, and was not part of any ‘global’ career plan.

Turning to those with an implementing role, the focus of much of the literature on how norms are implemented is on ‘subsidiary managers’ (Meyer et al., 2020). We did indeed find individuals who were charged with implementing a norm, drew on their hierarchical position within the country in which they managed and whose reach was limited to this country or region—in other words, their geographical reach was low, and they were not globally mobile. We term such globalizing actors *local managerial implementers*.

Intriguingly, while our research threw up many local managerial implementers, none of them had responsibility for a coherent country unit with broad responsibilities at national level who could be referred to as ‘subsidiary’ managers. We did, however, have many who had responsibility for implementing a particular norm across a country, and had influence stemming from their hierarchical position within a country, or sometimes cluster of countries. For instance, in the food and drink multinational there were several people who were charged with working to implement a global approach to public affairs (regulation and lobbying) (cases 66 to 72). Such people were definitively not managing a ‘subsidiary’ since their influence did not extend beyond public affairs; in other words, they were specialist managers as opposed to the generalist role implied in the common depiction of subsidiary managers. A dynamic in some cases was of norms being deliberately amended by Local Managerial Implementers, sometimes under the corporate radar. For example, one of the consultants in the US in another Business Services firm (case 52) set out the process of recording time:

You’re supposed to report your time honestly and fairly, that’s the party line that they give you. In practice though that never happens. If somebody tells you that you only have 8 h to do this, but it takes you 10 h, you should record 10 h and let the profitability of the project go down, but obviously you don’t want to do that because you don’t want to (irritate) the partner.

This illustrates that norms were rarely settled and local managerial implementers were very much part of this dynamism.

There was another group who were charged with implementing ideas and establishing norms but did so across an international unit. In several MNCs there were global virtual teams or international project-based groups and a leader of this had responsibility for implementation of norms, generally without travelling. There was considerable variation among this group in their source of influence: some had influence from a hierarchical position, but this was often limited and needed to be supplemented with influence through control over resources or social skill. They all had medium or high geographical reach and typically low organizational reach. We term these people *globalizing unit leaders*. There is a growing literature on those who engage in and manage ‘global work’ (e.g., Reiche et al., 2019) and our data advances our understanding of how these individuals engage in global norm formation.

There were several globalizing unit leads in our IT & communications multinational, some of whom managed technical staff and some of whom managed client-facing teams (cases 25 to 32). Sometimes these teams were very small indeed—around ten staff—but had genuine global reach, sometimes spread across four continents. Team members tended to have a local manager separate from the global team—who often had formal responsibility for such issues as managing their performance—as well as a global team leader, which limited the authority that the latter possessed. For instance, a ‘regional program manager’ in the US (case 25) was tasked with coordinating the service to a client in the Americas and did so through a globally distributed staff. Of approximately ten people in the team, only one was a direct report:

The others will definitely report to a line manager in their country, so the guys in India all report into some other line manager and my three in Columbia report into a different manager as well. So I would be asked to provide input into their performance when we do our annual quarterly performance review.

Thus globalizing unit leaders needed to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships with those with other managerial responsibilities, requiring very considerable social skills to supplement the influence stemming from

any authority they enjoyed from their global team leader role.

The move towards global teams was also evident in our publishing MNC. Editorial teams had been reorganized such that they were no longer geographically based but rather around broad disciplinary areas (e.g., medicine, science, etc.) which were global in reach. The leaders of such teams had the responsibility of implementing key norms within the company, including standardized processes of workflow (case 138). Managing these units was particularly challenging for those that had no experience in the countries in which they were managing staff, while in many cases they had not even met their staff in person. There were large populations of such people in some MNCs, with hundreds of client-facing global virtual teams in some large MNCs. Unlike the ‘country leads’ that are much studied in the IM literature, they face a much wider range of demands and expectations across a number of countries than the term ‘institutional duality’ conveys (Kostova et al., 2008). Many had not anticipated taking on the role, nor been trained for it; they found themselves thrust into it as technologies and work changed around them. While the myriad combinations of global units and teams had clearly been created by senior staff at director or executive level, the nature of norms within these teams were far from fully specified. For example, one respondent in a multinational bank in London coordinated a team of three, with the other team members in New York and Hong Kong and described the nature of data confidentiality in the following terms:

we need to basically take that message (concerning the handling of data), apply it also with the regional laws of the regions in which we’re operating, apply that with the different products which we’re operating in each of those regions, and then apply that down to really determine who gets to view what data.

