

# Expatriation in Malaysia: Predictors of Cross-Cultural Adjustment among Hotel Expatriates

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**Abstract**— The stress experienced by expatriates is usually caused by the inability to adjust to the host culture, which largely results from their lack of social skills needed in dealing with the new cultural environment. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to identify the predictors of cross-cultural adjustment among expatriates in Malaysia, by focusing on expatriates in hotel industry. The findings from the study could help clarify the overgeneralization made of data which are usually based on certain locations and groups of expatriates. Two hundred and three expatriates participated in the study. Personality, language ability, previous international experience, training, human resource support, social support, culture distance and family adjustment were analyzed using the multiple regression analysis to determine the predictors of adjustment. The data, which was drawn from a drop and collect method, self-administered questionnaire, revealed that social support and family adjustment were the most influential predictors of hotel expatriate adjustment. The findings also suggest that overgeneralizations of findings across disciplines are rather inappropriate. Detail discussions on the methods, findings, limitations, and suggestions for future research are presented in the paper.

**Keywords**— *Expatriate adjustment; organizational expatriates; self-initiated expatriates; personality, human resource support, social support*

## 1. Introduction

Studies on expatriation have shown the association between cultural environment and adjustment and how the relationship affects individual adjustments, attitudes and behaviors (see for example; [1]-[5]). According to Peltokorpi and Froese [6], culturally adjusted expatriates are open to the host culture and thus, able to adjust their behaviors, norms and rules

to the present environment. On the other hand, maladjusted expatriates will experience anxiety which leads to various negative work-related consequences such as lower job satisfaction and performance [7],[8], to the extent that it leads to premature return to the home country [9],[10],[11]. Hence, expatriate adjustment has become important research area in international business and cross-cultural literature.

Studies (see for example; [12]-[18]) have also proven that researchers seem to be more interested in studying expatriate managers in multinational companies (MNCs) from various other industries especially manufacturing, engineering and academics, with limited to no inclusion of the hospitality industry. Even though research have already embarked on various areas of expatriate adjustment, it is likely that the findings from studies of expatriates in hotel industry would yield different results as desirable attributes for expatriates in the hotel industry are somewhat different from those of other industries. For example, while Shay and Tracey [19] argued that adaptability, flexibility and good communication skills may be desirable attributes for expatriate managers in general, the nature of the hospitality industry requires a highly developed set of interpersonal and relational skills. Furthermore, this group of expatriates must understand the local culture and comprehend the needs of a diverse customer base. Although researches on expatriation, especially on the factors that may facilitate or inhibit expatriate adjustment have been abundance, there is still lack of empirical research on the adjustment of expatriates attached to the hotel industry. Thus, more studies are needed to look at adjustment among hospitality practitioners as to date only a handful of published studies have

explored the issue in hotel industry [20],[21]. As argued by Causin et al. [20], desirable attributes for expatriates in the hotel industry are somewhat different from those of other industries.

Based on these arguments, it is clear that a need for empirical studies which include a wider range of participants and countries is therefore, warranted. In an attempt to bridge the gaps that exists in the present literature, the arguments posed important justification for the present study to be conducted. In general, the present research hopes to achieve two main objectives. First is to investigate the relationships that exist between personality, language ability, previous international experience, training, human resource support, organizational culture, family adjustment and host culture and environment and expatriate adjustment. Secondly, the research also hoped to identify the most influential predictors of hotel expatriate adjustment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Expatriate Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment is the psychological comfort that an individual feels towards the new environment, which consequently leads him/her to function effectively and succeed during the assignment [22],[23]. It can be divided into three specific areas: adjustment to the general environment, adjustment to interaction with host nationals and adjustment to work [24]-[26]. The combination of these three areas of adjustment is important in determining the overall degree to which expatriates are able to adjust to their new country of assignment [27]. Church [28] describes well-adjusted expatriates as those who “represent a more integrative approach to a new culture, ...are open to the host culture, but integrate new behavior, norms and roles into the foundation provided by home cultures.” On the other hand, maladjusted expatriates are those who are unable or unwilling to accept the host countries’ behaviors, norms and roles. These expatriates view the host cultures as inferior to their own and they prefer to cling to their home cultures and remain in the expatriate “bubble” whenever possible.

