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# Why Should Organizational Scholars Study Migration?

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**Abstract.** Migration is one of the most significant forces shaping economies and societies, yet it remains largely understudied in organizational research. At the same time, scholars in other fields with long traditions of studying migration tend to overlook the essential role of organizations. This lack of dialogue is striking because organizations are often the central arena in which migrants interact with others and through which they impact society and the economy. We explain how scholars of migration and organizations can benefit each other by exploring two broad issues. First, we consider what an organizational lens can add to the existing migration literature. We argue that organizational heterogeneity plays an essential role in determining the causes and effects of migration. Second, we consider how taking migration seriously can yield theoretical advancements for organizational scholars. We present examples that introduce potentially novel theoretical concepts or that enrich existing theories. Our aim is to broaden the research agenda for scholars interested in migration or organizations and to motivate organizational scholars to engage more deeply with one of the most consequential issues of our time.

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**Keywords:** migration • organizations • firms • theory • multidisciplinary research • policy

## Introduction

Migration is one of the defining issues of our time. Many of the current economic, social, and political issues that dominate headlines and conversations can be traced to varying opinions about whether immigrants are beneficial or harmful for societies (Legrain 2007, Borjas 2016). Yet this is not just a recent or temporary topic. The causes and consequences of migration have been long and fiercely debated in academic and public circles (Tichenor 2002, Hatton and Williamson 2005, Ngai 2014, Abramitzky and Boustan 2017).

Despite the importance of the phenomenon, organizational scholars have—until quite recently—rarely taken migration seriously as a focus of study. Research on migration is carried out mainly in other disciplines like sociology (Waters and Jiménez 2005, Portes and Rumbaut 2006, Waldinger 2015), economics (Card 1990, Borjas 1994, Clemens 2011), political science (Leblang

2010, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, Fouka 2020), history (Handlin 1951, Abramitzky et al. 2021), anthropology (Schiller et al. 1992, Malkki 1995), and psychology (Berry 1997, Schwartz et al. 2010). This work has yielded valuable theoretical ideas and empirical facts, but its main focus is not on organizations or organizational theory (with the exception of the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship). Research in other disciplines is more concerned with informing policy or with explaining the immigrant experience. For instance, studies on the effects of immigration are dominated by an interest in outcomes such as jobs and wages, welfare systems, global trade, public safety, and public opinion. Research on the causes of migration emphasizes wage and skill differentials across countries, family and social networks, and geopolitical unrest. And those who study the immigrant experience focus on economic and social assimilation or the psychology of acculturation.

We are not the first to note the conspicuous lack of organizational perspectives in the study of migration. A decade ago, the economists Kerr et al. (2015, p. S148) noted the following: From an academic perspective, there is very little tradition for considering firms in analyses of immigration. As one vivid example, the word ‘firm’ does not appear in the 51 pages of the classic survey of Borjas (1994) on the economics of immigration, and more recent surveys also tend to pay little attention to firms... [E]conomists instead typically approach immigration through the conceptual framework of shifts in the supply of workers to a labor market. Firms provide some underlying demand for workers, but their role is abstracted from.” A similar observation can be made of the approach taken by scholars in disciplines other than economics who study migration. It is telling that such a critique has *not* been made in the pages of a major journal dedicated to the study of organizations.

In the decade since Kerr et al. (2015), research at the intersection of migration and organizations has increased substantially and begun to be published in top management journals. We will discuss much of that research later in this essay. However, the development of this body of work has been somewhat haphazard and has yet to coalesce into an organized, systematic literature in its own right.

The relative dearth of dialogue between organizational and migration scholars is puzzling because they each have so much to contribute to one another, as this essay and the special issue attached to it will show. This becomes apparent the moment one recognizes that organizations are the central arena in which migrants make their mark on society and the economy. The mechanisms explaining the “macro” effects of migration documented in other disciplines happen inside the black box of a firm, a nonprofit, or another type of public or private organization. Further, immigrants inevitably shape the organizational environments they inhabit, and organizations profoundly influence the flows and experiences of migrants.

Organizations are the primary entity that harnesses the myriad resources created by human mobility. For instance, firms are constantly responding to the growing and novel demand created by changing population dynamics and consumer preferences induced by migration flows. Both skilled and unskilled migrants carry novel ideas across borders, and much of that transmission—along with the resulting innovation—happens via the established organizations immigrants work for or the new organizations immigrants disproportionately start as entrepreneurs. Further, organizations strategically determine whether and where to make capital investments to exploit the resources and markets created by ever-evolving migrant communities and associated population changes.

Organizations are also central to the immigrant experience and immigrants are central to the organizational

experience. In the process of attracting and deploying talent, firms play a central role in moving people geographically and in determining the outcomes of mobility across borders (i.e., firms cause migration). Also, although sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and psychologists correctly point out that immigrants assimilate “to society” or “to the economy” or “to the local culture,” many (arguably most) of the socialization and identification processes that shape the assimilation experience happen as immigrants interact with other individuals and groups in the organizations in which they work, volunteer, or participate as newcomers. These include firms, schools, nonprofits, government agencies, and religious organizations. Further, the arrival of foreign-born colleagues has the potential to shape the organizational experiences of incumbent workers as they interact with people of different backgrounds.

This is far from a complete account of instances in which migrants and organizations intersect. But it is more than sufficient to illustrate the inseparability of the organizational and the migrant experience. The phenomenological nexus between migration and organizations is clearly complex—and still mostly unexplored.

But incorporating migration into organizational research, and vice versa, is about more than documenting relevant or newsworthy empirical phenomena. There is great potential to advance theory as well. At a minimum, the movement of people can serve as a fruitful empirical context in which to test extant theories. For example, the arrival of skilled migrant workers to an organization provides a natural experiment to assess theories of recombinant innovation (Choudhury and Kim 2019, Uhlbach and Anckaert 2025). But the possibilities are greater than that. Scholars may be able to extend existing organizational theories or develop new ones by taking migration seriously. For instance, as we explain below, migrant workers do not fit neatly into typical categories of diversity studied in extant research because their status as “multiple insiders” (deeply embedded in a sending and receiving location) requires a new concept to embody what they bring to an organization. Taking organizations seriously also promises to extend or develop theories of migration. For example, theories of assimilation do not sufficiently consider organizations as the context in which newcomers become socialized and learn cultural values. Doing so requires combining theories of organizational assimilation with theories of psychological and social acculturation that will probably result in novel theoretical constructs.

In the remainder of this article, we expand on these ideas to accomplish three objectives. First, we sketch out the state of the art in a selected set of issues covered by migration scholars from other disciplines. We organize our ideas around key questions that are relevant both

migration and organizational scholars. Second, we point out how taking organizations seriously can enrich, challenge, or explain core issues regarding the effects and causes of migration. Where relevant, we showcase how papers in this special issue demonstrate the power of taking an organizational lens. Third, and finally, we offer a few examples of the kinds of theoretical advancements made possible by combining organizational and migration research.

## An Indictment and an Opportunity

In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (of the United States) published a major report titled *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*. The report, an update to a similar one published 20 years earlier in 1997, was the result of a multiyear effort by a selected panel of leading economists who summarized the best empirical evidence available. The report focuses on U.S. immigration but takes stock of evidence from research representing many parts of the world. Its 10 chapters focus overwhelmingly on how immigration impacts two issues: natives' labor market outcomes (jobs and wages) and public coffers. Two years earlier, in 2015, the same organization published another major report titled *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine 2015). The panel for that report was composed mainly of leading sociologists plus experts in adjacent fields. Across another 10 chapters, it considers a variety of indicators of assimilation: legal status and citizenship, spatial integration, educational attainment, employment and earnings, culture, intermarriage, and public health.

Both documents are excellent summaries of the literature they cover. They are also influential, referred to often by think tanks, policy makers, and media outlets in the United States. (Of course, there are similar reports focusing on immigration to Europe (Caselli et al. 2024) and other parts of the world.)

At the same time, what these reports do *not* include speaks volumes. Across 1,101 pages (643 in the 2017 report and 458 in the 2015 report), only a single paper published in a leading management journal is cited. (That paper is in *Management Science* and its authors are not organizational scholars.) It is also telling to consider the topics not covered by these influential reports. For example, despite its focus on the economy, the 2017 report does not systematically consider how immigrants affect innovation, entrepreneurship, investment, or consumption. The 2015 report, despite its interest in migrant integration, does not deeply consider the role of organizations as the context of assimilation (other than passing references to community and governmental organizations that aid immigrants, usually on arrival).

These omissions are both an indictment and an opportunity for organizational scholars. On the one hand, they reveal that our field is virtually irrelevant to both the academic and policy conversations on one of the defining issues of our time—despite having much to say about the subject. (This also reveals the lack of awareness of organizational research by scholars in other disciplines, whether due to bias or lack of exposure.) On the other hand, there is tremendous scope for organizational scholars to provide valuable theories and empirical results that can bring clarity to academic and public debates on the drivers and consequences of migration, all while advancing organizational theory.

We attempt to sketch out what pursuing that opportunity as a field might look like. We organize our ideas around two broad questions. First, what can organizational research contribute to migration studies? Second, what can studying migration contribute to organizational theories?

## Terms, Definitions, and Scope

Before proceeding, we provide a few notes on definitions and the scope of our inquiry. Consistent with the bulk of the literature, we usually refer to someone as a migrant or immigrant if they reside in a location other than the one in which they were born or consider themselves to be from. Migrants are thus not defined by citizenship or legal status. In empirical research, birthplace is overwhelmingly used to distinguish a migrant from a native-born person. Common usage of the term implies that migrants intend to reside or have resided in the receiving location for a meaningful period—usually measured in years rather than weeks—although we do not take a stand on how long that must be. By this definition, an expatriate or international student who plans to return home after several years is a migrant, with the understanding that a permanent stay does not necessarily connote the same kind of experience or produce the same kinds of effects as a temporary stay. This distinguishes migrants from visitors or tourists.

Consistent with prior literature, we will at times distinguish between “skilled” and “unskilled” immigrants/workers—those with versus without a college degree. This definition is problematic for many reasons, including the fact that the jobs done by “unskilled” workers require a variety of skills even if they are not obtained via tertiary education. But we use the term to avoid confusion given its widespread use. We also follow convention in using the terms native or native-born for nonimmigrants, although we are aware of the controversy this term can create.

