



# A Knowledge-centric Recruitment Model Aimed at Organizational Learning

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**Abstract.** This paper examines inter-firm talent mobility and learning-by-hiring as strategic mechanisms through which firms seek to accelerate technological development, particularly in emerging economies where labor markets are frequently constrained by shortages of multilingual and highly specialized talent. Building on prior research on learning by hiring and the literature on strategic recruitment, and informed by the author's practitioner experience across multiple roles in global multinational companies, the paper presents a conceptual model - termed the Knowledge-centric Recruitment Model (KCRM) - that articulates how firms can purposefully target the recruitment of professionals who provide access to valuable knowledge. The model specifies boundary conditions that distinguish hiring motivated by the search for new firm competencies from routine recruitment practices, with a particular focus on the micro-level processes occurring within the hiring organization. The analysis suggests that, under knowledge-centric recruitment, firms seek to identify and integrate individuals whose knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience generate value beyond what is mandated by a single job, serving instead as foundational elements for the development of strategically important and innovation-related organizational capabilities.

**Keywords:** Knowledge-centric recruitment, Learning-by-hiring, Tacit knowledge, Absorptive capacity, Dynamic capabilities.

## 1 Introduction

The modern economy has become increasingly driven by intangible assets and knowledge-based capabilities, marking a shift toward a “dematerialized” landscape in which investment in intangibles has become dominant over the past two decades (Eric Hazan et al., 2021). Firms are no longer conceived merely as production or sales entities, they are equally seen as vehicles for creating and reconfiguring knowledge into

products and services, with dynamic capabilities that combine technological and complementary managerial know-how into different forms of innovation (Hock-Doepgen et al., 2024; Teece & Pisano, 1994). Accessing external knowledge is therefore a strategic avenue that enables firms to accelerate innovation and reposition themselves within their industries (Tzabbar, 2009). Yet firms are often path-dependent in their knowledge search with a preference for familiar research directions and managerial solutions that reflect past investments and successes. This bias limits their ability to break out of established routines and to innovate beyond existing technological domains. Compounding this challenge, much of the most valuable organizational knowledge is tacit, embedded in individuals and difficult to articulate, formalize, or transfer (Argote, 2024). As a result, employee mobility - the physical movement of personnel - constitutes an effective mechanism for accessing such knowledge, particularly when firms recruit individuals whose capabilities align with their strategic needs (Bibi, 2024).

The concept of “learning-by-hiring” (LBH) captures deliberate and large-scale strategies in which firms recruit talent from industry peers (especially in the semiconductor and biotechnological sectors, specifically to capture the knowledge embedded in those individuals (Song et al., 2003). While macro-level studies have examined knowledge diffusion through patent analyses, they provide limited insight into the micro-level processes that occur within the hiring firm (Parrotta & Pozzoli, 2012). Existing recruitment literature acknowledges firms’ desire to enrich human capital but rarely connects recruiting practices to the emergence of firm-level capabilities or competitive advantage. This paper addresses that gap by focusing on the emergent characteristics of LBH at the firm level, where knowledge acquisition is the explicit objective of the recruitment effort.

The knowledge-centric recruitment model (KCRM) is introduced in this paper as a strategic talent-recruitment framework that leverages LBH to build organisational capabilities and knowledge competences, particularly in emerging economies where talent shortages prevail. Drawing on more than twenty years of senior HR leadership experience across Central, South and Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East, the model highlights the micro-level recruitment process in which hiring managers balance two distinct criteria whilst searching for candidates: job-fit (alignment with immediate role requirements) and strategy-fit (potential for knowledge creation). This balance reflects a dynamic fit or “stretch-and-match” for the individual, triggering mutual learning between the organisational code (culturally embedded languages, beliefs, and practices) and the new hire. The resulting reconfiguration of organisational knowledge integrates the tacit expertise carried by mobile experts, thereby enhancing the firm’s dynamic capabilities.

## Critical Literature Review

### 2.1 Learning by Hiring

Organizations learn by hiring employees away from competitors operating in comparable business contexts and subsequently combining the knowledge of these new hires with their own existing knowledge base (Almeida & Kogut, 1999; Rosenkopf & Almeida, 2003; Song et al., 2003). The mobility of employees between firms acts as a conduit through which knowledge, particularly tacit and experience-based forms, can be transferred across organizational boundaries (Tzabbar et al., 2022). This inter-firm knowledge transmission process, widely known as learning-by-hiring, describes how firms gain competitive advantage through the movement of knowledge-carrying employees (Jain, 2016, 2024; Rosenkopf & Almeida, 2003; Song et al., 2003; Tzabbar et al., 2015, 2022). Recruiting employees together with their embedded expertise allows firms to bypass the time-consuming and costly process of developing equivalent knowledge internally (Rocha & Pozzoli, 2024). Because employees and their knowledge are inseparable, the firm's primary means of accessing knowledge is through hiring those who possess it (Dosi, 1988; Szulanski, 1996).

Knowledge workers act as repositories and carriers of knowledge that is inherently personal and largely tacit, making its access and transfer problematic (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Drucker, 1992). A significant portion of organizational knowledge is complex and tacit (Almeida & Kogut, 1999; Kogut et al., 2003), and therefore difficult to transfer unless the individual who holds it moves between organizations.