### 2.2 Determinants of Expatriate Adjustment

As research has consistently found that employees who adjust poorly often return earlier from their foreign assignment as compared to those who are

well-adjusted [29],[8],[11], it is important to ascertain the factors that affect expatriate adjustment so that their adjustment can be maximized. Tung [30] identified three desirable attributes; adaptability, flexibility and communication skills that could facilitate expatriates to adjust to life in a foreign country. The findings were consistent with Shay and Tracey’s [19] and Kim et al.’s [21] studies on the attributes of successful adjustment. The researchers argued that expatriates in hospitality industry might adjust differently to a new environment, and the results from past studies could have limited usage to those in hospitality industry. Interestingly, their study yielded results which showed significant differences in the variables that impact the adjustment of expatriates in hospitality industry. They found that the two most desirable attributes for expatriate adjustment are people skills and personal characteristics, such as adaptability, flexibility, tolerance and emotional maturity. These researchers, in fact, found that personal and social skills are more desirable than technical skills for expatriates in hotel industry.

Shay and Tracey’s study also found several similarities between the results of their study and past studies in other industries. For example, the spouse’s inability to adjust to the host culture as well as the expatriate’s inability to adjust to the host culture was identified as the most important reasons for failure. The expatriate’s lack of personal or emotional maturity was also found to contribute towards the failure of adjustment. Their findings also highlight the importance of relational and social skills for hotel expatriates and this suggests that the two variables are more desirable than technical skills. In sum, although past studies suggest that different attributes affect expatriate success abroad, the reasons for failure remain the same across industries.

Besides that, personality traits [6], communication and interpersonal skills [31],[32],[17], language proficiency [33] and previous international experience [34],[8] are also found to affect expatriate adjustment. Cultural distance or cultural dissimilarity has been another important factor in predicting adjustment [35]-[37] as does linguistic ability, general knowledge about host culture and quality of interaction with host nationals [38].

Meanwhile, Arthur and Bennett [39] identified five factors that are perceived to contribute towards the success in a foreign assignment, namely, job knowledge and motivation, relational skills, flexibility/adaptability, extra cultural openness and

family situation. In general, Arthur and Bennett conclude that family situation was found to be the most important factor in determining the success of a foreign assignment, a finding consistent with other research on the same issue.

Earlier studies categorized the variables discussed above into two distinct categories: the individual and organizational factors, but more recent research has taken steps to separate the variables found in the expatriation literature into four categories: individual, organizational, work and non-work factors, depending on the purpose of the research. For example, social support has been classified as a variable categorized under the organizational factor by some researchers, but in other cases, it has been discussed as the nonwork factor.

The individual factors generally include variables such as personality, language ability, communication and interaction, previous international experience, language ability, relational skills and perceptual skills. The organizational factor comprises of pre-departure training, human resource support, on-site support and organizational culture. Meanwhile, the work factor includes the variables that are related to expatriate's job such as role clarity, role conflict, role novelty and role discretion. Finally, the nonwork factor is made up of family/spouse adjustment, culture novelty and social support.

Even though some of these variables may belong to different categories, there are possibilities that the variables can interact with each other to enable successful adjustment. For example, language ability is very much needed for expatriates (or spouse and children) to communicate with the host. Good communication skills will ensure that the expatriate is able to communicate, interact and perform their job satisfactorily, thus enhance his/her adjustment. This is related to Furnham and Bochner's [37] suggestion that the stress experienced by sojourners is caused by the inability to socially adjust to the host culture, which largely results from their lack of social skills needed in dealing with the new situation that an individual might face when dealing with an unfamiliar culture. In this case, communication, which includes speaking and understanding the language used in the host country is seen as important to adjustment.