Our primary focus is on cross-national migrants rather than within-country (or internal) migrants, unless otherwise noted. This decision stems from the fact that cross-country migration has drawn the most interest

among academics and the public (both recently and historically) and from the need to keep the scope of this essay manageable. At the same time, we recognize the critical importance of internal migration (e.g., rural to urban movement, internal displacement, and other consequential within-country moves) and the role of firms in it (Choudhury et al. 2023, Guzman 2024, Teodorovicz et al. 2025). One paper in this special issue touches on it (Koo and Eesley 2025), and we hope organizational scholars will study it more systematically.

Another critical topic that we will not consider systematically is the distinction in the causes and effects of different types of immigration paths. People move for different reasons and in different ways: forced or involuntary (e.g., asylees and refugees), economic (e.g., skilled or unskilled migrants on work visas), family reunification, education, with or without authorization, and so on. Each of these experiences is unique, represents a literature in its own right, and may have distinct implications for organizational research (Klüppel et al. (2018) consider the case of forced migration). The papers in this special issue cover many of these experiences, as we will note. But we will not organize this essay by migration path because organizational scholars need to first consider more general issues that apply to migrants broadly before specializing in specific mobility paths. We expect such a specialization to happen as research at the organization-migration nexus matures.

## What Can Organizational Research Contribute to Migration Studies?

While the study of migration is only in its nascence for organizational scholars, other disciplines have very long traditions of researching the topic. Our goal in this section is twofold. First, to summarize the key issues and empirical results for a variety of major migration topics. This should be a useful primer for organizational scholars seeking to become familiar with the migration literature or who conduct research in adjacent areas. We will not provide a comprehensive literature review of each topic; instead, we consider key debates and stylized facts. We also cannot possibly cover all topics researched in the migration literature or of interest to the public. We only select a few of those that are relevant to organizational scholars. Even then, we are prone to leaving out some important topics.

The second goal is to point out areas within each topic to which organizational scholars can make valuable contributions. There is variance across topics in the extent to which organizational scholars have already conducted relevant research. If there is little to no prior organizational research on a topic, we will point out potential opportunities and speculate about what our field can add to the issue. If there has been a moderate to high level of engagement by organizational scholars, we

will explain how that research has contributed to the conversation and where there is still scope for further contributions. The disclaimer here is that there are more opportunities and existing studies than we can cover within the scope of this essay.

The broad insight from this section is that organizations are the conceptually mediating path that explains the effects and causes of migration documented in more “macro” (e.g., economics, sociology) or “micro” (e.g., psychology) research. Work in other disciplines is full of empirical patterns and anomalies for which no satisfactory explanation has been provided, either because dueling theories have not been reconciled or because no theory has been proposed. Many of these issues can possibly be explained by taking organizational theories and firm heterogeneity seriously. As we will show in what follows, variation across firms in terms of geography, capabilities, culture, organizational design, or strategy—issues long-studied by organizational scholars—can provide clarity to otherwise hard-to-reconcile evidence.

We now turn to each topic, in no particular order. We focus on six key questions that represent a long-standing interest in academic and public discourse and to which organizational scholars can make valuable contributions. (1) How do immigrants affect innovation? (2) What are the human capital contributions of immigrants? (3) How do immigrant workers affect native workers? (4) How do immigrants assimilate and develop new identities? (5) How do immigrants contribute as entrepreneurs and to entrepreneurial firms? (6) How does migration affect the global strategy and management of multinational firms?

Table 1 summarizes the key points in this section, whereas Table 2 provides a summary of the papers in this special issue and how they fit within the topics in this section.

## How Do Immigrants Affect Innovation?

There is a robust empirical literature documenting the positive effects of skilled migration on technological innovation (Kerr 2008, Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle 2010, Moser et al. 2014, Bosetti et al. 2015, Doran et al. 2022, Glennon 2024b, Lissoni and Miguelez 2024). Bernstein et al. (2022) find that immigrants are responsible for 36% of all patents in the United States despite being only 16% of the inventive population. That 36% can be broken into two quantities: Immigrant inventors author 23% of patents, and the remaining 13% is the result of immigrants boosting the patenting rate of native-born inventors by exposing them to new ideas and scientific networks. Immigrants thus contribute to innovation directly through their new ideas and talent and indirectly through knowledge exchange as they interact with nonimmigrants.

Unlike other topics covered in this essay, an important amount of work at the organizational level has explored the migration-innovation nexus. This work

**Table 1.** Six (of Many Possible) Migration Topics to Which Organizational Scholars Can Make Valuable Contributions

Topic	Key insights from prior research	Opportunities and questions for organizational scholars (not an exhaustive list)	Relevant organizational literatures or concepts
How do immigrants affect innovation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrants are responsible for a disproportionate share of patents, both directly as inventors and indirectly by making native inventors more innovative</li> <li>• Three types of mechanisms documented in the literature: (1) knowledge transfer, (2) collaboration with natives, (3) recombination by locals who build on knowledge introduced by immigrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the underlying mechanisms by which immigrants bring new knowledge into organizations and recombine it with existing knowledge and capabilities</li> <li>• Directly observe and theorize about the unique interactions between migrant and native knowledge workers</li> <li>• Understand how immigration policy changes affect firm innovation outcomes and processes</li> <li>• Move beyond skilled immigrants; study how unskilled immigrants affect innovation</li> <li>• Move beyond patents; study migrant-induced innovations in products, processes, and capabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge search &amp; transfer</li> <li>• Social networks</li> <li>• Boundary spanning</li> <li>• Absorptive capacity</li> <li>• Organizational design</li> <li>• Institutional theory</li> <li>• National distance</li> </ul>
What are the human capital contributions of migrants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The earnings of immigrants converge to, but do not catch up, to those of natives</li> <li>• The children of immigrants (in the US) out-earn the children of natives</li> <li>• Ethnic enclaves often help migrants develop industry-specific skills that become associated with certain national/ethnic groups</li> <li>• Expatriate workers are a unique class of mobile workers that help MNCs operate across borders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior work mostly at the labor market level, but human capital is recruited and deployed within organizations.</li> <li>• Study how the cross-national (and domestic) mobility of workers serves as a precursor of firm capabilities</li> <li>• Consider how firms and immigrants capture the value they jointly create</li> <li>• How do migrants contribute to the human capital of nonmigrant peers in the workplace?</li> <li>• What structures, processes, culture, and other mechanisms must be in place for firms to benefit from immigrant human capital?</li> <li>• Do some firms develop unique capabilities to benefit from immigrant talent? How?</li> <li>• How do firms react when policy restrictions prevent hiring foreign-born talent?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic human capital</li> <li>• Organizational design</li> <li>• Attraction-selection-attrition</li> <li>• Resources and capabilities</li> <li>• Expatriates</li> <li>• Agglomeration economies</li> <li>• Institutional theory</li> </ul>
How do immigrants affect native workers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unskilled immigrants do not, on average, damage the employment prospects or wages of native workers.</li> <li>• Skilled immigrants, on average, have positive employment and wage effects on native workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior work mostly at the labor market level, but firms are the key entity that hires migrant workers and sets wages. This process is poorly understood.</li> <li>• When do firms choose to hire native vs. foreign-born talent?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic human capital</li> <li>• Organizational design</li> <li>• Attraction-selection-attrition</li> <li>• Resources and capabilities</li> <li>• Wage setting</li> <li>• Teams</li> <li>• All theories of workplace interactions</li> </ul>

**Table 1.** (Continued)

Topic	Key insights from prior research	Opportunities and questions for organizational scholars (not an exhaustive list)	Relevant organizational literatures or concepts
How do immigrants assimilate and develop new identities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This occurs because (a) the arrival of immigrants grows and diversifies the economy—requiring more workers and skill variety—and (b) immigrants are not identical substitutes for native workers.</li> <li>• Sociological theories of assimilation have evolved from a linear and universal model of adaptation to the receiving culture toward variegated models that account for nonlinear processes yielding multiple outcomes, including those in which the host culture is not the target or may be updated by the migrants' original culture</li> <li>• Psychologically, migrants can reach four distinct states—integration, assimilation, separation, or marginalization—based on the strength of their identification with their original and receiving culture.</li> <li>• Strongly “macro” view in which migrants assimilate to society, culture, or the economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do firms organize and manage immigrant and native workers with distinct skills and abilities?</li> <li>• How do firms shift their strategy, structure, and inner workings in response to policies that restrict or enable hiring immigrants?</li> <li>• Move past the tired question of job and wage competition. Focus on how immigrant and native workers mutually affect each other and interact inside organizations.</li> <li>• Assimilation mainly happens inside organizations. Newcomers learn about the receiving culture and society as they interact with others in the workplace and other types of organizations.</li> <li>• Reconceptualize assimilation as an organizational process. Link organizational assimilation to “macro” assimilation (social, cultural, economic).</li> <li>• Explore how organizational context, culture, and structure shape the assimilation experience.</li> <li>• How do specific types of interactions with natives in organizations affect the direction and endpoint of the migrant experience?</li> <li>• Study all types of organizations to which migrants belong—firms, nonprofits, churches, communities, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity-focused theories</li> <li>• Organizational culture</li> <li>• Attraction-selection-attrition</li> <li>• Teams</li> <li>• All theories of workplace interactions</li> </ul>
How do immigrants contribute to entrepreneurship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrants are overrepresented among business founders. Their businesses contribute a significant share of jobs, new products, and technologies.</li> <li>• Traditional theories focused on immigrant entrepreneurship as driven by necessity, due to labor market disadvantages</li> <li>• Contemporary work focuses on immigrants' unique skills and resources as drivers of high-growth, high-technology entrepreneurship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is still much to be understood about what drives immigrants into business creation, from home and host country factors to individual traits and experiences.</li> <li>• Is there something unique about the strategic and organizational choices of immigrant- vs. native-founded firms?</li> <li>• How does the foreignness of immigrant founders affect their hiring, scaling, management style, and other decisions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Organizational design</li> <li>• Human capital</li> <li>• Agglomeration economies</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial finance</li> <li>• Social networks</li> <li>• Liability of foreignness</li> <li>• Global management</li> </ul>

Table 1. (Continued)

Topic	Key insights from prior research	Opportunities and questions for organizational scholars (not an exhaustive list)	Relevant organizational literatures or concepts
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Even for nonimmigrant founded startups, immigrant talent contributes to startup success</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When do immigrant founders cater to ethnic/enclave markets vs. the broader market?</li><li>• What role do immigrant workers play in startups? How can resource constrained firms access scarce immigrant talent?</li><li>• How do immigrants’ cross-border networks affect access to funding and the globalization of entrepreneurial capital?</li></ul>	
How does migration affect the global strategy and management of multinational firms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The movement of capital, goods, and firms across borders follows the movement of people.</li><li>• Migration is a leading indicator of where trade (exports and imports) and FDI flow.</li><li>• At the firm level, the location choices and performance of MNCs are positively affected by the presence of conational immigrant populations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Studies argue that knowledge and trust are the mechanisms driving the findings in prior work, but those mechanisms have not been directly observed.</li><li>• How does the diaspora affect the global strategy of MNCs, including the balance of integration-responsiveness?</li><li>• How do MNCs modify their internal functioning—structure, personnel assignments, coordination mechanisms, location of functions—in response to migration patterns?</li><li>• What role do MNCs play in shaping global and local migration patterns as they move personnel across their various units?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Location choice</li><li>• Integration-Responsiveness</li><li>• Organizational design</li><li>• Human capital</li><li>• Agglomeration economies</li><li>• Cross-national distance</li><li>• Social networks</li></ul>

can be organized around three mechanisms through which skilled migrants positively affect innovation within firms: (1) knowledge transfer, (2) collaboration between immigrants and locals, and (3) knowledge recombination by locals who build on knowledge introduced by immigrants.

