Journal of
Global Mobility

The Home of Expatriate Management Research

Volume 7 Number 3 2019

237 Editorial

239 Of ostriches, frogs, birds and lizards: a dynamic framework of cultural identity negotiation strategies in an era of global mobility
Chenchen Li, Ling Eleanor Zhang and Anne-Wil Harzing

255 Satisfaction with an expatriate job: the role of physical and functional distance between expatriate and supervisor
Liisa Mäkelä, Hilpi Kangas and Vesa Suutari

269 Beyond nationality: international experience as a key dimension for subsidiary staffing choices in MNEs
Chipoong Kim, Chul Chung and Chris Brewster

285 Identity, glass borders and globally mobile female talent
Susan Kirk

300 Expatriate time to proficiency: individual antecedents and the moderating effect of home country
Marie-France Waxin, Chris Brewster and Nicolas Ashill

www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/jgm
What is expatriate management?

Expatriate management is a concept that may include two different activities: management of expatriates and management by expatriates. The former includes all the traditional activities undertaken by organizations to manage their assigned expatriates (AEs), from recruitment to repatriation. Management by expatriates is associated with most cross-cultural and other issues that foreign managers encounter in a host location, from language problems and communication difficulties to leadership challenges. These two activities, however, are not mutually exclusive and may actually overlap since many AEs may need support and help from the parent country organization to successfully discharge their managerial duties.

Lately, a host of non-traditional global workers have emerged, such as self-initiated expatriates, inpatriates, international business travelers, short-term assignees and international commuters. Recently, expatriates in non-corporate communities, such as diplomats, academics, international school teachers, international volunteers, military, missionaries and sports professionals have also been studied. Healthcare employees are another type of expatriate group, but despite their growing international importance, they have seldom been investigated. Similarly, the vast numbers of low-status expatriates, from construction workers in the Middle East to domestic helpers in Southeast Asia, have been neglected by scholars. Many of these foreign workers need to be managed and some of them perform management tasks themselves.

This is the emerging picture of expatriate management, from issues with traditional corporate AEs to a plethora of global workers and the challenges they face. With a focus on expatriate management in its widest possible meaning, the *Journal of Global Mobility (JGM)* welcomes research on all forms of expatriates.

A new feature of *JGM* is an Editorial Review Board (ERB) of dedicated specialists within our area performing highly developmental reviews. This is also done in a prompt and timely fashion, underlining the *JGM* policy of a one-month turnaround time for the first submission of a manuscript until a decision is made. This probably makes the journal the fastest in our area. Since *JGM* is the only academic journal to consistently and exclusively focus on global mobility and expatriate management, the slogan that *JGM* is managed by experts for experts becomes ever more true by introducing an expert ERB. Since the journal was launched, the Editorial Advisory Board of *JGM* reads as a Who’s Who in our area and the editorial team and authors are also all specialists.

Recognized as a fast developing newcomer, *JGM* went straight into the second level of the Chartered Association for Business Schools (UK) *Academic Journal Guide 2018*. Before this, *JGM* was indexed in Scopus (CiteScore 2018: 1.93) and ESCI. The journal is also ranked by the Australian ABDC List as a B journal and ranked by the Nordic countries and Brazil.

We have two special issues this year: *The Dark Side of Global Mobility*, edited by Benjamin Bader, Tassilo Schuster, Anna Katharina Bader and Margaret Shaffer and *Low Status Expatriates* edited by Chris Brewster, Washika Haak-Saheem and Jakob Lauring.

The journal is also involved in social media featuring *JGM*-associated content. We have a *JGM* LinkedIn Group, a *JGM* Facebook Group (please contact Yvonne, ymcnulty@expatresearch.com if you want to join) and a Twitter account, @JanSelmer_JGM.

Despite its specialist emphasis, *JGM* publishes a variety of rigorous research methods, thorough theoretical developments and focused literature reviews. We also welcome multi-level studies and research from a variety of academic domains, as well as cross-disciplinary studies.

Unlike many other academic research journals, *JGM* welcomes replication studies. We believe that, as important that it is for science to break new grounds, previous discoveries
must be examined again to reaffirm or disconfirm their existence. Replication studies can be of various forms, where previous results are investigated with same or different methodologies and settings as well as providing extensions of primary research.

In this issue

The first article, authored by Chenchen Li, Ling Eleanor Zhang and Anne-Wil Harzing, is a conceptual paper trying to uncover how employees on international assignments respond to exposure to new cultures. Their unique approach to this well-known topic includes proposing a dynamic framework of cultural identity negotiation strategies by drawing upon exclusionary and integrative reactions theory in cross-cultural psychology. Metaphors for these different types of strategies are introduced: “ostrich” (monocultural strategy), “frog” (multicultural strategy), “bird” (global strategy) and “lizard” (cosmopolitan strategy). The second paper, written by Liisa Mäkelä, Hilpi Kangas and Vesa Suutari, deals with satisfaction with an expatriate job and the link to leadership. Providing new knowledge on leader distance in the context of expatriation, they examine how physical distance and functional distance between expatriate and supervisor are related to expatriate job satisfaction. Based on a sample of 290 Finnish expatriates, results show that low functional distance with a supervisor is related to greater satisfaction with the expatriate job while physical distance is not directly connected. However, among those whose functional distance is low, working in the same country with the leader is linked to greater expatriate satisfaction than among those who were physically distant. Chipoong Kim, Chul Chung and Chris Brewster are the authors of the next contribution to this issue. They propose an integrative typology to identify and classify various types of traditional and alternative subsidiary staffing options and evaluate them in relation to social capital and knowledge flows across multinational organizations. Identifying nine types of subsidiary staffing options, they include and classify traditional and alternative staffing options while highlighting types which need further research. The purpose of the fourth article, written by Susan Kirk, is to explore the interplay between identity and global mobility in the careers of senior, female talent as well as identify the role organizations can play in enabling women to overcome identity constraints. Results based on data from 38 in-depth interviews with senior managers in a large, multinational organization indicate that female talent has more fluid interpersonal boundaries than men, creating on-going identity struggles equivalent to a glass border. The last article in this issue is authored by Marie-France Waxin, Chris Brewster and Nicolas Ashill and deals with how expatriate time to proficiency is associated with individual antecedents but moderated by home country. Results based on survey data from AEs from different countries in India show that social orientation, willingness to communicate, confidence in technical abilities and active stress resistance reduce expatriate time to proficiency but also that the individual antecedents of expatriate time to proficiency vary significantly across home countries suggesting that these antecedents interact with context, here home country.

Expatriate management is becoming a much more varied field of study as well as covering wider ground. By recognizing new phenomena to study within our field, the traditional concept is expanding from AEs to include just about all workers on temporary assignments abroad. This is the amalgamation of global mobility issues and expatriate management that is the essence of what JGM is all about. Our ERB delivers highly developmental reviews in a prompt and timely fashion and the JGM editorial team facilitates your way to a favorable publication decision. You can count on being supported by a dedicated group of specialists making our motto for JGM a reality: managed by experts for experts. And, the very core of JGM is expatriate management, in its widest possible form, making the journal the leading outlet for academic research within this domain.

Jan Selmer
Of ostriches, frogs, birds and lizards
A dynamic framework of cultural identity negotiation strategies in an era of global mobility

Chenchen Li
School of Public Administration, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Chengdu, China

Ling Eleanor Zhang
Institute for International Management, Loughborough University London, London, UK and Department of Management and Organisation, Hanken School of Economics, Helsinki, Finland, and

Anne-Wil Harzing
Business School, Middlesex University, London, UK and Tilburg Institute of Governance, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Abstract
Purpose – In response to the somewhat paradoxical combination of increasing diversity in the global workforce and the resurgence of nationalism in an era of global mobility, the purpose of this paper is to uncover how employees on international assignments respond to exposure to new cultures. Specifically, the paper aims to explicate the underlying psychological mechanisms linking expatriates’ monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategies with their responses toward the host culture by drawing upon exclusionary and integrative reactions theory in cross-cultural psychology.
Design/methodology/approach – This conceptual paper draws on the perspective of exclusionary vs integrative reactions toward foreign cultures – a perspective rooted in cross-cultural psychology research – to categorize expatriates’ responses toward the host culture. More specifically, the study elaborates how two primary activators of expatriates’ responses toward the host culture – the salience of home-culture identity and a cultural learning mindset – explain the relationship between cultural identity negotiation strategies and expatriates’ exclusionary and integrative responses, providing specific propositions on how each type of cultural identity negotiation strategy is expected to be associated with expatriates’ exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture.
Findings – The present study proposes that expatriates’ adoption of a monocultural identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with exclusionary responses toward the host culture and it is negatively associated with integrative responses toward the host culture; expatriates’ adoption of a multicultural identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with both exclusionary responses and integrative responses toward the host culture; expatriates’ adoption of a global identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with exclusionary responses toward the host culture; and expatriates’ adoption of a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with exclusionary responses, and positively associated with integrative responses toward the host culture. The following metaphors for these different types of cultural identity negotiation strategies are introduced: “ostrich” (monocultural strategy), “frog” (multicultural strategy), “bird” (global strategy) and “lizard” (cosmopolitan strategy).
Originality/value – The proposed dynamic framework of cultural identity negotiation strategies illustrates the sophisticated nature of expatriates’ responses to new cultures. This paper also emphasizes that cross-cultural training tempering expatriates’ exclusionary reactions and encouraging integrative reactions is crucial for more effective expatriation in a multicultural work environment.
Keywords Expatriate, Cultural identity, Global identity, Cosmopolitan identity, Exclusionary reactions, Integrative reactions, Multicultural identity
Paper type Conceptual paper
Introduction
In an era characterized by global mobility, there is a resurgence of nationalism and increasingly unsettled international relations between the world’s major political and economic powers. Identifying culturally competent employees for international assignments and tailoring supportive practices for their expatriation have thus become more challenging and critical than ever before (Horak et al., 2019). In the current expatriation literature, there is a strong but unfounded assumption that expatriates are predominantly monocultural (Mao and Shen, 2015). However, according to research in social psychology, an individual’s cultural identity can change as a result of prolonged exposure to more than one culture during primary or secondary socialization (e.g. Berry and Annis, 1974; Hong et al., 2000; LaFromboise et al., 1993). Secondary socialization takes place when people start interacting with a wider range of other social groups, for example during expatriation abroad (Jarvis, 2006). Expatriates are powerful minority groups with access to unique social, economic and public services in the host country, and they have considerable freedom to negotiate their cultural identities (Adams and Van de Vijver, 2015). The recent stream of research on multicultural employees in international business (e.g. Fitzsimmons et al., 2017; Vora et al., 2019) acknowledges that individuals’ cultural identities have become increasingly complex but focuses predominantly on individuals who are from bicultural families, such as American–Chinese and British–Indians, instead of the wider population of internationally mobile workers such as expatriates.

To address this research gap, this paper highlights the notion of choice in conceptualizing cultural identity negotiation strategies of expatriates and explores how organizations can better understand and manage expatriates from a dynamic cultural identity perspective. This paper focuses on corporate expatriates only, because their expatriate duration tends to be relatively standardized. Among self-initiated expatriates on the other hand, the length of exposure to new cultures varies significantly (Mayrhofer et al., 2008). Self-initiated expatriates may also stay in the new culture for a much longer period than the average corporate expatriates (Doherty, 2012). As duration of stay in the new culture is an important factor affecting how individuals develop new cultural identities (Tsai and Pike, 2000), it is thus preferable to not conflate these two types of expatriates.

By examining expatriates’ exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture, this paper proposes a theoretical framework of how expatriates can develop different types of cultural identity negotiation strategies such as monocultural identity negotiation strategy, multicultural identity negotiation strategy, global identity negotiation strategy (Sussman, 2002) and cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy (Levy et al., 2007). Cultural identity is defined as an individual’s perception of belongingness to a cultural group (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Identity negotiation strategies are shaped through both personal choice and environmental forces (Berry, 1997).

Specifically, this study draws upon recent work on globalization in psychology that explicates the psychological processes through which individuals develop exclusionary vs integrative responses toward foreign cultures (Chiu et al., 2011). Exclusionary responses among expatriates are characterized by feelings of stress and anxiety associated with working in the host culture. Exclusionary emotions may further externalize as resistance toward and rejection of host culture employees and knowledge. In contrast, an integrative response leads expatriates to leverage components in the host culture to complement their home culture for a fruitful expatriation experience and future career success. An understanding and appreciation of cultural differences helps expatriates to adjust to and perform well in the host culture (Chen and Starosta, 2000; Fitzsimmons, 2013; Mol et al., 2005), whereas psychological discomfort in the host culture is usually associated with poor mental health, low job performance and withdrawal cognition (Hechanova et al., 2003). Therefore, using the lens of exclusionary and integrative reactions toward the host
culture offers considerable scope for understanding expatriation outcomes. More importantly, the perspective of exclusionary vs integrative reactions explicates the psychological mechanisms linking expatriates’ adoption of different cultural identity negotiation strategies with their exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host and home culture.

This paper makes a number of key contributions. First, it adds to the understanding of expatriates’ cultural identity negotiation strategies by integrating monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan negotiation strategies to articulate their implications for overseas assignments, suggesting that expatriates adopting different strategies vary in their exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture. Second, it contributes to the expatriation literature by explaining how expatriates with different identity negotiation strategies may engage in exclusionary and integrative reactions toward the host culture and why they do so, i.e. the present study identifies the underlying psychological mechanisms. Monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategies vary in terms of the saliency of home cultural identity and the level of cultural learning mindset, thus resulting in differences in expatriates’ responses during overseas assignments.

In the following sections, the paper first reviews the relevant literature on cultural identity and multicultural employees in the context of expatriation success (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). The conceptualizations of monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan cultural identity negotiation strategies are then presented. The paper further introduces exclusionary and integrative reactions toward foreign cultures and specifies how this perspective can be applied in order to understand expatriates’ responses toward the host culture. Subsequently, the study explicates the association between different expatriates’ cultural identity negotiation strategies and their reactions toward the host culture. The paper concludes with theoretical and managerial implications.

Cultural identity, multicultural employees and expatriation success

Cultural identity, as one type of social identity, is a critical predictor of individual behaviors in intercultural settings. How individuals self-define themselves plays an important role in regulating motivation and affects, and in other intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Markus and Wurf, 1987). In fact, research has shown that cultural identity facilitates the processing of certain types of information so that specific cultural knowledge may be cognitively accessible only for those who identify with the culture (Hong et al., 2000). People who identify with one particular culture typically internalize its cultural values, follow its cultural norms and engage in cognitive processes that are consistent with the culture (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Markus, et al., 1996).

There is an increased recognition of the importance of different types of employees in terms of their cultural identities, such as multicultural employees (Fitzsimmons, 2013; Fitzsimmons et al., 2017) and cosmopolitan employees (Levy et al., 2018). Prior literature has investigated the role of these different cultural identities in successful expatriation, including adjustment (Black et al., 1991), job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005) and expatriate turnover (Hom and Griffeth, 1991). Empirical studies in the expatriation literature argue that identification with the host culture potentially facilitates intercultural adjustment and performance because of access to knowledge and skills from multiple cultures, and the ability to switch between cultures (Gillespie et al., 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). However, prior research has also suggested that global and cosmopolitan expatriates, who are culturally independent of the home culture and the host culture, enjoy performance benefits resulting from their openness to multiple cultures and integration across cultures (e.g. Levy et al., 2007; Maddux and Galinsky, 2009). A recent empirical study (Fitzsimmons et al., 2017) found that expatriates with multiple cultural identities have more social capital and display
higher levels of intercultural communication skills. However, this paper argues that developing multiple cultural identity negotiation strategies is not exclusive to a small group of individuals who are born into multicultural families. Instead the wider population of expatriates can learn to negotiate their cultural identities in order to meet the development needs of their work abroad and/or to improve their own psychological well-being.

Moreover, cultural identity is important for MNCs and their employees because the cultural learning associated with a change of cultural identity plays an important role in expatriate adjustment and performance (e.g. Hechanova et al., 2003; Takeuchi, 2010). Individual characteristics that promote the understanding and embracing of cultural differences between the home and host cultures also contribute to successful expatriation. These characteristics are, for example, being culturally sensitive and being humble about one’s culture of origin. A recent empirical study found that being culturally sensitive helps expatriates adjust to the new environment and perform better in the new workplace in which they need to interact with colleagues from a different culture (Bhatti et al., 2013). Individuals who are motivated to appreciate cultural differences are prone to engage in intercultural interaction, and thus become effective intercultural communicators (Chen and Starosta, 2000). By contrast, being ethnocentric, i.e. believing in the superiority of one’s own culture, can significantly reduce expatriate effectiveness in the host culture (Shaffer et al., 2006).

The existing literature on multiculturalism also offers an extended discussion of how differences in identity content (i.e. which culture(s) people identify with) and structure (i.e. whether different cultures are separate or integrated) between multiple cultural identities influence multicultural people’s attitudes, behaviors and intercultural performance (e.g. multicultural identity plurality and integration, Fitzsimmons et al., 2017; bicultural identity integration among bicultural individuals, Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005; Chen et al., 2008; Cheng et al., 2008). These findings shed light on which group of multicultural expatriates are more likely to engage in exclusionary vs integrative reactions toward the host culture. As emphasized throughout this paper, however, we need to redirect our focus from a small group of born multicultural employees to the wider expatriate population.

**Expatriate cultural identity negotiation strategies**

Identity negotiation strategies are shaped as a joint outcome of personal choice and environmental forces (Berry, 1997). Expatriates may adopt a monocultural strategy to maintain their home-culture identity when working in the host country. Expatriates who are assigned to countries with cultural traditions that differ considerably from those of their own may experience severe culture shock (Ward et al., 2001). After the initial shock, some expatriates, especially ethnocentric expatriates, may decide to follow a monocultural identity negotiation strategy (i.e. choosing their home culture in defining self when working in the host culture) and view themselves as foreigners working in a different country, thus connecting their self-identities to their home culture and not identifying with the host culture (Shaffer et al., 2006).

Expatriates may also temporarily ascribe to new cultural identities through their experience with multiple cultures. Some may employ a multicultural strategy, identifying with their home culture as well as the host culture. As Berry (1997) proposed, maintaining the home cultural identity while being receptive to the host (receiving) culture is a common acculturation strategy when adapting to a new cultural environment. For instance, some American expatriates begin to feel “more” Japanese some time into their assignment in Japan (Sussman, 2002).

In their negotiation of cultural identities, expatriates are not restricted to a choice between their home culture and the host culture. Globalization has witnessed the rise of international connectedness and the birth of global citizens – those who accept the world’s
global interdependence and hence develop a strong sense of belongingness to a global community that transcends national boundaries (Arnett, 2002; Erez and Gati, 2004). Those who appreciate similarities and universalism across cultures tend to adopt a global identity negotiation strategy – employing neither the home culture nor the host culture to define self. Expatriates following a global identity negotiation strategy endorse a universal set of values, for example, mutual respect and protection of human rights (Appiah, 2006), and/or environmental responsibility and ethical behaviors (Shokef and Erez, 2006). These universal values then guide expatriates during overseas assignments and allow them to maintain a global lifestyle anywhere in the world. MNCs with operations that span the world are usually keen to employ expatriates with a global mindset, especially for strategic business functions (e.g. Hong and Doz, 2013).

Expatriates who employ a cosmopolitan strategy are culturally independent from the home and host culture yet are willing to engage with the host culture. Similar to global expatriates, cosmopolitans detach themselves from both their home culture and the host culture during their overseas assignments. Yet they perceive themselves as consumers of cultures and value their engagement with the host culture (Adams and van de Vijver, 2015; Holt, 1997). As such, cosmopolitans are always ready to participate as members in a given culture and to detach themselves from the home culture (Adler, 1977). Different from their counterparts who employ a global identity, expatriates who adopt a cosmopolitan identity strategy do not subscribe to universal values. An open and non-judgmental stance to any culture enables cosmopolitan expatriates to obtain information from many sources without referring to national or cultural origin. Cosmopolitan expatriates are usually good at learning new languages and fitting into a variety of different cultures (Brimm, 2010).

Thus far, the paper has introduced the concepts of monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan cultural identity negotiation strategies among expatriates. Individuals can position themselves purposefully and thus navigate among various cultural identity negotiation strategies in different contexts (Roccas and Brewer, 2002; Hanek et al., 2014). The adoption of these cultural identity strategies is thus dynamic and context dependent. In the following section, this paper will elaborate on the perspective of exclusionary and integrative reactions toward foreign cultures and how this perspective can be applied so as to understand expatriates’ responses toward the host culture.