### **2.3 The Process and Theories of Adjustment**

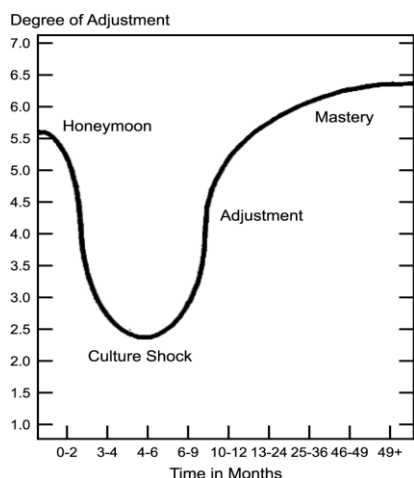
Reviews of the literature reveal that the process of adjustment and adaptation has, thus far, followed a universal pattern as suggested by Berry, Kim,

Minde and Mok [40]. Hence, the process of adjustment is discussed based on two theories that have been widely used to explain adjustment: the U-Curve Theory (UCT) and Social Learning Theory (SLT). Discussions on the theories will help towards a better insight of the phenomenon.

#### *2.3.1 The U-Curve Theory (UCT) and adjustment*

The empirical work on UCT was initiated by Lysgaard [41] who claimed that adjustment is a process over time, and is said to follow a u-curve pattern, which comprises of four phases. The first phase is the initial stage of elation and optimism, which usually takes place in the first few weeks of arrival. At this phase adjustment is seen to be easy and this could be the reason why it is often referred to as a honeymoon stage. During this stage, an individual will often feel fascinated and excited about the different aspects of the new cultural environment. As the individual learns to adapt to the new life, phase two occurs. At this phase, the individual may realize that there are differences in the new culture, and at this level, this individual will feel irritated, frustrated and bewildered. He/She will also feel isolated due to their inability to behave appropriately in the new culture. The feeling of isolation/alienation leads them to fall into cultural stereotype where they begin to compare the home and the host cultures. The third phase is the gradual adjustment to the new environment. This stage will see the individual try to adapt and cope with the differences that they encounter. The individual has begun to learn about the new set of cultural norms. For example, they have learned some language skills, are able to interact with the local people, learned the appropriate behaviors and are able to move around without assistance. These are considered important steps toward adjustment. The final phase is actually the full adjustment period itself, where the individual has already mastered the various practices in the new culture and knows what is appropriate and what is not acceptable in the new culture. Black and Mendenhall [42] note that at this stage, the ability to perform effectively shows only a minor increase. Torbiorn [23] argues that the categorization of u-curve into the various stages does not always accord with the description in the literature. He claims that the "boundaries and content of the different stages and the force that impels the adjustment process from one to the next is rarely specified" in the usual descriptions of the curve (p. 93). Obviously, learning from the mistakes, recognizing what is considered wrong, and observing the behavior of others (what is

appropriate and what is not) proves to be essential in cross-cultural adjustment. The phases of adjustment from the perspective of the UCT are illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The u-curve theory of adjustment

Source: Black & Mendenhall (1991)

### 2.3.2 The Social Learning Theory (SLT) and adjustment

If UCT describes adjustment from its various phases and the actual feelings that a sojourner feels during a sojourn, the SLT looks at adjustment from the behavioral aspects. Black and Mendenhall [42] therefore, suggest that SLT can be used to explain how individuals learn as the theory integrates both behavior and cognitive theories. The SLT proposed by Bandura [43] originated from various basic concepts of learning theory and over the years, it has become a prominent learning theory. In proposing the theory, Bandura contends that direct reinforcement could not be applied to all types of learning. He then introduced social element to his theory, in contention that people can also learn through observation.

SLT consists of three main notions. First is the thought that people can learn through observation. Bandura demonstrates that people learn and emulate the behaviors of others. Second, it relates to the belief that internal psychological conditions are the vital element in learning process. Bandura notes that learning and behavioral execution are not only influenced by the extrinsic or environmental fortification but also by intrinsic reinforcement such as self-esteem, contentment and achievement. Finally, Bandura acknowledges that although people have learned something, it does not mean that they will behave differently. Even though behaviorists propose that learning led to a permanent behavioral change, observational

learning establishes that learning does not always yield new behaviors.