First, the mobility of workers across boundaries is instrumental in transferring new knowledge between disparate locations, whether between different firms (Rosenkopf and Almeida 2003), across multiple outposts of a single firm (Singh 2008), or between countries (Oettl and Agrawal 2008, Bosetti et al. 2015). Almeida et al. (2015) show how migrant inventors are able to access information otherwise unavailable to local inventors by tapping into community and diaspora networks. Bahar et al. (2020) find that migrants transfer knowledge from origin to destination country, specifically in industries where the country of origin enjoys a competitive

advantage. Bahar et al. (2024) further report that the number of inventors who move across borders during their career has increased more than tenfold over the past two decades and that those who have patented in a given technological area before moving are 70% more likely to introduce that technology to the receiving location.

As important as these stylized facts are in their own right, the role of organizations in the process by which migrants transfer knowledge is still poorly understood. After all, most immigrant inventors are employed by or start firms. The paper by Uhlbach and Anckaert (2025) in this special issue provides insights in this regard. Using remarkably granular data from Denmark, the authors show that newly hired foreign research and development (R&D) workers contribute significantly more to knowledge exploration—patenting in areas where the firm had never previously done so—than

**Table 2.** Summary of Articles in the Special Issue on Migration and Organizations

Article title	Author(s)	Themes	Key finding
Uncertainty and Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Evidence from Brexit	Acosta and Marinoni	Entrepreneurship, immigration policy, uncertainty, startup quality	Uncertainty around immigration policy significantly reduces immigrant entrepreneurship. The Brexit referendum lead to an estimated loss of over 900 startups in the UK. Faced with uncertainty, would-be founders of lower-quality ventures tend to seek employment instead, while higher-quality founders often relocate and launch their startups elsewhere.
In search of a soft landing: How premigration work attainments influence identity transformation processes of refugee entrepreneurs	Amin, van Burg, and Stam	Assimilation, refugees, identity formation, attribution	Skilled refugees who credited their past success to internal factors struggled to adapt professionally, as they were less willing to revise their identities—contrary to the typical view that an internal locus of control fosters adaptability. Those who attributed their premigration success to external factors were more flexible in updating their identities and more likely to engage in behaviors that supported successful adaptation.
Migration and Global Network Formation: Evidence from Female Scientists in Developing Countries	Fry and Furman	Returnees, brokerage, global networks, institutions	Institutional support for gender parity enhances female migrants' ability to connect knowledge across borders. Female scientists who return home after PhD training abroad don't automatically facilitate connections between colleagues across home and host countries, but only when both the home and host countries exhibit higher levels of gender equality.
Fast Friends: The Impact of Short-term Visits on Firms' Invention Outcomes	Kang and Eklund	Innovation, short-term migration, talent mobility within firms	Short-term migration of scientists between a firm's R&D centers boosts the quantity and scope of innovation. Benefits are greatest when the knowledge overlap between sites is moderate, allowing for learning without redundancy. Greater cultural distance between locations amplifies the innovation gains, consistent with the value of distant search.
Centralization and Organization Reproduction: Ethnic Innovation in R&D Centers and Satellite Locations	Kerr	Human capital, innovation, organizational structure	Centralized R&D systems shape the deployment of migrant talent across geographies. The ethnic makeup of inventors at satellite R&D sites mirrors the composition of the main R&D headquarters for firms with centralized R&D, but not for firms with decentralized R&D. HQ imprinting for centralized firms is stronger when there is more collaboration and inventor mobility across locations.

Table 2. (Continued)

Article title	Author(s)	Themes	Key finding
Take Me Home, Country Roads: Return Migration and Platform-enabled Entrepreneurship	Koo and Eesley	Internal migration, entrepreneurial performance, human capital	A policy making it easier for urban migrants to return to rural areas boosted the performance of rural startups. This gain came from returnees who brought back valuable technical and managerial knowledge and also expanded local demand by becoming customers.
Refugee Hiring and Organizational Performance	Santangelo, Rocha, and Sofka	Refugees, firm performance, value creation and capture	Firms that hire refugees become more profitable than those that don't, after accounting for the hiring of other foreign workers. This profitability boost is primarily due to cost savings—refugees tend to work longer hours for lower wages, especially in firms with high job insecurity. In contrast, nonrefugee immigrants increase firm value through higher sales rather than labor cost reductions.
Migration and Innovation: How Foreign R&D Hires Shape Firm-Level Exploration in their Host Country	Uhlbach and Anckaert	Innovation, hiring, exploration vs. exploitation, teams	Newly hired foreign R&D workers help firms patent in new areas of innovation, especially in domains where their home countries hold a technological edge. This effect is strongest in firms with limited prior collaboration with foreign inventors and shorter-tenured R&D teams, where the knowledge they bring is more novel and more likely to be embraced.

other types of R&D workers within the firm. This redirection of the firm's scope of knowledge exploration is driven by domains of knowledge in which the sending country has a technological advantage relative to Denmark. Demonstrating the importance of firm heterogeneity, the authors further show that the effect of newly hired immigrant R&D workers on knowledge exploration is stronger under two conditions: first, the less experience the firm's inventors have collaborating with foreign inventors (which strengthens the effect because the knowledge brought by foreign R&D workers is more novel to the firm); second, the shorter the tenure of R&D workforce (which strengthens the effect because existing workers will be more open to new sources of knowledge).

The contribution of Uhlbach and Anckaert (2025) is emblematic of a larger opportunity for organizational scholars. The existing literature on knowledge transfer within and across organizations (Gupta and Govindarajan 2000, Jensen and Szulanski 2004) is still largely disconnected from, but can contribute valuable insight to,

the migration literature. For instance, the distinction between tacit and codified knowledge might help clarify when the role of migrants as knowledge carriers is more versus less valuable. The knowledge transfer literature has also considered a variety of internal mechanisms and external relations firms utilize to scan for, absorb, and apply knowledge; however, we know less about when human mobility is a substitute or a complement to those factors.

A second way in which immigrants can contribute to innovation is via collaboration with coworkers in an organizational context—whether migrant or native colleagues in the same organization, conationals residing in their country of origin, or collaborators residing in other countries. Bernstein et al. (2022) highlight this mechanism by showing that the untimely death of a foreign-born collaborator causes double the decline in innovation (patenting) among native-born scientists than the untimely death of a native-born collaborator. Almeida et al. (2015) show that collaboration with migrant conationals, up to a certain point, can bolster

patent quality among native-born inventors. Kerr and Kerr (2018) show that patents filed by cross-border collaboration teams tend to outperform other patents.

This and other work show that there is something unique about exchanging ideas with a foreigner, even if the literature is somewhat unclear what that something is. As before, organizational scholars can do much to identify the underlying mechanisms by directly looking into the interactions migrants have with their colleagues within and across organizational boundaries. Concepts from several strands of organizational research should be helpful, including social networks, boundary spanning, absorptive capacity, and institutional theory.

An excellent example of this possibility is the paper by Fry and Furman (2025) in this special issue. The authors begin with the premise that migrants are structurally positioned to act as knowledge brokers across geographies. But they note that some succeed in connecting ideas and people between the organizations in which they worked in different countries while others fail to do so. Fry and Furman demonstrate that the national institutional environment plays a critical role in explaining when migrants can successfully function as knowledge brokers. The empirical context is an United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) program that provides PhD fellowships for female scientists in developing countries to study abroad. The authors track the extent to which the non-immigrant female colleagues of women who completed their fellowship abroad and returned home subsequently collaborate with scientists in the foreign institution where the fellows completed their PhDs. Simply having a returnee colleague is not enough. The key contingency is gender parity: Returnee scientists facilitate more collaborations across their home and host institutions as the gender parity in both the sending and receiving countries increases. Besides its theoretical contribution, this study is notable for actually observing the collaboration networks of migrants.

Researchers also note a third mechanism by which immigration stimulates innovation: after immigrants transfer ideas previously “locked” in unique cultural or linguistic contexts (the first mechanism), that knowledge becomes available to others—including nonimmigrants—for potential recombination (Borjas and Doran 2012, Ganguli 2015). Recombination as we define it here is distinct from collaboration with an immigrant (the second mechanism) because it can result from interactions among natives who build on knowledge introduced by the migrant. Focusing on recombination within firms, Choudhury and Kim (2019) show that Chinese and Indian inventors tend to be among the very first authors of patents relying on medicinal herbs traditional to their home countries, whereas their native-born colleagues play a pivotal role in filing follow-on patents that recombine herbal and synthetic ingredients.

Research on knowledge recombination often points to a difficult tradeoff between searching for distant knowledge, which is associated with breakthrough innovations, and pursuing proximate knowledge, which is easier to absorb and combine with prior knowledge (Schilling and Green 2011). Phene et al. (2006) suggest one solution for this tension by arguing that firms can achieve high-impact outcomes by searching for technologically proximate information across distant geographic contexts (i.e., across countries). One of the papers in the special issue adds a migration-related twist to this tension.