Exclusionary vs integrative reactions

Introducing the perspective of exclusionary vs integrative reactions

People may develop exclusionary or integrative reactions toward foreign cultures after being exposed to the mixing of components from their own culture and foreign cultures (Chiu et al., 2011). Exclusionary reactions include negative affects (e.g. anger and hatred) and the rejection of foreign cultures. An example of an exclusionary reaction is the public protest in Beijing against the opening of a Starbucks Coffee Shop (perceived by Chinese people as an iconic American coffee shop) in the Forbidden City, an iconic historical site representing Chinese culture (Chiu et al., 2011). The salience of an individual’s home cultural identity is positively associated with exclusionary reactions toward foreign cultures, because a salient home cultural identity heightens an individual’s awareness of intercultural differences in scenarios of cultural mixing (Chiu and Cheng, 2007). It further highlights the potential that foreign cultures may be seen to contaminate the integrity and purity of one’s own home culture, thus activating negative emotional reactions toward foreign cultures (Torrelli et al., 2011). Therefore, people may engage in rejection of or even aggression toward foreign cultural icons and commercial brands.

In contrast, individuals may welcome the alien elements from foreign cultures brought in by globalization, and even actively integrate those elements with those of their own culture. Such positive affects (e.g. admiration) and acceptance toward foreign cultures are
labeled as integrative reactions. Starbucks’ introduction of snow-skin mooncakes in Singapore during the Mid-Autumn Festival is an example of innovative integration of the American coffee culture with a flavor of Chinese tradition. Individuals with a cultural learning mindset pay attention to distinctive sets of values and knowledge rooted in foreign cultures, and consequently are likely to integrate novel components for problem solving. Leung and Chiu (2008) noticed that when exposed to foreign cultures, individuals who are open to new cultures provided more creative solutions. Exposure to cultural mixing may thus activate integrative reactions toward foreign cultures among individuals with a cultural learning mindset.

Expatriate responses toward the host culture

Working in the host culture constantly presents expatriates with the cultural mixing of their own home culture and the host culture. The host cultural components are embedded in their working and living environment during their overseas assignments. At the same time, expatriates experience the home culture through their contact with family members, friends and colleagues in the home culture. Expatriates themselves may also serve as carriers of the home culture. Exposure to the cultural mixing of home culture and host culture may activate the two distinctive categories of responses discussed above: exclusionary and integrative reactions toward the host culture. Table 1 summarizes the major differences between these two types of responses.

Exclusionary reactions toward the host culture are influenced by the stress and anxiety arising from living and working in a new cultural environment. Difficulties in understanding and controlling others’ behaviors may cause expatriates to perceive the overseas assignment as disruptive. Given that expectations in terms of working styles and interpersonal norms might diverge between their home culture and the host culture or even be opposite in nature, expatriates are likely to experience uncertainty and conflict. Empirical research supports the view that role ambiguity and role conflict are primary sources of maladjustment and performance deficits during expatriation (e.g. Bhaskarshrinivas et al., 2005; Kawai and Mohr, 2015). To manage the uncertainty rooted in the host culture, expatriates might respond by minimizing the interaction with host culture employees and other carriers of the host culture. Rejection of the host culture further induces frustration and stress as expatriates are still expected to conduct business in locally accepted ways. These exclusionary reactions are likely to result in failure to adjust and a premature return from their assignment (Aycan, 1997; Shaffer et al., 1999). Therefore, expatriates’ exclusionary responses toward the host culture have clear negative implications for expatriate adjustment and job performance during overseas assignments.

Integrative reactions toward the host culture are goal-oriented actions that aim to solve problems by integrating cognitive resources located in the host culture. Expatriates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I.</th>
<th>Expatriates’ exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusionary responses</td>
<td>Integrative responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional responses to uncertainty associated with the host culture</td>
<td>Goal-oriented reactions to solve problems with new knowledge in the host culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of working in the host culture: disruptive conflicts</td>
<td>Perception of working in the host culture: growth opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative intercultural affects: stress, anxiety</td>
<td>Positive intercultural affects: admiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusionary behavioral reactions:</td>
<td>Integrative behavioral reactions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation from local employees</td>
<td>Active interactions with local employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of local culture</td>
<td>Learning about local language and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural rejection</td>
<td>Creative integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High salience of home culture identity</td>
<td>A cultural learning mindset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
displaying integrative reactions perceive working in the host country as an opportunity for personal growth and future career advancement. They show admiration and appreciation toward the host culture, thus further engaging with host culture employees and learning about the host culture. Interaction with host culture members is an effective way to acquire knowledge about culturally appropriate behaviors (Caligiuri, 2000). In addition, expatriates’ integrative reactions help them to enhance learning during their expatriation as a result of new job roles, new performance standards and expectations from the host subsidiaries, all of which are critical to expatriate adjustment and performance (Gong and Fan, 2006; Kramer et al., 2001). Integrative responses also facilitate the development of global leadership skills, as best practices from various host cultures can be synthesized and novel resolutions can be developed as a consequence. In sum, expatriates’ integrative reactions toward the host culture have positive implications for expatriates’ individual performance, subjective well-being in the host culture, as well as the subsidiary performance as a whole.

Psychological mechanisms underlying expatriates’ responses toward cultures
The salience of home cultural identity, i.e., the dominance of the home cultural identity in one’s self perception, and a cultural learning mindset, i.e., a set of favorable attitudes that an individual holds toward intercultural learning (Chiu et al., 2011), serve as the main activators of expatriates’ exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture. When the home cultural identity is salient, the home culture becomes the most accessible lens through which expatriates process and categorize information (Chiu et al., 2011). Simultaneous exposure to two different cultures elevates perceived cultural incompatibility and highlights the different characteristics of these two cultures (Torrelli et al., 2011); this is likely to cause a sense of uncertainty among expatriates. The salience of home cultural identity further guides expatriates’ attribution of perceived stress and anxiety to the host culture. For instance, expatriates may make unfavorable comparisons between the host culture and their home culture (Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005). A salient home cultural identity is therefore likely to activate expatriates’ exclusionary reactions toward the host culture.

Expatriates with a cultural learning mindset are open and curious about the host culture and are keen to acquire cultural knowledge for effective intercultural performance. Appreciation and an understanding of cultural differences between the home and host culture promote appropriate intercultural communication (Chen and Starosta, 2000) and expatriate job performance (Mol et al., 2005). In addition, living and working in the host culture presents alien experiences in numerous domains, from cultural rituals and language to recreational activities. A cultural learning mindset encourages expatriates to expose themselves to distinctive or even opposing opinions and experiences rooted in the host culture. Attempts at the integration of novel components from foreign cultures nurtures cognitive complexity – a cognitive ability that helps people to capitalize on the creativity benefits embedded in multicultural experiences (Tadmor et al., 2012). Therefore, expatriates with a cultural learning mindset are more likely to engage in integrative reactions toward the host culture.

Thus far, the paper has articulated how the perspective of exclusionary and integrative reactions toward foreign cultures can be applied to understand expatriates’ responses toward the host culture. Next, the paper will discuss how expatriates’ adoption of monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategies is associated with their exclusionary and integrative reactions to the host culture.

Identity negotiation strategies and expatriates’ responses toward cultures
The two activators of exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture – the salience of home cultural identity and a cultural learning mindset – differentiate monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan strategies among expatriates, thus
serving as the inter-mediary mechanism linking cultural identity negotiation strategies and expatriates’ responses. The associations between expatriates’ identity negotiation strategies and their exclusionary and integrative reactions are summarized in Figure 1. An animal analogy (Harzing, 2001) is included for each cultural identity negotiation strategy to illustrate and clarify the differences between the four strategies.

Of ostriches: the monocultural strategy and expatriate responses toward the host culture

Expatriates adopting a monocultural identity negotiation strategy rely on the values and behavioral norms rooted in their home cultures to guide them when working in the host country. This is labelled as the “ostrich” strategy. The ostrich is chosen as an analogy, because it symbolizes the image of an individual burying their head in the sand and ignoring the host culture. The cognitive closed-mindedness associated with a monocultural strategy inhibits expatriates from engaging in integrative reactions toward the host culture, thus preventing expatriates from being able to leverage knowledge and practices in the host culture for creative benefits and the development of global leadership skills. Expatriates employing a monocultural strategy tend to have a salient home cultural identity and lack a cultural learning mindset toward the host culture. Therefore, expatriates employing a monocultural identity negotiation strategy are more likely to develop exclusionary responses and are less likely to engage in integrative responses toward the host culture:

P1a. Expatriates’ adoption of a monocultural identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with their exclusionary responses toward the host culture.

P1b. Expatriates’ adoption of a monocultural identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with their integrative responses toward the host culture.

Of frogs: the multicultural strategy and expatriate responses toward the host culture

A multicultural identity negotiation strategy refers to expatriates choosing to identify with the host culture while maintaining their home cultural identity. This is labelled as the “frog” strategy, because frogs can live both in the water and on the land. Expatriates following a multicultural strategy are receptive to internalizing the host culture, while at the same time maintaining their home culture as an important part of their self-identity. The cultural

![Figure 1. The associations between cultural identity negotiation strategies and expatriate responses.](image-url)
mixing of the home culture with the host culture during expatriation therefore activates exclusionary responses toward the host culture. Yet, expatriates employing a multicultural strategy are also willing to acquire and internalize values and knowledge of the host culture; the cultural learning mindset among expatriates following a multicultural identity negotiation strategy activates expatriates’ integrative reactions toward the host culture. Therefore, cultural mixing of the home and host cultures may activate both exclusionary and integrative responses among expatriates who employ a multicultural identity negotiation strategy in the host culture:

P2a. Expatriates’ adoption of a multicultural identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with their exclusionary responses toward the host culture.

P2b. Expatriates’ adoption of a multicultural identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with their integrative responses toward the host culture.

This paper does not propose that expatriates employing a multicultural strategy display exclusionary and integrative responses at the same time. Whether exclusionary or integrative responses are activated among these expatriates depends on the perceived compatibility between their home culture and the host culture (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos, 2005). When expatriates perceive the host culture to be in conflict with their home culture, their multicultural strategy is dominated by a salient home culture identity, leading to exclusionary responses toward the host culture. On the contrary, perceived harmony between the home culture and the host culture elevates the role of cultural learning mindset in a multicultural strategy, thus activating integrative response. However, a full articulation of the antecedents to exclusionary vs integrative responses or the role of perceived compatibility between the home and host cultures in responses toward the host culture lies outside the scope of this paper.

Of birds: the global strategy and expatriate responses toward the host culture

Using a global identity negotiation strategy enables expatriates to work and socialize in the host culture through deploying universal work styles and communication patterns across cultures. The global identity negotiation strategy is represented with the metaphor of a “bird” symbolizing the detachedness from the host and home culture (in the same way that birds are often seen flying in the sky). For expatriates employing a global identity negotiation strategy, moving into a new host culture highlights their sense of belongingness to a global community (Sussman, 2002) rather than activating the salience of their home cultural identity. Therefore, expatriates following a global cultural identity negotiation strategy are less likely to display exclusionary reactions toward the host culture. Although they are open to cultural diversity, they do not have a strong motivation to engage with the host culture (Hanek et al., 2014); possibly because their belief in the transcendence of values beyond cultural boundaries results in the perception of the host culture as part of a large global village. Because these expatriates typically possess high levels of intercultural competence, inclusive of interpersonal sensitivity and open-mindedness (Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Lyttle et al., 2011), they do not possess a strong motivation to learn about specific aspects of the host culture. The study therefore proposes that a global identity negotiation strategy does not activate either expatriates’ exclusionary or integrative responses toward the host culture:

P3a. Expatriates’ adoption of a global identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with their exclusionary responses toward the host culture.

P3b. Expatriates’ adoption of a global identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with their integrative responses toward the host culture.
Of lizards: the cosmopolitan strategy and expatriate responses toward the host culture

Expatriates employing a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy do not subscribe to the home culture in their self-definition but do engage with the host culture during their overseas assignments. This strategy is represented with the metaphor of “lizard” because the skin color of a lizard adapts to its surroundings. The cultural independence of these expatriates suppresses information processing through the lens of their home culture, thus preventing the activation of salient home cultural identity. Therefore, working in the host culture is less likely to evoke exclusionary reactions toward the host culture among these expatriates. Expatriates employing a cosmopolitan strategy are willing to learn about the host culture; they consume cultural products from many cultures and appreciate cultural novelty (Levy et al., 2007). As cultural connoisseurs, they are motivated to experience the host culture (e.g. Hannerz, 1990, 1996), and thus have more exposure to alien knowledge embedded in the host culture. Because these expatriates are able to detach themselves from both the home culture and the host culture, their “outsider” status allows them a peripheral position from which to absorb and integrate seemingly incompatible components from different sources for creativity and innovation (Van Kleef et al., 2013). Meanwhile, these expatriates also wear the “insider” hat to actively interact with host culture employees and learn about the host culture. Therefore, a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy facilitates expatriates’ engagement with integrative reactions toward the host culture:

P4a. Expatriates’ adoption of a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy is negatively associated with their exclusionary responses toward the host culture.

P4b. Expatriates’ adoption of a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy is positively associated with their integrative responses toward the host culture.

Discussion

Expatriates may choose a monocultural, multicultural, global and/or cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy when working in the host country. The present study has drawn on pertinent theories and empirical evidence to categorize expatriates’ responses toward the host culture into exclusionary and integrative reactions. Specifically, expatriates employing a monocultural strategy are likely to engage in exclusionary responses because their home culture identity is salient. They are less likely to develop integrative responses toward the host culture due to the absence of a cultural learning mindset. The adoption of a multicultural strategy is positively associated with both exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture, because of the coexistence of high identity salience and a cultural learning mindset among expatriates. By contrast, expatriates following a global strategy do not engage in exclusionary or integrative reactions toward the host culture, because their home cultural identity is not salient and they do not have a learning mindset toward the host culture. Since home culture does not take a central place in the self-definition of expatriates following a cosmopolitan strategy, these expatriates are less likely to develop exclusionary reactions toward the host culture. They also enjoy the beneficiary effects associated with integrative reactions due to the presence of a cultural learning mindset.

This paper contributes to the field by offering a dynamic framework to understand expatriates’ responses toward the host culture. In the proposed framework, expatriates’ cultural identity negotiation strategies are associated with their tendency to engage in exclusionary and integrative responses toward the host culture through the inter-mediatory roles of the salience of home cultural identity and a cultural learning mindset. In doing so, the study offers insights into psychological mechanisms linking identity negotiation strategies and expatriates’ affective and behavioral responses toward the host culture.
Further, this study integrates the expatriate literature and the multiculturalism literature by delineating the relationship between cultural identity negotiation strategies and cross-cultural adaptation. The multiculturalism literature mainly focuses on adaptation ensuing from identifying with the host culture (e.g. Berry, 1997), i.e., it proposes that internalization of knowledge, values and norms of the host culture enhances adaptation. Meanwhile, the expatriate literature has widely examined various factors as facilitators of adaptation to the host culture, such as openness to cultural differences, cultural sensitivity, cultural knowledge and linguistic skills (e.g. Chen and Starosta, 2000; Mol et al., 2005). A cultural learning mindset toward the host culture nurtures these facilitators regardless of the expatriate’s identification with the host culture. Integrating the multiculturalism literature can provide a better understanding of expatriate adaptation in the host culture, both from the perspective of cultural identification and that of cultural learning. 

The proposed framework of expatriate identity negotiation strategies is applicable to a broader category of mobile workforces who are exposed to a multicultural working environment. Technological developments transform the ways that people experience foreign cultures. Foreign cultural elements are prevalent in the workplace and in the media; multicultural exposure thus no longer requires traveling overseas. Scholars have further identified global domestic and global virtual team members as subgroups of global workers that are rarely physically overseas, yet are responsible for interaction with stakeholders from other cultures (e.g. Shaffer et al., 2012). Employees experiencing exposure to foreign cultures in such a virtual way are also likely to employ one of the identity negotiation strategies discussed above in order to navigate a multicultural environment. For instance, a local employee located in a global virtual team may gradually develop a cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategy as a result of the accumulated new cultural exposure during daily interactions with colleagues from other cultures via e-mail or video calls. Therefore, the proposed framework of expatriates’ cultural identity negotiation strategies also offers insights into managing non-expatriate employees in a multicultural workplace.

This paper acknowledges the variations in strategies that an expatriate may choose to employ across different assignments. Expatriates may adopt different strategies when facing assignments in different host cultures. For example, an Asian–American employee is likely to take advantage of his/her Asian ancestry and employ a multicultural strategy when assigned to work in an Asian subsidiary. He/She may choose a different strategy such as a monocultural strategy, global strategy or cosmopolitan strategy during deployment to a South American office. When expatriates choose the same strategy consistently across different host cultures over a long period of time, they may internalize their choice as a stable cultural identity type and become a monocultural/multicultural/global/cosmopolitan individual. On the other hand, expatriates may even adopt different strategies in the same host culture. For example, the same Asian–American expatriate may use a cosmopolitan strategy when addressing his/her local subordinates and a global strategy in a meeting with other expatriates from various countries.

Limitations, suggestions for future research and managerial implications

The present study acknowledges that expatriates’ choice of a certain cultural identity negotiation strategy is the joint outcome of many factors such as expatriates’ own personality, their cultural experiences as well as their expatriation tasks. Given that this paper is not a focused investigation of all possible antecedents, future studies could examine in more detail what factors would result in expatriates’ choice of a specific strategy. For instance, congruence between universal values and one’s home culture values may contribute to expatriates’ choice of a global strategy. The theoretical framework proposed in this paper focuses on corporate expatriates. Future studies could systematically examine the characteristics of self-initiated expatriates and how they
develop cultural identity negotiation strategies in a way that is similar to or different from corporate expatriates. Since this paper is conceptual in nature, future studies could test the propositions. Moreover, only expatriates’ cultural identity is examined in this paper. Future work could look at other identities of expatriates such as ethnic identity (Zhang et al., 2016) as well as other identity markers such as mother tongue, accent in speaking the lingua franca of the MNC as well as the local language, gender and age.

In spite of its conceptual nature, this paper has important implications for international HR practices. Trait antecedents affecting expatriation experiences such as personality, ethnocentrism and willingness to communicate (Black, 1990) are innate, thus are difficult to change. MNCs can nevertheless provide training to prepare expatriates for overseas assignments and help them to develop a cultural identity negotiation strategy that is appropriate for both for work and personal purposes. Such specific cross-cultural training would be beneficial for both MNCs and their employees. Cross-cultural training has generally been found to be helpful in improving expatriates’ adjustment and performance in past research (e.g. Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Morris and Robie, 2001). Cross-cultural training for expatriates usually covers a wide range of topics from foreign language, field experience in the host culture to intercultural sensitivity (Morris and Robie, 2001; Tung, 1981). These training programs equip expatriates with intercultural knowledge and skills to adapt to and work in the host culture environment. In addition to this type of training, MNCs could provide further preparatory training that focuses on tempering expatriates’ exclusionary reactions and encourages integrative reactions to enhance expatriate adjustment and performance. For example, strengthening expatriates’ belongingness to the global organization may be an effective way to weaken the salience of expatriates’ home cultural identity, thus deactivating expatriates’ exclusionary reactions. Such training sessions could present successful innovation in managerial practices, products and marketing strategies that leverage knowledge of the host culture to activate integrative reactions by cultivating a cultural learning mindset among expatriates. MNCs could also predict potential strategies that expatriates may employ and further tailor training practices to facilitate/inhibit the adoption of a certain strategy. For example, for expatriates with the tendency to employ a multicultural strategy, training sessions weakening the salience of home cultural identity might guide them to adopting a cosmopolitan strategy.

In addition, despite the generally negative (positive) implications of an exclusionary (integrative) response toward the host culture in terms of expatriate adjustment, psychological well-being, job performance and other work-related outcomes, there are many moderating factors in the relationship between expatriates’ exclusionary/integrative reactions and specific expatriate outcomes. Even if organizations fail to influence an individual expatriate’s choice of identity negotiation strategy, it is still possible to influence expatriation outcomes by affecting factors such as role ambiguity, which is a specific trigger of expatriates’ exclusionary reactions at work. Kawai and Mohr (2015) found that organizational support buffers the negative association between role ambiguity and work adjustment. Therefore, organizations could minimize the detrimental influence of exclusionary responses by providing support to expatriates, such as offering expatriates recognition for going the extra mile.

Conclusion
Cultural identity has significant implications for expatriate adjustment and performance. Yet, to date, the scholarly understanding of expatriates’ identity negotiation strategies is limited to a small group of born multicultural employees. This paper provides a dynamic framework explaining monocultural, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan identity negotiation strategies among the broader population of expatriates during overseas
assignments, and it elucidates the psychological mechanisms underlying the associations between these identity negotiation strategies and expatriates’ responses toward the host culture. Contrary to the recent literature on multicultural employees that has downplayed the notion of choice, this paper sees expatriates as active agents who can choose their cultural identity negotiation strategies based on their own preferences and environmental demands. It thus provides a solid conceptual ground for future empirical research on understanding the cultural identity of corporate expatriates from a dynamic perspective.