SLT claims that apart from learning based on the consequences of their behaviors, an individual also learns and behaves through their observations of how others behave, the consequences of that behavior and also by imitating the modeled behavior. In the case of expatriates, as they arrive in the new culture, they will have to learn and behave appropriately based on how people of the host culture behave. The observation can help them to retain what is appropriate and discard what is not. This can be explained further by looking at the steps taken by expatriates during the period of adjustment, starting from the time they enter a new culture. This process is described based on the four important components of SLT—attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. All these components (steps) are involved in the observations during the learning process and as expatriates are also observing and learning about the new environment, SLT is deemed to be the right theory to describe the process that expatriates have to go through during the process of adjustment.

The SLT also suggests that during the learning process, communication and interaction with hosts is crucial, as it helps expatriates to obtain information regarding what is appropriate and what is not in the new society. Through the feedback received from people of the host country, an expatriate will be able to adjust their behavior to comply with the current situation. However, although observational learning is believed to be effective, Bandura believes that it also has some disadvantages. For example, the actions that yielded from the observation depend very much on whether the component skills exist and if the skills are not available, it will yield to an inappropriate behavior (action). Another problem with the observational learning is that what has been learned and stored in ones memory (ideas) are not always transformed into appropriate actions for the first time.

The discussions presented above explain how expatriates go through the various phases during their adjustment, and how different factors affect their adjustment. Reviews of the literature have led to the generation of the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between personality, language ability, previous international experience, training, human resource support, social support, family adjustment and host culture and environment and expatriate adjustment.*

*Hypothesis 2: Personality, language ability, previous international experience, training, human resource support, social support, family adjustment and host culture and environment are predictors of expatriate adjustment.*

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

The unit of analysis of this study is the individual expatriate attached to the Malaysian hotel industry. Several steps were devised in order to reach the target respondents. An expatriate association in Kuala Lumpur had shared a list of hotels in Peninsular Malaysia (multinationals and international joint venture hotel companies), which were registered with the organization. These hotels were randomly stratified based on the rankings and regions where the hotels were located.

It was identified that there were 323 expatriates attached to hotels in Peninsular Malaysia, with positions ranging from General Managers (GMs) to non-managerial positions such as chef and technical experts. Since the population of expatriates in Peninsular Malaysia was rather small, all of the expatriates were included as respondents. Of the total number of questionnaires distributed, 241 questionnaires were returned and after the cleaning process, 203 usable data were analyzed, which yielded a 71 per cent returned, usable rate.

#### 3.2 Measurements

Table 1 summarizes the measurement of each variable being studied as well as the alpha values ( $\alpha$ ) of each variable.

**Table 1.** Measures

Variables	Measures	Total Items	$\alpha$
Adjustment	Black [24], Expatriate Adjustment Survey (1 = not adjusted at all; 5 = very well adjusted)	14 items	.92
Personality	Sherer et al. [44], Self-efficacy Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)	23 items	.74
Human resource support	Guzzo et al. [45], Company practice Item (1 = to not extent; 5 = to great extent)	43 items	.81
Social support	Caplan et al. [46], Social Support Scale (1 =not relevant; 5 = very much)	8 items	.60
Culture distance	Black & Stephens [26], Culture Novelty Questionnaire ( 1=	8 items	.86

	very different; 5 = very similar)		
Family adjustment	Black & Stephens [26], Measures of Adjustment (1 = not adjusted at all; 5 = very well adjusted)	9 items	.94

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Of the total respondents, 131 (64.5%) of them were married and had been in the country from 9 months to more than 20 years. The age of respondents ranged from under 35 to 50 years. Ninety-six (47.4%) respondents had a college degree and 58% had a bachelor's degree. A majority of the expatriates (48.3%) came from European countries, 52 (25.6%) from Australia/New Zealand region, 42 (20.7%) from Asian countries and 11 (5.4%) from North America. Most of these expatriates (90.6%) had experiences working in foreign countries prior to expatriation in Malaysia. It was also found that 179 respondents (88.2%) held managerial posts as compared to those holding the non-managerial positions (11.8%). In describing their ability to speak the native language of Malaysia, 121 (59.6%) admitted that their ability to speak the native language (Bahasa Malaysia) were limited to very short and simple phrases only.