Kang and Eklund (2025) show that the short-term migration of scientists across R&D centers owned by the same firm—enabled by the loosening of visa restrictions across countries—enhances the quantity and scope of firms’ inventions. These visits enhance intraorganizational knowledge flows and mutual trust between scientists. The innovation benefits are especially strong when the knowledge overlap between sending and receiving R&D centers is intermediate (neither too high nor too low), which provides sufficient absorptive capacity without excessive redundancy. Greater cultural distance between countries further enhances the benefits of short-term scientist migration on innovation, congruent with the benefits of distant search.

As with the other two mechanisms linking migration to innovation, there are still many open questions to be explored when it comes to recombination. To give one example, the organizational design literature seems particularly ripe to contribute to this domain. The movement of people with novel ideas is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition for recombination. The organization must put processes in place to capitalize on the knowledge recombination potential created by the arrival of foreign-born workers. Thus, how do organizational structure, incentives, and coordination mechanisms enable or constrain the process of knowledge recombination?

The research covered in this section heavily focuses on “skilled” immigrants (i.e., college educated) and on technological innovation in the form of patenting. Although highly important, the focus of such work is narrow. Many of the novel ideas, practices, and paradigms immigrants bring to organizations and societies do not manifest in the form of patents. Instead, they might show up as innovative processes, products, or practices that are not codified as formal intellectual property. Further, so-called unskilled immigrants are also carriers of novel ideas and skills that can contribute toward organizational innovation. For example, the study of Quinonez Zepeda (2025) of the Mississippi cattle industry shows that Mexican workers brought tacit knowledge that helped make cattle operations more resilient. Iskander et al. (2010) document the “new and innovative building techniques” brought by Mexican

constructions workers to Philadelphia. The innovations introduced by these unskilled immigrants usually cannot be attributed to a specific individual—as is the case for the inventor in a patent—which requires scholars to consider processes of knowledge transfer, collaboration, and recombination that occur at the level of groups, populations, or institutions rather than at the individual level.

Taking these blind spots into account, by giving attention to a broader variety of innovation processes and to a wider set of immigrant profiles, presents yet another powerful opportunity for organizational scholars.

### What Are the Human Capital Contributions of Immigrants?

Questions about the human capital of immigrants have primarily focused on the transferability of skills from an immigrant's country of origin to workplace settings in the host country—as proxied by earnings. Research has examined immigrants' human capital as economic inputs within (1) host country settings in which they work alongside native-born workers, (2) immigrant enclaves, and (3) multinational enterprises.

A starting point can be found in Chiswick's (1978) examination of Chiswick (1978) of differences in earnings between immigrant and native-born men in the United States, revealing that immigrants closed an initial wage gap after 10–15 years of obtaining country-specific skills in the receiving location. Although the article underscores the important relationship between immigrant integration, skill development, and earnings potential, it also established the view that skills and training obtained in an immigrant's home country may not hold as much value in similar occupational fields in the immigrant's host country. Similar patterns were discovered in other countries, such as Germany (Dustmann 1999) and Canada (Banerjee and Lee 2015).

More recent research suggests that immigrants do not uniformly close the wage gap with natives even after long periods of integration. Lubotsky (2007) emphasized that wage gaps are difficult to explain without accounting for the return or out-migration of immigrants. Based on US data, the author finds that low-skill workers are more likely to return to their home countries sooner than high-skill workers, resulting in the overrepresentation of skilled workers within cohorts over time. Because skilled workers face a smaller earnings gap upon arrival, explanations of an average earnings gap decrease may be largely attributable to the mix of immigrants who stay abroad. Villarreal and Tamborini (2018) further showed that more educated immigrants experience higher earnings growth than less educated immigrants.

Abramitzky et al. (2021) take a long-term view by relying on historical census data, also from the United

States. Like prior work, they find that the earnings of immigrants converge but do not fully catch up with those of native-born counterparts. However, they show that the children of immigrants consistently outearn the children of natives—a pattern that holds across virtually all immigrant groups, regardless of origin. One explanation for this two-generation advantage is that immigrants, being more mobile than natives, have historically been more likely to move into locations with stronger economies. Thus, the mechanism seems to be one of mobility and flexibility in location choice.

Orthogonal to this view is the perspective that immigrants' human capital contributions do not necessarily have to be viewed through the lens of host country assimilation. Many scholars emphasize the presence of ethnic enclaves—neighborhoods characterized by a large concentration of conational or coethnic immigrants—as a means through which immigrants gain access to a host country's labor market opportunities without the challenge of assimilating into institutions and culture (Wilson and Portes 1980, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, Waldinger 2001, Zhou 2010). Through tightly knit social networks, immigrants accumulate tacit knowledge germane to succeeding in specific occupational niches. As a result, immigrants from certain parts of the world have become associated with specialized roles. Examples from the United States include Gujarati hotel operators (Kalnins and Chung 2006) and Korean and Vietnamese nail salon workers (Eckstein and Peri 2018). Waldinger (1994) further shows that such immigrant-specific niches can also emerge within host country institutions, such as in civil service roles, wherein some immigrant skills that do not require immediate credentialing (like engineering and accounting) could help forge an upwardly mobile career trajectory.

Finally, the growth of multinational corporations (MNCs) created networks of global mobility in which professionals, managers, and executives increasingly sought experience across countries. As a result, a new set of skills emerged as essential to achieving professional success in a world in which trade, global markets, and easy communication across borders became increasingly commonplace. Immigrants in such expatriate roles were trained in and largely expected to possess cross-cultural communication skills, global mindsets, and multiple language proficiency (Caligiuri and Tarique 2012). MNCs credited global talent as central to establishing a balance between enforcing company-wide standards and adapting to local practices (Edström and Galbraith 1977, Stahl et al. 2012). Although good for the MNCs that hire this talent, Krammer et al. (2009) point out the challenges of being frequently rotated across positions in different parts of the world, including anxiety, burnout, and turnover.

The lenses of host-country assimilation and wage convergence are important but tend to neglect the fact that immigrant human capital is deployed—and further developed—inside firms. Organizations are not merely backdrops where immigrants perform tasks; rather, firms and their strategic choices shape how immigrants' knowledge and skills are mobilized to create value for both the organization and the individual employee. By focusing heavily on macro-level wage gaps or enclave dynamics, we miss critical firm-level processes—such as how organizations select, develop, reward, and promote immigrant workers, and whether these processes differ from those for native-born employees.

From a resource-based perspective (Barney 1991, Helfat et al. 2007), organizations that effectively integrate immigrants can gain unique capabilities stemming from these employees' diverse experiences, networks, and cultural competencies. Mostafa and Klepper (2018), for instance, show how migrant workers with experience in textiles seeded the development of firm capabilities in the Bangladesh garment industry. These capabilities may give firms a competitive advantage. Glennon et al. (2024) find that immigrant workers expand the “strategic repertoire” of organizations, enabling them to perform a wider and more complex array of competitive moves—and that immigrant employees play a critical coordinating role that enables the deployment of more complex strategies. Future research should dig more deeply into whether and how cross-national talent mobility can function as a precursor of firm-specific capabilities, both as a “microfoundation” when the spotlight is on individual movers and as a “macrofoundation” when the focus is on aggregate mobility patterns or migration policies that govern the movement of human capital.

At the same time, whether and how immigrant workers capture the value they cocreate depends on firm-specific structures, processes, and capabilities (Coff 1997). By shedding light on these organizational mechanisms, research can better capture the dual dynamic of value creation and capture by firms and the immigrants they employ, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how foreign-born human capital truly functions in economic and social contexts.

One good example of this possibility is the paper by Santangelo et al. (2025) in this special issue. The authors focus on refugees, a source of human capital that moves across borders through no choice of their own and is initially more vulnerable than other types of migrants. A typical “macro” study would quantify how the earnings of a cohort of refugees compares to that of natives over time. Santangelo et al. (2025) instead look at the relative value capture between firms and refugees using a uniquely detailed sample in the Danish context. They find that firms become more profitable after hiring refugees, compared with firms that do not hire refugees and

after accounting for hiring other types of foreign workers (nonrefugees). This result is explained by cost-related gains for the firm: Refugees work longer hours and get paid less than other employees, including other types of immigrant workers, and their impact on profitability is stronger in firms where job insecurity is high. Notably, this is not the case for nonrefugee immigrants, who create value for firms by increasing sales but not by decreasing wage costs. In other words, the firm captures more value from refugees than other types of workers, both immigrant and nonimmigrant.

The paper by Santangelo et al. (2025) raises important questions of business ethics. Is it fair for firms to pay refugees and other forced migrants lower wages? Or are firms actually performing an ethical act by hiring vulnerable migrants in the first place, giving them a toehold into the labor market that will allow them to upgrade their human capital over time? Moving beyond the ethical questions, what role do firms play in helping immigrant workers develop their skills over time? Under what conditions do immigrant workers and firms cocreate value, and how is that value distributed? What role does the structure of the firm play? How does the immigrant or ethnic composition of the firms' workforce evolve over time? Questions like these can only be answered by looking inside the proverbial black box of organizations. Answering them will provide a powerful complement to prior work pioneered in other disciplines.

We finish this section by highlighting another paper in the special issue that gets at these types of questions and shows the importance of considering firm heterogeneity. Kerr (2025) examines how a firm's R&D centralization affects the ethnic composition of inventors at the firm's satellite locations. This question is important because ethnic scientists play a large and increasingly important role in supplying the talent firms rely upon to innovate, as we discussed earlier. Drawing on U.S. patent data, Kerr finds that the mix of inventor ethnicities at satellite facilities largely mirrors the local labor market in which the satellite is based for decentralized firms. But for centralized firms, the ethnic makeup of inventors in satellite R&D locations closely resembles that of the firm's main R&D headquarters. This imprinting of headquarters on satellite locations is stronger as cross-location collaboration and intrafirm inventor mobility increase. Thus, centralized R&D systems transfer workforce characteristics across geographies, suggesting a strong firm specificity in the way firms deploy migrant human capital.

### How Do Immigrant Workers Affect Native Workers?

Perhaps no issue is more controversial than what effect immigrant workers have on the jobs and wages of native-born workers. A large literature in the field of

labor economics is dedicated to the topic, competently reviewed in the 2017 report mentioned earlier. When it comes to unskilled immigrants, the balance of evidence suggests no effect on native unemployment—that is, immigrants do not take jobs from natives—and that “the impact of immigration on the overall native wage may be small and close to zero,” particularly over a period of several years after immigrants’ arrival to the labor market (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017, p. 189). The report further concludes that skilled immigrants have a positive effect on natives’ employment and wages. Research conducted since the publication of the report further validates—and if anything strengthens—these conclusions. For example, two rigorous recent studies show that all immigrants (including unskilled) create jobs and increase wages for native workers, including native workers with little formal education (Caiumi and Peri 2024, Burchardi et al. 2025).

