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Expatriates adjustment and job performance: An examination of individual and organizational factors

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# Expatriates adjustment and job performance

## An examination of individual and organizational factors

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating effects of expatriate adjustment (work, general and interaction) between individual (previous international experience, self-efficacy, social network and cultural sensitivity) and organizational factor (direct and indirect support) and job performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The data were collected from 201 expatriates working in Malaysia and analyse by using structural equation modelling (Amos-16).

**Findings** – The results of the study indicated that expatriate adjustment (work, general and interaction) mediate the relationship between individual and organizational factors and expatriate performance (supervisor rated).

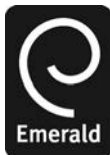
**Research limitations/implications** – The data were collected from the expatriates working in Malaysian universities. There can be differences between education industry and pure business organization in terms of working environment, selection process and management support. The respondents were citizens of different countries around the world which include Asia, Europe and Middle East. Even though Malaysia is a multicultural society and expatriates from any part of the world can find themselves in Malaysia, this research did not group the respondents in terms of their cultural differences and similarities with Malaysian culture.

**Practical implications** – The findings of this study suggest that human resource managers and MNC's management should provide direct and indirect support to the expatriates and their families in terms of language and cultural training, career development, logistical assistance, family mentoring, psychological counselling, job search, self-development and social activities. Furthermore, recruitment managers and MNC's management should consider these factors before appointing any employee for international assignment. Finally, the findings of this research suggest that better expatriate performance help MNC's to perform better in their international operations which will ultimately improve the home and host country economic situation. The better performance of MNC's in their international operations through effective expatriate performance will encourage other domestic organizations to expand their operations globally.

**Originality/value** – Expatriate literature have highlighted many individual and organizational factors which affect expatriate job performance and adjustment but the role of some individual and organizational factors is still not clear and/or ignored by past researchers. For example, the role of direct and indirect support has not been well conceptualized in past studies. In addition, only a few studies have explained the importance of self-efficacy, cultural sensitivity and social network in expatriate literature. Furthermore, role of previous international experience has generated conflicting results in past research.

**Keywords** Expatriates adjustment, Expatriates job performance, Direct/Indirect support, Individual factors, Expatriates, Jobs

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

Global business expansion has shifted domestic human resource (HR) practices to global HR practices which have brought many new challenges for HR professionals and researchers. Among the different HR functions employee's performance is well conceptualized at the domestic level but researchers have been trying to investigate those factors that affect employee's adjustment and job performance during international assignment. Although some of the factors are similarly important for employee's adjustment and job performance at domestic and international assignment but few factors have less importance at domestic level but more importance for successful completion of international assignment; for example, previous international experience, and cultural sensitivity. The employee's performance during international assignment, in other words known as expatriate performance, plays an important role in a MNC's growth. Palthe (2008) argued that mostly MNC's depend on expatriates for successful operation and continuous growth. MNC's have appointed many expatriates for their overseas operations in order to successfully achieve their global business objectives.

MNC's have realized the importance of expatriates for their overseas operations and invested more resources and efforts to improve their performance. MNC's have realized that their overseas business operation is based on better expatriate performance. In other words, better performance of expatriates has become important to the success of multinational organizations (Selmer, 2006). In this regard, researchers have focused to investigate those factors that affect expatriate's performance and adjustment (Paik *et al.*, 2007; Mezas and Scandura, 2005) in order to help MNC's to perform better in the international market. Templer (2010) argues that due to global business expansion and competition, there is a need to better understand the performance of international assignees. In addition, MNC have allocated more resources and attention to manage expatriates performance and researchers have also been investigating those factors that affect expatriate's adjustment and job performance. Yavas (2001) argued that expatriate's performance depends highly on their cross-cultural adjustment (work, general and interaction). The Black and Gregersen (1991) model is the most influential theory which explains that expatriate adjustment (work, general, and interaction) predicts better job performance.

## Research importance

Researchers have been focusing on expatriate's performance and adjustment (Paik *et al.*, 2007; Mezas and Scandura, 2005) to help the MNC's to perform better in the international market. Templer (2010) argues that due to global business expansion and competition, there is a need to better understand the performance of international assignees. Therefore, MNC has been allocated more resources and attention to manage expatriate's performance and researchers have also been investigating those factors that affect expatriate's performance. Therefore, investigation of those factors which influence expatriate's work, and general and interaction adjustment is important. Researchers have highlighted many factors that influence expatriate adjustment and job performance which are normally classified as individual, organizational and social level factors. The individual level factors include personality traits, personal characteristics of the expatriates. The organizational level factors include organizational contextual characteristics and HR practices. Finally, social level factors include broader cultural and institutional context of expatriate adjustment and job performance. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the body of

knowledge and practice related to international HR by highlighting individual and organizational factors which are assumed to affect expatriate work, general and interaction adjustment and job performance. Based on the major theoretical review that have advanced expatriate literature, logical explanation and arguments, this paper proposes a framework with hypothesis and examines the influence of individual and organizational factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance. Few past researchers have tried to explain the role of individual factors in expatriate's success (Caligiuri, 2000; Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997; Arthur and Bennett, 1995; Black, 1990) but due to insufficient conceptual and theoretical understanding the role of individual factors is not clear and a gap still exists (Bhatti *et al.*, 2013). Arthur and Bennett (1995) suggested that researchers should fill this gap by determining whether individual and organizational factors predict expatriate's success. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) argued that even though much emphasis on expatriate management but there is still a gap between individual factors and expatriates performance which researcher need to cover. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the effects of individual and organizational factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of expatriate adjustment (work, general and interaction) between individual and organizational factors and expatriates performance.