However, gaining access to new knowledge does not automatically lead to its effective use. The concept of absorptive capacity, defined as "the ability of the firm to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends" (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), is a critical enabler of learning through hiring (Zahra & George, 2002). The development of absorptive capacity is influenced by endogenous organizational factors such as shared norms, communication quality, collaboration patterns, the distribution of expertise, and the degree of inertia or resistance among incumbent employees toward new knowledge (Jain, 2016, 2024; Pham et al., n.d.). Moreover, path dependence, the notion that organizations require a pre-existing base of related knowledge to embed and learn from new knowledge, underscores the cumulative nature of organizational learning (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). The more rigid and path-dependent an organization is, the less likely it is to benefit from learning-by-hiring, as it tends to rely on existing technologies and familiar learning approaches. Learning by hiring and absorptive capacity are therefore interdependent. A firm must possess sufficient absorptive capacity to integrate the knowledge brought by new hires, while these new hires in turn reinforce and expand the firm's future absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002). As Jain (2016) notes, "knowledge gains through hiring do not only accrue to the firm at the time of recruitment, but also afterward, when incumbent organizational members assimilate and integrate the new hire's knowledge." Learning occurs when there is close collaboration between the new hire and existing employees; however, this learning is typically confined to the areas of practice and expertise in which the new hire was personally engaged at their previous firm (Tzabbar et al., 2015).

Additionally, new hires who possess rich collaborative ties (Tandon et al., 2020) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) tend to facilitate explorative learning—the pursuit and assimilation of novel, distant knowledge that extends beyond the firm’s established domain (March, 1991).

Knowledge distance refers to the extent to which new or transferred knowledge differs from the receiving firm’s existing knowledge base. It is often operationalized as the difference between a hired employee’s expertise and the hiring firm’s core technological domain (Pham et al., 2021). Knowledge distance can both facilitate and impede transfer: it encourages fresh perspectives that counter the rigidity of path dependence, yet excessive distance hampers integration because incumbents may struggle to interpret and apply unfamiliar knowledge. Successful knowledge transfer thus requires a degree of contextual commonality between the source and destination firms, such as in industry, market, or technological conditions (Jeon, 2021; Varshney, 2023). The balance between knowledge similarity and difference is captured by the concept of related variety (Smit, 2017).

A substantial body of empirical research on learning by hiring uses patent and patent-citation data to trace knowledge flows between firms. These studies often focus on technology-intensive industries such as semiconductors and biotechnology, which cluster in hubs like Silicon Valley and Northern California (Almeida & Kogut, 1999; Song et al., 2003). As Lee (2020) notes, patent-based analyses offer “information-rich, clean data” but are “ill-suited for studying knowledge flows that do not culminate in patentable outputs...”, particularly tacit knowledge. While these datasets reveal cross-firm mobility patterns, they overlook the post-hire social learning processes that are essential for effective knowledge assimilation and capability building.

In essence, LBH explains how firms gain knowledge through employee mobility on aggregate, whereas knowledge-centric recruitment extends its principles by framing such mobility as a deliberate, strategically orchestrated process for targeted knowledge access and capability acquisition.

## 2.2 Knowledge and Knowledge Processes in Organizational Contexts

“Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories, but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms” (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). This detailed definition highlights several essential characteristics of knowledge that are particularly relevant to the understanding of knowledge-centric recruitment. The following discussion elaborates on these characteristics and their implications for knowledge transfer and organizational learning.

Individual knowledge has an action-character; in essence, it emerges from direct experiences (problem-solving situations) in which employees personally participate, and from dialogical interactions within social communities (Tsoukas, 1996). Knowledge, therefore, represents a “capacity to act,” both at the individual and

collective levels (Sveiby, 2001). As Wittgenstein et al. (1969) assert, “knowledge is social and pragmatic; it is connected to the form of life of the community.” Some aspects of knowledge are tacit, subconsciously held, experiential know-how, while others are explicit and declarative, or know-that (Polanyi, 1958; Ryle, 2009). Importantly, tacit and explicit dimensions of knowledge are interdependent, representing two facets of the same phenomenon.

Tacitly held and unconsciously developed individual cognitions can surface during the new hire’s immersion into the destination firm’s employee community, a social setting distinct from their prior firm’s context and culture (Hadjimichael & Tsoukas, 2019). The process of bringing such tacit elements into conscious awareness and making them expressible is known as “articulation” or “punctuation”, wherein pre-existing individual knowledge is contextualized and adapted within the environment and community of the hiring organization (Polanyi, 1958; Røvik, 2023; Tsoukas, 2002).

Organizational knowledge, or capability, emerges from the interaction among (i) the collective knowledge of employees, (ii) the organizational structures that shape those interactions, and (iii) the dynamic processes that enable knowledge creation and renewal (Kusunoki et al., 1998). Moreover, knowledge within organizations is defined and constrained by both internal and external contextual conditions. Each individual employee has access and contributes only to those components of the organization’s collective knowledge that are linked to their direct participation (Tzabbar et al., 2015). The employee’s knowledge is thus embedded in collaboration patterns, shared norms, the organization’s culture (Jøranli, 2017), and their accumulated human capital.

When an employee onboards to a new firm, they encounter an environment that is partially familiar yet also divergent from their prior organizational context. These differences in routines, values, and interpretive frameworks often generate cognitive gaps, which trigger a process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Through sensemaking, the recruit and incumbent employees reinterpret and adapt the employee’s prior knowledge to fit the new organizational context eliminating perceived differences between their expectations and prevailing realities. Røvik (2023) argues that the adaptation of distant knowledge in a new host environment resembles linguistic translation, a process he calls “knowledge translation”. Without sufficient contextualization, he notes, newly acquired organizational knowledge lacks legitimacy and relevance in its new sociocultural setting (Røvik, 2016).

