

Abstract

Purpose of this paper:

Expatriate workforces are growing as a result of globalisation and the considerable cost associated with expatriation is a strong incentive to identify which employees are most likely to adjust to the host nation. One area relevant to cross-cultural adjustment is interpersonal needs. The theory of Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) as measured by the FIRO-B (Behaviour) may offer insights as to the relationship between interpersonal needs and cross-cultural adjustment.

Design/methodology/approach

One-hundred and eighty paper and pencil measures of the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation – Behaviour (FIRO-B) and Expatriate Adjustment Scales (General, Work, and Interaction) were distributed via informed international associates and convenience and snowball sampling. One-hundred and twelve expatriates from the United Kingdom (44%), South Africa (22%) and India (20%) returned completed questionnaires.

Findings

Expatriates with higher levels of wanted affection were higher on all subscales of cross-cultural adjustment. Those who wanted and expressed the need for inclusion were significantly higher in interaction adjustment while those who expressed and wanted control were less adjusted to work.

Research limitations/implications (if applicable):

The cross-sectional design limits the extent to which these findings can be interpreted as causal and the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the underlying theoretical premise would strongly support the hypothesised directional relationships in the normal population. Common method via self-report may inflate inter-relationship but cannot explain the interaction effects identified. A number of factors beyond the scope of this study may play a fundamental role including cultural similarity.

Practical implications

Whilst not predictive, and acknowledging that environmental factors may vary, these results give an indication that interpersonal needs are related to successful adjustment in expatriates. As such these findings could be used to help inform the recruitment and training of expatriates in areas of interpersonal interaction taking into consideration intrapersonal needs.

What is original/value of paper:

No study to date has explored the inter-relationship between the interpersonal needs and expatriate adjustment. This is the first paper to do so and identify that there is a significant association between expatriate's motives for interaction and their level of cross-cultural adjustment.

Introduction

With globalisation comes an increasing need for the global mobility of employees. Although multi-national corporations (MNCs) leverage virtual teams,

short-term relocations, and local recruitment to meet the growing global demands (PWC, 2006), the use of an expatriate workforce continues to grow (GMAC, 2008). Despite the impact of the global financial crisis, 46% of MNCs expected an increase in international assignments and 36% expected them to remain unchanged in the near future (Towers Watson & Worldwide ERC, 2012).

Although there are considerable challenges with measuring the return on investment of international assignments there is less debate regarding the associated high costs (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012; McNulty, De Cieri, & Hutchings, 2013). The logistical costs of accommodation, insurance, flights, visas, recruitment and training (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008), contribute to first year costs which have been estimated at between two and half and three times the base salary of an equivalent local worker (Harris, Brewster & Sparrow, 2003; McGoldrick, 1997; Wederspahn, 1992). More recent estimates suggest that expatriates cost a premium of 68% over domestic workers (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012), as a result organisations are increasingly motivated to reduce the cost differential (Dickmann & Baruch, 2011).

Much has also been made of the high levels of premature repatriation of expatriates, estimated to be anywhere between 16-50% (Birdseye & Hill, 1995; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), although recent estimates are much lower in the region of 4% (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012). Although early repatriation is often used as an indicator of failure, this underestimates the negative impact of poorly performing expatriates who stay (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Doherty & Dickmann, 2012). One factor consistently shown to be positively associated with expatriates' intentions to complete assignments is cross-cultural

adjustment (e.g. Gregerson & Black, 1990; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003).

Cross-cultural adjustment

The multi-dimensional model of cross-cultural adjustment consisting of general, work, and interaction adjustment, proposed by Black (1988) and Black and Stephens (1989), continues to be the model of choice in expatriate research. General adjustment incorporates situational factors that are important to the expatriate's physical and psychological well-being, including living and housing conditions. Work adjustment concerns the extent to which the expatriate adapts to their assigned role or job, including responsibilities, expectations, and performance standards. Lastly, interaction adjustment refers to the degree of comfort and satisfaction experienced with interacting and socialising with host country nationals (HCNs).