Despite this evidence, the fact that immigrants (particularly unskilled) do not, on average, harm native workers in the labor market continues to spur skepticism in both academic and public circles. Some argue that it violates basic economics that a rightward shift of the labor supply curve, due to the arrival of immigrants, does not make the labor market tighter by creating competition for jobs or lowering wages (Borjas 2003). But it is reasonably well accepted among scholars now that there are two good explanations for this. First, an increase in immigration does more than raise the supply of workers—it also makes the economic pie larger because immigrants increase demand, spur new business creation, and increase investment (Banerjee and Duflo 2019, Hernandez 2024). Second, immigrant and native workers are not identical substitutes (as many classic models of labor migration assumed) and thus do not compete as directly as initially thought. Immigrants perform different jobs or specialize in different skills within firms and industries (Caiumi and Peri 2024). For instance, recently arrived unskilled migrants perform tasks that do not require language or communication proficiency, or skilled immigrants often have highly specialized abilities that are scarce in the labor market. Credible studies documenting instances in which migrants actually lower natives’ wages are those in which the two conditions are not met—demand does not increase (Borjas and Doran 2012), legal restrictions prevent immigrants from doing anything other than working (Dustmann et al. 2017), or scenarios in which immigrants are very similar to incumbent workers (usually other recent immigrants) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017).

Economists should be commended for shedding light on these questions. But there is much scope for organizational scholars to contribute to this crucial topic. After all, the key decisions that determine the effect of

immigration of jobs and wages are made by managers in organizations—and those decisions have not been systematically studied. For example, under what conditions do firms choose to hire foreign- versus native-born individuals? Is the foreigner status of a potential employee relevant in the hiring decision or is it incidental to other worker attributes such as skill and experience? What role does the firm play in the sorting of skilled and unskilled immigrants into different industries (e.g., construction versus farming versus high-tech) and roles within industries and firms (e.g., production versus sales or research versus management)? If immigrants and natives perform complementary tasks, how do managers design work to benefit from those complementarities? How do firms shift their strategy and structure in response to policies that tighten or loosen restrictions on hiring foreign-born workers? Do some firms develop unique capabilities that allow them to benefit more from hiring immigrant workers than others?

These issues are critical because, as it stands, the literature assumes away these decisions as being solved by the invisible hand of the labor market. But they are actually determined by a “managerial hand” in an organization with a strategy, structure, and culture—issues that organizational scholars are well versed in but have not delved into sufficiently in the context of migration. Adopting an organizational lens can also help the migration literature move past the tired question of whether migrants hurt natives in the labor market. More interesting at this point is understanding how migrant and native workers mutually affect each other in organizations. How are incumbent (native) workers impacted by the arrival of foreign-born colleagues—in terms of the tasks and jobs they do or in the way they think? Along those same dimensions, how are immigrant workers impacted by the characteristics of their native colleagues? How can we better observe, measure, and conceptualize interactions between immigrants and natives in the workplace?

### How Do Immigrants Assimilate and Develop New Identities?

Research in the sociology of assimilation has largely been shaped by reactions to Gordon’s (1964) model of adaptation. Consisting of a seven-stage process—cultural, structural, marital, identification, attitude reception, behavior reception, and civic—the model emphasizes a linear experience similar for all immigrants. In addition to attacking the linearity and ethnocentrism of Gordon’s theory, scholars pointed out that the model could not account for why distinct ethnic cultural affinities persist. Segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993) relaxed the assumption of a linear experience, leaving room for different directions of incorporation by allowing for “upward” and

“downward” assimilation—which reflects disparate economic opportunities. Others argued that segmented assimilation continued to assume that a host country’s dominant ethnic culture ultimately determines the pathways of immigrant incorporation, which does not account for the emergence of novel and distinct immigrant-specific cultures.

Alba and Nee (2003) introduced a view that did not make any assumptions about the agency of a host country culture. They redefined assimilation as “the decline, and at its endpoint, the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it” (Alba and Nee 2003, p. 863). A further revision by Waters and colleagues questioned another key assumption: that assimilation has an endpoint. They noted that some immigrant groups never fully integrate into a host country’s culture and institutions (Waters and Jiménez 2005), in part because immigrant communities remain tied to communities in their home country due to enduring transnational social networks that result in continuous “replenishment.” Jiménez (2018) advanced one step further to conceptualize assimilation as a two-way process, showing how immigrant communities can also alter host country culture in meaningful ways.

The evolution of sociological thinking on assimilation is congruent with the dominant model of psychological acculturation developed by Berry (1997, 2005). An alternative to the widely held assumption that immigrants face a tradeoff between the cultures of their home and host countries, Berry’s contribution was to show that the home and host cultures are actually orthogonal. Immigrants can be strongly or weakly attached to one or both of them (a  $2 \times 2$ ), resulting in four possible states. From a psychological perspective, the ideal state is “integration,” which occurs when immigrants are strongly attached to both their home and host country cultures. This allows them to navigate the new environment without suffering a loss of identity from giving up important elements of the mother culture. “Assimilation” happens when the immigrant is strongly attached to the host culture but has low attachment to the original culture. “Separation” is the state of preserving strong identification with the original culture but not attaching to the host country culture—an outcome that stakeholders in the host country often worry about. Possibly the worst state of all (from the standpoint of identity development) is “marginalization,” in which the immigrant loses attachment to their original culture while failing to identify with the receiving culture.

The topic of social assimilation or integration is ripe for organizational scholarship. Other disciplines take a strongly “macro” view of the issue by focusing on how newcomers assimilate “to society” or “to the national culture” or “to the economy.” Although these are valid issues, the rubber meets the road in terms of

assimilation inside organizations. Migrants spend a disproportionate amount of their time in the organizations in which they work (a firm), study (a school or university), volunteer (e.g., parent-teacher association or a community organization), or participate (e.g., a church). Just focusing on the workplace would capture a very large share of where assimilation really happens. At a minimum, this suggests that assimilation “to the organization” should be a literature in its own right. But more profoundly, the mechanisms by which assimilation to the macro context (society, national culture, economy) happens are activated inside organizations.

Prior work does recognize the importance of the workplace as a context of assimilation in which immigrants interact with the native born (Allport 1954, Gordon 1964, Alba and Nee 2003). But it tends to focus on the labor market as the unit of analysis instead of the organization, where workplace interactions actually take place (Diop et al. 2025). This recognition raises a variety of questions. How do different organizational contexts, cultures, and professional environments shape the assimilation experience and success of immigrants? What organizational factors determine which of Berry’s four quadrants an immigrant ends up in? What types of interactions with coworkers and managers shape the assimilation experience and in what direction? How do workplace experiences—both positive and negative—shape the evolving identity of immigrants?

One of the papers in this special issue illustrates the possibilities. Amin et al. (2025) conducted an ethnographic study of highly educated refugees participating in an entrepreneurship incubator, who face challenges to their professional identity because they cannot find work that matches their abilities and past accomplishments. This is a common challenge for migrants who achieved success in their homelands (e.g., a former business owner, engineer, or lawyer) and are forced to leave everything behind. A key factor in successfully navigating this challenge is the ability to update one’s self-perception (identity flexibility). But what explains differences in identity flexibility? The authors reveal the importance of the attributions refugees make about their past work attainments. Those who attributed their premigration attainments to internal factors (e.g., ability, hard work) engaged in behaviors that anchored them to their past and were less able to update their identities (low flexibility), which resulted in less successful adaptation to their new professional reality. This is counterintuitive because it goes against the common notion that an internal locus of control makes individuals more adaptable. In contrast, those who made external attributions about their premigration attainments (e.g., recognizing the role of outside forces) were more likely to engage in practices that enabled a more flexible updating of their identities—such as professional

networking with locals or developing friendships outside their coethnic groups—resulting in more successful professional adaptation.

### How Do Immigrants Contribute to Entrepreneurship?

Immigrant entrepreneurs are individuals who found firms outside their countries of origin, such as an Italian pizzeria owner in the United States or an Indian engineer who founds a software firm in the United Kingdom. Immigrant entrepreneurship is not new. Records date to the 19th-century ironworking industry in Italy (Eckaus 1961), cotton textiles in India (Wolcott and Clark 1999), the nitrate industry in Chile (Stein and Hunt 1971), and steel production in Russia (McKay 1967). In the past few decades, however, immigrant entrepreneurship has grown in prevalence and importance. Immigrant-founded ventures constitute a significant share of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, generate tax revenue, and create a disproportionate share of jobs (Azoulay et al. 2022, Chodavadia et al. 2024). Immigrants are more likely to start businesses than natives in most countries (Fairlie and Lofstrom 2015). For example, in the United States, immigrants found around a quarter of all businesses despite being only 14% of the population (Chodavadia et al. 2024). Their rate of business creation is 80% higher than for natives, and they are overrepresented among entrepreneurs across the entire distribution of firm size—from small “mom and pop” shops to Fortune 500 firms (American Immigration Council 2004, Azoulay et al. 2022). In Europe, nearly 12% of self-employed individuals are foreign-born (OECD/European Commission 2023). The share rises significantly for high-growth, investor-backed startups; for instance, immigrants founded 60% of unicorns in Germany (OECD/European Commission 2023).

Existing research gives two types of explanations for the unusually high rate of entrepreneurship among immigrants. The first applies to low-skill immigrants, who often have difficulties obtaining employment in the formal labor market due to information asymmetry, lack of social connections, or outright discrimination. Facing such disadvantages, immigrants resort to entrepreneurship out of necessity or as a transitional step in the process of labor market assimilation (Bonacich et al. 1977, Borjas 1986, Portes 1987, Sanders and Nee 1996).

The second explanation is characteristic of more recent studies that emphasize immigrants’ unique skills or resources. For example, immigrants in many wealthy countries are disproportionately represented among the highly educated—particularly those with STEM skills who tend to participate in innovative technology startups (Saxenian 2007, Chodavadia et al. 2024). In the United States, for instance, immigrants are nearly half of all science and engineering workers with graduate

degrees and are founders of more than half of all unicorns (Anderson 2022, National Science Foundation 2024). Besides human capital, immigrant entrepreneurs often have access to unique resources arising from their transnational connections and experiences—such as the ability to hire conational employees, sell products to members of the diaspora, or access and import resources from their homelands (Hernandez and Kulchina 2020).