#### 4.2 Hypotheses Testing

For both hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was used to test the relationships between variables. The independent variables were divided into three categories. The first was the individual factors which were comprised of personality, language ability and previous international experience. The organizational factors were made up of training, human resource support and social support. Finally, the nonwork factors were comprised of family adjustment and host culture and environment.

##### 4.2.1 Individual factors

For the individual variables, only previous international experience seemed to establish a significant positive relationship with adjustment ( $\beta=-.195$ ,  $t=-2.798$ ,  $p=.01$ ) (Table 3). From the result, it can be interpreted that the more experience the expatriates had internationally, the

better they adjust to a new cultural environment. The other two variables; personality ( $\beta=.072$ ,  $t=1.028$ ,  $p=.305$ ) and language ability ( $\beta=.035$ ,  $t=.509$ ;  $p=.611$ ) did not demonstrate any relationship with adjustment.

#### 4.2.2 Organizational factors

The analysis conducted on organizational variables showed that there was no significant relationship between the training expatriates had prior to expatriation and their adjustment ( $\beta=.032$ ,  $t=.467$ ,  $p=.641$ ) (Table 2). Analysis on human resource support also did not reveal any significant relationship with expatriate adjustment ( $\beta=.069$ ,  $t=1.004$ ,  $p=.317$ ). However, there was a significant, positive relationship between social support received by expatriates from their supervisor and other people at work and their level of adjustment toward the host country ( $\beta=.262$ ,  $t=3.794$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This showed that the more support that expatriates received from their boss and other people at work (i.e. making work life easier, easy to talk with, reliable and willingness to listen), the better they adjust to the new cultural environment.

#### 4.2.3 Non-work factors

For the non-work factors, two variables were tested against the dependent variable. First, the analysis looked at the relationship between culture differences/similarities. The hypothesis hoped to identify whether culture similarities or differences have any relationship with expatriate adjustment. The analysis however, did not show any relationship between the two variables ( $\beta=.016$ ,  $t=-.266$ ,  $p=.790$ ). This contradicts past research that claimed culture dissimilarities/similarities as one of the determinants of adjustment to a new cultural environment. The final variable tested was family adjustment and its relationship with expatriate adjustment. The results revealed that there was a significant, positive but weak relationship between family adjustment and expatriate adjustment ( $\beta=.264$ ,  $t=3.082$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This would mean that if their family were better adjusted, the expatriates would also adjust themselves better to the new environment. Table 2 displays the summary of the results of the study.

**Table 2.** Multiple regression analysis for relationship between independent variables and dependent variable

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$	T	Sig.
<b>Individual factors</b>					
Previous experience	-.258	.092	-.195	-2.798	.006
Personality	.053	.052	.072	1.028	.305
Speak other language	.080	.157	.035	.509	.611
<b>Organizational Factors</b>					
Training	.033	.071	.032	.467	.641
Human Resource	.074	.073	.069	1.004	.317
Social Support	.346	.091	.262	3.794	.000
<b>Nonwork Factors</b>					
Culture	-.012	.046	-.016	-.266	.790
Family	.120	.032	.264	3.802	.000
Constant = 2.749					
R <sup>2</sup> = .134					
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .134					
F = 3.764					
Degree of Freedom = 202					

Dependent Variable: Adjustment;  $p < .01$

Next, further analysis was conducted to determine the predictors of expatriate adjustment. The multiple regression analysis with enter method was used to identify the predictors of expatriate adjustment. Personality, language ability, previous international experience, training, human resource support, social support, family adjustment and host culture and environment were analyzed, and resulted in an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 1.34. The results of the analysis revealed that out of eight variables tested, only social support and family adjustment predict expatriate adjustment. Other variables (i.e. personality, human resource, culture, previous international experience, ability to speak languages other than their own and training) did not predict the adjustment directly. Table 3 displays the result of the analysis.