Interaction adjustment is inhibited by communication barriers that go well beyond language differences including latent and connotative meanings (Usunier, 2011; Wlotoko & Federmeier, 2012), and nonverbal behaviours, such as body movement, posture, proximity, facial expressions, and eye contact (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2010; Knapp, 2012). Cultural barriers also exist such as ignorance of cultural conventions, status differences, and differences in the definitions and expectations of friendship (Peltokorpi & Clausen, 2011).

Positive social interactions with HCNs are, however, a necessary condition for effective adjustment and are considered by some researchers as crucial and decisive in the adjustment process (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Proficiency in

initiating relationships results in greater information exchange which in turn reduces uncertainty and anxiety, and allows for the development of intercultural competence (Graf & Harland, 2005). Research suggests that for interaction adjustment and job performance network density is less important than the frequency of interactions, depth of relationships, trust, and contact quality (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003; Liu & Shaffer, 2005). In other words, quality rather than rather quantity of HCN interactions facilitates effective expatriate adjustment.

Beyond a survival level of language ability, it appears that willingness and desire to communicate, combined with social orientation and the ability to establish relationships, determine expatriates' interaction adjustment (Meddenhall & Oddou, 1985). Although extraversion has been associated with frequency of contact, social support, and interaction adjustment (Johnson et al., 2003; Ramalu, Rose, Uli & Samy, 2010; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006), and negatively with expatriates' intentions to terminate assignments early (Caligiuri, 2000), there is limited research exploring the motivations of expatriates to form relationships with HCNs (Johnson, Kristof-Brown, & Klein, 2003). One model that does examine the motives underlying interactions is the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation – Behaviour (FIRO-B; Ryan, 1977).

FIRO-B and adjustment

Despite the popularity of Emotional Intelligence (e.g. Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2004), the FIRO-B continues to be used in contexts where interpersonal

relationships are critical for success, including teambuilding (Fisher, Macrosson, & Semple, 2001), virtual teams (Jenster, 2009), coaching (Cerny, Smith, Ritschard & Dodd, 2007), and leadership (Jenster & Steiler, 2011). The FIRO-B inventory was designed to measure an individual's relationships with others via an assessment of their interpersonal needs in the domains of *inclusion*, *control*, and *affection*, which are measured in terms of behaviour directed towards others (*expressed*) and towards themselves (*wanted*; Ryan, 1977; Schutz, 1977; Waterman & Rogers, 2004).

Inclusion refers to the individual's social orientation and the extent to which a person associates with others. *High expressed inclusion* indicates that the individual is more comfortable in social environments while *low expressed inclusion* suggests the individual is uncomfortable around people. As social interaction, especially with HCNs, is imperative for interaction adjustment, it is expected that *expressed inclusion* will be positively associated with adjustment.

High wanted inclusion is interpreted as the individual having a greater need to be accepted and belong, while *low wanted inclusion* suggests greater is selectivity with regards to who they establish relationships with. Unsurprisingly, extraversion is positively associated with both expressed and wanted inclusion (Furnham, 2008). Expatriates with greater motivation to integrate into the new culture would be expected to more readily initiate contact with HCNs and as a consequence experience greater levels of adjustment. It is therefore hypothesised that there will be a positive association between *wanted inclusion* and adjustment.

High expressed control suggests that the individual is comfortable taking

responsibility while *low expressed control* reflects a desire to avoid decision making. Expatriates are generally employed as a result of their established expertise in areas that HCNs cannot provide suggesting that they are comfortable working in positions of influence. Furthermore, culture shock is often associated with a perceived lack of control and anxiety associated with a lack of understanding of the cultural norms (Lombard, 2014). Expatriates who are uncomfortable with making decisions and taking responsibility are unlikely to adjust to situations that require leadership as a result of their expertise and position within the organisation. As such, *expressed control* is expected to be positively associated with adjustment.