References


Corresponding author
Ling Eleanor Zhang can be contacted at: l.e.zhang@lboro.ac.uk
Satisfaction with an expatriate job

The role of physical and functional distance between expatriate and supervisor

Liisa Mäkelä, Hilpi Kangas and Vesa Suutari
School of Management, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to focus on satisfaction with an expatriate job and how such satisfaction is linked to leadership. Specifically, this research examines how two different kinds of distances – physical distance and functional distance – between an expatriate and his/her supervisor are related to satisfaction with the expatriate job.

Design/methodology/approach – The study was conducted among 290 Finnish expatriates. Moderated hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in order to test the research hypothesis.

Findings – The results show that low functional distance with a supervisor is related to greater satisfaction with the expatriate job. The physical distance is not directly connected to expatriate job satisfaction, but the common effect of the two types of distance shows that among those whose functional distance is low, working in the same country with the leader is linked to greater expatriate satisfaction than recorded among those who were physically distant. Interestingly, expatriates with high functional distance are more satisfied with the expatriate job if they work in a different country to their supervisor.

Originality/value – This study makes a contribution in three areas; first, it addresses the understudied phenomena of international work-specific job satisfaction, specifically satisfaction with an expatriate job. Second, it provides new knowledge on the outcomes of leader distance in the context of expatriation, a work situation that is inherently related to changes in physical location and to organizational relationships. Third, it contributes to leadership literature and highlights the importance of the conditions and the context in which leadership occurs.

Keywords International mobility, Leadership, Job satisfaction, Expatriate, Leader distance

Introduction

The internationalization of economies has grown dramatically increasing the need for internationally mobile and highly skilled employees (Collings et al., 2009; De Cieri et al., 2007; Salt and Wood, 2012). Expatriates, people living outside their home country owing to their work, are a critical group of these international professionals, and essential assets for their employers, and therefore, their experiences and success relating to work merit attention (Bonache et al., 2018).

It has been stated, that one important predictor of expatriate success is job satisfaction (Culpan and Wright, 2002; Grant-Vallone and Ensher, 2001) defined as being a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences (Locke, 1976, p. 1300). Job satisfaction has been studied either as a general phenomenon similar for all employees or as an occupation-specific or work-specific experience, such as measuring satisfaction with a nursing job (van Saane, 2003) or international business travel (Mäkelä and Kinnunen, 2016). The focus in previous literature has been on expatriates’ general job satisfaction (Bonache, 2005; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011). However, research shows that especially when the aim is to explore employees’ experiences in the international work context, it is important to take account of the international aspect of work because general measures may not capture the specific issues affecting that kind of work (Mäkelä and Kinnunen, 2016). This study contributes to current knowledge by following an occupation-specific or work-specific approach to job satisfaction and focusses on satisfaction with an expatriate job.
Prior studies show that leadership plays a vital role in expatriates’ general job satisfaction (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). However, earlier studies about leadership and expatriation rarely take account of the specific nature of the international work context, in which, for instance, the distance from a leader is a pertinent issue (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Bligh and Riggio, 2013). Leader distance has been defined in several ways, for instance, referring to physical and functional distance between leader and follower (see e.g. Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Antonakis and Jacquart, 2013; Griffith et al., 2018; Napier and Ferris, 1993).

Physical distance can be caused by the physical structures of organizations, and globalization and new working structures are often shown to increase the physical distance between leader and subordinate (Avolio et al., 2014; Zander et al., 2012), especially in an international work context. Functional distance refers to the quality of the functional working relationship between the leader and the subordinate and has been studied with reference to leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Napier and Ferris, 1993, p. 337). The high quality of the LMX relationships is a significant antecedent of job satisfaction (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Erdogan and Enders, 2007), and has also been linked to expatriate success (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Pattie et al., 2013).

Distance, both physical and functional, between the parties of these dyads may limit the availability of some important resources, such as the natural occurrence of interaction, support gained from each other and access to more developmental work tasks (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Varma and Stroh, 2001). Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002) states that the resources people have are important for their wellbeing; and job satisfaction is an essential indicator of such wellbeing (see e.g. Mäkelä and Kinnunen, 2016) and therefore COR theory is adopted as a theoretical basis for this study.

Although there is a growing body of research investigating the supervisory relationships of expatriates (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer et al., 2001; Pattie et al., 2013), also highlighting the important role of the supervisor in the general job satisfaction of the expatriate (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011), the connection merits further study. The aim of this study is to focus on satisfaction with an expatriate job and how such satisfaction is linked to leadership. Specifically, this research examines how two different kinds of distances – physical distance and functional distance – between an expatriate and his/her supervisor are related to satisfaction with the expatriate job. Therefore, the contribution of this study is threefold; first, it addresses the understudied phenomena of international work-specific job satisfaction, specifically satisfaction with an expatriate job. Second, it provides new knowledge on the outcomes of leader distance in the context of expatriation, a work situation that is inherently related to changes in physical location and to organizational relationships. Third, the current study contributes to leadership literature and highlights the importance of the conditions and the context in which leadership occurs. Below, the relevant literature is reviewed and hypotheses developed.

**Leader distance and satisfaction with an expatriate job**

Globalization and new working structures often increase the physical distance between leader and subordinate (Avolio et al., 2014; Zander et al., 2012), especially in an international work context. Expatriates working in the global or regional headquarters of multinational firms often have supervisors who are not located in the same country. From the leadership perspective, expatriation is challenging for supervisor–subordinate relationships especially given the frequent need to manage people who are physically distant and to manage the temporary nature of expatriate assignments (Benson and Pattie, 2009). The same challenges also apply to relationships between the expatriate and his/her own supervisor.
Although studies on expatriates and distance from a leader are limited, some research has investigated the link between the physical distance of expatriates and their mentors (Carraher et al., 2008; Zhuang et al., 2013). Those relationships are also equated with the supervisory relationship (Raabe and Beehr, 2003). It has been shown that the physical distance is connected to job satisfaction among expatriates, and having a mentor residing in the home country (i.e. someone physically distant) has a negative relationship to job satisfaction among expatriates (Carraher et al., 2008). Moreover, the relevance of physical distance between leader and the follower has become evident through the studies focussing on globally dispersed or virtual teams, which are also an important form of globalized work (Jimenez et al., 2017). As with expatriation, work in global teams is also characterized by a globally dispersed working environment and limited face-to-face contact with team members who are physically distant (Maloney and Zellmer-Bruhn, 2006).

Studies on global and virtual teams reveal that remote team members feel isolated and perceive that they do not have access to critical information, and that they are not involved in crucial team decisions (Armstrong and Cole, 2002; Breu and Hemingway, 2004; Cramton, 2001). Expatriates working at a physical distance from their supervisor may find it difficult to participate in decision-making processes led by their remote supervisor, or they may feel that they are outsiders because of the reduction of naturally occurring face-to-face communication. Relying on COR theory (Hobfoll, 2011), such negative experiences are likely to reduce a person’s satisfaction with their work. In the domestic context, it has also been shown that extensive time spent in a virtual mode at work (i.e. where there is minimal contact with the supervisor) is negatively related to job satisfaction (Golden and Veiga, 2008).

Though the physical distance between the expatriate and his/her leader can thus be expected to impact on expatriates’ satisfaction with their work, no earlier studies analyzing this could be found. The impacts of the location of the supervisor have been analyzed, for example, in the context of expatriate performance management, but there the location of the primary supervisor was not found to be related to how successful the performance management was: success was more dependent on process-related factors such as what kinds of goals are set, how they were set, and how they were evaluated (Suutari and Tahvanainen, 2002). However, in the light of COR theory and findings from studies of expatriates and their mentors, as well as on virtual teams, we hypothesize as follows:

H1. Physical distance between the supervisor and the expatriate is negatively related to satisfaction with the expatriate job.

Functional distance and satisfaction with expatriate job

Functional distance between supervisor and the subordinate refers to the degree of closeness and quality of the working relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate (Napier and Ferris, 1993). LMX (see e.g. Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1998) theory offers a widely used approach to study such distance, in that the basis of LMX theory is that the leader and each of his/her followers create a unique relationship. Typical features of high-quality relationships include trust, co-operation and mutual affect between the partners (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). The presence of such characteristics indicates low functional distance between relationship parties (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002) and good availability of various resources (cf., COR theory) likely to lead to better wellbeing, for example, in the form of job satisfaction. Low-quality relationships are based on formal work tasks and contracts (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and can be seen as an indicator of high functional distance between leader and follower (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002) and, thus, as a situation in which fewer resources are available to the follower (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002). From the perspective of COR theory, this leads to reduced wellbeing for the follower.
The focal role of high-quality LMX relationships as an antecedent of job satisfaction has been acknowledged in numerous studies in the domestic context (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Golden and Veiga, 2008; Harris et al., 2006, 2009; Vidyarthi et al., 2014). It has also been argued that supervisory relationships in expatriate outcomes are undisputable (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Pattie et al., 2010). Research on LMX in the context of a high-quality expatriation LMX relationship between leader and the expatriate follower is suggested to be important for the job satisfaction of the expatriate, in particular when the supervisor is a local person (Boyd and Taylor, 1998; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013). Additionally, earlier expatriate studies have shown that different kinds of social support positively influence the adjustment of the expatriate to their new environment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Lee, 2010). The level of adjustment, in turn, relates to the job satisfaction of the expatriate (Gudmundsdottir, 2013).

In addition, earlier studies have shown that LMX is positively related to expatriates’ perceptions of organizational support (Liu and Ipe, 2010) as well as task and contextual performance (Kraimer et al., 2001). Though the research evidence is still very limited with regard to job satisfaction, a study by Varma and Stroh (2001) reported that high-quality LMX was associated with female expatriate satisfaction with their assignments. Therefore, in the light of LMX and COR theory and related empirical evidence, we hypothesize the following about the role of functional distance:

**H2.** Functional distance between the supervisor and the expatriate is negatively related to satisfaction with an expatriate job.

**Interaction effect of physical distance and functional distance on the satisfaction with an expatriate job**

As hypothesized above, we expect low distance, both physical and functional, to lead to greater satisfaction with an expatriate job. One main assumption in COR theory is that having multiple different kinds of resources strengthens a person’s wellbeing (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002). In particular, if one has multiple resources it is more likely that suitable support for varying situations is available compared to the situation where there is little variation of resources. Therefore, we also study the interaction effect of physical distance and functional distance on satisfaction with an expatriate job. Physical distance limits, for instance, natural interaction and opportunities to foster mutual support between leader and follower and therefore has been suggested to be a contextual factor with potential to moderate the effects of LMX on employee outcomes (Golden and Veiga, 2008; Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999). It seems that physical distance between leader and the follower is likely to limit the available resources. However, this interaction effect has not been studied in the context of expatriation, and merits further research.

There are only a few empirical studies on the interaction effects of physical distance and functional distance on organizational outcomes. A study by Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999) showed that high-quality LMX was linked to stronger follower performance irrespective of physical distance, thus no interaction effect was found. In that study, the physical distance recorded between leader and follower varied from working on the same floor to working in a different city. In contrast with the present study, the distances involved were not as extensive as working in a different country and the study focussed on performance rather than satisfaction with work.

Another study on physical distance and LMX in the context of virtual teams analyzed the connection between leader distance and general job satisfaction (Golden and Veiga, 2008). The study showed that if the quality of LMX was high, job satisfaction was almost equal for those who worked in a limited virtual mode or an extensive virtual mode. The study also showed that operating in an extensive virtual mode (i.e. having limited contact...
with the supervisor) in a low-quality LMX relationship caused job satisfaction to be weaker than in a situation where the leader and subordinate worked in a limited virtual mode (i.e. the employee is in regular contact with the supervisor).

Identifying only these two empirical studies reporting different results indicates that more research on the boundary conditions under which the distant leadership occurs is required. Neither of the last-mentioned studies were conducted in the context of international work and therefore our study contributes to the research field of international work and global mobility. Earlier empirical findings are not totally aligned with COR theory’s assumption that resources have cumulative or loss spiral effects (Hobfoll, 2002). In contrast, it seems that functional distance may operate as a resource that diminishes the negative effect of physical distance because both studies (Golden and Veiga, 2008; Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999) reported that the positive relationship between low functional distance with a supervisor and its outcomes were not affected by physical distance. However, COR theory does allow that some resources may be more critical than others (Hobfoll, 2002).

Because existing empirical evidence is insufficient and prior research does not address the context of expatriation, we base our hypothesis mainly on COR theory’s assumption that a situation characterized by more resources is better for individuals’ wellbeing (e.g. job satisfaction) than a situation featuring fewer resources. Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

**H3.** Low functional distance will be related to higher satisfaction with an expatriate job among those who work in the same country as the supervisor than it will among those who work in a different country to their immediate supervisor. In addition, high functional distance will be related to lower satisfaction with an expatriate job among those who work in a different country to their supervisor than it will among those who work in the same country.

The proposed study model and hypothesized relationships are summarized in Figure 1.

**Methods**

**Data collection**

The hypotheses were tested and answers to research questions sought using data collected through an internet survey. The survey was carried out in co-operation with the Finnish trade union TEK (Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland) in 2016. TEK sent an e-mail invitation to each of its 1,168 members shown as living abroad on its member register. A total of 305 survey responses were returned. Four responses were excluded because the respondents no longer worked abroad, and an additional 11 because the respondents did not work while living abroad. The final number of eligible responses was 290 and the final response rate 24.8 percent. Of the respondents, 76.7 percent were men. The average age of respondents was 42.3 years. The three most common host countries for expatriates were Germany (16.2 percent), the USA (14.1 percent) and Switzerland (9.3 percent) and in total the respondents listed 51 host countries. A total of 61.4 percent of our respondents reported that they had sought work abroad on their own initiative and 35.9 percent reported they were sent by their employer (2.8 percent did not respond to that question).
**Measures**

Functional distance was measured by an eight-item LMX scale (Tanskanen et al., 2018). Sample items include: “We trust each other” and “We can genuinely listen to each other’s opinions.” Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale anchored with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) and the Cronbach’s α for the scale was 0.96.

Physical distance was measured with the question “Does your immediate supervisor mainly work with you [...] (select one of the following options): a) in the same country and in the same office, b) in the same country but in some other office, c) in Finland, d) in some other country.” As the aim of this study is to explore whether the supervisor is located in the same country or in a different country to the expatriate, responses were recoded as a binary variable; the first two options as 1 = same country and last two as 0 = another country.

Satisfaction with expatriate job was measured through four items modified from the satisfaction scale used in the context of international business travel (Mäkelä et al., 2015; Mäkelä and Kinnunen, 2016; Westman et al., 2009). These items were modified to match the expatriate job context (sample item: “I like working as an expatriate”). The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale anchored with completely disagree (1) and completely agree (5) and the Cronbach’s α for the scale was 0.754.

**Controls**

Gender (a binary variable, where 1 = male and 0 = female), age and length of stay in the current country (in full years) were controlled for. In addition, organizational position (1 for the lowest and 10 for the highest level in the hierarchy) was included as a control variable because it has been shown that the effects of leader distance may vary depending on organizational level (Antonakis and Jacquart, 2013). Expatriation type (a binary variable, where 1 = assigned expatriate and 0 = self-initiated expatriate) was also controlled for in the study model.

**Results**

The analysis started with an examination of the dimensionality and discriminant validity of the scales for satisfaction with expatriate job and functional distance. CFA showed support for measurement validity for both LMX and satisfaction with expatriate job measurement scales. The two-factor measurement model indicated measurement validity for LMX and satisfaction with expatriate job scales by having an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2(62) = 168.84$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.077; Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.943; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.961). With regard to standard goodness of fit cut-off values: RMSEA < 0.080 indicates acceptable fit, and TLI and CFI values over 0.90 indicate an acceptable fit while over 0.95 indicate a good fit (e.g. Hu and Bentler, 1999). In satisfaction with expatriate job scale the post-hoc correlated error-terms between “I am satisfied with my current work tasks as an expatriate” and “I especially like my job because it involves the possibility to live abroad” were estimated. All factor loadings were significant and standardized factor loadings generally high (> 0.800), though satisfaction with expatriate work had one relatively low loading (0.615).

Means, SD and correlations between study variables are presented in Table I. The intercorrelations showed, first, that functional distance related positively to satisfaction with the expatriate job, but physical distance did not. With regard to our control variables, the findings indicate that higher organizational position was positively related to satisfaction with the expatriate job. Gender, age or length of the stay in the company did not have a significant relationship with the satisfaction with the job.

A moderated linear hierarchical regression analysis was used with the following procedure: first, control variables were entered in step 1 to control for their effects; second, indicators of physical and functional distance were entered in step 2; and finally, the
interaction terms of physical and functional distance were entered in step 3. In calculating the interaction terms, the variables were standardized to avoid multicollinearity (Cohen et al., 2003).

We did not find a significant relationship between physical distance and satisfaction with the expatriate job. Positive relationship between functional distance (functional distance is measured as LMX quality, thus the higher the LMX, the lower the functional distance) and satisfaction with the expatriate job ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) was found, which shows that the lower the functional distance, the more satisfied expatriates are with their job (see Table II). Accordingly, if the expatriate had a low functional distance from his/her supervisor, s/he was more satisfied with the expatriate job. In turn, the physical distance between the expatriate and the supervisor did not increase or decrease our participants’ satisfaction with their expatriate job. In addition, our interaction term made a significant contribution to the explained variance. The interaction term between physical and functional distance was significant ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$), and is illustrated in Figure 2 (satisfaction with expatriate job presented in standardized values). Our findings show that those expatriates with low functional distance benefit from the situation of low physical distance: their satisfaction with their expatriate job is higher when physical distance is low. In contrast, those who have high functional distance from their supervisor are more satisfied with the expatriate job if they also have high physical distance from the supervisor compared to the situation in which physical distance is low.

### Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>42.35</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (men/women)</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the stay in host country</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational position (1–10)</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expatriation type (AE/SIE)</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>−0.23**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(same country/another country)</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>−0.27**</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−0.34**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional distance</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with expatriate job</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $n = 282–290$. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

### Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Satisfaction with expatriate job ($n = 277$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1 $\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1: controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (men/women)</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the stay in the host country</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational position (1–10)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expatriation type (AE/SIE)</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2: direct effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance (same country/another country)</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional distance (LMX)</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3: interaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance × functional distance</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $\beta$, standardized $\beta$-coefficient for each step; $\Delta R^2$, change in explanation rate in each step; $R^2$, explanation rate. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
In addition, among the control variables, a significant relationship was found between organizational position and satisfaction with the expatriate job; the higher the organizational level, the higher is the level of satisfaction with the expatriate job ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$). This model explained 23 percent of the variance in satisfaction with an expatriate job.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The aim of this study was to examine the direct and interaction effects of physical distance and functional distance between an expatriate and his/her supervisor on the expatriate’s job satisfaction.

**Main findings and theoretical contribution**

This study contributes to the current literature by addressing the understudied phenomenon of international work-specific job satisfaction, specifically satisfaction with an expatriate job. In general, we found that expatriates were very satisfied with their jobs, recording a mean value of 3.98 of a maximum score of 5.0.

This study contributes to current research by forging a theoretical link between leader distance and expatriation specific outcomes and empirically testing that link. $H1$, suggesting that the physical distance between expatriate and his/her leader is related to satisfaction with the expatriate job was not supported. This finding counters findings among geographically dispersed virtual teams suggesting that distance between the supervisor and the team members leads to lower satisfaction (Golden and Veiga, 2008). However, our knowledge of the effects of the location of an immediate supervisor is still relatively limited in the expatriate context, and thus the findings on global/virtual teams may not hold in the expatriation context. The circumstances typical of an expatriate position, including moving to a new location and settling into new work and living contexts (probably for a limited time span) is likely to make the situation different to that of people remaining in their domestic working environment. It is also possible that digging deeper into the effects of physical distance of supervisor and expatriate, for example, taking account of geographical location, time zone differences and the infrastructure of the society in which the expatriate works would lead to different findings.

Therefore, future studies should focus on different aspects of physical distance between leader and follower also taking account if the leader is located in the expatriate’s host country, home country or some other country. However, in line with our findings, earlier
studies on supervisor location and work-related experiences of expatriates have shown that the location of the primary supervisor was not related to the perceived efficiency of performance management either (Suutari and Tahvanainen, 2002). It is therefore possible that in the context of expatriation, the location of the supervisor does not have a similar effect on the employee’s job-related experiences as it does in other kinds of jobs.

H2, suggesting a direct negative relationship between functional distance and satisfaction with the expatriate job was supported. The findings indicate that lower functional distance between relationship parties was related to higher satisfaction with the expatriate job. This finding is in line with previous studies conducted in the domestic context (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005; Golden and Veiga, 2008; Harris et al., 2009). It also extends our understanding of the outcomes of high-quality leader–follower relationships in the context of expatriation as called for in prior research (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Pattie et al., 2013). In addition, it is worth mentioning that there was no statistically significant difference in the functional distance between those whose supervisor worked in the same country (mean: 4.0) compared to those whose supervisor worked in a different country (mean: 3.9).