The role he played in this was not one that stemmed from a formalized role in managing the other two staff, but there was nevertheless an expectation on him that he would implement a globally coherent approach to data management (case 61).

Indeed, there were several cases where a loose pattern of global coordination and poorly specified forms of influence were even more marked, leading to a distinct, but related, type of globalizing actor. A number of those in junior positions were frustrated by the *nature* or even *absence* of norms that would provide predictability in their cross-border interactions and consequently sought to establish new ways of working, essentially by creating and implementing new global norms. They were not globally mobile and did not have the authority from a senior position in the hierarchy, but instead possessed a resource that helped them exert influence or relied on social skill. Their organizational reach was

typically low while their geographical reach was medium to high. To adapt a term used in the global mobility literature, we term these people *self-initiated globalizing actors*.

One excellent illustration was in our North American automotive components firm in which a UK health and safety (H&S) manager had pioneered a “behavioral approach” in which safety concerns were embedded into the routine actions of operators and team leaders and had achieved a significant reduction in accidents (case 130).

So we did a lot of training with managers, we did a lot of kind of building hearts and minds and commitment from the operators. We started focusing on their behaviors and not just their processes and so then over the years we reduced the accident rates considerably.

The norms the UK H&S head advocated to the global firm clashed with a “compliance-based approach” favored by the central H&S function. Through the social skill of spotting where potential allies might lie, the UK H&S manager received support from corporate HR and managed to “unblock” the opposition from the specialist H&S function by bypassing it, essentially using a different channel. However, the resulting co-existence of the compliance and behavioral approaches was an uneasy compromise, and convincing peers in other sites internationally to adopt his approach had been gradual and partial. This type of self-initiated globalizing actor is clearly not part of top-down process of global norm formation, but rather initiates a lateral process between specialists in different sites.

Indeed, individuals with international roles sometimes initiated a new norm to reduce uncertainty, occasionally under the corporate radar. For instance, in one of the market research organizations a new cross-border structure involved journalists who wrote fortnightly feature articles working collaboratively with researchers in India, giving a brief of what data they needed and how it should be presented (case 57). In one such UK-India team one source of stress concerning these interactions was the absence of norms on the speed with which such requests should be dealt with and what was considered appropriate quality. One UK-based journalist outlined significant variation in these respects and, having failed to get his managers to provide clarity, he sought himself to establish clear understandings through collaborations with those in the Indian office. What emerged were norms relating to turn-around times and quality thresholds that produced greater predictability in their work. The absence of norms can be frustrating for members of global teams and some initiate putting this right. These actors did not have any ambition to advance their position in the organization, but merely sought to solve practical problems.

Some others who aspired to engage in global norm-making were obstructed from doing so. One case was in a pharmaceutical multinational, which was structured through

four legally independent companies in different parts of the world, a structure that was designed to limit liability should the organization be sued (cases 83, 84, and 85). Concerned at the absence of a coordinated face at global industry events, various commercial managers formed a cross-national team to coordinate at such events, but lawyers prevented this, concerned that it would jeopardize the independence of the regional companies. Those who aspire to create global norms can thus be thwarted by higher levels of authority who seek to block the process, highlighting a fragility in the work of self-initiated globalizing actors.

The final type we identify concerns the monitoring role that globalizing actors can play in preventing the atrophy of a norm. There is a long-standing recognition in the literature of ways in which the mobility of managers is used to establish 'cultural' control over international operations in general and a monitoring role in particular (e.g., Edström & Galbraith, 1977). Our research generated a small number of globalizing actors who had a specialist monitoring role but who did not travel globally, utilizing their association to senior management (reporting to them on compliance, for instance) as a source of influence and with high geographical reach. We term these *globalizing monitors*.