This study examines the role of individual and organizational factors in expatriate adjustment and job performance. The next section will discuss the past researchers' arguments, findings and suggestions (Literature review) related to expatriate job performance, expatriate adjustment, individual and organizational factors. Second, this paper will explain the methodology used to conduct the research including research framework, data analysis techniques, measurements and demographic data of the respondents. Third, the results of the analysis will be presented with discussion and future research directions. Finally, this paper will explain the implications and limitations of the study.

### Literature review

Global business expansion increases the demand of employees for international assignment and MNC's have been investing maximum resources and efforts to manage their international assignees' performance. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) argued that organizations receive multiple advantages while having diverse workforce and expatriates. A survey conducted by Windham International and National Foreign Trade Council Inc (1998) on HR managers and international relocation experts reported that organizations continue to rely on expatriates and 41 percent of corporate revenues comes from outside the home country. Beechler and Woodward (2009) argued that organizations need expatriate employees in order to internationalize market and competition. Therefore, developing economies adopt international strategy for global expansion and recruit more expatriates for a successful and smooth process of global expansion.

In parallel to HR practitioners, researchers have also been trying to investigate the predictors of expatriate adjustment and job performance. Even though some of the researchers have tried to conceptualize the relationship between individual and organizational factors, past studies still lack clear directions for these relationships (Cheng and Yeh Yun Lin, 2009; Mol *et al.*, 2009). Claus *et al.* (2011) pointed that due to conflicting results in past research the role of previous international experience

in expatriate job performance is unclear. Furthermore, results conflict in past studies regarding effects of individual and organizational factor on expatriate's job performance and Church (2000) suggested further support for the proposed framework in this study. Andreason (2003) pointed out that past research has ignored the topic of direct and indirect support and its influence on expatriate adjustment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of individual and organizational factors as predictors to expatriate adjustment (interaction, general and work) and job performance (task and contextual performance).

Researchers have been highlighted many factors that influence expatriate adjustment and job performance which normally classified as individual factors, organizational level factors and social level factors. Some researchers have tried to explain the role of individual factors in expatriate's success (Caligiuri, 2000; Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997; Arthur and Bennett, 1995; Black, 1990) but there are few studies that examined the effects of individual factors on expatriates adjustment and job performance. Arthur and Bennett (1995) suggested that researchers should fill this gap by determining whether individual and organizational factors predict expatriates success. The following paragraphs will explain the different individual and organizational factors, expatriates adjustment (work, interaction and general) and expatriates performance.

### 1. *Expatriate's adjustment*

Past researchers have different views about adjustment and they have defined adjustment in terms of subjective wellbeing (Campbell, 1981) or unhappy feelings of expatriates about their circumstances (Munton and West, 1995). Furthermore, Selmer (1999) defined adjustment as socio-cultural characteristics in achieving effectiveness in interpersonal exchange with host country nationals. Black's (1988) definition of adjustment is mostly acceptable which explains that adjustment refers to psychological discomfort which can be categorized as work, general and interaction adjustment.

Work adjustment refers to the expatriate's comfort with their job; general adjustment refers to expatriate's comfort with non-work factors like food, language, transportation and entertainment. Finally interaction adjustment refers to comfort associated with interaction of expatriates with host country nationals inside and outside the work (Black, 1988). Black and Stephens (1989) have operationalized the three dimensions of adjustment and Shaffer *et al.* (1999) have validated these three dimensions. Past researchers have highlighted the concept of expatriate adjustment and explained that expatriate adjustment is multidimensional construct (work, general and interaction) (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). Cultural adjustment relates to non-work and work adjustment related to work. Whereas interaction adjustment relates to work and non-work environments (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). Kraimer *et al.* (2003) found that expatriate's adjustment related positively with job performance and when expatriates properly adjust in the host country's general environment, their job performance will be similar as they perform in their home country (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). In addition, if the expatriates develop better relationship with local employees, this will be helpful for expatriates to meet the performance expectations of the company (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). Furthermore, Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment positively related with expatriate's job performance. Some of the researchers have empirically examined all expatriate adjustment dimensions

(Thomas and Lazarova, 2006; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010) but the majority of the researchers have focused on work and interaction dimensions (Caligiuri, 1997; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2005).

Florkowski and Fogel (1999) pointed out that even though many researchers have highlighted the role of expatriate adjustment in expatriate success; still expatriate adjustment role is unclear. In addition, Maruyama (1992) argue that if expatriates fail to adjust themselves in host country, their level of cultural insensitivity, indifference and ignorance increases. Furthermore, Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriate's adjustment is a key indicator for expatriate's success in their international assignment. Claus *et al.* (2011) highlighted that past research were focusing on job performance in expatriate's contexts but mostly researchers were ignored the expatriate adjustment in their studies (Tucker *et al.*, 2004; Liu and Shaffer, 2005; Shay and Back, 2006; Osman-Gani and RockstuhI, 2008). In addition, Tucker *et al.* (2004) argued that the relationship between inter cultural adjustment and expatriate job performance is complex and not well understood. Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that even though expatriate's adjustment and job performance are linked to each other logically but empirical research still lacks empirical evidence. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) highlighted that few past studies have examined the effects of individual and organizational factors on expatriate performance but the researchers should pay more attention to expatriate adjustment in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically test the mediating role of expatriate adjustment between individual and organizational factors and expatriate job performance.