**Table 3.** Multiple regression analysis: Predictors of adjustment

Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	T	Sig.
Previous experience	-.131	.106	-.099	-1.235	.218
Personality	.004	.052	.005	.067	.947
Speak other language	.054	.158	.024	.342	.733
Training	.010	.071	.009	.135	.893
HR	.045	.076	.042	.589	.556
Social support	.300	.099	.227	3.036	.003
Culture	.069	.053	.103	1.302	.194
Family	.090	.033	.198	2.707	.007
Constant = 2.749					
R <sup>2</sup> = .134					
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .134					
F = 3.764					
Degree of Freedom = 202					
p<.01					

From Table 3, the results of the multiple regression analysis also found that social support significantly predict expatriate adjustment ( $\beta=.227$ ;  $t= 3.036$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and contributed 9.6 per cent toward expatriate adjustment. Meanwhile, family adjustment yielded  $\beta=.198$ ,  $t=2.707$  ( $p=0.00<0.01$ ). The variable contributed 13.4 per cent toward hotel expatriate adjustment in Malaysia. Together, both variables contributed 23.0 per cent toward the overall hotel expatriate adjustment. A total of 13.4% variance in expatriate adjustment are explained by previous international experience, personality, language, training, human resource support, social support, culture and family adjustment.

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

The main objective of the study was to identify the predictors of hotel expatriate adjustment. The results of the study could be explained in two ways. First, empirical studies conducted within the context of hotel industry have generally suggested that emphasis placed on certain skills and competencies may not completely conform to the more generic skills proposed in general expatriation literature. In all, the findings revealed the importance of previous international experience, social support and family adjustment in determining and predicting expatriate adjustment. Evidently, this supports findings from previous studies conducted across disciplines and job sectors [47],[48],[8] which suggest that support provided by the organization, supervisor, those at work and family would be particularly important to expatriates. For example, the adjustment and support from accompanying spouse was a great source of support and encouragement for the expatriate. Therefore, organizational support,

particularly social support and family adjustment should be taken seriously by organizations and expatriates themselves when considering expatriation as these are main predictors of adjustment. This was also consistent with previous studies which reported the direct influence of social support on the level of adjustment [49],[34],[50].

The results suggest that social support from supervisors and subordinates are important in determining the expatriate's level of adjustment. Organizations sending the expatriates, as well as those hosting the expatriates should consider the elements of social support (i.e. doing things to help ease work life, easy to talk with, reliable and willingness to listen) seriously in helping the expatriates to adjust and succeed in their job. It does not only suggest the important roles of the organizations as a whole but also the roles of the employers and subordinates in helping the expatriates to adjust.

Results from previous research had also shown consistent results on the link between family adjustment and expatriate adjustment. Previous research [51],[24],[12] pioneered the findings which suggest the importance of family adjustment in determining the success or failure of expatriate adjustment. The results also emphasize that family adjustment and human resource support are relevant determinants which should be taken into consideration by all types of industries when sending or hosting expatriates.

### 5.1 Implications

The research findings provide great implications on knowledge of theories and practices. These pertain to the added value of the study in terms of what is new to the body of knowledge and how the study relates to the theories and how it can be applied by concerned parties.

The findings contribute to the literature on adjustment, especially expatriate adjustment in several ways. Firstly, reviews of the literature had shown that research on expatriate adjustment mostly looked at a limited variable such as personality, communication and interaction, human resource support or family adjustment. The present research took further efforts in investigating all possible variables (except work role) that could possibly affect expatriate adjustment. Previous international experience, social support and family adjustment were found to be significantly related to adjustment. Social support and family adjustment have also shown to be the strongest predictors to expatriate adjustment.