One instance was in the IT and communications multinational where an individual had responsibility for ensuring that the recently revamped values were being followed in performance management reviews, reporting to the regional

HR director (case 7). A second case was in the advertising MNC where one of our respondents was charged with ensuring that the offices around the world carried out data analysis in a globally standardized way, reporting to those in the corporate HQ (case 82). A third example was in one of the charities, where a 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer' undertook a systematic, globally standardized approach to evaluating how donations were spent and its impact (case 3). She described what she looks for in the evaluation process:

I would be looking for specific frameworks, so do you have a framework in place [...] So I went to do what we call a gap analysis of the monitoring, evaluation and learning system of one of our country offices in South-East Asia and what we did was like a systematic analysis.

None of these three traveled as a routine part of their work.

These nine types are summarized in Table 4. All the cases fit into at least one of the types. (Additional illustrations of each type are found in the Online Appendix, Table 2). In most cases this is a neat fit, where the individual's role in global norm-making is very clearly in one of the categories. However, in a small number of cases there is some overlap between the categories, with an individual playing more than one role at a particular point in time. Some of the types were

Table 4 Types of globalizing actor

Role	Source of influence	Reach	Type	No. of cases
Creating	Hierarchical position in global firm	High geographical and organizational	Globalizing directors	10
Creating	Resource (expertise/contacts) + social skill	High geographical and organizational	Globalizing specialists	31
Disseminating and Implementing	Hierarchical position in a geographical unit	Low geographical and low-medium organizational	International assignees	2
Disseminating	Quite senior position in hierarchy but often need to supplement this	High geographical and organizational	Globalizing disseminators	13
Disseminating	Limited authority from taking on a particular role but need to supplement this with resource/social skill	Low geographical and organizational	Local champions	12
Implementing	Hierarchical position in a geographical unit	Low-medium geographical and low organizational	Local managerial implementers	31
Implementing	Some/limited authority from hierarchical position so need to supplement this with resource/social skill	High geographical and low organizational	Globalizing unit leaders	16
Creating	Social skill	Medium to high geographical but low organizational	Self-initiated globalizing actors	10
Monitoring	Authority is delegated by those in hierarchical positions	High geographical and organizational	Globalizing monitors	3
			Mixed cases	18
			Total	146

found together quite commonly, such as Local Champions and Local Managerial Implementer, while in small or rapidly internationalizing firms the roles of Globalizing Director, Globalizing Disseminator and Globalizing Implementer were found together in some individuals. Moreover, there was a dynamism to these roles; some were explicitly ‘fixed-term’ such as some of the Local Champions, while in those such as the self-initiated Globalizing Actors the motivation to take on the role was generally specific to a particular problem or challenge that was time-limited.

Discussion

Theoretical and empirical contribution

Studies of how MNCs achieve integration have focused too much on formal, conventional structures and too little on cross-border structures such as international business units and global teams, many of which are evolving or temporary in nature and sometimes cover very few employees. The dynamic nature of cross-border structures and groups highlights the array of interactions and interdependencies that exist between groups of employees in different countries. We have drawn attention to the ways in which apparently ‘powerless’ actors can play important roles in norm formation. More generally, the emphasis on dynamism, contention and turbulence in our approach is pertinent to how contemporary MNCs function given the ongoing churn and perpetual restructuring that characterizes such firms. Our examination of *who* is involved in global norm formation has therefore enhanced our understanding of *how* it occurs.

Moreover, our analysis has advanced our theoretical understanding of coordination in MNCs. Distinguishing central control from lateral coordination has been important, particularly for such groups as ‘self-initiated’ globalizing actors, a group that were seeking to achieve coordination among their close colleagues but without senior management control or even sometimes awareness. Thus coordination can be achieved without central control, especially where actors’ desire to reduce uncertainty in their jobs is the driving force. The emphasis in our theoretical approach on social skills forming a source of influence has drawn us to these informal processes of global norm formation.