## 2. Job performance

Harrison and Shaffer (2005) argued that job performance is function of the amount of time and energy (effort) that expatriate devoted to his/her job. Theory of job performance explained that job performance comprises multidimensional constructs which consist of task dimension and contextual dimension. Researchers have highlighted many factors that influence expatriate job performance such as goal orientation, self-efficacy, self-monitoring, task and people orientation, relational ability and international experience (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006; Wang and Kanungo, 2007). Tucker *et al.* (2004) argue that the relationship between expatriate adjustment and job performance is complex and not clearly understood. Furthermore, Claus *et al.* (2011) pointed out that expatriate adjustment and job performance are logically linked but this linkage has a lack of empirical proofs. This study will investigate the influence of individual and organizational factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance. In order to measure expatriate job performance researchers have using different source like peers, supervisor, subordinates, etc., which can be host country nationals or third country nationals. Paik *et al.* (2007) argued that performance of expatriates heavily depends on the host country workforce and researchers have neglected this area. Jassawalla *et al.* (2004) argue that expatriate adjustment mostly depends on how they deal with cross-cultural conflicts with the host country workforce. They further argue that those expatriates who successfully handle their conflicts with the host country workforce are more likely to experience smooth adjustment at their workplace. Templer (2010) highlighted that global business expansion requires more expatriates for international assignment which forces HRD professionals to manage effectively and better understand expatriate performance.

### 3. *Self-efficacy*

The concept of self-efficacy explains that individual's perception about their ability to achieve certain task motivates them to achieve their objectives at work place and in personal life. The concept of self-efficacy has widely been used in domestic employee performance and might be similarly applicable in the context of expatriate's performance. Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that low self-efficacy leads to poor performance, absenteeism and high intention to search for a job whereas high self-efficacy leads to better performance and high organizational commitment. Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) found that self-efficacy enhances job performance up to 28 per cent. Claus *et al.* (2011) argued that researchers should incorporate self-efficacy factors in the expatriate's performance model in order to better understand its effects on expatriate adjustment and job performance. An expatriate with high self-efficacy may perform his/her job tasks more effectively, develop better relationships and more positively interact with host country nationals. Moreover, expatriates with high self-efficacy level may take initiatives to solve problems and handle critical situations during international assignment which may help them to adjust in the host country and improve their performance. In addition, Bandura (1997) explains those individuals high on self-efficacy tend to be more for initiating tasks, consistent efforts to achieve tasks and persistent with problems even in the face of failure. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) argue that self-efficacy influences job performance through social networks (expatriate adjustment). Expatriates high on self-efficacy may interact with people more positively which helps them to extend their social network. Holton *et al.* (2000) argued that individuals with high self-efficacy perform their job task more effectively. Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment is positively related with expatriate's job performance. Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriate's adjustment is a key indicator for expatriate's success in their international assignment. In other words, an expatriate high on self-efficacy achieves better adjustment in the host country in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment, which further influences their performance:

*H1.* Expatriate's adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and expatriate's job performance (supervisor rated).

### 4. *Cultural sensitivity*

Chen and Starosta (2000) defined cultural sensitivity as "an individual ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication". Expatriate's ability to positively perceive the cultural differences might help them to adjust in the host country and improve their performance. Furthermore, the positive perception of an expatriate about cultural differences might help him/her to build better relationship and understanding with host county nationals (adjustment) which further improves their job performance. In this regard, Shin *et al.* (2007) and Adler (1997) suggested that expatriates need to adjust their behaviour in the new culture in order to reduce stress and job uncertainty. Mol *et al.* (2005) highlighted that cultural sensitivity is an important personal characteristics for better expatriate job performance and found that cultural sensitivity strongly and positively related with job performance. In addition, cultural understanding and appreciation ability might help expatriates to solve the critical cultural issues. Claus *et al.* (2011) stated

that expatriate cultural sensitivity help them to deal with the complexity of cross culture and develop global mind-set. Furthermore, Javidan *et al.* (2010) proposed that global mind-set inventory explain three major components defined by three specific attributes (intellectual capital, psychological capital and social capital). These three attributes might help expatriates to adjust in the host country, for example, intellectual capital refers to international business knowledge or individual knowledge to learn might facilitate the work adjustment of expatriates. In addition, psychological capital explains individual capacity to change and openness to different culture might help expatriates to facilitate interaction adjustment. Finally, social capital explains the individual ability to form connections, develop unity and attract stakeholders might facilitate general adjustment. Therefore, when expatriates manage to adjust in the host country in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment, there performance levels might increase. In this regard, Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment positively related with expatriate's job performance. Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriate's adjustment is a key indicator for expatriate's success in their international assignment:

H2. Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between Cultural sensitivity and expatriate's job performance (supervisor rated).