The findings from our study indicate that while there are general factors that affect the adjustment of expatriates, social support and family adjustment are the strongest predictors of hotel expatriate adjustment. Social support and family support and adjustment help motivate the expatriates to adjust to the culture in general, as well as the work environment. These factors help expatriates moved from the second phase of the UCT (which is the most critical stage in adjustment, where culture shock could occur together with the feeling of alienation and frustration with the new cultural environment and would lead to expatriate failure) to the next phase (adjustment) and consequently, succeed in their expatriation. Factors such as previous international experience help expatriates to learn through observation (in SLT) and fulfill expatriate's expectations prior to foreign assignment. The SLT suggests that during previous cross-cultural experience, individuals normally acquire the skills to cope with uncertainties in the new environment.

Besides the theoretical implications, the present research also provides practical implications. The social support from people at work (employers and subordinates) could help expatriates to better adjust themselves to the new environment. This means that those involve with expatriates should be aware that in ensuring successful adjustment of the expatriates, it does not only involve the efforts from the expatriate alone but also those in the host facility such as supervisors and co-workers. The importance of family adjustment is undeniable. The implications of the inability of the family to adjust to the new cultural environment had been discussed in various literatures and had proven to cause companies a great deal.

Apart from that, the findings from the study would not only help those in hotel industry but also MNCs in general. It could also help alert other organizations such as governments as they send employees to work in foreign countries, as well as sending students to study abroad, especially those married ones. Since adjustment of the spouse and the expatriate are highly correlated, sponsoring agencies, as well as those who are going abroad on their own have to be aware of the correlations, as this would affect their expatriates' overall adjustment, and would cause a premature return. Most corporations have ignorantly considered the spouse's opinion as an irrelevant factor in expatriation, and adjustment process and have not considered their opinion about the move nor provided them training to prepare them for living in a foreign environment [52],[30]. According to Black and Stephens [26], only 30 per cent of the firms sought the spouse's opinion concerning the assignment, over 90 per cent of the firm that they

studied offered no predeparture training for spouses and over 90 per cent of the firms did not offer job finding assistance for spouses even though approximately 50 per cent of the accompanying spouses worked prior to the assignment. Given that spouse adjustment is positively related to expatriate adjustment and expatriate intentions to stay or leave the assignment, organizations, be it private or public may also benefit from providing some sorts of predeparture training for spouses as well as expatriates themselves.

As for the government, the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) that the Malaysian government introduced in 2010 has emphasized on the utilization of foreign talent to enhance their careers in the country as many entry point projects (EPPs) from many National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) require foreign talent [53]. A report by MIDA [54] has also shown that the country has become one of the preferred FDI destinations in the South East Asian (SEA) region. The government's policy has clearly indicated that the country will face a continuous increase in the number of expatriates in various sectors such as oil and gas, manufacturing and engineering. In fact, part of the ETP has also acknowledged the human capital needs of the EPPs and business opportunities, whereby the government will take action to attract foreign talent (expatriates) to work in Malaysia and ease immigration rules to facilitate the entry of talent as it is believed that this will provide a ready pool of technical, critical thinking and leaderships skills needed to run future business opportunities as well as projects in non-NKEAs.

The growing trend in the number of expatriates in Malaysia has heightened the need for research and understanding of how these expatriates adjust to Malaysian environment during their assignments. Moreover, with the exception to Mohd. Tahir and Ismail [55] who investigated cross-cultural challenges, Sri Ramalu, Raduan, Jegak and Naresh [56] on personality and cross-cultural adjustment and [57] on expatriates' learning style, no similar study on expatriates in Malaysia has been published. Therefore, it is strongly believed that expatriates in Malaysia is a subject worth investigating, particularly when the country is moving and developing fast toward achieving its vision.

The research is also seen as further efforts towards understanding how expatriates in hotel industry adjust to a heterogeneous culture like Malaysia since it is reasonable to assume that different expatriate jobs and different regions of the world may require different emphasis on certain skills than others. Those in the hotel industry and those from different regions located in a heterogeneous



culture may emphasize on certain skills and competencies that may not completely conform to the more generic skills proposed in general expatriation literature.