Reflecting the results above against COR theory indicates that functional distance between leader and the expatriate plays a more important role as a resource than the physical distance. In addition, since the studies underpinning COR theory were published (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999; Hobfoll, 2002), communication technology has developed enormously and has improved the ease of communication over physical distance, which has inevitably affected leadership dynamics (e.g. Avolio et al., 2014). The recent discussion around the changing nature of expatriation raises the question of how much the development of information technology has changed the nature of the expatriation experience given it facilitates social interaction (Bonache et al., 2018; Kerri et al., 2015). Therefore, the role of the utilization of modern communication channels and social media between expatriate and leader should be acknowledged. For instance, future studies should explore if intensity of social media usage can affect experiences of leader distance and through that, different outcomes, such as job satisfaction.

H3, suggesting that in a situation marked by low functional distance, low physical distance is more beneficial than high physical distance was supported. This finding is in line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001, 2002) that suggests wellbeing is related to the different kinds of resources available to people. Prevailing conditions, for instance, working with a person who provides social support (Hobfoll, 2002) can be seen as a resource that supports a person’s wellbeing. It has also been shown that the more significant resources are available to someone, the greater are his/her opportunities to acquire additional ones. Aided by COR theory, we may assume that low functional distance together with low physical distance to the supervisor is a resource building situation. In particular, a low functional distance relationship based on trust and the dyad partners’ willingness to interact, alongside physical closeness, especially if working in the same time zone and cultural context, is likely to be more beneficial for the expatriate and lead to greater satisfaction with expatriate job.

H3 anticipated also that high functional distance would relate to lower satisfaction with the expatriate job among those whose physical distance from the supervisor was high compared to those whose physical distance was low; that hypothesis was not supported. Interestingly, for those relationships marked by high functional distance, working at a greater physical distance were more beneficial (i.e. they recorded higher satisfaction with the expatriate job) compared to the situation when physical distance was low. It seems that people who do not trust their supervisors and do not enjoy working with them enjoy the benefits of physical distance, probably because having to interact frequently with someone they do not have a good relationship with undermines job satisfaction. It is also very likely that expatriate jobs offer more autonomy than those in the home country (Jokinen, 2010) especially if the expatriate works in a different country to his/her supervisor. That may play
an important role in the expatriate’s experiences, such as job satisfaction, particularly for an employee with a high functional distance from his/her leader. In addition, our study contributes to leadership literature in general and highlights the importance of understanding the different boundary conditions under which leadership occurs. Our study might be especially interesting for LMX theory development as our findings partly contradict the basic assumptions of that theory that in certain conditions high functional distance (cf. low LMX quality) may lead to positive outcomes, such as greater satisfaction with the expatriate job when working in a situation characterized by high physical distance. More research is warranted in that field in both domestic and international contexts.

Limitations and future research
The current study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. Above all, the findings come from a study of cross-sectional design, meaning that we can draw no reliable conclusions on the causal direction of the effects. Longitudinal studies would be required to confirm the connections between leadership and satisfaction with the expatriate job. In addition, the data were based on self-reports, so common method variance may have affected our findings. However, it has been argued that it is an oversimplification to assume that common method variance automatically affects variables measured with the same method (Spector, 2006). In order to control for that, we compared two-factor and single-factor models for functional distance and satisfaction with expatriate job scales. A single-factor solution produced a poor fit with the data ($\chi^2(54) = 404.56; \text{RMSEA} = 0.150; \text{TLI} = 0.815; \text{CFI} = 0.872$) supporting the idea of two separate concepts and showing that common method bias was not a significant problem in our study. Nevertheless, future studies should acknowledge this in their research design and, for instance, use several sources for data collection, perhaps involving questioning supervisors too. In addition, earlier literature has pointed out that expatriates (and their supervisors) can face challenges posed by a complex set of relationships with leaders in both the home and host countries (Benson and Pattie, 2009). Therefore, the effects of dual leadership (i.e. having one supervisor in the home country and another in the host country) (Vidyarthi et al., 2014) and perhaps of e-leadership (Avolio et al., 2014) merit further study in the future. The focus of our study was not on the quality of the supervisor–subordinate relationship per se, and therefore we suggest that future studies might scrutinize that phenomenon, and for instance, study how the quality of the relationship evolves during the expatriation. In addition, the physical distance between the expatriate and supervisor should be studied in more detail, perhaps involving studying how the geographical location of dyad partners is linked to individual and organizational outcomes.

Practical implications
The results of the study yield several practical implications to support job satisfaction among expatriates. This knowledge has practical implications for human resource management experts working in the field of global mobility, supervisors of expatriates and expatriates themselves. By understanding the determinants of, and boundary conditions for, satisfaction with an expatriate job, organizational policies and practices, and also supervisors’ and expatriates’ behavior can be shaped to ensure the success of expatriation assignments. First, expatriates and their supervisors should pay attention to their functional distance, especially in the form of LMX relationships. This could be supported on an organizational level by developing training and coaching initiatives to support the development and maintenance of high-quality LMX relationships. For example, leaders, regardless of physical location, should be trained to lead expatriates, and to understand the challenges associated with expatriation and international assignments, such as coping with a foreign culture or other issues around expatriate adjustment.
Moreover, although the role of the leader is focal, the leadership process should be seen as reciprocal; one in which also the subordinate is an active participant. Therefore, expatriates should actively involve themselves in the different kinds of exchanges with their supervisor, for instance, using communication channels to keep the supervisor updated on work-related issues, giving feedback to the supervisor, and volunteering for new projects or tasks. Based on our finding revealing the fact that in a situation of high functional distance, high physical distance is beneficial for expatriate job satisfaction, we suggest that taking organizations should encourage leaders to recognize subordinates willing to develop their work role, tasks and task autonomy.

In addition, organizations (and especially human resource management experts) should pay greater attention to developing virtual and technologically driven working models (Pellegrini, 2015) to enable the leaders and subordinates to interact regularly, especially if the physical distance between them is high. Conference calls, e-mail and other communication channels should be utilized regularly to enable virtual interaction. Through these virtual working models, the expatriate and their leader can more effectively participate in exchange and interaction processes, even when the expatriate is on an assignment. Also meeting each other physically during the expatriation, perhaps by scheduling international business trips to the same locations or visiting each other’s working locations could be helpful. Such kinds of efforts can mitigate ‘out of sight, out of mind’ effects between parties and, in turn, may lead to lower functional distance and accordingly, increase resource exchange and expatriate job satisfaction.

References


Corresponding author
Liisa Mäkelä can be contacted at: llbm@uva.fi

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Beyond nationality

International experience as a key dimension for subsidiary staffing choices in MNEs

Chipoong Kim, Chul Chung and Chris Brewster

Department of International Business and Strategy,
Henley Business School, University of Reading, Reading, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The literature on international staffing in multinational enterprises (MNEs) often focuses on staffing choices based on nationality categories (e.g. parent-country nationals, host-country nationals, third-country nationals) for key positions in subsidiaries when examining their impacts on subsidiary outcomes. Considering both nationality and international experience, the purpose of this paper is to suggest an integrative typology to identify and classify various types of traditional and alternative subsidiary staffing options and evaluate them in relation to social capital and knowledge flows across MNE organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on a social capital view of MNEs, the authors propose a typology of subsidiary staffing options founded on the dimensions of nationality and the location of prior international experience of incumbents of key positions. Then traditional as well as alternative staffing options from the literature are identified and evaluated corresponding to each type of staffing option in the framework.

Findings – The typology identifies nine types of subsidiary staffing options. It includes and classifies the traditional and alternative staffing options, while highlighting types which need further research. The study also suggests impacts of the traditional and alternative staffing type on social capital and knowledge flows in MNEs.

Originality/value – The new typology identifies various types of subsidiary staffing options comprehensively and evaluates them systematically. HRM specialists can classify subsidiary managers based on the typology and examine which staffing option would be desirable given a specific subsidiary context. The research also provides novel insights on what needs to be considered to select and develop subsidiary managers who can build internal and external social capital in MNEs.

Keywords Knowledge flow, International experience, Social capital, Nationality, Multinational enterprises (MNEs), International staffing

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The competitiveness of a multinational enterprise (MNE) depends on its capacity to source, transfer, combine and utilize knowledge from internal and external sources across a range of geographical locations (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). To be effective, each subsidiary of an MNE should be able to access knowledge from corporate headquarters (HQ) as well as local external parties (Birkinshaw et al., 2005). Given the dual embeddedness of the subsidiary within the MNE and in the local context (Meyer et al., 2011), subsidiary managers should translate and utilize the sourced knowledge in ways relevant to the local context (Roth and O’Donnell, 1996).

In this regard, social capital, the sum of actual or potential resources embedded in the network of relationships possessed by an individual (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998) is particularly important. Social capital built by subsidiary managers with local parties as well as key individuals in HQ allows them to access knowledge sources across local environments and the MNE organization (Kostova and Roth, 2003). Social capital builds trust which nurtures the willingness to share knowledge with geographically and culturally distant employees (Adler and Kwon, 2002).
The decision of whom to appoint in key positions in a subsidiary – the subsidiary staffing decision – has considerable implications for the social capital needed for knowledge flows in the MNE. Each individual brings different social relationships or networks of relationships and also has different capacity in building them in the subsidiary. Some may have limited relationships with either local actors or HQ actors, while others bring wider and stronger relationships with both local actors and HQ actors, implying significant variations in the capacity of accessing knowledge dispersed across different locations. Thus, what matters is the type of individuals who can bring or build the social capital that enables knowledge flows in an MNE.

The issue of subsidiary staffing in MNEs has attracted significant attention in the fields of international business and international human resource management research (Belderbos and Heijltjes, 2005; Collings et al., 2007). Subsidiary staffing in the extant literature refers to the appointment of employees in subsidiary key positions (Colakoglu et al., 2009) to meet certain objectives such as responding to host market needs and transferring knowledge across national borders (Harzing, 2001a; Scullion and Collings, 2006). Much of this literature, however, confines the staffing decision for key positions in a subsidiary to a choice among parent-country nationals (PCNs), host-country nationals (HCNs) and third-country nationals (TCNs) (Gong, 2003b; Lazarova, 2006). In terms of the ability to access knowledge sources across countries, the nationality-based staffing options may imply trade-offs between connections to HQ and those to local parties. For example, while PCNs are better connected to HQ than HCNs (Harzing et al., 2015), HCNs have stronger local networks than PCNs (Vance et al., 2009). Considered as a “compromise” between PCNs and HCNs (Michailova et al., 2016; Reiche and Harzing, 2015), TCNs might have modest levels of connections with HQ and local parties facilitated by, for example, language affinity.

The current understanding of subsidiary staffing options based on the nationality categories may be too simplistic to consider alternative staffing options that enable a subsidiary to be connected to both HQ and local parties. In subsidiary staffing decisions, MNEs might consider not just individuals’ nationalities, but also their prior international experiences, which help to complement their capacity to build connections across different locations. For example, MNEs can use international assignments intentionally to develop a pool of PCN expatriates who have prior experience in particular host countries (Caligiuri and Colakoglu, 2007). They can hire foreign nationals who have experience in the MNE’s home country (Piaskowska and Trojanowski, 2014), and use short-term international assignments to provide relevant international experience to their employees (Wang and Tran, 2012).

Although the current literature has acknowledged various alternative forms of international working including self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) (Richardson and McKenna, 2014), inpatriates (Reiche, Kraimer and Harzing, 2009), global careerists (Georgakakis et al., 2016), regional specialists (Sparrow et al., 2017) and many others, “much of the work in this area has been atheoretical and often anecdotal in nature” (Collings et al., 2009, p. 1264). Each alternative form tends to be treated in a rather idiosyncratic way in the literature without an integrative framework or an underlying theoretical construct that may allow systematic comparison and analysis among the traditional and alternative staffing options. In particular, when it comes to examining the influences on, and the impacts of, various subsidiary staffing options, the nationality-based categories such as PCN and HCN are still widely used (Gong, 2003a; Tarique et al., 2006; Tarique and Schuler, 2008) and the alternative staffing options are not included in such analyses.

Our purpose here is to suggest an integrative typology of subsidiary staffing options by considering both nationality and prior international experience to identify and classify various types of traditional and alternative subsidiary staffing options. We evaluate traditional and alternative types of staffing options in relation to social capital and knowledge flows across MNE organizations. We make two contributions to the subsidiary
staffing literature. First, we provide a basis for comparative analysis of various staffing options by considering two key variables – nationality and the location of prior international experience – as underlying dimensions of the subsidiary staffing typology. The review of staffing options based on the new typology shows that the two underlying factors identified are keys to capture traditional and alternative subsidiary staffing options comprehensively. Second, we suggest implications for future study by evaluating the potential impacts of the staffing options on social capital and related knowledge flows within MNEs (Downes and Thomas, 2000; Taylor, 2007).

The paper takes the following form. First, we review previous literature on subsidiary staffing in MNEs. Then, we introduce a typology of subsidiary staffing options and evaluate potential implications of each staffing option for the development of various forms of social capital which enable knowledge to flow between HQ, local parties and subsidiaries. Finally, based on the discussion of the typology and the implications of the staffing options, we provide suggestions for practitioners and future research on subsidiary staffing in MNEs.

Studies of subsidiary staffing in MNEs

The first analysis of subsidiary staffing was Perlmutter’s (1969) widely cited typology of MNEs as ethnocentric, polycentric and geocentric. The ethnocentric staffing policy assigns PCNs to key positions in the subsidiaries, while the polycentric staffing policy prefers the utilization of HCNs in subsidiary key positions. The geocentric staffing policy seeks the best people for key positions throughout the organization, regardless of their nationality. Later, regio-centric supplemented the typology (Heenan and Perlmutter, 1979). A regio-centric policy is more likely to staff with a composition weighted toward TCNs – who have been socialized at the regional HQs (Tarique et al., 2006), and have the skills to run subsidiary operations, and often carry regional management responsibilities (Schuler et al., 1993).

Subsidiary staffing issues began to be explored extensively during the 1980s (Collings et al., 2009). Much of the early literature concerns issues related to assigned PCN expatriates such as their selection, training and development, adjustment and failure (Perera et al., 2017), while comparably less attention has been devoted to HCNs or TCNs (Collings et al., 2008; Tungli and Peiperl, 2009). Subsidiary staffing studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s focused on the latter stages of the expatriate cycle such as evaluation and repatriation (Stahl et al., 2002), but also expanded geographically from US MNEs to European MNEs (Sutari and Brewster, 2001), demographically to female expatriates (Altman and Shortland, 2008), and latterly to alternatives to expatriation, such as short-term assignments, and international business travel (Collings et al., 2007; Mäkelä et al., 2015).

One of the issues that have attracted substantial research interest is which type of subsidiary staffing option or composition leads to better subsidiary outcomes (e.g. Gaur et al., 2007; Gong, 2003a; Harzing, 2001b; Hyun et al., 2014). These studies usually assumed that PCNs and HCNs are the major subsidiary staffing choices for MNEs (Harzing, 2001b). Despite their high cost, assigned PCNs remain a valuable staffing option for MNEs as they are believed to understand and internalize the values and beliefs of the parent company and thus better function as HQ agents in controlling and developing subsidiaries (Collings et al., 2007; Gong, 2003a). On the other hand, HCNs – employees of the MNEs who work in the foreign subsidiary and are citizens of the country where the foreign subsidiary is located – can respond to the local conditions and requirements of the host country more effectively than PCNs, as they are familiar with the cultural, economic, political and legal environment of the host country (Tarique et al., 2006). HCNs might, for example, be better able to negotiate with local suppliers, buyers, and governments (Harzing, 2001b). Empirical studies of the relationship between subsidiary staffing options based on nationality categories and subsidiary performance have shown, not surprisingly, mixed results. Some studies found a positive impact of assigning PCNs on subsidiary performance (Gong, 2003a; Hyun et al., 2014),
while others showed a negative impact of using PCNs instead of HCNs on subsidiary performance (e.g. Fang et al., 2010; Gaur et al. 2007) or no significant impact (e.g. Colakoglu and Caligiuri, 2008). These mixed results of the empirical studies might indicate the potential limitation of using the dichotomous categories of staffing options.

A strand of research has emerged exploring alternative staffing options. A number of staffing or international working options have been suggested, such as short-term assignments, and international business travel (Collings et al., 2007; Mäkelä et al., 2015) mainly as cost-effective alternatives to expensive PCN expatriates. But, if we consider the needs of multi-directional knowledge flows in MNEs, staffing options with experiences in different nations may be more relevant, as they may bring social networks that enable such knowledge flows across borders. Indeed, staffing options with various international experiences have been acknowledged in more recent literature, such as inpatriation (Collings et al., 2010), SIEs (Andresen et al., 2013; Richardson and McKenna, 2014; Vaiman and Haslberger, 2013; Zhang and Rienties, 2017), global careerists (Georgakakis et al., 2016), regional specialists (Sparrow et al., 2017). As these alternative staffing options have been studied separately without being integrated into subsidiary staffing research, it seems useful to develop a conceptual framework based on certain common dimensions in order to analyze and evaluate both traditional and alternative staffing options comprehensively. Our next section introduces a typology based on nationality and international experience as key dimensions of subsidiary staffing options.

Dimensions of subsidiary staffing options

A social capital view suggests that the relational aspect of organizational life is important as key resources are “embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). The experiences of direct interactions with people in a place are particularly important in building social capital in that location (Burt, 1982; Granovetter, 1973), as they provide opportunities to build relationships and develop the capacity to build relationships through learning how to interact with people there (Kostova and Roth, 2003). With regard to subsidiary staffing in MNEs, it is crucial to consider the location of one’s experiences and social interactions, as they determine the locational boundary of social capital and knowledge flows that the individual can build and access. Arguably, nationality and the location of international experiences could be considered as key factors that capture a variety of nationally bounded experiences meaningfully for the purpose of subsidiary staffing decision.

Nationality of subsidiary managers

As discussed earlier, subsidiary staffing choices have been established to vary along the dimension of nationality (Harzing, 2001b; Sekiguchi et al., 2011). Nationality can be defined as “the country in which an individual spent the majority of her or his formative years” (Hyun et al., 2014, p. 809). It is an important dimension of subsidiary staffing options, as it determines one’s locational boundary of social capital built throughout and after the formative years. A person has opportunities to interact with people in the country of their nationality and build relationships there. PCNs, HCNs and TCNs are the traditional categories of nationality in relation to subsidiary staffing in MNEs. PCNs refer to the nationals of an MNE’s home country, while HCNs are the host country nationals of the MNE (Reiche and Harzing, 2015). TCNs are people, who are nationals of neither the home nor the host country. Each of the three categories indicates different national boundary of social capital.

From the social capital and knowledge-based perspectives, PCNs are better connected to HQ than HCNs, able to play a critical role in the knowledge transfer process from HQ to
subsidiaries (Harzing et al., 2015), while having limited contacts and thus limited access to local knowledge in the host country. By contrast, HCN subsidiary managers are disadvantaged in the exchange of knowledge between HQ and the foreign affiliates due to their limited connections to key HQ personnel (Sekiguchi et al., 2011), but can access local knowledge and respond to local requirements more effectively using their local networks (Vance et al., 2009). TCN subsidiary managers tend to be considered as a compromise between PCNs and HCNs (Michaelova et al., 2016; Reiche and Harzing, 2015), having modest levels of connections with both HQ and local parties. Depending on their closeness to a host country, or their language ability, they may have greater host country knowledge than PCNs, though having weaker local connections than HCNs (Dowling et al., 2008). In addition, TCN managers may have better connections with HQ and thus access sources of knowledge in HQ more easily than HCNs, though not better than PCNs (Perkins and White, 2008; Potočnik et al., 2014).

The location of international experience of subsidiary managers

Although an individual’s nationality may constrain one’s locational boundary of social capital, the boundary can be extended through international experiences. By working in a foreign country, one has opportunities to interact with people in the country and learn the ways of building relationships there, thus extending the locational boundary of his or her social capital.

International experience has gained increasing significance in the international HRM literature, being acknowledged as a vital vehicle to develop cognitive and relational abilities that international managers need for their successful career in MNEs (Takeuchi et al., 2005). International experience is a multi-dimensional concept (Le and Kroll, 2017; Takeuchi et al., 2005) in terms of type (work and non-work) (Kim et al., 2015; Wang and Tran, 2012), time (prior, current, future) (Ancona et al., 2001; Hippler et al., 2015) and location (Schmid and Wurster, 2017). However, with respect to the type and time dimensions, we incorporate only the “work” and “prior” aspects of these dimensions, while the location dimension varies. Although non-work and current and future international experiences might be important aspects of international experience, we focus on the locational aspect of prior work international experiences of subsidiary managers, considering that our major concern is to understand staffing decisions in the particular context of subsidiaries in MNEs.