##### 5. *Previous international experience*

Previous experience helps individuals to learn from their past mistakes and improve their future life. Individuals can improve their life by learning from past mistakes but at the same time past experience may guide an individuals about performing different tasks and handling different critical situations. Learning from the past mistakes and practicing certain set of activities to achieve certain goals may help an individual to improve their work and family life. More specifically, past work experience might help individuals to improve his/her job performance. In this regard, Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that previous job experience helps the individual to develop traits knowledge which is vital for job performance and an important element in domestic selection process. Past studies have highlighted this factor at international level and found that previous international experience positively related with expatriate's job performance (Wang, 2001; Grosch, 2004; Tucker *et al.*, 2004). In contrast, Mol *et al.* (2005) found that previous international experience does not influence expatriate job performance. The reason behind these findings may be due to moderating effects of expatriate adjustment as claimed by Mol *et al.* (2005) whereas expatriate literature suggest that expatriate adjustment play a mediating role between individual factors and expatriate's job performance (Ramalu *et al.*, 2011; Deller, 1997). Furthermore, some of the researchers found positive effects of previous international experience on expatriate job performance (Black, 1988; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999) but other researcher has not been constantly support these findings (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Selmer, 2006). Furthermore, conflicting results in past studies motivate the researchers to further examine the role of previous international experience in expatriate job performance. This study brings forward the Black (1988) and Shaffer *et al.* (1999) concept where they explained that previous international experience helps expatriates to adjust in the host country in terms of task, general and interaction adjustment which further influence expatriates performance. In this regard, Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment positively related with expatriate's job



performance. Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriates adjustment is a key indicator for expatriate's success in their international assignment. Therefore, in this study we hypothesized that previous international experience positively influences expatriate job performance mediated by expatriate adjustment:

- H3.* Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between previous international experience and expatriate's job performance (supervisor rated).

### 6. Social network

Social network refers to social relations that link an individual or group with another individual or group (Hwang, 1998). Wasserman and Faust (1994) defined social networks as "a group of behaviors linked by one or more relation types". Wang and Rabindra (2004) explained that expatriate social network consist on relationship between expatriates and host country nationals and friends. In addition, Jassawalla *et al.* (2003) suggested that when expatriates get information about their job and way of life from their social network, they adjust themselves to foreign culture faster. Therefore, social networks help expatriates to get proper information to improve their work and non-work life. In this regard, Li and Rothstein (2009) argue that social networks play an important role in expatriate social life and career development. Sometimes expatriate attachment and better relation with host country nationals or especially with well-known person in host country might facilitate expatriate work and non-work adjustment. Kilduff and Krackhardt (1994) explain that better relationship with well-known persons in an organization bring a boost in expatriate performance reputation. Better relationships with well know persons in an organization might generate information sources for expatriates which may further help career development and cultural understanding. In this regard, Seibert *et al.* (2001) found that social network enhance expatriates career success through accessing information, resources and career sponsorship. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) argue that social network play an important role on expatriate adjustment and job performance. Researchers have highlighted the concept of social network and explained that social networks help the expatriates to gain social support from host and home country nationals and this support helps them to adjust in the host country and improve their job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Wang and Nayir, 2006; Liu and Shaffer, 2005). Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that social networks support the expatriate's intercultural adjustment and job performance. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) argue that past studies failed to explain the role of social support in expatriate adjustment and job performance due to conflicting results. This study proposed that expatriate adjustment mediate the relationship between social support and expatriate performance. Therefore, we hypothesized *H4*:

- H4.* Expatriate's adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between social network and expatriate's job performance (supervisor rated).

### 7. Direct and indirect support

Erbacher *et al.* (2006) defined organizational support as "the extent to which the organization including parent and local company provides assistance to expatriates". The expatriate assistance includes financial assistance, family support (locating schooling for kids, housing) and general assistance (mentoring and counselling).

Kraimer and Wayne (2004) argue that career support is part of organizational support. Toh and DeNisi (2005) explain organizational support for expatriates in terms of informational support, cooperation and emotional support and proposed that these three kinds of support facilitate expatriate adjustment. They further argue that informational support helps expatriates to understand the host country culture whereas cooperation facilitates work adjustment. In addition, emotional support facilitate interaction adjustment and reduce the level of stress for expatriate (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). Furthermore, Andreason (2003) highlighted that organization support can be divided into direct and indirect support. Direct support is in the form of “organization sponsored programs and indirect support in the form of organization encouraged activities and techniques. Caligiuri *et al.* (1999) argue that researchers should highlight the positive effects of organizational support on expatriate’s adjustment. Furthermore, Andreason (2003) pointed out that past research has ignored the topic of direct and indirect support and its influence on expatriate adjustment. Dowling *et al.* (1999) argue that MNC’s provide tangible support to their international assignees in the form of compensation and benefits but this support is not enough to adjust to the life abroad. They further explain that the process of expatriate adjustment involves a whole range of emotional and psychological comfort. In this regards, Kraimer *et al.* (2003) suggested that “organization should provide language training and social opportunities for the expatriates to interact with foreign nationals”. Furthermore, pre-departure and cross-cultural training, good compensation packages might facilitate three dimensions of adjustment Kraimer *et al.* (2003). In addition, Kraimer *et al.* (2003) found that perceived organizational support not only influences expatriate interaction and general adjustment but also affects expatriate job performance. This study proposed that direct and indirect support influence expatriate job performance by means of expatriate adjustment. Therefore, we hypothesized *H5*:

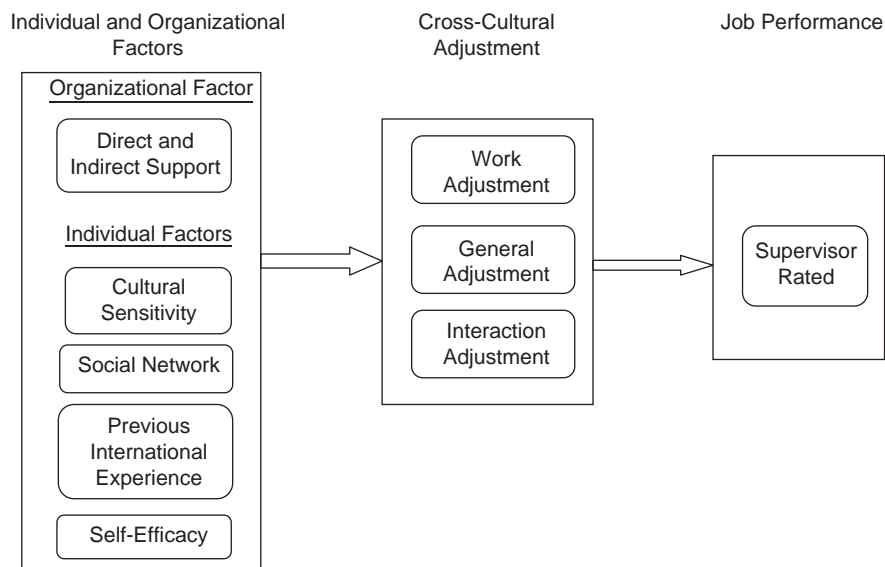
*H5.* Expatriate’s adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between direct and indirect support and expatriate’s job performance (supervisor rated).

### Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine the effects of individual and organizational factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance. The data were collected from 230 expatriates working in Malaysia and their supervisors. For this purpose two different questionnaires were developed and respondents (expatriates and their supervisor) were asked to respond to set off statement as per their level of agreement or disagreement. Questionnaire 1 consisted of 182 statements related to individual and organizational factors and adjustment (interaction, work and general) and was distributed to the expatriates. Questionnaire 2 consisted of statement related to expatriate’s job performance and was distributed to expatriates supervisor. In total, 230 questionnaires were distributed to expatriates and their supervisors and 207 questionnaires were returned after completion. Six questionnaires were discarded due to illogical responses. Finally, 201 questionnaires were used for analysis (Figure 1).

#### 1. Measurement

In order to measure the organizational factors (direct and indirect support) a new scale was developed based on the suggestions of Andreason (2003). A total of 24 items (reliability = 0.821) was developed to measure direct and indirect support. Sample items include “My Company provide on-going consultation regarding work and



**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual framework

non-work issues” and “My Company organized different cultural programs”. The factor was measured with a five-point Likert scale. The reliability and validity of this scale is reported in the following sections. The reason for developing a new scale based on Andreason (2003) is that it covers mostly direct and indirect support dimensions as compared to Jaap *et al.* (2009) and Toh and DeNisi (2005) scales. For example, Jaap *et al.* (2009) measure the support only in terms of career whereas Toh and DeNisi (2005) measure support in terms of information, cooperation and emotional support. In comparison to these two scales Andreason (2003) suggested that direct and indirect support provide multi dimensions to measure this factor. For example, these included pre-departure assistance, career development, language and cultural training, logistical assistance, family mentoring, psychological counselling, job search assistance, self-development and social activities.

Prior international experience was measured by using two items (reliability = 0.749) developed by Takeuchi *et al.* (2005). Social network was measured with six items (reliability = 0.826) developed by Manev and Stevenson (2001). Self-efficacy was measured with five items (reliability = 0.842) developed by Maner and Steveson Lo (2004). Cultural sensitivity was measured with three items (reliability = 0.859) developed by Costa and McRae. Expatriate adjustment was measured with (12 items) by using Black (1988) scale. Black (1988) classified expatriate adjustment into three categories and measured as general adjustment (four items) (reliability = 0.737), interaction adjustment (four items) (reliability = 0.896) and work adjustment (four items) (reliability = 0.818). Finally, expatriate performance through supervisor was measured with nine items developed by Kraimer and Wayne's (2004). Factor analysis of these items divided the scale into two sub-scales named as task performance (five items) (reliability = 0.849) and contextual performance (four items) (reliability = 0.831).

## 2. Demographic data of respondents

The data were collected from visiting scholars working in Malaysian universities. As part of the Malaysian 2020 plan (to become a developed nation by 2020), Malaysian

government was working on the education sector in the country. In this regard, Malaysian universities invited scholars from all over the world to help up-grade their education system. The list of visiting scholars was obtained from 8 well known universities. The questionnaire was sent to all 302 visiting scholars and their supervisors (mostly dean of the college) with a covering letter explaining the objective and importance of the study. 201 questionnaire (66 per cent response rate) were returned from the expatriates pool which included 153 male and 48 female. The lower number of female respondents might be due to female being reluctant to go for international assignment. All of the respondents were working in the current organizations more than two years. In total, 192 respondents had previous international experience. Expatriates were citizens of 12 countries which included Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, England, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and Thailand. The similar number of questionnaire were returned from expatriates' supervisors which included 98 female and 103 male. The high number of female respondents might be due to high number of female workforce in the country (Malaysia). The entire supervisor group was working with expatriates for more than two years.