The rearticulation of the recruit’s tacit knowledge through interaction with incumbent employees thus leads to the emergence of new organizational capability, a reconstructed and contextually grounded form of knowledge. (Sveiby, 2001), in his theory of knowledge transfer, emphasizes the unique non-depreciative nature of knowledge assets: “Instead of depreciating every time a transfer takes place, firms’ knowledge stocks double in quantity as both the transmitter and the receiver come to possess it”. This multiplying effect highlights a crucial distinction between knowledge and other forms of capital, which devalue through use.

At the same time, complex (particularly tacit knowledge) is often “sticky” or “viscous”, meaning it is difficult to share, codify, and reproduce across contexts (Røvik, 2023; Szulanski, 1996). For this reason, LBH represents a particularly effective mechanism

for the transfer of such knowledge. Employees act as the sources, processors, and transmitters of both explicit and tacit knowledge, carrying embedded experiential insights from one organizational setting to another, where they can be reinterpreted, recombined, and transformed into new capability.

In essence, knowledge-centric recruitment formalizes and integrates these individual and organizational knowledge processes into a deliberate recruitment strategy, intentionally leveraging employee mobility as a means of transferring, recontextualizing, and renewing firm capabilities.

### **2.3 Strategic Recruitment and Human Capital**

Hamilton & Davison (2018) propose that recruitment processes require fundamental redesign to facilitate the intentional targeting of inward knowledge flows. This need arises because “knowledge stars”, defined as employees who contribute a disproportionate share of firm performance and possess the potential to enhance organizational human capital, are typically not responsive to traditional job advertising. Such individuals are typically in stable employment relationships and are not actively seeking new positions when hiring firms advertise vacancies (Hamilton & Davison, 2018). Attracting these knowledge-hires, therefore, calls for cultivating relationships well in advance of any specific job opening.

Empirical evidence supports this proactive approach. Jøranli (2017), in a study of sixteen software service firms in Oslo, found that recruitment practices relying on the external social networks of existing employees, and even on “serendipitous events,” proved effective for identifying prospective knowledge-hires. These methods enabled firms to expand their technical expertise and project know-how, both being essential for sustaining rapid technological growth. Moreover, consistent senior decision-maker involvement ensures that recruitment objectives remain closely aligned with firm-level strategic priorities (Hamilton & Davison, 2018; Jøranli, 2017). Collectively, these studies emphasize that implementing strategic, knowledge-seeking recruitment mechanisms reshapes standard recruitment tactics from ad hoc, vacancy-based activity into a continuous, explorative process.

From a conceptual standpoint, Bidwell (2020) distinguishes between two archetypes through which organizations manage the movement of individuals into and within roles: (i) the job-pull model, in which recruitment is triggered by a vacancy created when an incumbent leaves a position; and (ii) the person-push model, in which the availability of a qualified and strategically valuable individual motivates the creation of a new role or position. We propose that knowledge-centric recruitment represents a form of the person-push model, as it is the identification and availability of the knowledge-hire that initiates the recruitment process.

Firms operating in knowledge-intensive industries increasingly compete on the basis of their human capital resources (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Importantly, human capital and human capital resources, though related, are distinct constructs. Human capital refers to individual-level attributes: knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that have economic value. In contrast, “human capital

resources are defined as a unit-level resource (e.g., at the team or firm level) that emerges from individual KSAOs through multi-level processes, becoming accessible and relevant for collective performance and competitive advantage” (Ployhart et al., 2014).

Knowledge-centric recruitment enables firms to benefit through the emergence of human capital resources and the reconfiguration of its dynamic capabilities. New competence is derived from the socialization and knowledge transfer induced by the introduction of a new, yet initially unintegrated, employee. Through the deliberate application of knowledge-centric recruitment, an organization can strategically reconfigure and augment its human capital resources to align with evolving business challenges and strategic objectives.

## **2.4 Theoretical Integration and Practical Limitations**

Our model integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to conceptualize knowledge-centric recruitment. Building on the learning-by-hiring literature, we view employee mobility as a vital channel for transferring complex, tacit knowledge that is typically sticky and resistant to mobilization (Song, Almeida, & Wu, 2003). However, we extend this perspective by incorporating insights from research on organizational knowledge processes and absorptive capacity. In our view, knowledge transfer through hiring is not a simple act of transmission but a dynamic process of knowledge translation, where the incoming employee’s embedded human capital triggers collective sensemaking and contextualization within the hiring firm. This interactive process, enabled by the organization’s absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), creates a social space in which new organizational knowledge emerges.

Through such social re-articulation, an individual’s human capital, comprising their knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs), can evolve into a collective human capital resource that supports organizational learning and renewal. This reorientation requires a shift in recruitment practices: from traditional, vacancy-driven “job-pull” hiring toward a strategic person-push model, where the acquisition of targeted knowledge, rather than the mere filling of a position, becomes the central objective. We further propose that organizations can better navigate the trade-off between knowledge distance and knowledge transfer by identifying conceptual and contextual linkages between the external environments of the source and hiring firms. Existing research on employee mobility often fails to explicate the micro-foundations of LBH, specifically how firms identify and select individuals as carriers of valuable, transferrable knowledge. Much of this literature centres on technological knowledge transfer among inventors and R&D professionals in high-tech industries such as biotechnology and semiconductors. By contrast, less attention has been given to the transfer of tacit, experiential knowledge that is deeply embedded in employees’ work practices (Lee, 2020). Our knowledge-centric recruitment framework addresses this gap by proposing a mechanism through which firms can deliberately target and internalize external knowledge reservoirs (McGrath & Argote, 2001) through the selective hiring and socialization of knowledge-carrying employees, thereby

transforming recruitment into a strategic lever for capability building and organizational learning.