In terms of the locational dimension, international experiences can be distinguished into two types such as culture-general and culture-specific experiences (Rickley, 2019). It has been acknowledged that culture-general experience (i.e. a variety of international experiences across different cultures) is associated with superior cognitive abilities that allow one to find common and differentiating patterns across cultures (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016; Lücke et al., 2014), and make sense of, and help adaptation to, other culturally distant environments (Hammer, 1987; Rickley, 2019). On the other hand, culture-specific experiences may enable one to learn how to interpret the actions of people in the particular culture, and interact and communicate with them appropriately (Maitland and Sammartino, 2015; Rasmussen and Sieck, 2015; Takeuchi et al., 2005). With culture-specific expertise, the individual would be more effective at information access and exchange in that culture (Rickley, 2019). Thus, the location of prior international experience matters in the context of subsidiary staffing decisions, as unique cultural attributes of a host country make a particular cultural-specific international experience more relevant than others (Chen et al., 2010).

A typology of subsidiary staffing options and social capital/ knowledge flows in MNEs

By combining the dimension of the national location of international experiences with the traditional nationality-based staffing categories (PCNs, HCNs and TCNs), more specific
staffing choices can be suggested (Figure 1): PCNs with no prior international experience; PCNs with prior international experience in the host country; PCNs with prior international experience in a third country; HCNs with no prior international experience; HCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country; HCNs with prior international experience in a third country; TCNs with no prior international experience; TCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country; and TCNs with prior international experience in the host country. We discuss each type of staffing choice in relation to its implications for social capital and knowledge flows in MNE subsidiaries:

1. PCNs with no prior international work experience usually imply traditional expatriates who were relocated by their organization from HQ to another country, usually for several years, to complete a specific task or accomplish an organizational goal (McNulty and Brewster, 2017). They may facilitate the communication process between the parent company and its affiliates by using their existing strong internal networks with managers in HQ (Downes and Thomas, 2000; Riisala and Suntari, 2004). Their home-country-based social capital may be valuable in influencing HQs in favor of decisions that benefit the subsidiary operations (Colakoglu et al., 2009). Early works with a knowledge-based view of MNEs gave attention to knowledge flows from HQ to subsidiaries (Schulz, 2001). PCN-expatriates were seen as key agents in transferring knowledge from parent firms to their subsidiaries (Delios and Björkman, 2000; Downes and Thomas, 2000; Gaur et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2009). However, as discussed earlier, this type of staffing option has limitations in accessing local networks and thus local knowledge sources.

2. PCNs with prior international experience in the host country include PCN-expatriates who participated in development programs that provide them with opportunities to experience local cultures as well as job responsibilities in the host country before their later international assignments in the country (Sparrow et al., 2017). Their understanding of local environment and local networks built from their prior experiences help their adjustment in the host country (Farh et al., 2010). When they perform as subsidiary managers, they may benefit from their local

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Country</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
<th>Parent Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3) PCNs with prior international experience in a third country e.g., global careerists</td>
<td>(2) PCNs with prior international experience in the host country e.g., expatriates who participated in development programs</td>
<td>(1) PCNs with no prior international experience e.g., traditional expatriates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) HCNs with prior international experience in a third country e.g., local subsidiary managers who have working experiences in countries other than the MNE home countries</td>
<td>(4) HCNs with no prior international experience e.g., local managers who work in the foreign country and are citizens of the country where the foreign subsidiary is located</td>
<td>(5) HCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country e.g., inpatriates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) TCNs with prior international experience e.g., national neither of the assignment country nor of the country in which the HQ is located</td>
<td>(9) TCNs with prior international experience in the host country e.g., subsidiary managers working in a host country who are neither PCNs nor HCNs but have prior experience in the host country</td>
<td>(8) TCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country e.g., subsidiary managers working in a host country who are neither PCNs nor HCNs but have prior experience in the MNE home country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.**
A typology of subsidiary staffing options
networks and abilities to build such networks in addition to their home networks. Comparing with PCNs with no prior international experiences, they are in a better position to contact experts who can provide novel information and different perspectives on relevant issues, being aware of a wider range of possible strategic solutions that can be applied to the challenges facing their firms (Blomstermo et al., 2004; McDonald et al., 2008). However, there has been limited attention on this type of staffing option.

(3) PCNs with prior international experience in the third country include PCN subsidiary managers who worked previously as expatriates in third countries. For example, global careerists are people who have a long-term commitment to working in an international context and face frequent international relocations during their career (Cappellen and Janssens, 2005; Suutari et al., 2012). From their culture-general international experiences, they may develop superior cognitive abilities to make sense of new environments and devise innovative strategies, which might be particularly useful in the context of new subsidiary development. They also develop skills in finding right contacts and strengthening social ties in new countries (Lamb and Sutherland, 2010). MNEs with high degrees of internationalization require managers with international networks to perform their roles effectively (Carpenter et al., 2001; Ruigrok et al., 2013). Although they do not have any working experiences in the host country, PCNs with prior work experience in a third country may build local networks by leveraging prior learning in other countries and also utilizing knowledge from those countries to solve similar problems in the newly assigned country, in addition to their home networks (Georgakakis et al., 2016). However, they might be less competent in understanding local contexts and accessing local networks than PCNs with prior experiences in the host country due to their lack of country-specific knowledge. In addition, their ability to utilize their cultural learning from the third country would be limited depending on the similarity of cultures between the third and the host countries.

(4) HCNs with no prior international experience are local managers who work in the foreign subsidiary and are citizens of the country where the foreign subsidiary is located (Tarique et al., 2006). They are likely to have networks within host countries, which may help the MNE to obtain valuable local knowledge if they share their local-based social capital with PCNs in the subsidiaries and with HQ (Varma et al., 2009). Their rich knowledge of local markets and institutions may also help MNEs to learn practices of business in the host country (Vo, 2009). However, due to their lack of working experience and social ties at HQ, they may face difficulties in accessing knowledge from HQ and the wider MNE (O’Donnell, 2000; Roth and O’Donnell, 1996; Sekiguchi et al., 2011), leading to potential conflicts with HQ’s intentions.

(5) HCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country are local managers who spent time as inpatiates at HQ before repatriating back to their home countries (Reiche, Kraimer and Harzing, 2009). As they have social networks not only in their own countries but also in their parent companies (Harvey et al., 1999; Harvey et al., 2011; Reiche, Harzing and Kraimer, 2009; Reiche, 2012), they can act as boundary spanners across borders (Björkman et al., 2004; Blomstermo et al., 2004; Carpenter et al., 2001; Harvey et al., 2011). Strong internal and external social interfaces provide access to information and influences that have been associated with effective knowledge transfer (Hansen, 2002; Moeller et al., 2016).
HCNs with prior international experience in a third country include local subsidiary managers who have working experiences in countries other than the MNE home countries. Similar to PCNs with third-country experiences, their culture-general experiences may help HCNs to develop novel insights into their subsidiaries’ business strategies. They may be able to build and utilize contacts there and perform boundary spanning roles between the subsidiary in his or her country and that in the third country. However, they have a limitation in accessing HQ networks and knowledge due to their lack of experiences in the MNE home country. We could not find any example of this staffing choice in the international staffing literature.

TCNs with no prior international experience are nationals neither of the assignment country nor of the country in which the HQ is located (Bahn and Cameron, 2013). TCNs are often regionalists: subsidiary managers or specialists within the region where the subsidiary is located (Reynolds, 1997). Such TCNs may be relatively close to the host country with regard to culture and language, which can play a critical role for individuals’ boundary spanning ability in MNEs (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). If they share a common, or similar, language with the host country, this will enhance communication with locals (Dowling et al., 2008) and enable them to be better informed of the host country contexts than PCNs without international experiences due to their communication skills with locals (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007). While some studies have acknowledged the significance of TCNs as a staffing choice (Gong, 2003b; Michailova et al., 2016; Tarique et al., 2006), there has been limited empirical work on the use of TCNs in MNE subsidiaries (Collings et al., 2008; Tungli and Peiperl, 2009).

TCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country include subsidiary managers working in a host country who are neither PCNs nor HCNs but have prior experience in the MNE home country. TCN managers can access sources of knowledge in corporate HQ than HCNs (Perkins and White, 2008), if they have close connections to HQ and understand the company’s goals, practices and procedures (Potočnik et al., 2014) through their prior experience. If a subsidiary in a country faces similar problems with another subsidiary in a third country, a TCN from that third country may function a boundary spanning role effectively among HQ and the two subsidiaries, utilizing networks in HQ as well as in the third country subsidiary. However, we found no research on this subsidiary staffing option.

TCNs with prior international experience in the host country are able to adjust and build relationships with locals rather easily at the subsidiary (Tarique et al., 2006). Cultural and language skills can be critical resources for individuals who play a boundary spanning role in MNEs, as they can perform more functions with those skills (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). Although there is little extant literature on TCNs in subsidiary staffing, we expect that they may develop useful relationships through their prior international experience in the host country and subsidiary also gains knowledge from third countries (Gong, 2003b).
tacit knowledge across borders (Riusala and Suutari, 2004). Research has also emphasized the role of international assignees for multi-directional knowledge flows in MNEs. Subsidiaries of an MNE may need to access knowledge from HQ, from local external parties (Birkinshaw et al., 2005) and from peer subsidiaries (Miao et al., 2011). These multi-directional knowledge flows may be one of the most important drivers of firm performance (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2016).

Discussion and conclusion
The way that MNEs choose to staff subsidiaries is one of the most strategic decisions when expanding global operations (Belderbos and Heijltjes, 2005; Delios and Björkman, 2000). However, previous research has focused on nationality-based staffing choices which may limit our understanding of the various subsidiary staffing options. By considering the location of international experience as an additional dimension for subsidiary staffing options, more specific subsidiary staffing options could be derived for further analysis. We also explore the implications of utilizing each type of staffing options.

Implications for future research
Using the staffing typology based on both nationality and the location of prior international experiences, we identified various types of staffing options which have different implications to social networks and knowledge flows in MNEs. Future studies may explore, first, how each type of staffing options affects subsidiary managers’ social networks and knowledge flows in MNEs. For example, we may examine whether the staffing types such as PCNs with prior international experience in the host country and HCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country are more conducive to the development of their social networks with both HQ actors and local actors, and thus knowledge flows from both HQ and local parties.

Second, we can extend the research on the relationship between subsidiary staffing and performance by considering the more nuanced types of staffing options than the nationality-based categories of subsidiary staffing options. Based on the two dimensions underlying the typology we suggest, we may identify different types of staffing options in various empirical settings and examine which one would be most beneficial for subsidiary performance. Furthermore, based on the social capital and knowledge-based view, we may theorize and test a model that includes subsidiary managers’ social networks with HQ and local actors and knowledge flows from HQ and local parties as mediating factors in the relationship between the types of subsidiary staffing options and subsidiary performance.

Practical implications
The progress of globalization has critical implications for global talent management. It has been argued that there is a shortage of talented managers to deal effectively with the challenges arising from firms’ international operations (Dragoni et al., 2014): increasing the pressure to develop managers with networks and knowledge. This study suggests two practical implications.

First, HRM specialists can classify the subsidiary managers based on the typology and examine which staffing option would be desirable given a specific subsidiary context. In particular, depending on a subsidiary’s strategic context (e.g. multidomestic, global and transnational strategic context), the sources of critical knowledge the subsidiary needs might be different (e.g. knowledge from HQ, knowledge from local parties). For example, in the context of transnational strategy which demands both global integration and local responsiveness for a subsidiary, subsidiary managers without international experience are less capable of having the internal and external social networks that allows them to access...
relevant sources of information and knowledge across the MNE and local environment (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2009). By utilizing staffing options such as PCNs with prior international experience, HCNs with prior international experience in the MNE home country or relevant TCNs, therefore, MNEs can exploit managers’ social relations across MNEs (Reiche, 2012) in order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000).

Second, MNEs can devote attention to effective selection systems for international managers by considering both nationality and prior international experiences in order to reduce their failure rates and to improve organizational performance in the subsidiary (Caligiuri et al., 2009). MNEs should be aware of the limitations of traditional forms of international assignments and should work toward more sophisticated recruitment and selection methods (Collings et al., 2007). Most MNEs continue to focus on domestic career record as the most important selection criteria, not fully appreciating international experience (Morley and Flynn, 2003). For example, inpatriates are one alternative. During their assignments in HQ, they build social ties with HQ colleagues (Reiche, 2012). A strong internal and external social interface that provides access to information and influence is associated with effective knowledge transfer (Hansen, 2002; Moeller et al., 2016).

Limitations

This study has limitations. Although we mentioned above the strategic context of a subsidiary and relevant staffing options, we do not comprehensively discuss how the specific subsidiary contexts can be linked to the different types of staffing options in the typology. One such contextual factor we do not examine is the cultural distance (Chen and Hu, 2002) between focal countries in relation to subsidiary staffing. For example, when there is a high level of cultural difference between the MNE home and subsidiary host countries, PCNs with prior international work-related assignments in the host country would be preferable, as their previous international work experiences in the host country may help them access accurate information or knowledge about the foreign country (Lee and Sukoco, 2010; Shannon and Begley, 2008).

In addition, we do not consider another important contextual factor – the role of supply and demand of workforces in subsidiary staffing decisions. For the demand side, subsidiary strategic contexts could be considered, as the significance of international experience would be different depending on specific demands from the subsidiary strategic context. For example, as mentioned earlier, in the transnational strategic context of a subsidiary, where knowledge access to both HQ and local parties would be important, relevant international experience would be more important than global or multi-domestic strategic context. For the supply side, the consideration of a particular position would be important where the available human resources would be limited in key managerial positions because the context may be much more demanding. For these positions, choosing a manager with international experience may be more important than others to increase the pool of available human resources and access knowledge across boundary.

References


**Corresponding author**

Chipoong Kim can be contacted at: ckipm1@empal.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:  
[www.emergalgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emergalgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)  
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Identity, glass borders and globally mobile female talent

Susan Kirk
Department of Leadership, Work and Organisation, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the interplay between identity and global mobility in the careers of senior, female talent, uniquely taking into account the perceptions of both female and male participants. In addition, the role organisations can play in enabling women to overcome these identity constraints is identified.

Design/methodology/approach – This interpretivist study draws on data from 38 in-depth interviews with senior managers in a large, multinational organisation to elicit a rich picture of how such careers are enacted.

Findings – Findings reveal how identity conflicts function as a glass border for globally mobile, senior female talent. Ways in which talent can access positive identity narratives to inform global mobility choices are identified.

Research limitations/implications – The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and the single case design of this research. The findings, however, offer insights into the identity work of globally mobile, female talent across different contexts.

Practical implications – Organisations can facilitate access to identity narratives through mentoring, face-to-face forums and via the internet to enable globally mobile, female talent to make more informed global mobility choices.

Originality/value – Drawing on identity theory, this paper examines how identity work for globally mobile, female talent has more fluid interpersonal boundaries than for men, creating on-going identity struggles. In highlighting how identity narratives can act as a means of breaching the glass border and facilitating global mobility for female talent, a contribution is made to existing debates in the fields of identity, gender studies and global talent management.

Keywords Women, Identity, Glass ceilings, Global mobility, Organisational support

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Forms of global mobility have been expanding over the past 20 years (Kirk, 2016), but shortages in globally mobile talent have increasingly been reported (Böhmer and Schinnenburg, 2016). Talent is defined here as “a bench of high potentials located in the talent pipeline and, a senior leadership suite, which potentials aspire to” (Groutsis et al., 2018, p. 2232). Global mobility, as Bozionelos et al. (2017, p. i) note, “takes many forms, ranging from short duration assignments that do not repeat themselves to long-term expatriate assignments either initiated by the employing organisation or self-initiated”. The focus in this paper is on the international careers of senior, female “talent” who engage in numerous forms of global mobility including traditional expatriation (one to five years), short-term assignments (less than one year), localised transfers from one business unit to another, global commuting and business travel (Bozkurr and Mohr, 2011).

This paper is a response to calls for research into how such international careers are enacted from a female perspective (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016) as travelling for work remains “a gendered experience” (Jeong et al., 2013, p. 148). Only 25 per cent of those engaged in expatriate assignments are female (Brookfield, 2016), however there is no available data showing numbers of individuals involved in business travel or global commuting.

Gender inequality in talent management schemes act as barriers to women’s progression (Festing et al., 2015), thus globally mobile, female talent, despite having apparently broken through the glass ceiling, remains vulnerable to isolation and
marginalisation (Beirne and Wilson, 2016). Glass ceiling is defined here as a “subtle, impenetrable barrier that blocks women and minorities’ advancement in a management hierarchy; they can be promoted below the barrier – but not across it” (Zeng, 2011, p. 312).

It is argued in this paper that women face an additional glass ceiling in the form of identity conflicts resulting from trying to balance multiple roles and identities, and this exacerbates the difficulties they face in being globally mobile. The aim of the study is to explore how identity impacts on barriers facing globally mobile, female talent, thereby offering a contribution to the literature on identity, gender studies and global talent management. The two research questions that have guided this study are therefore:

**RQ1.** What impact does identity have on senior, female managers’ pursuit of different forms of mobility inherent in a globally mobile career?

Second, in response to calls for studies that explore how the glass ceiling might be shattered (Powell and Butterfield, 2015):

**RQ2.** What role can organisations play in enabling women to overcome identity constraints and enact globally mobile careers?

**Literature review**

**Barriers to women**

Drawing on the work of Adler (1979), Cross and Lineham (2006) assert that women face a self-imposed glass ceiling in their working lives. This barrier is related to the priority they attach to their caring role, the need to balance their personal lives and careers and, in turn, their identity construction. In spite of female participation in the labour market increasing (Dang et al., 2014), there is evidence of under-representation of women in senior talent pools (Powell and Butterfield, 2015). This has been attributed to discrimination against women epitomised in the metaphor “the glass ceiling” which has dominated gender studies since the 1980s.

The nature of these barriers has been documented elsewhere. For example, it has been argued that women face an invisible “firewall” (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010) where “outsiders” cannot gain access to “the system” as the rules are established and maintained by the (male) insiders. Others have suggested that glass escalators exist where men who work in typically female occupations have better internal promotion prospects than women in the same occupations (Hultin, 2003). Some assert that there are “sticky floors” that are reflective of the lower average wages of women relative to men (Christofides et al., 2013). Gender differences in external hiring creates glass doors (Hassink and Russo, 2010) and even when women are promoted, they are often offered opportunities in organisations which are facing difficult circumstances and thus face a so-called “glass cliff” as they have to rise to even greater challenges than their male counterparts (Ryan et al., 2011). Women in such “high risk” positions, who may lack support and/or authority are at greater risk of being fired than men (Glass and Cook, 2016). There are additional barriers facing women in global careers, as the next section highlights.

**Barriers to women in global careers**

Barriers extend to women in globally mobile careers with images of glass borders (Lineham and Walsh, 1999) being added in recognition of the increasingly international nature of contemporary careers. Despite the myth that women do not want international assignments being discredited (Adler, 1979), a lack of globally mobile, female talent remains (Varma and Russell, 2016). Although expatriate numbers continue to rise (Brewster et al., 2014), women are often confined to domestic enterprises whilst men increasingly occupy senior positions in multinational or global businesses (Tienari et al., 2010).
The reluctance to send women on international assignments continues to be of concern not only from an ethical perspective, but also from a logistical one (Insch et al., 2008) as it limits the already scarce talent pool (Powell and Butterfield, 2015). It has also been noted that expatriate women face more challenges than men (Mäkelä et al., 2017). These barriers also relate to other forms of global mobility and are attributable to a variety of reasons including: identity constraints exacerbated by bias in selection for assignments and promotion; inequitable gender power relations and a lack of organisational support. These are considered in the following sections.

Identity work and women
Identity is defined here as, “The individual’s own notion of who and what they are” (Watson, 2008, p. 131). It has an internal dimension (self-image) related to how we see ourselves and how we would like others to see us and an external orientation (public image), which is how others categorise us. “Humaness”, ethnicity and gender all form part of an individual’s “primary identities”, are “implicated in many contexts”, reinforced through socialisation and are resistant to change (Jenkins, 2000, p. 21). Identity work is thus a process of internal self-reflection and social interaction with others through which individuals define and redefine themselves (Jenkins, 2014). In other words, it is the process through which different identities (such as work identity, maternal identity, etc.) is crafted and re-crafted over time.

It has been claimed that this process of identity work for women is more complex and relational (Ely and Meyerson, 2010) leading to calls to explore to what extent female identities have more fluid interpersonal boundaries (Brown, 2015). This complexity and fluidity, it is argued here, may be magnified for women identified as talent, as although such categorisation (Jenkins, 2000) can act as a motivator, paradoxically, it can have the opposite effect as it is associated with higher expectations and demands (Daubner-Siva et al., 2018). Such labelling is especially the case, it is contended, for those identified as global female talent, as compared to women in domestic roles.