This more contemporary perspective, which does not view migrants only as necessity entrepreneurs, shows that immigrants found organizations with significant numbers of employees (Azoulay et al. 2022) and complex structures. Thus, scholars need to study the organizations immigrant entrepreneurs build. There is much to learn about what factors, beyond labor-market constraints, drive immigrant firm formation, what strategies such firms employ, how their strategies compare with those of native-founded firms, and how immigrants’ strategic choices affect the outcome of their ventures. Further, because immigrant entrepreneurs often rely on resources and talent spanning the home and host countries, we also need to understand the geographic complexities of the organizations they manage.

Researchers have started examining some of these questions. A complex mix of host- and home-country conditions, coupled with cultural and individual traits, can affect immigrant entrepreneurs’ entry decisions. For example, immigrants might be more risk and opportunity seeking than natives, which may explain their higher entrepreneurship rates (Chodavadia et al. 2024). Immigrants also tend to locate their firms in host regions where they like to live, even when this negatively affects their firms’ performance (Kulchina 2016). Further, cultural traits inherited from the home country may influence entrepreneurial behavior, as illustrated by a recent study showing that the entrepreneurial culture of immigrants’ countries of origin significantly affect their propensity to start a venture (Kleinhempel et al. 2023).

Host country factors are also likely to play an important role in the entry choices of immigrant entrepreneurs. Policies meant to attract foreign entrepreneurs seem to make a difference, nudging skilled entrepreneurs toward countries with welcoming policies at the expense of countries with restrictive migration policies (Glennon and Lee 2023). The presence of conational enclaves affects the rate, location, and performance of immigrant startups (Marinoni 2023).

The paper by Acosta and Marinoni (2025) in this special issue points to another host country factor: policy uncertainty. Using the United Kingdom as an empirical context, the authors demonstrate that an uncertain immigration environment decreases immigrant entrepreneurs’ entry. They compare the rate of firm founding by immigrants from the European Union (EU), who were impacted by the Brexit referendum, to the

founding rate by immigrants from other countries who were unaffected by Brexit. Within two years, Brexit led to an estimated loss of more than 900 firms that would have been founded in the United Kingdom by EU immigrants. The study further suggests that potential founders of low-quality ventures are likely to take paid employment to deal with the uncertainty, whereas potential founders of high-quality startups are likely to establish their firms in another country.

The foreignness of the founder is a defining aspect of immigrant entrepreneurship. The literature largely treats foreignness as a liability, which firms can partially overcome by hiring managers from among the local (native) population (Zaheer and Mosakowski 1997). However, up to 65% of immigrant entrepreneurs run their firms personally (Kulchina 2017), which defies theoretical expectation. How immigrant founders run their firms and build their teams are consequential organizational issues. For example, Kulchina (2016, 2017) shows that when immigrant founders operate their firms personally, they significantly improve firm performance by hiring workers of the same nationality (which is more cost-effective) and by applying management practices that they bring from their home countries. Immigrant entrepreneurs also govern their relationships with hired managers differently from native entrepreneurs. For instance, they rely more on relational than formal contracts (Kulchina and Oxley 2020).

The differences between immigrant entrepreneurs and their local employees in management style, culture, and training open a broad array of potential research questions. How would such differences affect coordination and productivity? Which norms dominate in the young firm—those typical of the local environment, those brought by the immigrant founder, or a combination of the two? How does a founder's foreign experience affect hiring and organizational design choices?

Besides these internal organization questions, immigrant entrepreneurship raises important demand-side issues that affect entrepreneurial strategy. Immigrant-founded firms often arise in ethnic enclaves (e.g., Chinatowns) or in places with sizable conational populations (e.g., Colombian neighborhoods in Spain). In those cases, a critical decision is how much to interact with and rely on the conational community as a market and for other resources (workers, suppliers, and more). Tailoring the business to the needs of the immigrant community might offer early wins and safety. For example, Hernandez and Kulchina (2020) show that immigrant entrepreneurs in Russia are more profitable in regions with more conational immigrants—but activating those benefits requires appointing a chief executive officer (CEO) who is also an immigrant. At the same time, tailoring the business to the ethnic community might come at the expense of long-term growth because the business fails to appeal to the broader native

population. How immigrant entrepreneurs navigate this dilemma remains an open question.

Immigrants also seem to play a critical role in the growth and performance of entrepreneurial firms, even if they are not founders. Chen et al. (2021) report that technology startups—who often depend strongly on a few key workers—experience significant disadvantages when they are unable to hire skilled immigrants due to restrictive visa policies. They document that startups patent less, produce patents of lower quality, and are less likely to successfully exit (IPO) when they lose out on the H-1B lottery in the United States. Tareque et al. (2024) show that the arrival of workers on H-1B visas (who cannot start their own firms) to a region of the United States enhances the quality of startups founded in that region. Despite the importance of foreign talent for startups, however, young firms are the least likely to have the resources and flexibility to sponsor the visas of skilled immigrants. Thus, research shows that foreign-born graduates of U.S. universities are significantly less likely to work at a startup than a large firm, despite being equally likely to prefer work at a startup (Roach and Skrentny 2019). In fact, immigrants are significantly more likely than natives to transition from paid employment to entrepreneurship when not subject to visa restrictions (Agarwal et al. 2022).

The small but growing work on how immigrant non-founders impact startups also presents valuable opportunities for organizational scholars. If we take the stylized fact that foreign-born talent enhances startup success, the natural follow up question is why. What does the arrival of an immigrant bring to the startup? Is it merely skill or something else? How are existing workers in the startup affected by the arrival of the immigrant? How does hiring foreign-born workers shape the product and market strategy of the startup?

The paper by Koo and Eesley (2025) in this special issue takes on some of these questions by considering domestic migration—mobility within the same country—in this case from cities to rural areas. Much attention has been given to urban migration, which can be a source of social mobility for movers while simultaneously hampering the development of firms and economies in rural sending areas. A special challenge for young firms in such areas is attracting talent. Koo and Eesley (2025) explore how a policy change in China that reduced the barriers for urban immigrants to return to their rural homes affected the performance rural e-commerce startups. The authors find that, after the policy change, these firms experienced a 19% performance gain relative to the businesses in other provinces because they could tap into returnee talent. These returnees benefitted startups through two important mechanisms: transferring valuable knowledge (both technical and managerial) acquired during their urban residence and increasing demand for startups' products by serving as new customers.

Finally, a handful of recent studies have recently begun to show that migration plays an important role in the ecosystem of entrepreneurial financing. For instance, Balachandran and Hernandez (2021) demonstrated that the extent and location of venture capital (VC) firms' foreign expansion is a function of the relationships VC develop with immigrant founders. Li (2024) further shows that immigrant workers from a given country significantly influence a startup's ability to raise capital from investors in that country. Many opportunities exist to study the functioning and effects of cross-national migrant networks in funding entrepreneurial ventures.

### How Does Migration Affect the Global Strategy and Management of Multinational Firms?

The movement of goods, services, and knowledge across borders is inseparable from the movement of people across the very same borders. Thus, there is an important relationship between migration and the global strategy and management of multinational organizations. Anecdotal observations of this relationship date back at least to the classic study of Aharoni (1966) of the foreign investment decision process, in which he observed that firms' foreign expansion decisions seemed to be driven less by "hard" economic variables than by information provided by foreign nationals of the target country working at firm headquarters.

A more systematic documentation of the effect of migration on international business began with studies of trade. The influential paper of Gould (1994) showed that imports and exports between the United States and its trading partners were significantly influenced by migration patterns, presumably due to immigrants' knowledge of home country markets, language skills, product preferences, and business contacts—all of which reduce transaction costs and other frictions to cross-border sales. Many follow-on studies from a variety of countries, at both the country and firm levels of analysis, revealed a similar pattern (Head and Ries 1998, Combes et al. 2005, Cohen et al. 2017). This work was important because it provided evidence that the arrival of immigrants does more than increase the supply of labor—it also changes the mix of goods (and implicitly services) demanded by consumers across the sending and receiving locations. In other words, migration creates new categories of demand. Such demand gets satisfied by trade, by the creation of a new firm (as discussed in the previous section), or by the expansion of an incumbent firm (as discussed next).

A related body of research has shown that cross-national migration has a significant effect on foreign direct investment (FDI), which requires an operational presence in the foreign market and thus a higher level of commitment than trade. In other words, migration is an

important explanation for the existence of MNCs. Early studies provided evidence of this relationship at the country level (Bandelj 2002, Buch et al. 2006, Leblang 2010), followed by work at the firm level (Rangan and Sengul 2009, Iriyama et al. 2010, Foley and Kerr 2013, Hernandez 2014, Burchardi et al. 2019, Li et al. 2019). The effect of migration on foreign investment works in both directions—from sending to receiving country and vice versa. For example, Foley and Kerr (2013) show that MNCs that employ migrants in the headquarter's country have higher levels of foreign activity in countries of the same ethnicity as the migrants.

Glennon (2024a) provides another angle to the immigration-foreign investment relationship by demonstrating that immigration restrictions preventing firms from hiring foreign-born talent in their headquarter's country push firms to hire that talent in foreign countries. This affects the geographic scope of MNCs because firms respond to the immigration restrictions either by hiring more in existing foreign subsidiaries or by opening entirely new subsidiaries in which to place the desired talent. Thus, whether strategically or as an unintended consequence of restrictive immigration policy, human mobility deeply affects firms' geographic scope.

Scholars have further shown that the pull of conational immigrants on the location choices of MNCs is not driven simply by a suboptimal preference for living near people who speak the same language or share the same culture. The subsidiaries of MNCs perform better because of the presence of the immigrant community, as indicated by initial survival (Hernandez 2014), sales (Rangan and Sengul 2009, Hernandez and Kulchina 2020), and long-term profits (Hernandez and Kulchina 2020). These immigrant-driven investments also create more jobs in the local community (Burchardi et al. 2019).

Studies in this line of research commonly argue that knowledge or trust are the underlying mechanisms explaining the empirical regularity. That is, migration creates networks of information and assurance that reduce the liabilities of foreignness that underlie cross-border business (Zaheer 1995). However, there is still significant scope for documenting these and other potential mechanisms. An underlying assumption in this work is that communities of immigrants create transnational networks that act as the carriers of knowledge and trust, but data limitations have made it difficult for scholars to directly observe and measure such networks. Studies offering more visibility into that transnational immigrant network—its functioning, structure, and resources—would be valuable. In a similar vein, most studies assume that the subsidiaries of MNCs somehow interact with individual members of the conational immigrant community (as customers, employees, sources of information, or referrals) but do not observe those interactions directly.