### Analysis and results

Structural equation modelling with Amos-16 was used to test the proposed model. At the first step, measurement model (factor) analyses evaluated the contribution of each item to the construct (latent variables) being assessed. Then at the second step, the structural model was tested to determine the strength of the hypothesized relationships between the constructs.

Table I shows that the reliability and internal consistency of all scales is above 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2007) which indicates that all scales have high internal consistency level.

### Convergent validity

Fornell and Larcker (1981) argued that the convergent validity of all scales should be at least 0.50. All variables have values at least 0.50 or  $> 0.50$  which shows that all scales have adequate convergent validity.

### Discriminant validity

All items in the results squared covariance greater than 0.60 as proposed by (Hair *et al.*, 2007) which demonstrates that all variables discriminate from each other and are statistically significant.

Name of variable	Internal consistency
Direct and indirect support	0.821
Previous international experience	0.749
Self-efficacy	0.842
Social network	0.826
Cultural sensitivity	0.859
General adjustment	0.737
Work adjustment	0.818
Interaction adjustment	0.896
Task performance	0.849
Relationship building	0.831
Overall performance	0.914

**Table I.**  
Reliability of the scale

**Notes for the model**

Tables II-IV shows the measurement model fit. Six indicators have been selected to explain the model fit. In this model comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.954 is higher than the acceptable baseline (CFI ≥ 0.90) that indicates adequate fit (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009). With reference to adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) the value is 0.849 which fulfills the acceptable baseline (AGFI ≥ 0.80) and indicates good fit Cheng 2007. Furthermore, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.041 which shows a model fit value which should be < 0.05 to indicate a good fit (Byrne, 2001, p. 85) while higher value up to 0.10 can indicate average fit (Chen *et al.*, 2008) but above a value of 0.10, the fit is said to be poor (Byrne, 2001, p. 89). The  $\chi^2$ /degree of freedom (CMIN/df) of 1.568 also indicates good fit CMIN/df < 3 Cheng 2007; Byrne, 2001; Chau, 1997). In addition, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is 0.957 indicating adequate fit (Loibl *et al.*, 2009). Finally, IFI is 0.961 which also is considered adequate fit (Lai, 2009) (Table V).

The above table shows the standardized model fit. Six indicators have been selected to explain the model fit. In this model CFI is 0.949 for the proposed model which touches the acceptable baseline (CFI ≥ 0.90) which indicates adequate fit (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009; Chan *et al.*, 2008; Cheng 2007; Chau, 1997).

With reference to AGFI the value is 0.812 for the proposed model which fulfills the acceptable baseline (AGFI ≥ 0.80) and indicates good fit Cheng 2007; Chau, 1997). Furthermore, the RMSEA is 0.041 which should be < 0.05 to indicate a good fit (Byrne, 2001, p. 85) and higher up to 0.10 can indicate average fit (Chen *et al.*, 2008) but above a value of 0.10, the fit is said to be poor (Byrne, 2001, p. 89). The CMIN/df is 1.647 which also indicates good fit CMIN/df < 3 Cheng 2007; Byrne, 2001; Chau, 1997). In addition, the TLI is 0.954 for the proposed model indicating adequate fit (Loibl *et al.*, 2009). Finally, IFI is 0.971 which is also considered adequate fit (Lai, 2009).

Number of distinct sample moments	1,329	<b>Table II.</b> Computation of degree of freedom (default model)
Number of distinct parameters to be estimated	314	
df (1,021-235)	1,015	

Minimum was achieved	Score obtained	
$\chi^2$	721.264	<b>Table III.</b> Results (default model)
df	378	
Probability level	0.000	

Overall model measure	Overall model score	Acceptable model fit	Acceptable baseline	
CFI	0.912	Passed	≥ 0.90	<b>Table IV.</b> Measurement model fit
AGFI	0.828	Passed	≥ 0.80	
RMSEA	0.029	Passed	< 0.10	
CMIN/df	2.657	Passed	< 3	
TLI	0.925	Passed	≥ 0.89	
IFI	0.939	Passed	≥ 0.90	

Table VI explained that direct and indirect supports have stronger direct effects (0.319, 0.364 and 0.202) on expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) as compared to indirect effects (0.210, 0.257 and 0.101) on expatriate performance (task performance, relationship building and overall performance), respectively. Therefore, the results of the study conclude that expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) mediates the relationship between direct

**Table V.**  
Structural model fit

Overall model measure	Proposed model	Acceptable model fit	Acceptable baseline
CFI	0.949	Passed	≥0.90
AGFI	0.812	Passed	≥0.80
RMSEA	0.041	Passed	<0.10
CMIN/df	1.647	Passed	<3
TLI	0.954	Passed	≥0.89
IFI	0.971	Passed	≥0.90