### 3. The Knowledge-centric Recruitment Model

#### 3.1 Definition

We define knowledge-centric recruitment as an interconnected set of recruitment and socialization processes through which a firm purposefully acquires a knowledge-carrying expert capable of enriching its human capital base. This enrichment occurs through two primary mechanisms: (i) the transfer of the individual's own knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAOs), and (ii) the indirect access the individual provides to the organizational capabilities of their former employer, the source firm. The tacit knowledge embodied in the recruit functions as a cognitive and experiential bridge to the collective capabilities of the source organization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). While this individual's tacit knowledge serves as the nucleus from which elements of the source capability can be reconstructed, it is the socialization process within the destination firm that catalyzes the transformation of this personal knowledge into a shared organizational resource (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Grant, 1996). Accordingly, knowledge-centric recruitment can be understood as a deliberate knowledge development strategy designed to leverage human mobility as a channel for organizational capability building and renewal (Teece, 2007; Teece & Pisano, 1994). The knowledge-hire's mobility from the source to the destination firm represents the central dynamic of this model, temporarily connecting the knowledge bases of the two firms during the recruitment process. The knowledge-hire serves as the host (Røvik, 2011) who embodies and enacts the targeted capability, helping to contextualize the practices in which that capability is embedded. This individual occupies a position of central agency within the model, having been both a direct participant in and a contributor to the development of the organizational capability at the source firm. His or her knowledge simultaneously contributes to and derives from the organizational capability that is mobilized and transmitted through the hiring process. The human capital and tacit knowledge embedded in the knowledge-hire constitute a highly valuable strategic resource in relation to the path-dependent human capital resources of the destination firm, owing to their shared operational context with the source firm. In other words, the knowledge-hire's value is not universal but contextually contingent and defined relative to the specific needs and knowledge environment of the hiring organization.

Building on Nyberg et al. (2024) conceptualization, we view strategic recruitment as the optimization of a firm's aggregate human capital resources rather than their maximization. From this perspective, firms do not necessarily benefit from hiring the most skilled or high-performing individuals in isolation, but rather from acquiring those whose knowledge and capabilities optimize the existing human capital configuration in alignment with strategic objectives. Extending this line of thinking, knowledge-centric

recruitment represents a specific form of strategic recruitment in which the primary goal is not to locate the best candidate in an absolute sense, but to identify and select a knowledge-hire whose expertise complements and enriches the firm's prevailing knowledge base. The emphasis is therefore on complementarity, the integration of externally sourced tacit knowledge and experiential insight that fills gaps or extends the firm's idiosyncratic organizational capabilities, rather than on the pursuit of generalized excellence in isolation from its context.

### **3.2 The Destination Firm**

The destination (hiring) firm is the primary actor in the knowledge-centric recruitment model. It engages in explorative search for external knowledge and strategically important capabilities, aiming to identify and adopt externally available competencies that can strengthen its competitive position. Strategic recruitment serves as a mechanism for appropriating knowledge embedded in rival firms' employees, who act as carriers of valuable expertise.

The role of the destination firm in KCR involves several key functions:

- a. Connecting the firm's strategic recruitment objectives with its capability needs.
- b. Identifying rival-firm employees as potential recruits possessing superior human capital and embedded experience in desired capabilities.
- c. Involving senior decision-makers, such as the CEO or COO, in recruitment decisions to ensure alignment with strategic priorities.
- d. Enabling effective knowledge transfer through socialization by fostering strong norms of collaboration.

Empirical research suggests that the greater the firm's collaborative density—measured by the intensity and connectivity of its internal social networks—the more effective the knowledge transfer from new hires to incumbents (Tzabbar et al., 2022). The destination firm thus orchestrates KCR by designing recruitment processes and training recruiters to meet both job-specific and strategic objectives. However, because knowledge transfer is inherently emergent and socially embedded, the intended capability outcomes of the process can only be estimated *ex ante*. Their final form often emerges through the process of interaction and adaptation.

### **3.3 The Source Firm**

The source firm's role in the model is that of an involuntary donor of the targeted capability. Its organizational competence serves as the focal knowledge base motivating the destination firm's recruitment. The source firm's capabilities result from cumulative learning, historical adaptation, and collective experience (Nelson & Winter, 1985). Employees are socialized to internalize these capabilities through training, routines, and participation in established practices that encode tacit, context-specific expertise.

When a key employee departs, the source firm experiences only a partial loss of organizational competence, as much of the underlying capability remains institutionalized in routines, social structures, and other employees (Knudsen & Lien, 2023). Returning to the earlier example of product development, such a capability may constitute a shared priority for both the source and destination firms, even when their strategic environments differ. The extent of knowledge transfer, therefore, depends not only on the mobility of individual talent but also on the degree of contextual alignment between the two firms' operating environments (Smit, 2017).

### **3.4 The Knowledge-Hire**

The knowledge-hire serves as the critical linking mechanism between the source and destination firms. Acting as a conduit for cross-firm knowledge transfer (Rosenkopf & Almeida, 2003), the knowledge-hire embodies a dual source of value: individually developed human capital and socially embedded tacit knowledge derived from past collaboration at the source firm (Polanyi, 1966; Grant, 1996). By having participated directly in the enactment of the targeted capability, the knowledge-hire possesses an experiential understanding of the interdependencies among tasks, technologies, and routines that constitute that capability.