An opportunity for work in this space is to observe how the presence and size of diasporas around the world affects the strategy and inner workings of MNCs. A classic issue in international business is how to balance global integration with local responsiveness (Pralhad and Doz 1987, Bartlett and Ghoshal 1988, Ghemawat 2007). How do immigration patterns affect this balance, including the structural and coordination mechanisms the firm uses to balance centralization and decentralization? Firms rely on a mix of formal and informal “tools” to achieve such balance—from assigning expatriates to foreign subsidiaries, to relying on centralized versus decentralized decision making, to vertical and horizontal structures (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1988, Birkinshaw and Hood 1998, Harzing 2001). This work has long rested on the idea that the population in the foreign market is composed primarily of natives of the foreign country. But what if there is a large diaspora of immigrants born in the headquarter’s country (e.g., Indians in London or California from the perspective of an Indian MNC)? How might that change the calculus of whom to appoint as local manager, what kind of products to sell in the “foreign” market, or what kind of coordination mechanisms to use within and across units of the MNC?

Yet another opportunity, mostly untapped, is to switch the dependent and independent variables and consider how MNCs affect cross-national migration. Earlier (in the section on human capital) we referred to research on expatriates as valuable sources of talent for MNCs. That work has focused on the benefits of expatriates for the firm (e.g., control, coordination) or on how the expatriate experience affects the individual, personally and professionally. Less attention has been given to how MNCs, as agents of human mobility, affect global patterns of migration and the implications of those patterns. For instance, it is not uncommon for former expatriates to remain permanently in a country to which they were originally assigned by an MNC. These individuals often go on to start businesses, introduce new technologies and ideas, or play a connecting role between sending and receiving country. Another phenomenon of interest pertains to how MNCs affect the employment choices of conational immigrants. For example, the arrival of a Korean MNC in Italy might influence the career choices of a Korean immigrant already residing in Italy, such as whether to start a business that supplies the MNC or to become a paid employee of the MNC. This, in turn, will have an impact on the economic and social assimilation of the immigrant and their family.

The exploration of these six core questions in the migration literature clearly shows the importance and power of adding an organizational lens. We have only scratched the surface, leaving out other essential issues at the migration-organizations nexus—such as the

effects of emigration on organizations and markets in the sending country, how diversity in nationality affects team effectiveness, or the role of institutions and stakeholders in the nonmarket environment in shaping the mobility of talent and organizations across geographies. The omission of these (and many other) issues is only meant to keep the scope of this article manageable. Regardless of topical area, the common insight is that organizational heterogeneity is essential to understand both the antecedents and consequences of human migration.

## What Can Studying Migration Contribute to Organizational Theories?

Studying migration also promises to bring novel theoretical insights for organizational scholars, whether by extending existing theories or by suggesting entirely new concepts. Here we offer four examples meant to illustrate what these insights could look like. As before, this barely scratches the surface of the possibilities.

### Geographic Folds

The topics we considered in the previous section point to a multiplicity of potential benefits firms can gain from immigrants—from innovation to access to new markets to improved performance (Glennon et al. 2024). Immigrants thus seem to bring something powerful and unique to organizations. Studies often refer to the novel ideas, experiences, or knowledge newcomers transfer across locations; to unique social networks that allow migrants to mobilize resources or garner trust; or to the language or cross-cultural competence of individuals who have lived in more than one location. But none of these factors in isolation seems to be sufficient to embody the fullness of what an immigrant carries. Nor can extant theories of recombination, diversity, skill, or cross-national cultural ability fully explain what is going on.

To offer the beginnings of a more encompassing theoretical construct, we advance the idea of migrants as “geographic folds” whose unique role in organizations arises from their status as *multiple insiders* across the geographic contexts they inhabit. Our theorizing is rooted in the notion of structural folds (Vedres and Stark 2010, De Vaan et al. 2015), which describes actors who sit at the confluence of different organizational groups or units, being “intercohesive without being exclusive.” Two groups are intercohesive if they have members who are “multiple insiders,” or well accepted and socialized actors in both groups. This contrasts with the notions of structural holes or brokerage (Burt 1992, Obstfeld 2005) or boundary spanning (Aldrich and Herker 1977), where the organizational actor need not be an insider of either group they connect (e.g., a mediator who resolves a dispute). Instead of being situated *across*

groups, those who create structural folds simultaneously belong *within* multiple groups.

Building on these ideas, we define geographic folds as comprising organizational actors who are multiple insiders in two or more geographic contexts (i.e., migrants). We emphasize that geography here is an expansive concept that includes a panoply of dimensions attached to a place. This aligns with prior scholarship that conceptualizes distance not only along the geographic plane but also along cultural, administrative, economic, and other forms of distinction (Ghemawat 2007, Berry et al. 2010). When someone is “from somewhere,” they cannot be characterized just by one dimension associated with that place—such as its culture, knowledge, language, or identity. As insiders, they embody the lot.

Geographic folds emerge within organizations that include migrants, who are multiple insiders across two or more geographic contexts through lived experience over meaningful periods of time. Our definition excludes certain organizational actors which cannot be conceptualized as occupying geographic folds. For example, temporary expatriates (Edström and Galbraith 1977, Harzing 2001) cannot be viewed as having deep familiarity in their host contexts—unless their assignments are unusually long. Similarly, workers on outsourced teams (Srikanth and Puranam 2014) cannot be create a geographic fold, nor can visitors on temporary assignments or very recently arrived migrants. A protracted period of residence and socialization in each geography is required.

The implications of geographic folds for organizations are far reaching. A geographic fold essentially collapses the multiple elements of two locations, akin to a wormhole that connects different points in space-time in theoretical physics, into a single touchpoint that potentially opens unique possibilities for the individual and for the organization in which they work. In what follows, we outline three mechanisms enabled by geographic folds—adaptation, recombination, and resolution—that potentially affect a variety of organizational outcomes.

**Adaptation.** By creating geographic folds, migrant workers are ideally positioned to mobilize the transfer and adaptation of complex and tacit knowledge across organizational boundaries and country borders. Their embeddedness in two different cultural, economic, and institutional environments positions them to serve as crucibles of knowledge transformation within organizations. Knowledge transfer involves a process of knowledge translation *and* adaptation. When immigrant workers transfer knowledge from their home geography to an organization in the host society, they do not just import ideas about how things are done in their countries of origin. They also must adapt their knowledge, especially

the “know-how” component, using different ensembles of culturally, organizationally, and regionally embedded resources. Williams (2007) refers to such migrant-held knowledge as socially situated knowledge, which is acquired through individual experiences, social relationships, and shared understandings that are all tied to a specific place.

What is arguably most valuable about migrant-held knowledge (its novelty or uniqueness) might also be what is most responsible for transmission errors. Socially situated knowledge often demands a specific shared understanding about the norms required to put it to use. When migrants bring such knowledge from their home countries, they engage in a process of adaptation and sense-making that leads to a reconfiguring of their expertise to fit the confines of rules, values, and resources of their new environments (Williams 2007). Congruent with the concept of geographic folds, this is not easily done without deep embeddedness in two environments. A good example is the popularization of Greek yogurt in the United States by Hamdi Ulukaya, the Turkish immigrant founder of Chobani. That kind of yogurt had long existed in many Mediterranean and Eastern European countries. Surely many immigrants in the United States from those countries knew about it, and many tourists from the United States enjoyed it while traveling abroad. But it took a multiple insider like Hamdi—who grew up on a dairy farm in Turkey, migrated as an adult to the United States, and worked in the dairy industry in the United States for years—to engage in the adaptive transfer necessary to make Greek yogurt a runaway success.

**Recombination.** Transmitting and adapting knowledge is one thing. Combining it with knowledge “on the other side” for novel use is another. Given their familiarity with different geographic contexts, migrant workers can facilitate the recombination of diverse organizational resources (i.e., knowledge, labor, capital). But not all migrants necessarily fulfill the promise and potential of recombinant production. According to Vedres and Stark (2010), structural folds must have the distinct ability and willingness to engage in exchange and recombination at a deeper level than individuals who merely have knowledge *about* different social groups. Similarly, recombination involves more than just knowing. Deep familiarity with multiple contexts enables *trust* across contexts to motivate action on the part of others whom the occupant of the geographic fold must mobilize. Thus, immigrants must possess the social skill to activate their knowledge as multiple insiders to generate recombinant output.

This raises a critical point. Hiring immigrants creates geographic folds within the organizational context, but that is only a necessary condition for recombination. The individual must be able to understand the potential

recombination and be willing and able to make them. Many factors within the organization also must be in place, such as complementary organizational resources and processes (Fleming 2001) and prior choices made by the firm related to recombination and specialization (Nerkar and Paruchuri 2005).

**Resolution.** Organizations often face paradoxes, or “persistent contradictions between interdependent elements” (Schad et al. 2016, p. 6). Some of the most common include having to simultaneously explore new knowledge and exploit existing knowledge, needing to adapt to local market conditions while maintaining global consistency, or collaborating with a competitor. By creating geographic folds, migrants can enable organizations to resolve geographic paradoxes or those that arise from distinct conditions across locations.

For example, a western MNC might face a contradiction between expansion to an economically promising but possibly corrupt emerging market and transparency goals that suggest avoiding locations where the firm might be tempted to violate ethical or legal principles. A migrant employee with deep familiarity in both the home and host country contexts could help the firm resolve this paradox by suggesting strategies that enable the MNC to operate in the emerging market and yet engage in transparent business practices. Although the mechanism of recombination entails exploiting complementarities in resources across geographic contexts, the mechanism of resolution entails navigating and resolving persistent contradictions in the underlying realities of geographic contexts.

We note that these three mechanisms—adaptation, recombination, and resolution—elicited by considering immigrants as creators of geographic folds, cannot fully be explained by reducing immigrants simply to enhancing diversity along one of the dimensions embodied in being a foreigner (e.g., language, knowledge, or cultural diversity). The key is that occupying a structural fold elicits all or many of the dimensions of being an insider across geographies simultaneously, and the mechanism is more than the summation of those dimensions. Of course, this is only an initial sketch of the theoretical possibilities in the hopes that future research will further develop the concept.