Our empirical work has revealed a number of groups who have not featured in previous accounts of global integration in MNCs: those who work at the instigation of directors to create and disseminate the detailed nature of norms (globalizing specialists); those who disseminate norms without being globally mobile (both globalizing disseminators and local champions); those who implement norms (globalizing unit leaders); those who have a specialist role in monitoring norms (globalizing monitors); and those who engage in the

creation and implementation of global norms despite not having been charged with this responsibility (self-initiated globalizing actors). The capabilities and activities of these six types of ‘forgotten’ globalizing actors are crucial in making cross-border interactions work. We have also shed new light on three groups who have not been forgotten in previous research, who we have termed globalizing directors, international assignees, and local managerial implementers.

Practical considerations

A central consideration for those within MNCs concerns the wide range of individuals who may be involved in global norm formation. The dynamic of top-down processes initiated by senior staff within the corporate hierarchy was present in our cases, but there were also important lateral and bottom-up elements to how some global norms emerged. A focus on these dynamics draws attention to those who have an important role in global norm-making but are not endowed with authority. While most globalizing directors and international assignees have deliberately chosen a path involving global mobility in general and engagement in global norm formation in particular, many of those in the other categories have fallen into a global role that does not involve mobility but rather comes about as the technological context and nature of their work has evolved. Management should look at how their skills and experiences can be fully harnessed, how barriers to global norm formation are minimized, and how these individuals can best be prepared for the changing nature of their work.

Future research

Methodologically, we have shown the value in ‘following the story’, engaging in an ongoing interaction between theory and empirics, and reflecting on emerging findings in a way that leads researchers to actors they did not set out to include. We identify three ways in which research might be further advanced.

First, we have highlighted the importance of social skill in global norm formation, allowing us to bring to the fore many globalizing actors who have been ‘forgotten’ in previous analyses. One way of interrogating this further is through exploring the relationship between social skill and nationality. For example, are the constituent elements of social skill—establishing relationships, framing, issue-selling, and communications—found in different mixes in individuals of different nationality? Moreover, does the ease with which aspiring globalizing actors use social skills to influence global norm formation vary depending on the main national groups with whom they interact? Our approach of ‘following the story’ of global norm formation led us to

so many nationalities—over 20—that this exercise is left to future research.

Second, the three axes of variation could conceivably lead to more than nine types; there are some ‘empty cells’ where no cases were found of combinations of particular characteristics, which of course does not mean that they do not exist. For instance, while we found *globalizing* monitors, it is possible that there is also a group of those who fulfil this monitoring function within particular geographies. Such ‘Local Monitors’ may be involved in global norm formation if they operate in a globally coordinated way with their peers, just as Local Champions operate within an international network. Other combinations of the characteristics are much less likely to be found together. For example, while we have emphasized that some actors will engage in global norm formation without being expected to do so, which was most evident in the self-initiated GA category, there will probably not be anyone likely to perform a monitoring function without the authority to do so. In sum, future research could usefully explore whether there are other types to the nine documented here.

A third aspect of future research should be on organizational context. Our findings are indicative of variation by organization type in the way globalizing actors operate. For example, actors seeking to form global norms in ‘federal’ MNCs rely more on social skill than those in integrated MNCs in which authority can stem from senior positions within a corporate hierarchy. Similarly, those in rapidly internationalizing MNCs more commonly use social skill to exert influence than those in MNCs where other channels of influence are well established. We could extend this to examine global norm formation across the boundaries of MNCs in which we might observe a complex intersection of norms as is the case in relation to codes of conduct across supply chains. A systematic comparison of how norm-making processes and impacts are influenced by organizational contexts would contribute to building a more general picture of global norm-formation.

Conclusion

If global integration is central to the strategy of an increasing number of MNCs then common understandings and reference points across borders are crucial. Our contention is that previous academic research on global mobility has shed light on only a sub-set of MNC employees involved in global norm formation. It has failed to fully appreciate a range of important groups who are active in global norm formation. Our findings demonstrate that the lens through which we view global integration should allow us to study a wide range of globalizing actors, including those who are

globally mobile but also to see beyond such individuals to encompass a range of others who do not travel.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-023-00663-6>.

Acknowledgements We are grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK (ES/N007883/1) for funding the research that led to this article.

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