Upon entering the destination firm, the knowledge-hire facilitates both the transfer and translation of knowledge, adapting prior practices to fit the new context (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The effectiveness of this transfer depends on three key contingencies: (1) the knowledge distance between the source and destination firms (Lane & Lubatkin, 1998); (2) the absorptive capacity of the destination firm (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990); and (3) the social integration mechanisms that govern how newcomers and incumbents collaborate (Tzabbar et al., 2022). Through these processes, the knowledge-hire transforms individual experience into collective expertise, acting as both carrier and co-creator of new organizational knowledge (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

### **3.5 Summary of Model Dynamics**

The KCR model conceptualizes recruitment as a strategic process of knowledge mobility unfolding through interactions among three interdependent actors. The destination firm initiates the process through targeted search, while the source firm holds the embedded capability that becomes the object of transfer. The mobility of the knowledge-hire creates a temporary connection between their organizational systems, enabling the flow of tacit and explicit knowledge. Once embedded in the destination firm, the knowledge-hire's socialization and collaboration with incumbent employees catalyze the emergence of a reconstituted, contextually adapted organizational capability.

This reconstructed capability is not always an exact replica of the source firm's competence. Instead, it reflects an adaptive synthesis shaped by contextual conditions, interpretive differences, and collective learning processes (Kogut & Zander, 1992). The

KCR model thus portrays recruitment as a dynamic capability in itself, through which individual mobility transforms into organizational renewal and connects micro-level individual knowledge with macro-level capability emergence.

### **3.6 Contextual Similarity Linking the Source and Destination Firms**

The strategic value of the knowledge-hire, particularly their tacit knowledge, is amplified by the degree of contextual similarity between the source and destination firms. Contextual similarity, introduced in this paper and developed from the concept of ‘‘related variety’’ proposed by Smit (2017), refers to the extent to which the recruit’s previous experience aligns with the destination firm’s internal routines, norms, and external environmental conditions or challenges. It captures the idea that firms may operate in different sectors yet still share sufficiently overlapping knowledge domains, institutional logics, or market dynamics to enable the transferability and relevance of knowledge. As a moderating construct, contextual similarity ensures that the transferred knowledge is divergent enough to add novelty but similar enough to be interpretable, integrable, and useful within the destination firm

Contextual similarity arises when two firms, possibly operating in different industries, face analogous environmental challenges or strategic imperatives that compel them to build related organizational capabilities (price wars, system implementation, market entry, etc.). This similarity may emerge from comparable ownership structures, institutional frameworks, customer bases, competitive dynamics, or R&D approaches. It creates a shared social-cognitive frame that enhances alignment during the integration of external knowledge (Carlile, 2004).

Within the KCR model, contextual similarity serves as the bridge across cognitive and communicative boundaries, ensuring that the knowledge-hire’s human capital is relevant and impactful. However, the relationship between similarity and knowledge transfer effectiveness is curvilinear. Low similarity leads to cognitive distance and communication barriers, whereas excessive similarity can induce groupthink (Jain, 2016), limiting creativity and constraining innovation. Thus, optimal knowledge transfer occurs under conditions of moderated similarity, where a balance between divergence and shared context allows organizations to integrate external expertise while fostering learning and innovation.

The following graph illustrates the process of the hiring firm’s search for distant knowledge and using new hires as knowledge bridges to access it.

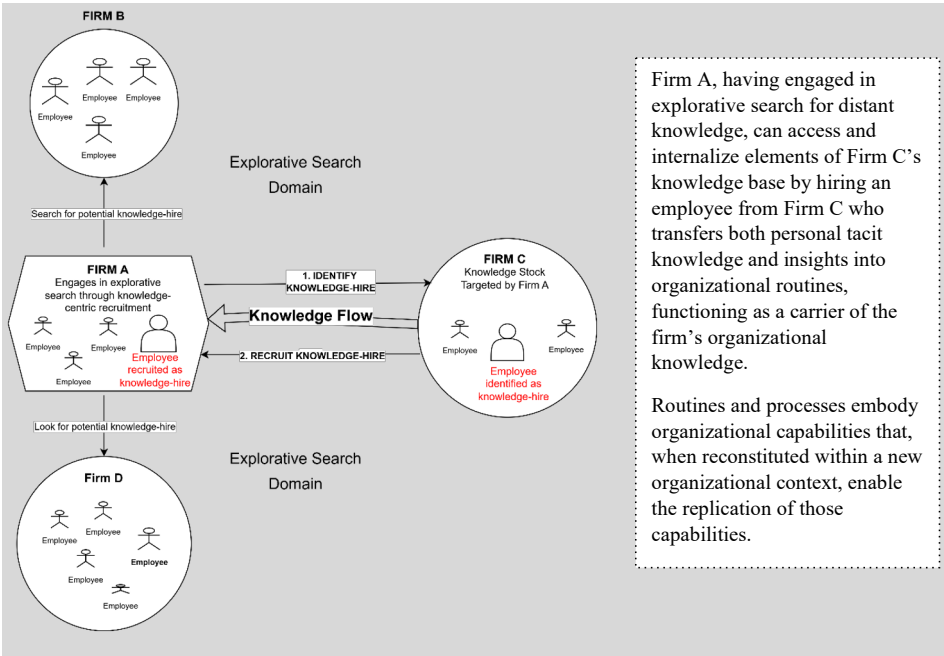


Fig.1. Replication of organizational capability through knowledge-centric recruitment

#### 4. The Cyclical Knowledge-Centric Recruitment (KCR) Process

When a firm's strategic aim is to acquire a targeted organizational capability, the recruitment process becomes pivotal in identifying candidates who can facilitate the replication and adaptation of that capability. The firm's capacity to evaluate an individual's potential for knowledge transfer depends on its ability to uncover the candidate's tacit knowledge and align it with the firm's capability needs. Accordingly, the effectiveness of knowledge-centric recruitment rests on the systematic execution of deliberately designed recruitment principles and iterative practices that transform recruitment into a continuous strategic learning process.