High wanted control reflects a disposition to accept control from others while *low wanted control* indicates that the individual does not want others to control them. Extraversion has been shown to be positively associated with expressed control but has no relationship with wanted control (Furnham, 2008). Furthermore, expatriates are often required to exercise self-control, especially in relation to work demands (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). The expatriate who demonstrates a need to be controlled is unlikely to be able to adjust to new cultures where they have to be self-directed. In extreme cases expatriates who do not wish to be controlled may be unwilling to co-operate with HCNs and as a consequence may fail to adjust to the new culture. *Wanted control* is therefore hypothesised to be negatively associated with overall adjustment.

Affection reflects the extent to which an individual becomes emotionally involved and is concerned with the need to establish meaningful relationships. Unsurprisingly it is positively associated with extraversion and facets of

agreeableness (Furnham, 2008). *Low expressed affection* suggests that the individual is less comfortable establishing close and intimate relationships while *high expressed affection* indicates that the individual is more driven to establish meaningful relationships. Cross-cultural interactions are predicated on establishing relations with HCNs, consequently *expressed affection* is hypothesised to be positively associated with adjustment.

Individuals with higher levels of *wanted affection* are comfortable when others initiate relationships while *lower wanted affection* suggests selectivity in establishing relationships and lower emotional involvement. Expatriates who are comfortable when HCNs attempt to interact with them are likely to gain a greater depth of understanding of the host culture. Consequently *wanted affection* is expected to be positively related to overall adjustment. Table 1 below summarises the direction of the hypothesised relationships between FIRO-B and adjustment as discussed.

Table 1: Summary of the hypothesised relationship between overall adjustment and the FIRO-B.

	Expressed			Wanted		
	Inclusion	Control	Affection	Inclusion	Control	Affection
Adjustment	+	+	+	+	-	+

Method

Procedure & Participants

Questionnaires were distributed to 180 expatriates using convenience

and snowball sampling and informed international associates. One hundred and twelve completed FIRO-B and Expatriate Adjustment Scales were received representing a response rate of 62%. Participants ranged between 17 to 56 years (M=35.7, SD=10.5; 61% female, 39% male) with 82% married and 4% accompanied by a partner. The sample represented seven home nations (UK (44%); South Africa (22%), India (20%), USA (7%), AUS & NZ (7%).

Measures

FIRO-B. Ryan's (1977) 54-item questionnaire measured the six dimensions of personal interaction, based on expressed and wanted needs rated on a 6-point rating scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*usually*): *expressed inclusion* (e.g. I try to be with people), *wanted inclusion* (e.g. I like people to invite me to things), *expressed control* (e.g. I try to influence strongly other people's actions), *wanted control* (e.g. I let other people control my actions), *expressed affection* (e.g. I try to be friendly to people), *wanted affection* (I like people to act close toward me).

Cross-cultural Adjustment: The three components of adjustment were measured using a twenty-item, 7-point rating scale from 1 (*not at all adjusted*) to 7 (*very well adjusted*) constructed using items identified by Black (1988) and Black and Stephens (1989). Eleven items measured general adjustment to the cost of living, health care, housing conditions, and living conditions in general. Five items measured work adjustment relating to job responsibilities, working with host country workers, performance standards, supervisory responsibilities, and planning responsibilities. Interaction adjustment was measured using three

items concerning socialising, speaking and interacting with HCNs.

Results

Normality and common method

Skew and Kurtosis were within the accepted range of +1/-1 for all scales with the exception of Job Adjustment where Kurtosis was 1.15. Visual inspection of the histograms indicated that although the sample was generally well adjusted the responses approximated a normal distribution. Harman's single factor test which forces all items to load onto one factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) did not account for the majority of variance (18.63%) thus no general factor arising from common method is apparent. Furthermore, common method bias is unable to explain interaction effects (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010).