In all, we find that successful adjustment of expatriates does not only depend on the efforts (expatriate's personality) shown by the expatriates alone, but it is also the responsibility of parent companies, foreign facilities and the accompanying family. While organizations can provide appropriate human resource support and social support to the expatriates, family can do the same in helping the expatriates to adjust. This in turn will help ease their learning process and adjustment to the new environment. Besides, to organizations planning to send expatriates for international assignment, those responsible for expatriate selection should also consider appropriate selection criteria when choosing expatriates for the assignment. Training should be provided and not just taken for granted by assuming that the expatriates will be able to adjust. As the theories suggest, the greater the difference of the home and the host cultures, the longer it takes for the expatriates to learn and adjust. Therefore, relevant parties involved should ensure that each play a role in assisting expatriates during the assignment.

## 5.2 Limitations

In spite of the significant contributions we discussed above, several limitations need to be acknowledged. The first is the reliance on a single respondent for the independent and dependent variables, which may have contributed towards a common method variance. Although this issue is pervasive for research in social sciences, it is particularly salient when measuring variables more susceptible to perceptual bias. Therefore, when designing the questionnaire survey for the study, attempts were made to minimize same source bias by placing the independent and dependent variables in separate sections of the questionnaire. Furthermore, if the same respondent bias or common method bias was in effect and inflated the correlations among the variables, the self-rated individual, organizational and nonwork variables should have had stronger effects on the expatriate adjustment, which was not the case. Hence, the concern for same respondent bias or common method bias was further reduced.

Secondly, this study also has limitations in its statistical techniques and data as it only looked at only one particular industry (i.e. hotel). The hotel industry was chosen because despite the extraordinary interest of MNHCs and IJVHCs in expanding their operations globally, very little is known about expatriates in this industry. Another

limitation with regard to this is the sample size itself. Response rates within groups are particularly important for all multivariate analysis [58]. In the present study, the 203 respondents are rather small samples for multivariate analyses, and this could lead to some problems when estimating regression weights in relation to hypotheses testing. But due to the time constraints and the small population of expatriates in the industry, the number of respondents was considered appropriate (return rate of more than 70 per cent). Also, owing to the constraints of time and financial resources, the samples of this study are also limited to expatriates located in Peninsular Malaysia. Thus, generalization of the results (that all expatriates in Malaysian hotel industry) should be made with appropriate caution. Besides the statistical techniques, data and sample size, there is also a limitation with the instruments adopted by the study.

Even though it is acknowledged that the instruments used in the data collection were adapted from past research as they had shown high reliability and validity, the instruments were still applied with caution as in hotel industry some of the supports (especially human resource support) could have not been provided by the organizations or they are already available to the expatriates due to the nature of the industry (i.e. car, housing, etc.). Next, the cross-sectional nature of the present research also contributes towards the limitation of the study. Clearly, a longitudinal research that tracks the adjustment progress and communication activities during expatriation is needed. In addition, statements of causality based on the results of statistical techniques (such as multiple regression and SEM) are useful in making inferences, but must be treated with caution given the correlational nature of the data.

## 5.3 Conclusions

The analyses of the study also confirm the value of unpacking concept of adjustment and presenting it as a multidimensional concept. As hypothesized, while on the whole the expatriates in our sample are well-adjusted to working and living in Malaysia, they do show variations across the adjustment dimensions examined.

In sum, the knowledge gained from this study would definitely contribute towards new knowledge in expatriation literature about the differences that exist among expatriates in hotel industry, as well as those involved in hotel industry (MNHCs and IJVHCs) to better understand the variables that would facilitate and inhibit the adjustment of hotel expatriates. The knowledge gained would also help avoid generalizations that

the same variables affect the adjustment of hotel expatriates especially those attached to the hotel in a multinational country like Malaysia.

## Acknowledgments

The authors fully acknowledged Universiti Utara Malaysia for the fund and support that made the research possible.

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