#### 4.1 Structuring the KCR Process

Organizations seeking to adopt a knowledge-centric recruitment approach should consider several foundational design principles to guide implementation:

- a. treat recruitment as a continuous and strategically driven process;
- b. proactively target external knowledge and capabilities, rather than merely responding to position vacancies;
- c. involve incumbent employees as active recruiters and knowledge scouts who provide professional referrals and network-based recommendations; and
- d. engage senior leaders, such as the CEO and COO, in early recruitment stages to ensure linkage between strategic objectives and recruitment decisions.

The destination firm's search for valuable external knowledge should mirror its environmental scanning and learning activities: it must be continuous, proactive, and strategically informed (Jøranli, 2017). Potential knowledge-hires are often not active job seekers, so firms must identify and attract them through proactive outreach. This ongoing search process ensures that recruitment decisions are guided by long-term capability objectives rather than short-term vacancy pressures.

In essence, knowledge-centric recruitment is best executed within a person-push recruitment model, rather than a traditional job-pull approach (Bidwell, 2020). In a job-pull model, recruitment begins with an existing vacancy, and candidates are sought to fill a predefined role. In contrast, the person-push model begins by identifying strategically valuable knowledge and potential knowledge-hires—employees embedded within other firms who possess distinctive expertise—well before any job opening becomes available. Job roles are then customized *ex post* to the recruit's specific human capital profile and the firm's knowledge needs. Thus, the process is defined not by a static job description but by the potential for knowledge transfer and contextual fit.

Because the particulars of a recruit's tacit knowledge and contextual experience often become evident only during later recruitment stages, the final role design is sometimes determined as a last step. This outcome underscores how, in the knowledge-centric model, capability relevance and contextual similarity drive candidate selection, while the formal job definition emerges from the candidate's expected knowledge contribution.

#### 4.2 Operationalizing the KCR Cycle

While some aspects of knowledge-centric recruitment correspond to traditional recruitment procedures, the following steps define its distinctive, iterative character. These steps are non-linear—participants may move back and forth between them as learning unfolds during candidate evaluation and interaction.

a. **Identify Knowledge Gaps and Source Domains:** define the strategic knowledge domains in which the firm's current capabilities are lacking, and map potential external knowledge sources such as rival organizations, partner ecosystems, or professional and inter-firm communities of practice. These knowledge domains should directly align with the firm's strategic ambitions and performance priorities.

b. **Search for Prospective Knowledge-Hires:** leverage the external networks of existing employees, industry events, professional associations, and social platforms to identify potential knowledge-hires who are likely to possess the targeted capabilities. Incumbent employees act as active scouts, using their professional and social linkages to connect with individuals whose expertise aligns with the firm's evolving capability requirements.

c. **Conduct Deep-Dive Evaluation and Tacit Knowledge Discovery:** interview prospective knowledge-hires using participatory and experiential methods designed to surface tacit and context-dependent knowledge. In addition to traditional behavioral or situational interviews, employers assess simulations, workplace challenges, or problem-solving exercises to elicit "thick descriptions" of candidates' decision-making and contextual understanding (Geertz, 1973). Engage senior decision-makers—particularly those familiar with strategy and capability needs—to better connect candidate assessment with strategic objectives.

d. **Define or Design the Optimal Role Configuration:** once a knowledge-hire's tacit and explicit knowledge has been assessed, determine the job configuration that best enables effective transfer, socialization, and capability re-articulation. This may involve tailoring the role to maximize fit between the recruit's expertise and the firm's capability gaps, ensuring complementary alignment and opportunities for collaborative integration within teams.

These steps should not be conceived as sequential phases but rather as iterative cycles of discovery, reflection, and adaptation. Feedback at any stage may prompt re-evaluation of prior assumptions or lead to renewed search activity. The process's iterative nature mirrors the emergent character of knowledge transfer—recruitment decisions evolve as deeper insights emerge about what knowledge is strategically valuable and how it can be successfully assimilated into the organization.

### **4.3 Strategic and Practical Implications of the Cyclical Process**

The cyclical nature of knowledge-centric recruitment transforms recruitment from a transactional activity into a strategic mechanism of organizational learning and capability renewal. By proactively targeting external knowledge rather than reacting to vacancies, firms enhance their absorptive capacity and strengthen their ability to reconfigure internal resources in response to environmental change (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Teece & Pisano, 1994). This shift positions recruitment as a dynamic capability, i.e. a mechanism through which organizations sense, seize, and integrate knowledge opportunities embedded in external labor markets.

From a strategic perspective, the KCR process enables firms to balance exploitation and exploration (March, 1991). Continuous search and proactive identification of

potential knowledge-hires promote exploration, while structured socialization and internal knowledge assimilation support exploitation through the embedding of new capabilities. Over time, these iterative recruitment-learning cycles foster evolutionary capability renewal, equipping firms to adapt to shifting technological, market, and institutional environments.