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, inter-correlations and Cronbach's alphas for the study variables. Three of the six explicitly hypothesised relationships were supported. The correlations between *wanted control* and adjustment ($r=-.19$, $p=.05$) and *expressed inclusion* and adjustment ($r=.17$, $p=.08$) both approached significance in the hypothesised direction. Although the relationship between *expressed control* and adjustment was non-significant *expressed control* was significantly negatively correlated with work adjustment.

Path Analysis

On the basis of the significant correlations reported in Table 3 an exploratory analysis of the relationship between adjustment and the FIRO-B was conducted

using AMOS 21.0. Goodness of Fit indices indicate a good approximation to the data with non-significant Chi-Squared ($\chi^2 = 31.74$, $df=2$, $p=.062$), Normal Fit Index ((NFI) =.89, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) =.96, and the Root Mean Square Error of Application (RMSEA) =.048 (Arbuckle, 2011). As illustrated in Figure 1, *wanted affection* was positively associated with all three components of adjustment, and *wanted* and *expressed control* were negatively associated with work adjustment.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas and Pearson's correlations coefficients for expatriate adjustment and the FIRO-B.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Adjustment Overall ⁺	5.19	0.79	(.87)									
2. General Adjustment	5.24	0.90	.90**	(.81)								
3. Interaction Adjustment	4.55	1.34	.57**	.24*	(.89)							
4. Work adjustment	5.50	0.94	.79**	.57**	.35**	(.84)						
5. Expressed Affection	33.68	6.54	.27**	.25**	.14	.22*	(.80)					
6. Expressed Control	26.11	7.24	-.09	.03	.01	-.36**	.09	(.89)				
7. Expressed Inclusion	32.80	6.70	.17	.09	.26**	.12	.60**	.25**	(.81)			
8. Wanted Affection	39.27	7.01	.36**	.29**	.28**	.31**	.67**	-.04	.53**	(.86)		
9. Wanted Control	25.48	6.31	-.19	-.16	-.03	-.25**	.07	.08	.23*	-.02	(.82)	
10. Wanted Inclusion	35.82	7.58	.21*	.14	.28**	.13	.48**	.27**	.59**	.61**	.08	(.93)

Note: + = Adjustment Overall is derived from the average of general, interaction and work adjustment, Cronbach's Alpha in parentheses on the diagonal, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$

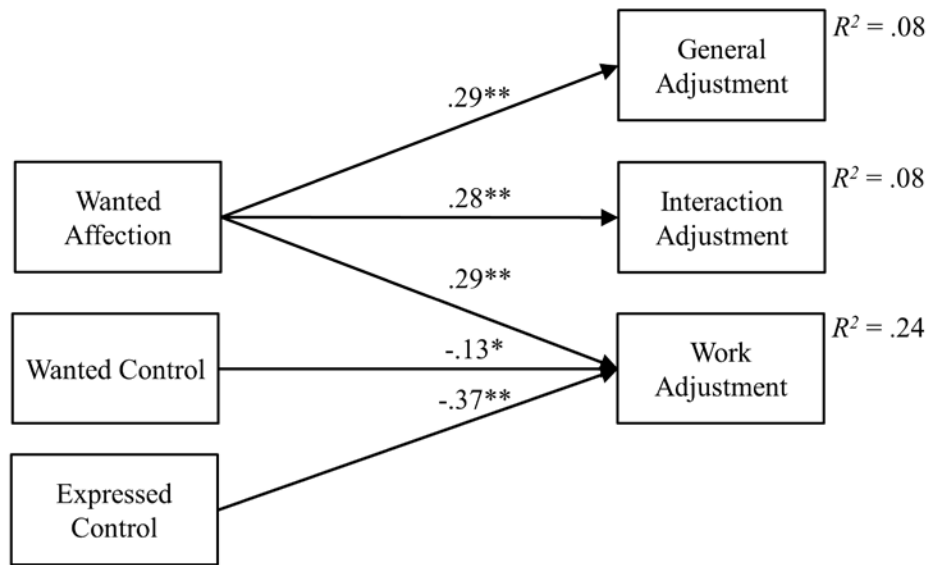


Figure 1. Path model of the relationships between cross-cultural adjustment and the FIRO-B.