Identity and mobility
Identity is associated with mobility as it also emerges through an individual’s interaction within a context or place (Scurry et al., 2013). It is not just being immersed in a new cultural environment that impacts on identity, it is also the process of choosing whether or not to accept such an opportunity. Such choices can also result in higher levels of stress, anxiety and identity struggles (De Boeck et al., 2018) creating an additional disadvantage to women, many of whom already juggle multiple roles and identities (Painter-Morland et al., 2018). Those who are globally mobile, face an extra level of complexity as individuals need to engage in identity work that enables them to cope with “perpetually shifting assignments, relationships and locations” (Tansley and Tietze, 2013, p. 1813).

For women who are required (or choose to) relocate, cultural and religious attitudes can constrain positive identity work, making global careers even more challenging (Scurry et al., 2013). Furthermore, gender discrimination at institutional level in some countries can lead to harassment for female expatriates (Bader et al., 2018). Thus international assignments invoke a change in identity (Kohonen, 2005; Mao and Shen, 2015), but the same is true, it is argued, for all forms of global mobility (Kirk, 2016).

The extent to which lower female numbers can be attributed to a lack of willingness to engage in global mobility is unclear. Research indicates that women are less globally mobile than men, especially when there are children in the family (Lirio, 2014). This is particularly true of in terms of travelling to locations perceived to be dangerous (Stoermer et al., 2017). It is suggested that women impose a glass ceiling on themselves as they evaluate the costs and benefits of accepting expatriate assignments, with the deciding factor being the impact taking that role will have on their work-life balance (Cross and Lineham, 2006).
Women are positioned as being “powerlessly caught in a penalising structural context” (Janssens et al., 2006, p. 133) as they seek to respond to societal discourses that emphasise their maternal roles and de-emphasise their identities as successful, working women. This is particularly the case in some developing countries, where attitudes to women’s domestic roles inhibits global mobility (Hutchings and Michailova, 2017). It is true to say, however, that in some contexts, such as East Asia, the Caribbean and North Africa, access to low-cost, high quality childcare can offer women a means of reconciling their role and identity conflicts (Shortland, 2018). Although each society has its own prevailing expectations, beliefs and cultural values that influence attitudes to motherhood and the outcome of such competing discourses is by no means certain (Duberley and Carrigan, 2012). However, other constraints, such as bias in selection impact on the way in which women construct and reconstruct their identities and their ability to be globally mobile, as discussed next.

Bias in selection
The percentage of female expatriates has risen, but they remain underrepresented due to on-going gender bias in selection for global assignments (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). Furthermore, men are more likely to select other men for international assignments for the same reasons (Varma and Russell, 2016). Women are also perceived to need managerial experience prior to the international appointment; a condition that male managers are not subject to, thus making them less likely to be chosen (Ng and Sears, 2017). Women are also required to hold higher qualifications than their male colleagues (Caliguiri and Bonache, 2016). All these factors also influence the identity work of female talent as they react to the way in which they are treated by others. In addition, power differentials in mentoring relationships present a further barrier, as discussed below.

Inequitable power relations
A shortage of female mentors including access to networks for women (Sugiyama et al., 2018) creates challenges for globally mobile women. Furthermore, women from non-western cultures and those with higher power distance and low gender egalitarianism gain less from mentor relationships than those with lower power distance and high gender egalitarianism, as they tend to adopt more submissive attitudes and can be subject to abuses of power by their mentor. This can impact on their career progression (Ramaswami et al., 2013) and self-image (Jenkins, 2000) by deterring or even preventing them from seeking opportunities to be globally mobile. A lack of organisational support can also impact on how individuals craft and re-craft their identities and reinforce the glass ceiling, as explored in the next section.

Lack of organisational support
Research in the field has tended to focus on expatriation and the organisational support that female expatriates require (see for example, McNulty and Hutchings, 2016; Howe-Walsh and Torka, 2017), including for dual-career couples (Sugiyama et al., 2018).

There are only a few studies exploring other forms of global mobility, such as business travel (Trzebiatowska, 2010) and business travel, short-term assignees and international commuters (Mäkelä et al., 2017). Even fewer researchers have explored other forms of global mobility from a female perspective, a notable exception being Puchmüller and Fischlmayr’s (2017) study into the emotional, instrumental and informational support needed by female business travellers.

An image emerges of a multi-layered, glass ceiling maintained by attitudes of both men and women in certain cultural contexts, imposed and enforced in others through gender bias by men and by women through identity conflicts. An area that remains largely unexplored,
is the support that organisations can offer in terms of facilitating identity construction for those enacting globally mobile careers. This is particularly pertinent for women, who experience conflict in reconciling their multiple identities, which is further exacerbated by the challenges inherent in the careers of senior female talent, who are often subject to greater scrutiny than their male counterparts (Glass and Cook, 2016), and thus need additional support. Hence the research questions identified to guide this study.

**Methodology**

This qualitative, interpretivist study, was designed to gather empirical data for a PhD funded jointly by the ESRC and a sponsoring organisation. It was designed to examine how identity impacts on senior, female managers’ ability to successfully pursue a globally mobile career. The case organisation, a large multinational with a presence in over 70 countries worldwide, covers nine diverse sectors from animal nutrition to transportation and logistics, giving a broad scope in terms of types of business. The scale of this research, unlike many other studies in the field, is not confined to expatriation but includes a wide range number of forms of mobility. Theoretical sampling (Huberman and Miles, 2002) was used to work with a case organisation contact to purposively select particular individuals who served to illustrate differing examples of the concepts in the study, i.e. those faced with global mobility choices operating in different cultures and contexts across the case organisation. These were employed across the global businesses in supply chain, global diversity, HR, organisational effectiveness and corporate business units.

A pilot was conducted prior to commencement and this informed the interview protocol (see Appendix). A total of 38 interviews were conducted, 16 with senior female talent and 22 with men. The sample selected was representative of the target population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, length of service, etc. A combination of in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face and telephone interviews by the author were carried out, 11 of which were face-to-face in the head offices of the case organisation in America. This necessitated visiting the participants in their offices across the corporate site, thus enabling the researcher to observe their body language; however, a drawback was the occasional phone call interruption. The remaining interviews were undertaken by telephone due to the challenges presented by both the global mobility of the participants and the geographic locations in which they were based.

The “relative anonymity” that telephone interviews might be seen to provide (Sturges and Hannahan, 2004, p. 108) was useful as some of the issues raised by participants were quite personal in nature. Having no visual cues, such as body language, was a slight disadvantage; however, it did enable the researcher to focus on subtler nuances (such as pauses, sighs, etc.) and pay closer attention to the stories being told (Holt, 2010). Furthermore, these participants are very accustomed to the use of technology, such as Skype, video conferencing, etc. to communicate (Trier-Bieniek, 2012, p. 630) and the richness of the data and the length of the interviews bears testimony to their level of comfort with this research method.

The duration of the interviews varied, as might be expected in open, exploratory studies of this nature, ranging from an hour’s duration up to 2 ½ h in length. The interviews were digitally-recorded and transcribed. The table below shows the sample profile. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants’ privacy.

**Data analysis**

With respect to data analysis, an iterative approach was taken to identify preliminary themes from the data. This prevented a blinkered view being adopted by developing *a priori* codes (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Frequency of recurring themes and observations from transcripts were noted in order to give an indication of the strength of shared feeling; however, the focus
was also on the narratives told by participants which reflected details of the culture(s) in which these individuals work. The stories the women told about the identity constraints on their globally mobile careers was of primary interest.

In the interviews, both female and male participants were asked what they perceived to be the identity barriers and facilitators for women to being globally mobile. The themes from the interviews were connected in a recursive and analytical approach to identify not only what were perceived to be the challenges associated with an international career but also what support employers might offer to enable them to overcome these.

Following the approach adopted by Gioia et al. (2013, p. 18), first order codes were identified, i.e. those “informant-centric terms” that epitomised the lived experiences described by these individuals. These included: “lack of work-life balance”; “dependants as a barrier”; “fear of saying no”, etc. which were linked to the second order, “theory-centric” theme: “a change in the permeability of the glass ceiling”, making it harder to penetrate. This resulted in the identification of the aggregate dimension of “triggering identity struggles”. The first order codes being offered a “flexible approach to global mobility” and “freedom to share information” were linked to second order themes such as “feelings of agency” and the ability to “access identity narratives” to inform mobility choices. This led to the identification of the aggregate dimension of “a reduction in the glass border facing female talent”. Such organisational support enabled “flexible careers” which is encapsulated in the aggregate dimension an “ethical approach to global talent management”. To avoid definitional drift, as only one researcher was conducting the analysis, memos were written to record the rationale for codes identified and constant comparisons were made between the original codes and those generated as the analysis progressed, as advocated by Gibbs (2018) (Figure 1).

The following section details the findings from the study and highlights the factors that result in identity struggles for many globally mobile talented females, as well as those that lead to a reduction in the glass border.

Findings

**Saying no to global mobility**

For a number of globally mobile women in this study, “mother” was an imbedded source of identity (Kohonen, 2005). Norma Stevens, a director, said she had declined to accept

![Figure 1. Coding and themes](image-url)
expatriate assignments opting to engage in flexpatriate assignments, globe-trotting and, where necessary take short-term assignments (see Table I) instead explaining; “I believe what’s most important to many of us as women is our children”. However, for some participants the non-work identity of mother is a career barrier, creating an impenetrable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms of participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Dependents</th>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Forms of mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douglas Manners</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>OE Manager</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>GT; COM; FLEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igor Simmons</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>OE Manager</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Edwards</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>EX (T); COM; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sian Byers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Leadership and Talent Management</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Howarth</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>EXP; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Bryant</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Supply Chain Manager</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>COM; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terence Greenhall</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>OE Consultant</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; COM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Westwood</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Best</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Corporate Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Leadbetter</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Tartan Manager</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>EX (T); FLEX; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Regan</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen King</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Platform Leader</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>COM; EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elias Koffman</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Corporate Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; VGE; IN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirstin Shore</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Global Diversity and Inclusion Mgr</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Ealing</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Global Mobility Consultant</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma Stevens</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; FLEX; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Vine</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Corporate Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; COM; EX (T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ria Redmond</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Head of HR</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Sanders</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Global Mobility Specialist</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia Hughes</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Lead Human Resources</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginu Glass</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Tartan Manager</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA; FLEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Stevens</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>HR Director</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Morrison</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Regional Director</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynette Winter</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Global Leadership Talent Manager</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Peterson</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Vine</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>COM; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moira Somerville</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Ex (T); FLEX; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regan Lavelle</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmond Malvers</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Supply Chain Manager</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>COM; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Briars</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Supply Chain Lead</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>COM; GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlett Boxall</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Global Mobility Manager</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen North</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Zeit</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Head of Human Resources</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Zabel</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>HR Director</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; FLEX; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presley Carsters</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Commercial Director</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>EX (T); GT; STA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb Cameron</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>OE Consultant</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Ex (T); GT; STA; FLEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tia Gallway</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Global Diversity and Inclusion Mgr</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Carnegie</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Business Unit Manager</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>EX (T); GT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** OE, organisational effectiveness. Forms of mobility: EX (T), expatriate (T); FLEX, flexpatriate; IN, inpatriate; STA, short-term assignee; GT, globetrotter; COM, commuter; VGE, virtual global employees

**Table I. Sample profile**
wall which they feel can only be breached by seeking an alternative source of employment, as Sylvia Hughes, a senior Human Resources Manager, recounted:

> I know of a case very well: this younger woman has young children and the expectations in her current role, she cannot balance that need to be with the children. So she has felt uncomfortable raising it, but feels, if need be she'll go and work somewhere else.

This collision between work and non-work roles results in identity struggles, but even for those women without children, there may be caring roles that impact on their ability to engage in all forms of global mobility. Kirstin Shore, a Global Diversity and Inclusion Manager, explained how currently she will only agree to global trotting, rather than relocation:

> I mean right now technically you’d think I would be able to, single with no children. Plus I’m global, I’m interested, but I’ve got other considerations right now in my life stage with my parents and whatnot, so it doesn’t make sense for me right now.

A number of male colleagues recognised these barriers for women in the talent pool and expressed empathy. Elias Koffman, a Corporate Vice President, expressed shock when he realised how some women feel:

> My eyes got opened. I had to give a talk on the Middle East in a [case organisation] Women’s Forum. I did my spiel on the Middle East and then listened […] there was 104 women from all over the world and the anguish, these women felt like God, I’ve just had a baby, but I didn’t want to tell I didn’t want to come because they won’t invite me again.

Sylvia Hughes’, Lead Human Resources, children have now grown up and left home and her parents have passed away. She explained how until now, she had only been prepared to engage in globe-trotting and short-term assignments. This was the first time in her career, as an “empty-nester”, she has felt able to accept an expatriate assignment and how she perceives identity tensions negatively affected her global mobility career choices and those of other senior women within the case organisation:

> For women earlier in their career it is a major obstacle to overcome. Number one the career break or at least downturn that many women have. Number two, the negative response from leaders and men in the company about women taking career break or potentially taking career breaks or not accepting an assignment at a point in time because of family issues.

However, agreeing to be globally mobile, in whatever form, also comes with a cost, as the next section shows.

**Guilt**

Many of the women interviewed expressed feelings of guilt at the compromises they have to make affecting their family’s lives. Lynette Winter, a Global Leadership Talent Manager who regularly accepts expatriate assignments and also engages in frequent globe-trotting, explains how her husband is much less mobile in his career than her and therefore provides much of the childcare for their son. This clearly causes Lynette identity issues as she recounts an occasion when her husband’s work took him abroad and how her young son said he didn’t like his father travelling. Lynette Wryly says when she asked him if he missed her when she was away, he said no. In attempting to make sense of her roles as mother and talented leader, she says the answer made her “glad and not glad”. This illustrates the talent paradox, where being identified as talent is a source of motivation, but also brings the pressure of higher expectations. In the case of globally mobile women, it is argued here, these pressures are further magnified.

**Selfishness**

Lynette’s case of a less mobile husband was a rare example in the study. Most female participants expressed the view that the forms of global mobility they would be prepared to
engage in are constrained by their identity as carer. Their male colleagues suggested that the reasons for this were twofold; first, that men are not inclined to adjust their careers to accommodate that of their partners, as Jeffrey Vine, a senior manager, said:

The women will follow men wherever they go, etc. I know that’s very old fashioned but if it’s part of our culture today and it’s not that common to see that men are prepared to quit their jobs for the international experience for their wives.

Second, it was perceived that men are more selfish than women with regard to their careers, as Jim Regan, a President, stated:

I have countless examples of women who had very nice careers, but they were willing to sacrifice their career for their husband. And so for whatever reason women do seem to be a lot less selfish than men about their careers.

All female participants said that it was not willingness that made women sacrifice their careers for men, more that many men were not inclined to make compromises in their careers. In other words, women felt they had no choice. There was a lot of sympathy expressed by the male participants for their female colleagues with regard to the demands of being in a global talent pool, as Mark Edwards, an HR Manager, admitted:

I do think potentially there are more challenges [for women] to a certain extent because I think being a male you tend to think, the wife will give up her job and come with me. But if I put myself in the situation where if my wife had been working and said, I’ve got an opportunity to go to Belgium will you give up your job and come with me, it would have been a heck of a decision.

Terence Greenhall, an Organisational Effectiveness Consultant, endorsed this view saying:

[...] I think there’s also a barrier or perceived barrier, you know, guys are jerks and we do it anyway, we drag family with us; women tend to be more thoughtful and think of the impact of it.

For the majority of those interviewed, such opportunities for identity re-construction are not unproblematic as having multiple, competing identities acts as a barrier to global mobility (and by association, to career progression). For female managers who are experiencing such identity conflicts, more support is needed to enable them to make sense of the global mobility choices they might make. This support can take a number of forms, as the discussion in the next section shows.

Support for globally mobile women
The female managers interviewed unanimously asserted that women are no less willing than their male counterparts to be mobile, but that their mobility needs to be facilitated through appropriate organisational support. All participants in this study, regardless of age, ethnicity, length of service or the form of mobility engaged in, stressed the need for both emotional and instrumental support. Perhaps this is because all identified some caring role, whether for parents or children. There were some differences in the perceived support needed depending on the form of global mobility engaged in. For instance, women engaging in business travel suggested that Skype rather than face-to-face meetings would reduce the amount of unnecessary travel helping them with childcare issues.

However, regardless of the form of mobility, one of the key issues was perceived to be a need for a flexible approach to managing global mobility to enable women to balance the demands of their multiple identities. As Joanne Westwood, a Human Resource Manager with young children and who will only engage in globe-trotting, put it:

I think our biggest issues is, if we are going to be a high potential talent vehicle and we’re going to have women in diverse going through the organisation, we have to be flexible and adaptable to meet the needs that they have.
The global mobility policy, participants felt, should encompass alternatives to international travel, such as, for example, video conferencing, etc. They also referred to the need to enable women (and men) to manage dual careers by ensuring that appropriate timings were jointly negotiated for global mobility assignments. Through this, the identity struggles experienced by the women can be lessened by allowing the needs of both partners to be accommodated. The acceptance of a variety of forms of global mobility (such as shorter assignments and frequent business travel) were seen by many of both the male and female respondents to offer a solution to relocating a partner and family. This was seen to be particularly important as even on expatriate assignment, respondents reported that they were still required to engage in other forms of global mobility, such as globe-trotting, to manage operations. Being able to negotiate alternative forms of global mobility clearly reduces identity conflict for some women as Sian Byers, Head of Leadership and Talent Management, explained:

I travel quite a bit, with a daughter who has just graduated from high school, the stress associated with travel was much lower than the stress that would have been associated with moving her somewhere else.

A number of participants emphasised how being able to share experiences and exchange stories helps them make global mobility choices and reduce identity conflict, as Norma Stevens, a Director, explains:

And people can... learn about different stories. You know [...] like what colour is my parachute stuff out on the web, what are my values and interests and skills and what does that equal.

Sian Byers described how she and others have been deterred from some global mobility opportunities because they perceive that asking questions about the implications of the role could be seen as evidence of a lack of commitment. Individuals in situations such as this give and receive support and guidance from each other through the process of storytelling:

I'm thinking about the people who've shared stories with me about even interviewing for a role because they felt that all these questions were taboo that they really needed to understand the commitment and the impact on their personal life.

In attempts to break through the barriers that women face in enacting a globally mobile career, stories provide a means of accessing identity narratives that assist in reconciling identity conflicts. Given the additional complications in terms of time differences and geographic distance, technology can also be used to facilitate such communications.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was twofold; to explore the interplay between identity and global mobility in the careers of senior female talent and to identify the role organisations can play in enabling women to overcome identity constraints. Work in the field has tended to focus on the more tangible aspects of the so-called “glass-border” (Lineham and Walsh, 1999) with a few studies exploring the role identity plays in the cultural adjustment of expatriates (Glanz, 2003; Kohonen, 2005; Scurry *et al.*, 2013); however, this study is unique in that it explores the relationship between identity and different forms of global mobility from the perspectives of both male and female talent.

The findings from this study show globally mobile, talented women face not only external pressures, they also experience internal, identity conflicts. Non-work roles and associated primary identities (Jenkins, 2000), such as mother, daughter collide creating tension for women. The pressure of also being categorised as globally mobile and talented brings into conflict the self- and public-image of the women’s identities (Jenkins, 2014) exacerbating these identity struggles and creating stress. The results from this research show that, although male colleagues empathised with some of the barriers facing their
counterparts, there were aspects that they did not appreciate, such as the embeddedness of some aspects of female identities. Furthermore, the unwillingness of men to make compromises in terms of their own careers clearly increases the pressure on women to continue to make sacrifices in their own working lives.

Identity evidently serves as a key influence for women with respect to the forms of global mobility they are prepared to engage in. For those with dependants, relocation appears to be the least desirable option due to the disruption it causes for their family. Reasons offered for this were that being able to engage in globe-trotting, flexpatriation and occasional short-term assignments created less stress for the family than having to move them to another country. This is especially the case in the light of constantly changing business needs. These women clearly experience identity struggles in striving to match the perceived expectations (including those embedded in their own self-image) of their roles as mothers, daughters, wives, etc. Being identified as global talent further exacerbates this self-conflict.

Men, on the other hand, do not appear to fully appreciate the tensions suffered by their female colleagues or to experience such problems in separating home and work life. This shows how for globally mobile, female talent, the process of internal self-reflection and external engagement with others is a continual, somewhat fraught dialectic. This suggests that identity work for globally mobile, female talent has more fluid interpersonal boundaries than for their male counterparts and responds to calls by Brown (2015) for further research into how gender influences identity work.

The importance of instrumental and emotional support for all forms of globally mobile talent, not just business travellers (Puchmüller and Fischlmayr, 2017) is underscored by the findings from this study. There is a need to negotiate with global, female talent to identify “strategic windows of opportunity” (Harvey et al., 2009, p. 15) where they may be able to expatriate; however, it is also important to offer flexibility over the form of mobility that can be engaged in. Access to alternative identity narratives is essential, not only for expatriates (Scurry et al., 2013) but, it is argued here, for any form of global mobility. Thus access to stories through mentoring, networking and via the internet (Glanz, 2003) needs to be provided.