**Table VI.**  
Summary of effects

Variables	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
Direct and indirect support → general adjustment	0.319	–	0.319
Previous international experience → general adjustment	0.425	–	0.425
Self-efficacy → general adjustment	0.316	–	0.316
Social network → general adjustment	0.249	–	0.249
Cultural sensitivity → general adjustment	0.490	–	0.490
Direct and indirect support → interaction adjustment	0.364	–	0.364
Previous international experience → interaction adjustment	0.159	–	0.159
Self-efficacy → interaction adjustment	0.319	–	0.319
Social network → interaction adjustment	0.463	–	0.463
Cultural sensitivity → interaction adjustment	0.356	–	0.356
Direct and indirect support → work adjustment	0.202	–	0.202
Previous international experience → work adjustment	0.401	–	0.401
Self-efficacy → work adjustment	0.154	–	0.154
Social network → work adjustment	0.418	–	0.418
Cultural sensitivity → work adjustment	0.264	–	0.264
Direct and indirect support → task performance	–	0.210	0.210
Previous international experience → task performance	–	0.309	0.309
Self-efficacy → task performance	–	0.256	0.256
Social Network → task performance	–	0.101	0.101
Cultural sensitivity → task performance	–	0.051	0.051
Direct and indirect support → relationship building	–	0.257	0.257
Previous international experience → relationship building	–	0.012	0.012
Self-efficacy → relationship building	–	0.161	0.161
Social Network → relationship building	–	0.127	0.127
Cultural sensitivity → relationship building	–	0.048	0.048
Direct and indirect support → overall Performance	–	0.101	0.101
Previous international experience → overall performance	–	0.154	0.154
Self-efficacy → overall performance	–	0.158	0.158
Social network → overall performance	–	0.354	0.354
Cultural sensitivity → overall performance	–	0.049	0.049

and indirect support and expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance).

With reference to previous international experience, the direct effects (0.425, 0.159 and 0.401) on expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) as compared to indirect effects (0.309, 0.012 and 0.154) on expatriate performance (task performance, relationship building and overall performance), respectively. In other words, the results of the study indicated that expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) mediates the relationship between previous international experience and expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance).

Table VI further showed that self-efficacy has stronger direct effects (0.316, 0.319 and 0.154) on expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) as compared to indirect effects (0.256, 0.161 and 0.150) on expatriate performance (task performance, relationship building and overall performance), respectively. Therefore, the results of this study indicated that expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance).

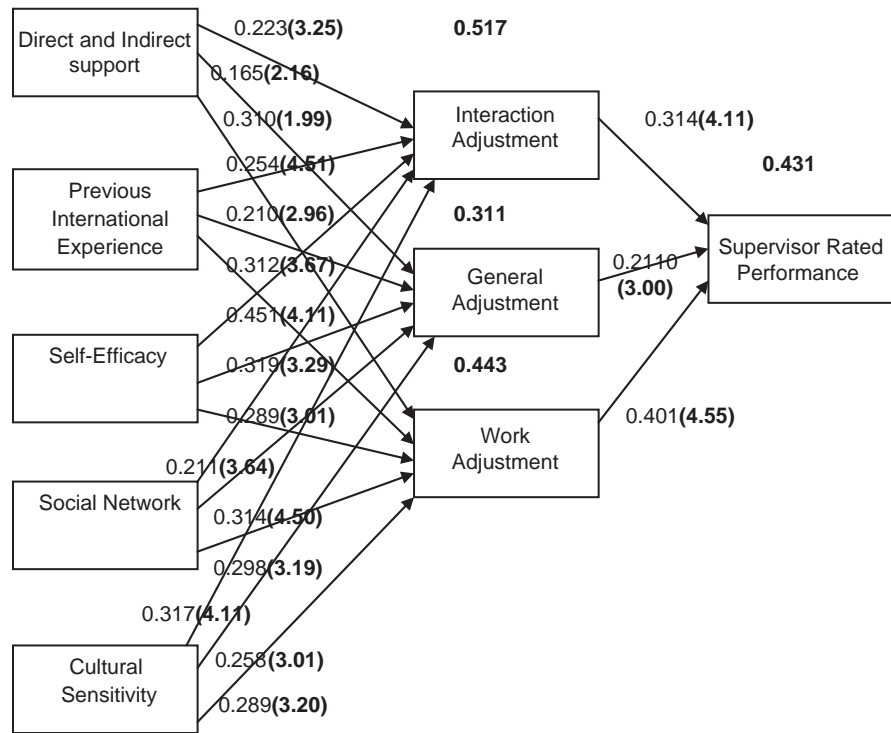
Table VI also demonstrates that social network has strong direct effects (0.249, 0.463 and 0.418) on expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) as compared to indirect effects (0.101, 0.127 and 0.354) on expatriate performance (task performance, relationship building and overall performance), respectively. Therefore, the results of this study indicated that expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) mediates the relationship between social network and expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance).

Finally, cultural sensitivity shows strong direct effects (0.490, 0.356 and 0.264) on expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) as compared to indirect effect (0.051, 0.048 and 0.049) on expatriate performance (task performance, relationship building and overall performance), respectively. Therefore, the results of this study indicated that expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work adjustment) mediates the relationship between cultural sensitivity and expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance) (Figure 2).

All constructs are statistically significant with  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$  ( $p < 0.05$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007). In order to see the effects of individual and organizational factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance, the researcher has explained the parameters of the significant paths. The results also indicated that individual factors (previous international experience, self-efficacy, social network and cultural sensitivity) and organizational factors (direct and indirect support) influence expatriate job performance through expatriate adjustment. In other words, expatriate adjustment plays mediating role between individual and organizational factors and expatriate job performance.