Discussion

Expressed and wanted affection and adjustment

Of the six FIRO-B scales *expressed* and *wanted affection* had the strongest positive associations with overall adjustment and the centrality of *wanted affection* to all aspects of adjustment was further supported via the path analysis. As hypothesised expatriates with a higher need for close relationships experience greater adjustment than those who are emotionally distant. It is however surprising that *expressed affection* was not significantly related to interaction adjustment. A closer examination of the *expressed affection* and interaction adjustment scales suggests the latter is concerned with the extent to which expatriates are adjusted to and feel comfortable with interacting with HCNs, while *expressed affection* is concerned with the establishment of close

relationships. In the context of international assignments it is conceivable that individuals could feel comfortable interacting but have no, or limited, desire to establish close relationships. Given the transitory nature of many expatriate assignment this may act as a protective, coping, strategy.

As anticipated work adjustment was positively associated with *expressed affection*. The expatriate is in many respects an outside agent within the host nation organisation. The individual with low *expressed affection* is more cautious about establishing personal relationships. Central to adjusting to new employment situations is the establishment of congruent relationships with co-workers. The distant and emotionally removed individual conceivably has difficulty establishing meaningful relationships with co-workers. This can give rise to problems such as reduced authority and respect that are more consequential in novel situations where responsibilities and performance expectations are ambiguous (van Dijke, De Cremer, & Mayer, 2010).

By establishing relationships, particularly with other expatriates as is often the case (Church, 1982), ambiguous and novel information is more likely to be explained within a familiar cultural framework. This may explain, in part, why many expatriate relationships are with HCNs who have prior experience of the expatriate culture. In effect, friendships enable learning within the novel environment, leading to greater understanding and comfort with the general environment.

Less adjusted expatriates appear to have the typical profile of 'the pessimist'. They are cautious when expressing affection, uncomfortable when others do so,

and more pessimistic about the outcome of interactions. In contrast, expatriates with higher levels of adjustment express the typical profile of the ‘warm’ individual who is capable of giving and receiving affection, but does not make excessive emotional demands on their relationships. Consequently, although they express a desire to be accepted, they neither need, nor demand, affection from others. As a result they are more tolerant of unaffectionate and hostile individuals (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014; Ryan, 1977).

Expressed and wanted control and adjustment

Expressed and wanted control were both found to be negatively correlated with work adjustment. This implies that expatriates who like decision making and taking responsibility and making decisions don’t adjust to the same extent as those who are less motivated to control. It is conceivable that the nature of expatriate assignments away from the employee’s established organisational base could limit the confidence and responsibility that is placed in them.

Technological advances have reduced the distance between the organisational centre and the host nation which can restrict the degree to which expatriates can influence and take responsibility for organisational strategy. Furthermore, the increased efficiency and flexibility with which organisations can share information and use expertise from a wider global source (Sultan, 2011), without the need for on-site expatriates also reduces their influence.

Expatriates with higher levels of work adjustment reflect a profile termed the ‘rebel’, typified by striving to communicate an impression of self-sufficiency, adequacy, and dependency (Ryan, 1977). This aligns with Kealey’s (1989)

finding that expatriates demonstrate action-orientated behaviour characterised as being forthright but open when dealing with others, and self-confident with regards to their personal goals and ability to make judgements. On the other hand, expatriates with lower levels of work adjustment express the profile of ‘the matcher’ who, while being capable of decision making, prefer to share responsibility. However, the nature of the sojourn may limit the extent to which expatriates can share responsibility given that they are frequently seconded due to being experts in a specific area and limitations with regards to the extent to which relationships can be established that enable them to delegate effectively.