In focusing on a range of forms of mobility, rather than just expatriation, this paper offers greater insights into the nature of globally mobile careers. In highlighting how identity narratives can act as a means of breaching the glass border and facilitating global mobility for female talent, it offers a contribution to identity theory, gender studies and global talent management.

Implications for practice
Direct support can be offered by providing flexibility and family-friendly policies to accommodate these female workers. More specifically, allowing women to choose the form of global mobility that best suits them at any given point in their life cycle is vital. Being able to opt to engage in business travel or global commuting, rather than to relocate, consistently emerged as a means of reducing identity conflict. Second, as women seek to reconcile the often competing needs of their different embedded identities, they are influenced by the experiences of others to whom they can relate. Thus, organisations can facilitate indirect support by enabling stories to be exchanged, allowing individuals to make sense of their global mobility choices. Opportunities could be created to exchange these stories either face-to-face or by using technology in order to facilitate the process of positive identity construction. Such activities would allow women to access a wider range of identity discourses helping them navigate through their complex working lives and compete on a more even playing field with their male colleagues.

Conclusions
Findings from this study show that, despite the emergence of new forms of careers and the associated discourses of individual agency and choice, in practice globally mobile female talent face barriers to being mobile due to identity conflicts that act as an internal glass ceiling and
border to career progression. These struggles are exacerbated by the fact that identity work for such women has more fluid interpersonal boundaries than are faced by their male counterparts. Participants in this study indicate that it is not a lack of willingness that prevents them from being globally mobile, but a lack of organisational support in terms of gaining access to alternative identity discourses that could enable them to make more informed choices about global mobility. Furthermore, it is concluded that organisations can reduce discrimination and promote equality by offering both direct and indirect support through implementing gender-focused policies and creating opportunities (through mentoring and networking) for women to access alternative identity narratives that enable them to navigate better their work-life boundaries.

Limitations and future research
The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size and the single case design of this research. However, given the scale of the operations in this large multinational, the findings offer insights into the impact of identity on globally mobile female talent across a number of different contexts. The results also highlight the implications for organisations in facilitating the global careers of female managers. Future research could be designed to explore the interplay between identity and global mobility across all genders and levels of the talent pool. A longitudinal study would enable researchers to gain deeper insights into how global talent identity narratives influence identity work over time, thus informing HR policy for the future.

References


Female talent


Further reading


Appendix. Interview guide

What types of global mobility are required from you?
How frequently are you required to be globally mobile?
What do you believe are the (dis)/advantages of global mobility for (a) the individuals themselves and (b) the organisation?
What do you believe are the main challenges for women in being mobile and do you believe they are different than for men? Please give examples.
What factors attracted you to a career that involves international travel?
What factors do you take into account when deciding whether or not to accept an assignment?
Can you give mean example of an assignment that you have accepted and explain the issues that you believe you faced?
Have there been any opportunities for an assignment that you personally have not taken up? If so, why?
What, if any, career “help” is offered to employees making decisions about being internationally mobile?
To what extent, if at all, do you believe it is the responsibility of the individual employee to manage their career path and mobility choices?
To what extent do you see a logical career path/s for yourself? Will this involve international travel? Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not yet discussed?

About the author

Dr Susan Kirk is Senior Lecturer in International Human Resource Management at Newcastle University. Susan is Interpretivist Researcher and publishes in the fields of identity, global mobility and talent management. She is Co-Track Chair for the Human Resource Management Special Interest Group in the British Academy of Management. She has published in journals such as; *Employee Relations, The International Journal of Human Resource Management* and the *European Management Review*. Dr Susan Kirk can be contacted at: susan.kirk@newcastle.ac.uk

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Expatriate time to proficiency: individual antecedents and the moderating effect of home country

Marie-France Waxin
Department of Management,
American University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Chris Brewster
Department of International Business and Strategy,
Henley Business School, University of Reading,
Reading, UK;
Department of International Human Resources Management,
University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland and
Department of International Human Resources Management,
Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen,
Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and

Nicolas Ashill
Department of Marketing,
American University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the direct impact of individual variables (cultural openness, social orientation, willingness to communicate, confidence in one’s technical abilities, active stress resistance, prior international experience) on expatriate time to proficiency (TTP); and the moderating effects of the home country on the relationships between these individual variables and expatriate TTP.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors use a quantitative, self-administered questionnaire to gather data from assigned expatriates from different countries in India, analysed through partial least squares.

Findings – The findings show that, first, four individual variables, i.e. social orientation, willingness to communicate, confidence in technical abilities and active stress resistance reduce expatriate TTP in the global sample. Second, the individual antecedents of expatriate TTP vary significantly across home countries.

Research limitations/implications – The results confirm the importance of individual antecedents in explaining expatriate TTP and the importance of context in the study of expatriates’ cross-cultural effectiveness. The authors also propose new, shorter measures for the individual antecedents.

Practical implications – The practical implications for HRM professionals relate mainly to selection and cross-cultural training. Expatriates may also get a better understanding of the individual and contextual variables that impact their TTP.

Originality/value – The authors show that individual antecedents interact with context, here home country, to predict expatriate TTP in an under-researched host country, India.

Keywords Antecedents, Context, International experience, Individual, Culture, Expatriation, Adjustment, Time to proficiency, Home country

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Black (1988) defined intercultural adjustment as the degree of an individual’s psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country and put forward three, unfortunately not discrete, facets of adjustment: work, interaction and general adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Haslberger et al., 2014).
In most of the literature, however, it is assumed that intercultural adjustment equates with job performance, even though few, if any, of the relevant researchers have measured that aspect (Lazarova and Thomas, 2012; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). This may be partly because neither the notion of adjustment nor the notion of performance is clearly specified; indeed they overlap in some studies, and partly because adjustment measures include a number of different domains (Haslberger et al., 2014): adjustment to the work domain is obviously more likely to be linked directly to work performance. Moreover, the literature on expatriate adjustment also tends to ignore the effects of time, which is obviously at the core of the adjustment process – expatriates will be more adjusted as they spend more time in a country (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hippler et al., 2015).

Pinder and Das (1979) and Pinder and Schroeder (1987) used the notion of perceived time to proficiency (TTP) in the context of transfers within one country. Pinder and Schroeder (1987) define TTP as “the time required for employees to become proficient in their jobs following a transfer” (p. 336). TTP following a transfer includes two different aspects. First, it requires the individual to meet the competencies in the official demands of that job (Barnard, 1938), or “in-role performance”, the undertaking of core technical duties of the job (Fisher, 2003). Second, TTP requires the individual to be proficient in the informal, social demands of the job (Barnard, 1938). This aspect of job effectiveness includes the extent to which a person’s job behaviour is congruent with a role sender’s expectation (Tsui, 1984). Using this notion of TTP, we define expatriates’ TTP as the time it takes expatriates, after starting the foreign assignment, to become proficient, i.e. to reach full performance in the official and informal demands of their job (Waxin et al., 1997, 2016). So, whereas the concept of work adjustment measures the degree of adjustment of an individual at a certain point in time, the concept of TTP measures the length of time it takes expatriates to reach an acceptable performance level in their new international assignment. Harrison and Shaffer (2005) found that a long expatriate TTP is a strong negative predictor for overall performance.

TTP is important for the expatriate, because proficiency is positively related to job satisfaction and psychological well-being (Aryee and Stone, 1996). Expatriate TTP is important for the employer because as expatriates become more proficient, they become more valuable for the organisation. Until the expatriate becomes proficient, the global expatriation costs are greater than the total contribution that the expatriate makes to the organisation (Pinder and Das, 1979). Multinational enterprises (MNEs) have struggled with the measurement of their return on investment from expatriates (McNulty et al., 2009; McNulty and Inkson, 2013). A simpler measure may be useful for assessing the value of their expatriation assignments. In addition, any individual antecedent that can shorten their TTP will be valuable and could be an input for the selection process.

There has been little research on assigned expatriates’ TTP and its antecedents (Waxin, 2000; Waxin et al., 1997, 2016; Selmer, 2006), or on the relative importance of the different individual and contextual antecedents in predicting expatriates’ cross-cultural competence, adjustment and performance (Wang et al., 2017). Most of the research examining individual variables on expatriate effectiveness has focussed on American expatriates assigned to a single host country (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Thus, our research objectives are twofold: first, to examine the individual variables that facilitate expatriate TTP, and, second, to test the moderator effect of the home country on the relationship between these individual variables and expatriate TTP.

We develop the paper as follows. First, we review the literature, examining the individual antecedents of expatriate TTP, and the potential moderating effects of home country, to develop hypotheses, encapsulated in a new model of expatriate TTP. Second, we outline our methodology. We then successively present, and discuss, the study’s findings. Finally, we present the limitations, implications and conclusions of our research.
Time to proficiency and its antecedents

The individual antecedents of time to proficiency (TTP)

Individual antecedents are important in explaining expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment (Huang et al., 2005; Lauring et al., 2017; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014). But what are these individual antecedents? Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) initiated this line of research in a conceptual paper. Their analysis is empirically derived, rather than, for example, following the more accepted and tested dimensions of cognition, behaviour and effect (Haslberger et al., 2014), but it has been influential. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) identified four dimensions of competencies facilitating expatriates’ adjustment process: “perceptual” relates to the expatriate’s ability to understand why foreigners behave as they do; “others-oriented” relates to the expatriate’s ability to interact effectively with host nationals; “self-oriented” relates to the expatriates’ self-esteem, confidence and mental hygiene; and “cultural”, not a personal attribute but one we include as a mediator in our analysis below.

We use the insights in that model, and in later literature, to develop the individual antecedents we test here.

Cultural openness. Mendenhall and Oddou’s (1985) “perceptual” dimension refers to the ability to understand the meaning of host nationals’ behaviour. It reduces uncertainty in interpersonal relations, facilitating adjustment. Well-adjusted expatriates tend to interpret the behaviour of the host country’s inhabitants without judging them (Kraimer et al., 2001). Cerdin (1999) operationalized the perceptual dimension, labelling it “openness”, and found that cultural openness predicted expatriates’ interaction and general adjustment. Culturally open expatriates are likely to gain acceptance and social support of their local colleagues, and thus become proficient more quickly.

Social orientation. Social orientation is the ability to create and maintain relationships with individuals from other cultures (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Social orientation has been given different labels, such as people orientation (Shaffer et al., 2006), relational abilities (Jordan and Cartwright, 1998) or relational skills (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). People orientation facilitates work adjustment and contextual performance (Shaffer et al., 2006), and proactivity in social relations facilitates work adjustment (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012). There are surprisingly few studies on social orientation, but those that exist, even when they include stages of organisational growth (Dunbar, 1992), or organisational dissimilarity (Guillaume et al., 2014), lead us to expect a positive effect on expatriate TTP. Local subordinates perceive expatriates’ relational skills as the most important competencies for successful expatriate adjustment (Templer, 2010). It seems likely that an expatriate’s social orientation will have an impact on their TTP.

Willingness to communicate. Following Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), we define this ability as the individual’s confidence and willingness to use the host culture’s language or any other common language to communicate with locals. Communication skills may be the most important competency for international assignments (Seak and Enderwick, 2008). Black (1990) operationalized the concept of willingness to communicate, and Cerdin (1999) refined it, finding that willingness to communicate was positively related to expatriate adjustment, and Mol et al. (2005) found it to be positively related to expatriate performance.

Confidence in one’s technical ability. There is considerable evidence in the expatriate selection literature that technical competency has traditionally been and continues to be the primary decision criterion used by MNEs across multiple countries (Caligiuri et al., 2009). Confidence in one’s technical ability is positively related to expatriates’ work adjustment (Ben Ameur, 2010; Cerdin, 1999). It seems reasonable to suggest that someone struggling to make an impact in a new environment is going to find that more difficult if they see themselves as less than capable of dealing even with the technical side of the job.
Active stress resistance. The ability to deal with stress is a key factor for intercultural effectiveness (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Wang et al., 2014). The ability to tolerate stress is positively related to interaction and work adjustment (Shaffer et al., 2006) and expatriates who manage stress effectively demonstrate better adjustment (Wang et al., 2014). However, there has been little research on the topic (Takeuchi et al., 2005). Folkman et al. (1986) identify four different strategies that individuals use to fight stress in the workplace: changing one’s environment (e.g. changing procedures), actively seeking information or training, psychologically re-evaluating the situation and withdrawing psychologically. Feldman and Thomas (1991) suggest that the first two strategies, external and active, are positively correlated with expatriation success, and proactivity has been found to predict expatriate performance (Stroppa and Spiess, 2011). We define active stress resistance as the ability to naturally and preferably resort to active (rather than passive) and external (rather than psychological) stress coping strategies.

Prior international experience. Many current expatriates have been expatriates before (Suutari et al., 2012). Existing research presents inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between prior international experience and expatriates’ adjustment and performance. Nicholson (1984) suggested that employees who are frequently mobile learn how to adjust to new work settings, as each successive transfer helps them become comfortable and productive faster and more easily. Quality might be more important than length (Church, 1982). Takeuchi et al. (2005) differentiated between different aspects of international experiences to include non-work, work and culture-specific experiences, and found that prior international experience was positively associated with cross-cultural adjustment. Caligiuri et al. (2009) found that prior international experience significantly predicts expatriates’ success and recommended including prior international experience in the expatriate selection criterion, whilst Kraimer et al. (2009) suggested that the relationship might be curvilinear. In their meta-analysis, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that prior international experience was positively, but only weakly, related to work adjustment. Although the exact influence of prior international experience on expatriate success is still unclear, it may lead to the development of some cross-cultural abilities (Şahin et al., 2014). More extensive past experience might be expected to be associated with shorter expatriate TTP.

On the basis of the discussion so far, we propose that:

H1. High scores on cultural openness (a), social orientation (b), willingness to communicate (c), confidence in one’s own technical abilities (d), active stress resistance (e) and previous international experience (f) will be negatively related to expatriate TTP.

Home country effect
Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) assumed that generic cross-cultural skills help expatriates adjust effectively regardless of context (Wang et al., 2017). The relative importance of the different individual antecedents in predicting expatriates’ cross-cultural competence is unclear: inconsistencies in previous findings imply that the general cross-cultural skills model is not always valid across different contexts and cultures (Wang et al., 2017). Conceptual models on the impact of individual antecedents on expatriates’ adjustment usually overlook both the expatriates’ host (Ward et al., 2004) and home country contexts (Wang et al., 2017). We argue that expatriates’ home country will moderate the impact of individual antecedents on TTP. We controlled both the home and the host country to take context into account.

Countries vary in their values and cultures (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). Culture can be defined as “shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or
meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations (House et al., 2004, p. 15). Researchers using the cultural approach usually use countries’ average scores on cultural dimensions to explain differences in outcomes that seem to originate from the differences in cultural values and practices. Since nearly all studies of culture conflate culture with “country”, assuming a similarity of culture within the country and distinctiveness between countries, we use those studies to partially explain expatriate TTP. We use these cultural measures as indicators of national difference, arguing that the cultural differences indicated in these “country of origin” effects will moderate the hypotheses we have offered so far. We note the important critiques of the cultural literature (see, e.g. Gerhart, 2008; McSweeney, 2002) and that the scores offered by Hofstede and GLOBE are incompatible even when they have the same titles (Avloniti and Fragkiskos, 2014). Our research being exploratory, our hypothesis is a form of what is in effect a proposition to be tested; we suggest differences but do not advance specific country relationships until we have assessed the empirical results:

H2. Home country will moderate the relationships between the individual antecedents and expatriate TTP (Figure 1).

Methodology

Sample description

The sample included 224 respondents (191 males and 33 females), from four different home countries: France (56), Germany (53), Korea (60) and Scandinavia (57)[1], who were assigned expatriates in New Delhi, India. They were working in multinational companies headquartered in their home countries, in general management or high technical positions, for a maximum period of four years in India. Like all the research cited so far, our focus is on assigned expatriates sent by their home headquarters to the foreign country. The respondents, on average, were 38 years old (SD = 7.5), reported 2.16 years (SD = 2.35) of prior international experience, and had job tenure in their current position of 20.49 months (SD = 8.89) at the time the data were collected. In broad terms, our data reflects the demographic make-up of assigned expatriates found in other studies (Shaffer et al., 2006).

Measures

The final key measures are listed in the Appendix.

Individual variables. To measure cultural openness (three items), social orientation (three items), willingness to communicate (four items) and confidence in technical ability (three items),
we simplified Cerdin’s (1999) scales. First, we analysed the confirmatory analysis of Cerdin’s scales (Cerdin et al., 1999). Second, we conducted a pre-test with a convenience sample of 20 expatriates of the different cultural groups of interest (Waxin, 2000, 2005) to eliminate superfluous, unclear and redundant items. The four final measures are shorter and show increased Cronbach’s αs. Respondents were asked to report their level of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1: strongly disagree, to 7: strongly agree.

To measure active stress resistance, we created an index by asking respondents to distribute 100 points among four types of anti-stress strategies (Folkman et al., 1986). Then we added together the points given to the two active stress resistance strategies (ASR1, ASR2), giving us a score out of 100 for each respondent.

To measure previous international experience, we created an index by asking the number of months spent abroad (working, studying, living abroad) before the actual expatriation experience in India. Respondent answers ranged from a minimum of 0 month to a maximum of 132 months (11 years), with a mean of 26 months (2.16 years) and a median of 18 months.

**Expatriate time to proficiency (TTP).** To measure TTP, we adapted the four items used by Pinder and Schoeder (1987) to the expatriates’ context (Waxin et al., 2016). We asked them to estimate how much time it had taken to become proficient at their new jobs, formally (two items: TTP1 and TTP2) and informally (TTP3, TTP4). For the four items of the scale, we used answers expressed in number of months and weeks, allowing more precision in the results. We then computed the average in weeks of these four items. Like Pinder and Schoeder (1987), we verified that this measure was not significantly correlated with seniority in the expatriate’s position (respectively \( r = 0.12, \text{ns} \)).

**Home country.** The home countries of our respondents (France, Germany, Korea and Scandinavia) are culturally very different from each other: their scores on the cultural dimensions used by both the GLOBE (House et al., 2004) and Hofstede (2001) studies are distinctive, and they belong to different “culture clusters” in both studies.

**Analytical techniques**

We use partial least squares (PLS) graphs (Chin, 1998). PLS has become an increasingly popular multivariate analysis technique used by human resource management researchers (Ringle et al., 2018). Three reasons justify our use of PLS. First, hypothesised relationships linking individual antecedents to TTP have largely remained unexplored. PLS is more applicable in research areas where theoretical knowledge is not as strong as that demanded by covariance-based approaches inherent in LISREL, AMOS and EQS, and can be used to suggest where relationships might or might not exist (Hair et al., 2011). Second, PLS can be used with small sample sizes (as in our four home country groups) because the iterative algorithm behind PLS estimates parameters in only small subsets of a model during any given iteration (Whittaker et al., 2007). Third, PLS can be used for both exploratory and confirmatory applications, since, unlike covariance-based approaches, it does not try to go beyond the data (Wold, 1982). Consequently, PLS made it easier to explore the differences between expatriates from four different home countries by comparing their path coefficients (Chin, 2009).

To test the first hypothesis, a main effects model was run and evaluated on the basis of the \( R^2 \) values for expatriate TTP, the size, \( t \)-statistics and significance level of the structural path coefficients (based on 5000 bootstrapping runs), and the Stone–Geisser \( Q^2 \) test (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974) for predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014).

To test the second hypothesis, the moderating role of home country was assessed through group comparisons. The differences between the four home country groups were analysed using path coefficients’ comparison using a parametric procedure from (Chin,
as originally described by (Keil et al., 2000). This procedure is shown below and shows a t-distribution with \( m+n-2 \) degrees of freedom:

\[
 t = \frac{\text{Path}_{\text{sample,1}} - \text{Path}_{\text{sample,2}}}{\sqrt{\frac{(m-1)^2}{m+n-2} \times \text{SE}^2_{\text{Sample,1}} + \frac{(n-1)^2}{m+n-2} \times \text{SE}^2_{\text{Sample,2}}} \times \left[ \frac{1}{m} + \frac{1}{n} \right]}}
\]

where path is the path coefficient; SE the standard error; \( m \) the sample 1 size; and \( n \) the sample 2 size. It determines a t-value with \( m+n-2 \) degrees of freedom dependent on the standard error of the estimated path coefficients from bootstrapping as well as the sample size (Chin, 2009).

**Findings**

We first present the descriptive statistics to indicate the general responses to the constructs measured. The correlations, means, standard deviations and Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) of the variables are presented in Table I. Significant differences were detected for previous international experience. Specifically, the mean score for previous international experience was higher for Scandinavian respondents than for expatriates from France, Germany and Korea. No significant differences were detected for active stress resistance.