Practically, implementing KCR requires developing recruitment infrastructures capable of sustained search, in-depth candidate evaluation, and socially embedded onboarding. Organizational systems must facilitate collaboration, cross-functional communication, and leadership involvement throughout the process to translate external expertise into firm-specific capabilities. Recruiters, employees, and executives must operate as co-creators, or joint participants in the organization's knowledge acquisition strategy. When effectively institutionalized, the cyclical KCR process embeds strategic openness and continuous learning into the organizational fabric, turning recruitment into an enduring source of adaptability and innovation.

## 5 Distinctive features of traditional, vacancy-focused recruitment and the Knowledge-Centric Recruitment Model

The following table compares and contrasts the key characteristics of traditional and knowledge-centric recruitment models. Certain features, such as the selection objective, desired job-fit, and desired culture-fit, reflect the recruiter's orientation and decision-making approach. In contrast, aspects like socialization processes, job architecture, and assessment methods relate more closely to the firm's dynamic capabilities and its ability to adapt, learn, and integrate new knowledge.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Traditional Recruitment and the Knowledge-Centric Recruitment Model (KCR)

<b>Recruitment Policy Features</b>	<b>Traditional, Vacancy-Focused Recruitment</b>	<b>Knowledge-Centric Recruitment Model (KCR)</b>
<b>Selection Objective</b>	Select candidates to maximize immediate job performance.	Select candidates who contribute to and enrich the firm's knowledge base through unique expertise and experience.
<b>Job Architecture</b>	Defined by rigid job descriptions and fixed tasks within a hierarchical structure.	Characterized by flexible and evolving job roles that can adapt to the knowledge, skills, and experiences of incumbents.

<b>Recruitment Policy Features</b>	<b>Traditional, Vacancy-Focused Recruitment</b>	<b>Knowledge-Centric Recruitment Model (KCR)</b>
<b>Desired Job-Fit</b>	Focuses on a close match between the candidate's skills and the specific requirements of the job.	Emphasizes a dynamic fit between the candidate's tacit knowledge and the firm's existing knowledge stock.
<b>Desired Culture-Fit</b>	Candidates are expected to align with existing organizational culture, values, and norms.	Candidates are valued for bringing new perspectives, questioning existing practices, and fostering learning and growth.
<b>Target KSAOs and Dominant Knowledge Type</b>	Prioritizes explicit, codified knowledge and recognizable credentials (e.g., degrees, certifications).	Values tacit and experiential knowledge—such as industry insights, problem-solving experience, and contextual understanding—alongside formal qualifications.
<b>Assessment Methods</b>	Relies on CV reviews, structured interviews, and occasionally psychometric tests focused on job-specific competencies.	Utilizes situational assessments, simulations, and strategy-oriented interviews that evaluate cognitive flexibility, innovation potential, and collaborative mindset.
<b>Hiring Manager Role</b>	Translates job requirements into candidate evaluation criteria and assesses fit with standard selection tools.	Interprets strategic and knowledge needs of the firm, assessing candidates' potential to enhance knowledge flows and innovation capacity.
<b>Socialization</b>	Quick onboarding aimed at assimilating the newcomer into existing norms and routines.	Extended socialization process to integrate and leverage the newcomer's distinct knowledge and experience for organizational learning.

<b>Recruitment Policy Features</b>	<b>Traditional, Vacancy-Focused Recruitment</b>	<b>Knowledge-Centric Recruitment Model (KCR)</b>
<b>Organizational Sponsorship</b>	Guided primarily by the hiring manager to support task induction.	Supported by a senior mentor who helps the newcomer navigate cultural adjustment and knowledge integration challenges.
<b>Knowledge Transfer</b>	Involves transfer of similar (proximal) knowledge, reinforcing existing practices and routines.	Facilitates transfer of diverse (distant) knowledge, encouraging novelty, learning, and cross-functional collaboration.
<b>Retention Risk</b>	Low, because of strong task and culture fit.	Higher, due to adaptive challenges and the dynamic fit required between individual and organizational knowledge systems.
<b>Positive Organizational Implications</b>	Reinforces existing systems, promotes stability, and sustains established performance norms.	Enhances organizational learning capacity, stimulates innovation, and builds absorptive capability through knowledge diversity.
<b>Organizational Challenges</b>	May limit adaptability and inhibit innovation due to overemphasis on stability and cultural conformity.	May create representational gaps, cultural tension, and short-term disruption as new knowledge and practices are assimilated.

The comparison underscores that knowledge-centric recruitment represents a paradigmatic shift from transactional hiring toward a knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Rather than merely addressing immediate vacancies, this approach strategically contributes to the firm's long-term learning and innovation potential. By emphasizing the acquisition and integration of diverse and tacit knowledge, organizations can enhance their absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), strengthen dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), and facilitate cross-functional learning and creative problem-solving. In practice, this enables the reconfiguration of organizational knowledge through the recombination of varied experiential and cognitive resources, supporting both exploratory and

exploitative learning (March, 1991). However, these benefits are accompanied by higher integration costs, representational gaps, cultural friction, and retention risks arising from dynamic role adaptation and cognitive diversity. Consequently, effective socialization, mentoring, and knowledge integration mechanisms are essential to mitigate fragmentation and ensure the successful embedding of new knowledge. Overall, the knowledge-centric recruitment model reframes talent acquisition as a strategic process of knowledge renewal and capability building, aligning human resource decisions with the firm's broader learning and innovation strategy.