### Theorizing Workplace Interactions Between Immigrants and Locals

Research at the intersection of migration and organizations is still in the “black box” stage. Although a growing literature (as reviewed above) explores the outcomes firms obtain from hiring immigrant workers, in most cases the underlying mechanisms—usually involving interactions at the individual or team levels—that give rise to those outcomes are theorized but unobserved or simply unknown. We do not have systematic

theories of the microinteractions between immigrant and native-born individuals, whether they be horizontal (i.e., worker-worker, manager-manager) or vertical (i.e., manager-subordinate), and how those interactions aggregate to explain organization-level outcomes. Of course, some empirical work has begun to build the foundation by studying immigrant-peer interactions (Bernstein et al. 2022, Choudhury et al. 2024).

For example, earlier we summarized some of the evidence pointing to the innovation benefits of hiring immigrant workers and noted that studies in that domain usually resort to theories of knowledge transfer or recombination to explain innovation outcomes. But what kind of interactions motivate immigrants to “import” new ideas into the organization? Are they the same or different types of interactions that lead to the recombination of the knowledge brought by the immigrant with the knowledge possessed by native incumbent workers? When is it better for immigrants to work alone versus in teams? What mix of native versus foreign-born workers is best for different types of innovation outcomes (e.g., exploration versus exploitation)? If immigrants make their native-born colleagues more creative, as research seems to show, how does that happen? There are many opportunities for novel theorizing at the micro level for a variety of different organizational-level outcomes besides innovation.

Putting organizational outcomes aside, taking a closer look at immigrant-native interactions in the workplace might also help update theories of organizational behavior. To give an example, consider the work on person-organizational (P-O) fit (O'Reilly et al. 1991, Judge and Cable 1997). Immigrant employees enter organizations with unique backgrounds but also face the imperative of adapting to their new national environment. This can alter the trajectory of person-organization fit over time. Rather than passively being filtered by selection and attrition processes (Schneider 1987), these individuals actively engage in acculturation strategies within the workplace, and their presence might force ongoing adjustments by the organization.

One could use Berry's acculturation framework, which we summarized earlier, to understand this. Which of the four orientations the individual follows (assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization) will probably shape P-O fit over their tenure. For example, an employee who pursues an assimilation path adopts both the nation's and the organization's culture and sheds aspects of their heritage, likely increasing P-O fit over time (at the cost of suppressing their distinct identity). In contrast, one who seeks integration (biculturalism) will try to maintain core elements of their cultural identity while also embracing key aspects of the organization's culture. This integrated individual may not mirror the organizational culture exactly, but they could contribute to an evolution of P-O fit if the

organization becomes slightly more accommodating to different backgrounds. Those who experience separation (holding onto their original culture and not adopting the organization's norms) or marginalization (feeling disconnected from both cultures) are likely to remain misaligned, creating ongoing friction and often eventual attrition or isolation.

At the same time, which of Berry's quadrants an immigrant ends up in is not independent of organizational context and practices. For instance, a company with a strong inclusion climate and supportive peers is more likely to encourage an integration orientation, whereas a rigid culture that expects conformity may push immigrants either to assimilate or to exit. This is yet another reason to theorize assimilation within organizations rather than only at higher levels of analysis, as we mentioned earlier.

### **Demand-Side Theories of Migration and Organizations**

Research on the economic implications of immigration, whether it pertains to organizations or has a more macro focus, is overwhelmingly focused on supply-side issues—or “inputs” that migrants bring to firms, industries, or countries. These include factors like labor, skills, ideas, networks, identities, and more. This emphasis should be apparent from the first half of this essay.

But immigrants also have a profound influence on the demand side of markets and economies, in at least three important ways. First, and most obviously, more people in the economy means more consumers that raise aggregate demand. Second, immigrant groups introduce demand for new goods and services that they used to consume in their homelands, such as foods, cultural products, or leisure activities novel to the receiving location. Over time, some native-born people also begin to consume these novel goods and services. Third, as the tastes and preferences of natives and immigrants get combined and recombined over time, novel categories of consumption that did not exist in either the sending or receiving location get created (e.g., Tex-Mex food or Australian rules football). The latter two mechanisms are important because they mean that migration does more than just increase the quantity of demand; it also increases its heterogeneity, novelty, and dynamism. Further, because these population-level changes manifest unevenly and uniquely across different geographic subregions of a country or city, migration also creates ever-evolving heterogeneity in the geography of demand.

These simple observations have not been taken seriously enough by scholars—whether in the fields of migration or organizations—but they can have profound implications for theory. Here we provide just two examples of how taking migration-induced demand heterogeneity can enrich and challenge extant organizational theory.

von Hippel (1986, 2006) introduced the concept of user innovation by positing that users themselves—especially “lead users”—are key sources of product and process innovations because they frequently develop or modify products to suit their unique needs before firms do. The notion of “lead users” primarily focuses on individuals or specialized (usually small) communities of users whose needs are ahead of the general market. Immigrant communities may serve as another type of lead user, although the impetus is more likely to arise at the group or population level than at the individual level.

For instance, an immigrant population from a developing country residing in a wealthy country might have extremely high standards for mobile money solutions that were already popular in their home country, where traditional banking was not the norm. Or they may push a firm to introduce an entirely new product line that better reflects their bespoke needs—which over time is adopted by the wider market as the advantages of the new service become apparent. Thus, migrants might function as “transnational lead users,” adding a geographic dimension to von Hippel's theory by bringing customer-specific knowledge of advanced solutions from their home markets. An interesting question stemming from this possibility is whether leading or lagging firms are more likely to be attentive to the cutting-edge needs of migrant groups. Given that those needs are initially unusual or seen as exotic, we posit that transnational lead users present opportunities for lagging firms to leapfrog leading firms.

This latter possibility brings us to other literature that could benefit from taking the demand-side dynamics of migration seriously. A central question in the field of entrepreneurship is where business opportunities come from, with a large debate on whether entrepreneurs create or discover such opportunities (Eckhardt and Shane 2003). The temporal changes in the quantity and variety of demand created by the arrival of different immigrant waves, across varied geographies, seem like a ripe variable to consider for scholars interested in this issue. Obviously, not all changes on the demand side of the economy induced by migration result in new businesses. Thus, when do entrepreneurs versus incumbents seize such opportunities? If it is an entrepreneur, when is it an immigrant versus a native founder who capitalizes on the chance? What factors determine which entrepreneurs “see” those opportunities? Note that this goes beyond simply studying immigrant entrepreneurs, raising interesting theoretical issues for the entrepreneurship field more generally.

### **Organizations as Complements or Substitutes to Other Factors**

Another area in which further theoretical development appears promising is identifying conditions under which organizations serve as complements or substitutes for

other (nonorganizational) factors that influence the impact or experiences of migrants. Although the focus of our special issue is the organizational context, we recognize that prior research has explored other important conditions that affect the impact or experiences of migrants. These include, but are not limited to, immigration policy (Massey and Pren 2012, Glennon 2024a), the immigrant's skill level (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017), the immigrant's status or visa type upon arrival (e.g., humanitarian, work-related, student, family reunification, undocumented) (Card 1990, Orrenius and Zavodny 2005), the availability of a conational or coethnic community or enclave (Wilson and Portes 1980, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), housing availability and other infrastructure that determine congestion in the receiving location (Saiz 2007), or public attitudes toward and perceptions of immigrants (e.g., xenophobia) (Quillian 1995, Wang 2015).

We envision that future theoretical insights can develop by studying how the organizational context interacts with these other factors. In some cases, organizations may strengthen the effect of those other factors; in other cases, organizations may weaken such effects. For example, immigrants have a more difficult time integrating into communities where xenophobia is prevalent. This negatively affects their ability to find employment, to integrate into the workplace, and the speed and direction of social assimilation. But these "average" outcomes of xenophobia are likely to be meaningfully enhanced or diminished based on a variety of organizational factors. A firm with prior experience of hiring immigrant workers—or workers of the focal immigrants' same nationality—is likely to attenuate the negative effects because the firm will be less prejudicial at the point of hiring or may have practices that are more welcoming than the rest of the community. This, in turn, may help the immigrant achieve a more successful social and psychological integration process by enabling the formation of social relationships with coworkers who are less prejudicial than the average resident of the receiving community. The presence of foreign firms, especially MNCs from the same home country as the immigrant (e.g., Hyundai in Alabama for Korean residing in that state), is likely to have a similar attenuating effect.

This example reflects just one of many possibilities, of course. To offer more specific directions for future research, we believe that additional theoretical advancement on the role of organizations and migrants is necessary. Nevertheless, we believe that this would be a fruitful ground for theoretical advancement.

## Conclusion

Migration has long been and will remain a defining phenomenon for societies and economies. As this essay has

demonstrated, migration and organizations are deeply intertwined: Organizations act as central arenas where migration's economic, social, and institutional effects materialize; and migrants, in turn, shape the organizations they join or create. Despite extensive research on migration in adjacent disciplines, organizational scholars have largely been absent from these conversations, limiting both theoretical and empirical advancements in understanding how migration functions within and through organizations. This gap represents both a missed opportunity and a fertile ground for future research.

Taking organizations (and their heterogeneity) seriously can enrich the migration literature by providing a path to explain a variety of mechanisms to explain theories and empirical findings documented by more "macro" or "micro" research in other disciplines. Taking migration seriously promises to enrich organizational theory by forcing it to reconsider of fundamental assumptions about issues pertaining to firm boundaries, workplace interactions, individual identity, talent mobility, innovation, and more—not to mention the possibility of discovering entirely new theoretical concepts.

The implications of this research agenda extend beyond academic discourse. As policymakers grapple with migration's economic and social consequences, insights from organizational research can inform debates on immigration policy, workforce integration, talent management, economic growth, and more. Organizational insights can especially help policymakers understand the mechanism by which policies may be effective in producing desired outcomes at higher levels of analysis—such as the economy or society. Business leaders must also recognize that migration is not just a labor market phenomenon but a strategic issue that deeply influences individual and team behavior, innovation, investment, market demand, and ultimately firm performance.

If the National Academies of Science continue to follow the practice of releasing a major report on the state of the immigration literature every 20 years, then the year 2037 presents an opportunity for organizational scholars. Will we have something to say about one of the most important phenomena impacting societies and economies? We hope this essay—and the papers in the special issue it accompanies—can serve as inspiration for organizational scholars to be more engaged in helping us understand the causes and effects of cross-national migration. This effort will advance our field by producing new organizational theories and timely empirical regularities, while making our field more relevant to policymakers and the public.

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