**Measurement model assessment**

The measurement model was assessed by examining individual item reliability, internal consistency and discriminant validity, which are acceptable if there exist other indicators in the block for comparison. All of the loadings (item reliability) exceed Chin’s (1998) suggested threshold of 0.50 or 0.60, and the more stringent threshold of 0.707 suggested by Barclay et al. (1995). Table II summarises the measurement model results for the overall sample. We then assessed whether the same measurement model held for each home country group by analysing the measurement model invariance between respondents from the four home country groups, using the bootstrapping technique and the Fishers \( z \) transformation.

Table II shows that most individual item loadings do not differ significantly across the four home country groups. Table II also shows composite reliability (internal consistency) and average variance extracted (AVE) scores for the overall sample and the four sub-samples. All composite reliabilities are above the 0.70 acceptable threshold (Gefen et al., 2000) and range from 0.93 to 0.98. AVE scores range from 0.80 to 0.95 across the four groups. When AVE is greater than 0.50, the variance shared with a construct and its measures was greater than error (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All constructs in the model also meet the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion of discriminant validity. Recently, Henseler et al. (2015) have suggested that those criteria and cross-loadings are insufficiently sensitive to detect discriminant validity problems. To address this issue, we used their new heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. Specifically, we computed the heterotrait-monotrait ratio criteria for each pair of constructs on the basis of the item correlations. The computation yielded values between 0.07 and 0.16 in the overall sample. Using a conservative criterion of 0.85 (Kline, 2011), our findings corroborate the existence of discriminant validity for the overall sample. Similar values exist for each pair of constructs in each expatriate home country group, thus demonstrating discriminant validity for the four sub-samples.

**Structural model results**

The structural model results for the main effects model are shown in Table III. Falk and Miller (1992) suggest that the variance explained (\( R^2 \)) for endogenous variables should be greater than 0.10.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall sample</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confidence in technical ability</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social orientation</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural openness</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time to proficiency</td>
<td>−0.22**</td>
<td>−0.29**</td>
<td>−0.32**</td>
<td>−0.22**</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Active stress resistance</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>−0.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Previous international experience</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>−0.15*</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>17.31</td>
<td>58.82</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>France</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confidence in technical ability</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social orientation</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>(0.97)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural openness</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time to proficiency</td>
<td>−0.29**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.11*</td>
<td>−0.43**</td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Active stress resistance</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>−0.11*</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>−0.45**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Previous international experience</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>57.87</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>14.95</td>
<td>20.95</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germany</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confidence in technical ability</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social orientation</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>(0.97)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural openness</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time to proficiency</td>
<td>−0.31**</td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td>−0.32**</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Active stress resistance</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Previous international experience</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>−0.11*</td>
<td>−0.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>14.95</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>21.94</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korea</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confidence in technical ability</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social orientation</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>−0.14*</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural openness</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>(0.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time to proficiency</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>−0.22**</td>
<td>−0.55**</td>
<td>−0.19**</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Active stress resistance</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>−0.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Previous international experience</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>−0.28**</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>24.90</td>
<td>59.41</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>23.18</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scandinavia</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Confidence in technical ability</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social orientation</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>(0.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural openness</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time to proficiency</td>
<td>−0.54**</td>
<td>−0.39**</td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td>−0.35**</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Active stress resistance</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.29**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Previous international experience</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>17.17</td>
<td>62.10</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>20.41</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Cronbach’s α coefficients are displayed on the diagonal. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
### Table II. Model validation results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct and items</th>
<th>Overall sample (n = 224)</th>
<th>France (n = 54)</th>
<th>Germany (n = 53)</th>
<th>Korea (n = 60)</th>
<th>Scandinavia (n = 57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loading  IC  AVE</td>
<td>Loading  IC  AVE</td>
<td>Loading  IC  AVE</td>
<td>Loading  IC  AVE</td>
<td>Loading  IC  AVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in technical ability (CTA)</td>
<td>0.96 0.89</td>
<td>0.97 0.91</td>
<td>0.95 0.85</td>
<td>0.98 0.92</td>
<td>0.96 0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT1</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT2</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT3</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social orientation (CO)</td>
<td>0.97 0.93</td>
<td>0.98 0.95</td>
<td>0.98 0.93</td>
<td>0.97 0.91</td>
<td>0.97 0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO1</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO2</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO3</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to communicate (WtC)</td>
<td>0.95 0.83</td>
<td>0.97 0.88</td>
<td>0.97 0.89</td>
<td>0.95 0.83</td>
<td>0.95 0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WtC1</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WtC2</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WtC3</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WtC4</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural openness (CO)</td>
<td>0.96 0.88</td>
<td>0.96 0.88</td>
<td>0.93 0.81</td>
<td>0.97 0.91</td>
<td>0.95 0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO1</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO2</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO3</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to proficiency (TTP)</td>
<td>0.97 0.87</td>
<td>0.97 0.89</td>
<td>0.96 0.87</td>
<td>0.94 0.80</td>
<td>0.96 0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP1</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP2</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP3</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP4</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** IC, internal consistency; AVE, average variance extracted.
To test our first hypothesis, we examine the results in the global sample. Collectively, the individual antecedents explain 20 per cent of the variance in assigned expatriates’ TTP. The results in Table III show that four of the six individual antecedents of expatriate TTP are significant. Confidence in technical ability ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -2.06$), social orientation ($\beta = -0.13$, $t = -1.98$), willingness to communicate ($\beta = -0.21$, $t = -3.05$) and active stress resistance ($\beta = -0.17$, $t = -2.65$) all demonstrate a significant negative relationship with TTP. $H1b$–$H1e$ are therefore supported.

However, cultural openness and previous international experience both demonstrate a non-significant relationship with TTP ($\beta = -0.05$, $t = -0.86$); $\beta = -0.08$, $t = -1.42$), so $H1a$ and $H1f$ are rejected.

The Stone–Geisser test of predictive relevance was also performed to further assess model fit in PLS analysis (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974). Using omission distances of 10 and 25 produces similar results, indicating that the estimates are stable. Values greater than 0 indicate that the model has predictive relevance. The communality $Q^2$ for expatriate TTP was greater than 0.

To test our second hypothesis, the moderating role of home country was assessed through group comparisons. The structural model results for the four sub-samples are shown in Table III. The relationship between cultural openness and TTP is negative and significant in only one country sample, the French one ($\beta = -0.28$, $t = -2.11$). Social orientation ($\beta = -0.31$, $t = 2.56$) and confidence in technical ability ($\beta = -0.46$, $t = -4.46$) demonstrate significant negative relationships with TTP in the Scandinavian sample only. The relationship between willingness to communicate and TTP is negative and significant for Korea ($\beta = -0.58$, $t = -4.65$) and Germany ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = 1.80$) only. Active stress resistance demonstrates a negative and significant relationship with TTP for expatriates from France ($\beta = -0.35$, $t = -3.24$), Germany ($\beta = -0.27$, $t = -1.98$) and Scandinavia ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -2.50$), but the relationship between active stress resistance and TTP is not significant for Korea. Previous international experience demonstrates a negative and significant relationship with TTP for expatriates from France ($\beta = -0.18$, $t = -1.84$) and Korea ($\beta = -0.17$, $t = -1.81$). Collectively, the individual antecedents explain the least variance in TTP in the German sample (21 per cent) and the highest variance in TTP in the Scandinavian sample (47 per cent). These findings are complex but clearly suggest that the individual antecedents of TTP vary across home country. Therefore, $H2$ is supported.
Discussion

Our results show that individual antecedents interact with host country to predict expatriate TTP. This is a key contribution, as too few studies have examined the links between individual antecedents, home country and expatriates’ work outcomes simultaneously (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014).

First, the direct effects of individual antecedents on TTP contribute to the scarce literature on the link between individual antecedents and expatriates’ work-related outcomes (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014; Shaffer et al., 2006). We found that on our global sample, four variables – confidence in technical ability, social orientation, willingness to communicate and active stress resistance – are negatively related to TTP. This is probably because these four variables are directly relevant to the work situation where TTP is measured.

Cultural openness did not show any significant relationship with TTP in our global sample. In previous literature, cultural openness has not been connected with work adjustment, which is what we are concerned with here. The results for the French sample may reflect France’s long international (colonial) history.

Previous international experience did not show any significant relationship with TTP in the global sample either. TTP, as defined by Pinder and Schoeder (1987), is designed as a transfer-specific concept, dependent on individual and assignment-specific variables. This may be the reason why previous international experience does not have a significant effect on expatriate TTP. In the previous literature, previous international experience had been found to be positively related to expatriate adjustment (Selmer, 2007, 2009), but not significantly related to job performance (Mol et al., 2005). It is interesting to note, however, that Waxin et al. (1997) found that previous international experience was only negatively related to French expats’ TTP in Norway when the new assignment was perceived as “similar but more difficult”.

Second, the results in the country-specific samples are more complex. We found that the individual antecedents of TTP vary according to expatriates’ home country. So, not only the individual antecedents per se, but also their interaction with expatriates’ home country, partially predict TTP. Indeed, the percentages of TTP variance explained in the home country samples were higher than in the global sample.

Active stress resistance was significantly and negatively related to TTP in the global sample, and in all the country samples, except the Korean one. These results confirm previous work (Feldman and Thomas, 1991; Lauring et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2014) that active and external coping strategies are positively correlated with expatriate success. Expatriates who score high on stress tolerance should be more able to display flexible verbal and nonverbal behaviours that put others at ease in cross-cultural situations (Rose et al., 2010). Since Korea and India are both high context, tight, vertical collectivist cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011), individual stress resistance strategies may be less relevant for Koreans.

Only in the French sample was cultural openness negatively related to expatriate TTP. We expected cultural openness to have a more important negative effect on TTP, because India is a “tight” cultural country (Gelfand et al., 2011), making it harder to understand and adapt to the work environment. In their meta-analytic analysis, Shaffer et al. (2006) found that cultural flexibility was not significantly related to adjustment or to task performance. The fact that cultural openness explains TTP for French expatriates in India is a unique feature that requires further research.

Confidence in technical ability was found to be significant in the global sample, but only in the Scandinavian sub-sample. Perhaps because of their low power distance, Scandinavian expatriates rely more on their confidence in their own higher technological capability to acquire legitimate authority (Hofstede, 2001).
Willingness to communicate was significant in the global sample, and in the German and Korean sub-samples. Willingness to actively communicate with local subordinates, colleagues and bosses has been found to be positively related to expatriate adjustment (Cerdin, 1999). It makes intuitive sense that willingness to communicate has more of an effect in the more collectivist and more uncertainty-avoidant countries. It may also be the case that the accents of German and Korean expatriates may be more difficult for Indians to understand and so they may need to make more of an effort to verify that they have been understood.

Social orientation was significantly related to TTP in the global sample, but only in the Scandinavian sub-sample. The results in the other home country samples contradict previous research that suggested that people orientation facilitated work adjustment and contextual performance (Shaffer et al., 2006; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012). This might be an indication of the limitations of the adjustment measures used in the previous research or it might be the host country context having an impact here. Social orientation could be a less significant antecedent of TTP in a tight, vertical, collectivist country (like India) where talkative, outgoing behaviour disturbs traditional relationships and in-group boundaries (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012).

Previous international experience reduced TTP among Koreans and French expatriates. We note that these expatriates reported less previous international experience than Scandinavians. This may be an indication that most cross-cultural learning takes place in the first and second assignments and then the learning curve flattens out.

Overall, our country sub-sample results show that the impact of certain individual antecedents on TTP is not universal but dependent on the home country. However, the partial, amorphous and contested measurements of the concept of culture make it difficult to draw any direct correlations. Home country has a clear effect on the relevance of individual variables’ impact on TTP but more research is needed to establish exactly how. Moreover, the impact of individual antecedents on TTP might also depend on the characteristics of the expatriates’ host culture, for example, India. Our research refines the results of many previous studies that have implicitly assumed uniformity in the predictive power of personality traits, regardless of home and host country context (Wang et al., 2017) (Table IV).

Conclusions

Limitations and suggestions for future research

The first limitation of our research relates to the sample. Only four countries of origin and one host country are examined. Due to sample size limitations, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish expatriates had to be bundled together within one sample called “Scandinavia”. Moreover, research suggests that cultural values can vary considerably inside the same country, especially in multi-ethnic countries, like India (Lenartowicz and Roth, 2001). That is why we studied expatriates in just one major city, New Delhi. Future studies should include more countries of origin, more host countries and more respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents of expatriate time to proficiency</th>
<th>Global</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Scandinavia</th>
<th>Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural openness</td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social orientation</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to communicate</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in own technical abilities</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active stress resistance</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior international experience</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** V: significant negative relationship with expatriate TTP

Table IV: Summary of results: individual antecedents of expatriate time to proficiency on the global and different home country samples
Other limitations relate to our measures and data collection. The questionnaire was written in English, which, although is the working language of expatriates in India, is a foreign language for all the respondents. The dependent and independent variables were collected simultaneously via a single, self-report questionnaire from individual respondents, at a single point in time, which may artificially increase the strengths of some relationships. However, Nicholson (1984) noted in his person-centred theory of role transitions that what is operationally important is a person’s subjective perceptions of the reality, following the reasoning that what is perceived as real is real in its consequences. Mol et al. (2005) found that personality scales in expatriate studies did not have any self- and other-rated moderation effect. Still, in order to generate more reliable answers from the participants, we mixed the items of the different scales and presented them in a random order. Waxin et al. (1997) found, in their Norwegian sample, that the difference between the self-reported and the supervisors’ measure of the expatriate’s TTP was not significantly different.

Finally, expatriate TTP may be influenced by other individual and contextual variables, and additional empirical studies would be useful. For example, the expatriate’s perceptions of job dissimilarity or complexity could moderate the relationships between TTP and its antecedents.

Regarding other avenues of research, it would be interesting to examine the individual and organisational antecedents of self-initiated expatriates’ TTP, in different contexts.

**Theoretical contributions**
Despite these limitations, our results are robust. The first contribution of this paper is that, using TTP, we offer a new way of thinking about expatriate adjustment to the work domain, that is more straightforward and more directly linked to work performance. Expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance have been covered in two extensive literatures, but the results are not only equivocal but have very limited connection to each other. Assessment of TTP is not only relatively straightforward, but it is also, for expatriates and for the host and home country of the MNE that is employing them, perhaps the crucial issue for their assignment. The quicker expatriates become proficient in their work; the more comfortable they will feel in that domain of their new environment, the faster the MNE will see a positive relationship between their investment in the expatriate and the outcomes of the work they are doing.

The second contribution of this paper is to enrich and support the recent literature that highlights the importance of context in the research on expatriates’ cross-cultural effectiveness and management. Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) and Peltokorpi and Froese (2014) demonstrated that host country context affects expatriate job satisfaction and adjustment. Waxin et al. (2016) found that the mean scores of assigned expatriates’ TTP in a specific host country significantly vary across home countries, and that the organisational antecedents of expatriates’ TTP and their relative importance also vary significantly across expatriates’ home countries. This present study provides evidence that home country also has an impact on the individual antecedents of expatriates’ TTP.

The third contribution of this paper is that we refined and validated the measures for cultural openness, social orientation, willingness to communicate and confidence in one’s technical ability. The new measures are shorter, with only three or four items, and show an increased Cronbach’s $\alpha$. We also proposed a simple, new measure of active stress resistance.

**Practical implications**
This study has practical implications for HRM professionals and expatriates, relating mainly to selection, cross-cultural training and assessment.
First, our results show that individual characteristics should be taken into account in expatriate selection. Selection for international assignments is generally based mostly on technical expertise and previous performance and the logic of doing so is confirmed by our evidence. Individual variables are much less commonly considered, but our results confirm that they should be. Moreover, recruiters should consider different individual variables depending on the home and host country cultures.

Second, expatriates can also benefit from our research to get a better understanding of the individual variables that impact their TTP and to prepare themselves better for their new assignment. Our results suggest that expatriate TTP can be reduced by pre-departure and on-site training of expatriates (Feitosa et al., 2014). Host country nationals should be trained too, as a better understanding of cultural differences in work-interactions and leadership styles can reduce cultural misunderstandings and negative stereotyping (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014). Leiba-O’Sullivan (1999) distinguished between stable competencies – such as ability and personality – that are relatively fixed and may constrain the potential to develop a skill, and dynamic competences, such as knowledge and skills, that can be enhanced through training. Several authors argued that cultural flexibility (Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000), social initiative (Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000) and stress tolerance (Hammer et al., 1978) could be enhanced by training. Based on our global sample, enhancing the individual dynamic competencies of expatriates could be a good organisational investment to increase their effectiveness.

Third, TTP offers a simple and easily measured concept relating directly to an expatriate’s work performance. Though it has obvious limitations and does not answer the key financial issue for MNEs, the concept of TTP provides easily understood evidence of the contribution of assigned expatriates, which has been, as McNulty and Inkson (2013) pointed out, a previously overlooked factor in attempts to establish overall return on investment, and hence it may be more useful to MNEs than complex and expensive attempts to measure return on investment. We contribute to expatriate management research by examining the individual variables that impact TTP, examining the moderating effects of home country on these individual variables, and conducting research in India, a big emerging country.

Finally, our results demonstrate that when discussing expatriate selection and management, context should be examined and assessed carefully.

**Note**

1. The ‘Scandinavian’ category includes 35 Danish, 13 Swedish and 9 Norwegian expatriates. The authors used the terms ‘country’ or ‘national sample’ rather than culture, in order to reflect the data more accurately, as the authors identified country of origin but did not test for culture.

**References**


Further reading

Appendix. The key measures

Time to proficiency (… months and … weeks, then recoded into weeks) (TTP) 
(\(\alpha = 0.95\))

TTP1. How many months did it take you to become effective at your new job following your last expatriation?

TTP2. How quickly do you feel you became proficient at your new job following your expatriation?

TTP3. How many months did it take you to get to know your way around the informal networks at your new job?

TTP4. Overall, how quickly did you start to feel comfortable in your new work setting following your last transfer?

Individual variables
Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Cultural openness (CO) (\(\alpha = 0.93\))

CO1. Abroad, I try to understand the host national culture.

CO2. Having many contacts with the nationals of the host country is important when abroad.

CO3. Learning about other cultures is interesting and fun.

Social orientation (SO) (\(\alpha = 0.96\))

SO1. It is easy for me to make new friends.

SO2. I feel comfortable when I encounter foreigners.

SO3. In general, I am comfortable in social settings even when there are lots of people I do not know.

Willingness to communicate (WtC) (\(\alpha = 0.94\))

WtC1. If I were speaking with a foreigner in their native language and they said something important, but I did not understand, I would ask them to explain it again.

WtC2. Even if I could not speak a foreign language well, I would try to use what I knew.

WtC3. Even though I make mistakes, I enjoy trying to communicate with foreigners.

WtC4. If a foreigner did not understand what I said, I would be willing to explain it a couple of different times if I needed to.

Confidence in one’s technical ability (CTA) (\(\alpha = 0.94\))

CTA1. My professional skills will enable me to successfully complete my mission in India.

CTA2. I have the necessary professional competencies for this mission in India.

CTA3. I am professionally qualified for this job in India.

Active stress resistance index (ASR)
Generally speaking, when you face a stressful situation, how do you react? Distribute 100 points among the four statements.

ASR1. I take action. – points

ASR2. I actively seek help or additional information. – points

ASR3. I try to see things in a positive light. – points

ASR4. I try to forget about the problem and I deal with the consequences of stress. – points

Corresponding author
Marie-France Waxin can be contacted at: mwaxin@aus.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
Backfiles Collections

Preserving over 100 years of management research online

A lifetime investment for your institution, Emerald Backfiles will significantly enhance your library’s offering by providing access to over 125,000 articles from more than 260 journals dating back to 1898.

Visit emeraldinsight.com

Get Backfiles Collections for your library

Recommend Backfiles to your librarian today.
Find out more: emeraldpublishing.com/backfilesollections
eBook Collections

Research at your fingertips

Bringing together over 1,600 eBooks, the Emerald eBook collections are a cost-effective way of instantly expanding library holdings and increasing usage through an award-winning platform alongside journals.

Visit emeraldinsight.com

Get eBook Collections for your library

Recommend eBooks to your librarian today. Find out more: emeraldpublishing.com/ebookcollections
Number 3

237 Editorial

239 Of ostriches, frogs, birds and lizards: a dynamic framework of cultural identity negotiation strategies in an era of global mobility
Chenchen Li, Ling Eleanor Zhang and Anne-Wil Harzing

255 Satisfaction with an expatriate job: the role of physical and functional distance between expatriate and supervisor
Liisa Mäkelä, Hilpi Kangas and Vesa Suutari

269 Beyond nationality: international experience as a key dimension for subsidiary staffing choices in MNEs
Chipoong Kim, Chul Chung and Chris Brewster

285 Identity, glass borders and globally mobile female talent
Susan Kirk

300 Expatriate time to proficiency: individual antecedents and the moderating effect of home country
Marie-France Waxin, Chris Brewster and Nicolas Ashill