## **6 Summary, Limitations, and Implications of the Knowledge-Centric Recruitment (KCR) Model**

The conceptual model of knowledge-centric recruitment (KCR) represents an idealized framework for understanding how firms can purposefully leverage recruitment as a strategic mechanism for knowledge acquisition and capability renewal. However, not all recruitment processes are knowledge-centric, and even those that adopt this approach may not fully realize their intended outcomes. The efficacy of KCR is contingent upon several interrelated factors (both individual and organizational) that influence the extent to which external knowledge is identified, transferred, and embedded within the destination firm.

First, the effectiveness of knowledge-centric recruitment depends on the destination firm's ability to recognize and accurately assess the tacit knowledge embodied in the prospective recruit's human capital. Beyond formal qualifications, recruiters and decision-makers must be capable of identifying the cognitive, behavioural, and relational competencies that facilitate knowledge transfer, such as communication, collaboration, and adaptive problem-solving (Jøranli, 2017). This knowledge spotting ability represents a distinctive absorptive capability that shapes the firm's capacity to evaluate the transfer potential of new hires.

Second, the tacit knowledge carried by the recruit must constitute a core element of an existing organizational capability at the source firm, one that the hiring firm also requires to strengthen its competitive advantage. The degree of contextual similarity between the source and destination environments (e.g., industry conditions, technological bases, or competitive logics) therefore determines how relevant and translatable the recruit's knowledge is. Contextual misalignment can render valuable knowledge inapplicable, whereas moderate similarity enhances both understanding and integration.

Third, the job position into which the knowledge-hire is integrated must be conducive to knowledge transfer and adaptation. This involves careful alignment between the recruit's knowledge domain, authority level, and network position within the firm. The role should provide visibility, autonomy, and relational access to enable effective socialization and collaborative learning. When such structural and social enablers are absent, even well-targeted knowledge cannot diffuse effectively.

Taken together, these determinants highlight that the success of KCR is shaped by both intentional design and contextual contingency. While the firm's recruitment strategy and assessment processes determine the quality of knowledge access, pre-existing organizational characteristics, such as cultural openness, collaborative norms, and absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002), condition the effectiveness of knowledge assimilation and capability development.

### **6.1 Limitations of the Conceptual Model**

As an idealized abstraction, the KCR framework simplifies the complexity of inter-firm knowledge transfer and the unpredictability of individual behaviour. Knowledge embedded in people is inherently tacit, situational, and socially constructed, factors that make transfer difficult to observe or control. Moreover, mobility-based learning is influenced by relational dynamics, power structures, and time delays that extend beyond the recruitment process. Hence, while the model provides theoretical clarity, its practical application requires adaptation to firm-specific conditions and environments.

### **6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, this model extends the learning-by-hiring literature by introducing a more agency-oriented perspective that positions recruitment as an intentional knowledge orchestration mechanism rather than a passive conduit for mobility-driven spillovers. It bridges the micro-level processes of individual movement with macro-level capability evolution, emphasizing the moderating role of contextual similarity and absorptive capacity in shaping knowledge outcomes.

Practically, the model suggests that firms must cultivate sophisticated recruitment competencies that go beyond evaluating skills and experiences. Effective knowledge-centric recruitment requires systems capable of identifying tacit knowledge, designing flexible roles to enable transfer, and fostering organizational environments that encourage collaboration and diversity of thought. Firms that institutionalize this approach may transform recruitment into a continuous capability-building mechanism that adaptively aligns external talent flows with strategic renewal.

## **7 Conclusion**

This paper conceptualizes knowledge-centric recruitment (KCR) as a strategic, dynamic process through which firms intentionally acquire, translate, and internalize knowledge embodied in external talent. Moving beyond traditional vacancy-driven recruitment models, KCR reframes hiring as a form of capability orchestration that links individual employee mobility to organizational learning and innovation. By positioning the knowledge-hire as the knowledge bridge between the source and

destination firms, the model integrates insights from the knowledge-based view, absorptive capacity, and learning-by-hiring literatures into a unified framework of capability transfer and renewal.

The KCR model contributes theoretically by identifying how human mobility can operate as a knowledge integration mechanism, contingent upon contextual similarity, absorptive capacity, and socially embedded learning processes. It highlights the conditions under which individual-level expertise becomes collective capability, emphasizing the reciprocal roles of the knowledge-hire, the destination firm, and the source firm in shaping learning outcomes. In doing so, the model advances the understanding of micro and macro linkages in organizational learning, demonstrating that recruitment can function as a deliberate dynamic capability rather than a purely operational activity.

Practically, the model provides guidance for firms seeking to transform their recruitment systems into mechanisms of strategic knowledge development. It suggests that organizations must develop the ability to identify tacit knowledge, proactively target knowledge-hire candidates, and align recruitment with broader capability needs. However, its effective implementation requires supportive conditions, such as cultural openness, collaborative density, and leadership engagement that allow new knowledge to be assimilated and recombined within the firm's existing routines.

Finally, while the model offers a theoretically coherent description of how firms may leverage recruitment as a source of strategic renewal, it remains a conceptual framework. Future empirical research should test its validity across different industries, organizational contexts, and institutional environments to determine how KCR operates under varying structural and cultural conditions. In doing so, scholars can further elaborate the mechanisms through which knowledge-centric recruitment contributes to sustained organizational adaptability and competitive advantage.

## **8 Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process**

During the preparation of this work the authors used Anara - AI-powered research assistant developed by Anara, and Grok developed by xAI for brainstorming, summarizing papers, language polishing. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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