Expressed and wanted inclusion and adjustment

Expressed and wanted inclusion were both significantly positively associated with interaction adjustment supporting the hypothesis that expatriates who are comfortable in social settings will be more comfortable interacting with HCNs. Interactions provide the opportunity to become familiar with and learn about novel and ambiguous environments with the social support of other expatriates and HCNs, which in turn can influence overall adjustment.

Expatriates with lower levels of interaction adjustment display the profile referred to as ‘the loner’ who are motivated by a fear of rejection, and are therefore selective about associating with others, although they can have a close circle of associates. By restricting the development of relationships with others adjustment can become restricted as it relies on learning about the new culture and being comfortable with the new environment. Relationships, particularly with HCNs, enable the development of greater cultural understanding and acceptance

of the host nation (Liu & Shaffer, 2005).

Adjusted expatriates express "now you see him, now you don't" behaviour. They are social but do not require constant socialisation. They are good at establishing acquaintances, but do not have an overbearing need to be included and can satisfy their needs with a select group of individuals. This enables the expatriate to establish relationships while being unaffected by rejection or the limited number of relationships.

Implications, limitations and future research

The results of this study demonstrate that the individual's motivations for interaction are central to any attempt to explain and predict expatriate adjustment. That is not to say that contextual and demographic factors should be ignored at both a practical and empirical level. Like Kealey (1989), this research suggests that personality may mediate or moderate the influence of contextual and demographic variables on adjustment. However, care should be taken not to overinterpret the results. These results do not allow us to conclude that the expatriate with the highest level of expressed or wanted affection or inclusion will be more adjusted than those with lower levels. Although the results imply that certain levels of these traits are desirable. The importance of any trait will be a function of the demands of the environment and tasks to be accomplished in that environment (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010). Furthermore, cultural distance, or difference, may well influence the extent to which inter-personal relationships are feasible and desirable (). Future research on cross-cultural adjustment, not just in the area of FIRO-B, needs to consider cultural alignment and similarity.

Organisations could benefit by employing caring, sociable employees who express a moderate desire for affection, inclusion and control, but not an overbearing desire to control or be wanted. The process of adjustment can also be conceived as a coping strategy applicable in both the host and home country. Whilst the importance of cross-cultural training is well established (Cerny II, et al., 2007; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992; Morris & Robie, 2001) its relevance to coping strategies has yet to be established let alone whether appropriate affection, inclusion and control behaviours can be learnt within a training programme (Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999).

Only tentative conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study due to the fact that expatriate populations are to a large extent self-selected by the organisation and the employee's desire and willingness to work overseas. When combined with the possibility that there is an over-representation of expatriate survivors it is conceivable that there is restricted variance in the measures. Furthermore, the cross-sectional concurrent design means that conclusions cannot be made about the directionality of the processes involved in adjustment. Although current theoretical understanding of cross-cultural adjustment hypothesises that differences in personality traits cause differences in adjustment, theoretically the reverse could occur. Longitudinal designs could enable the inclusion of a broader sample of expatriates and more definitive conclusions about causal influence. Common method variance may also have arisen as a result of participants providing cognitively consistent responses on both the dependant and independent variables. Future research should explore the use of objective measures of adjustment and related outcomes, for example, the number

and frequency of HCN interactions, absenteeism, performance and turnover.

Conclusions

Expatriate adjustment is an important consideration for the viability of many MNCs who are reliant on a globally mobile workforce. This research contributes to understanding how individuals' preference for interaction with others is related to successful adjustment. The extent to which expatriates are comfortable with other initiating and maintaining relationships seems particularly important to cross-cultural adjustment. Organisations would be advised to consider using information regarding employees' motivation for interaction as part of the selection and training process for expatriates, particularly with regard to wanted affection.

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