The  $t$ -value ( $t = 3.267$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007) indicated that adjustment mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and expatriate performance and supported  $H1$ . Self-efficacy directly influences adjustment (general, interaction and work) (effect = 0.316, 0.319, 0.154). The  $p$ -values ( $p = 0.020$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; Garver and Williams, 2009) indicate that the path (self-efficacy affects adjustment) is statistically significant. In other words, self-efficacy exerted an indirect effect on expatriate performance mediated by adjustment.

The result of  $H2$  indicates that adjustment mediates the relationship between cultural sensitivity and expatriate performance ( $t = 4.598$ ,  $t > 1.96$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007). The  $t$ -value ( $t > 1.96$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007;  $t = 1.96$ ) indicated that expatriate adjustment



**Figure 2.** Complete standardized model with parameter estimate and *t*-value mentioned in brackets

**Note:** Squared multiple correlation are in bold

mediates the relationship between previous international experience and expatriate job performance (*H3*). In other words, cultural sensitivity directly influences the expatriate adjustment (effect = 0.425, 0.159, 0.401). The *p*-value ( $p < 0.05$ ; Garver and Williams, 2009;  $p = 0.005$ ) indicates that the path (previous international experience positively related with expatriate adjustment) is statistically significant.

The results indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between social network and expatriate job performance ( $t > 1.96$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007;  $t = 4.201$ ) and supported *H4*. In addition, the results also explain that social network influences expatriate adjustment (effect = 0.249, 0.463, 0.418) and *p*-value ( $p < 0.05$ ; Garver and Williams, 2009;  $p = 0.009$ ) indicates that the path (social network positively related with expatriate) is statistically significant. Finally, the results supported *H5* and indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between direct and indirect support and expatriate performance. *t*-value ( $t = 3.25$ ;  $t > 1.96$ ; Hair *et al.*, 2007). The results shows that direct and indirect support directly affect expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work) (effect = 0.319, 0.425, 0.316). The results of this study also provide evidence ( $p = 0.011$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; Garver and Williams, 2009) that indicate that the path (direct and indirect support have positive relationship with adjustment) is statistically significant.

### Discussion and future research directions

The results of this study indicated that expatriate self-efficacy positively influences their job performance by means of expatriate adjustment. Furthermore, expatriates



with high self-efficacy facilitate adjustment better than those with low self-efficacy. The findings of this study are consistent with past theoretical notions and empirical research. Bandura (1997) argues that individuals with high self-efficacy take more initiative and continuous effort to accomplish certain tasks and solve problems. These similar views might be applicable to the expatriates during international assignment and expatriates with high self-efficacy develop better interaction with host country nationals (interaction adjustment), take initiatives to solve the problems (work adjustment) and continuous effort (general adjustment). If we examine the Bandura (1997) argument in the light of current research findings, we can conclude that self-efficacy facilitates expatriate interaction, general and work adjustment. The findings of this study are also consistent with other past researcher's theoretical viewpoints and empirical results "self-efficacy enhances expatriate job performance" (Osman-Gani and RockstuhI, 2008; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998).

The findings of this study also indicated that cultural sensitivity positively influences expatriate job performance through expatriate adjustment. As per the definition of Chen and Starosta (2000) those with cultural sensitivity develop positive feelings about other culture differences and develop better intercultural communication. These abilities as defined by Chen and Starosta (2000) might help expatriates to facilitate interaction and general adjustment. Furthermore, Shin *et al.* (2007) suggested that cultural sensitivity reduces stress and job uncertainty which means that expatriates facilitate work adjustment with cultural sensitivity. The findings of this study "cultural sensitivity influence work, general and work adjustment" also support the theoretical notions of a number of researchers (Chen and Starosta, 2000; Shin *et al.*, 2007; Javidan *et al.*, 2010; Claus *et al.*, 2011).

The findings of this study indicated that previous international experience positively influences expatriate's job performance by means of expatriate adjustment. Previous international experience enable expatriates to develop better interaction with host country nationals, maintain general and work adjustment due to their past experience during international assignment. Past researchers failed to provide consistent results to support their theoretical viewpoints. Some of the researchers found previous international experience positively related with job performance whereas others found no relationship. The findings of this study are consistent with Mol *et al.* (2005) as they suggested that previous international experience influences job performance through adjustment.

The findings of this study indicated that social network positively influences expatriate adjustment and further influences job performance. Social network help expatriates to get information regarding culture, language and behaviour of host country nationals which facilitates expatriate interaction and general adjustment. Furthermore, expatriates better relationship with well-known persons can provide useful information about culture, language and behaviour of host country nationals and if expatriates develop similar relationship with any employee within the organization it can facilitate expatriate work adjustment. In this regard, Jassawalla *et al.* (2003) argue that information from social network about work and non-work life facilitates expatriate adjustment in the host country. Seibert *et al.* (2001) further found that expatriates enhance their career success by accessing information, resources, and career sponsorship from their social network. The findings of this study also supported the logical view point of (Osman-Gani and RockstuhI, 2008; Claus *et al.*, 2011; Wang and Nayir, 2006; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005) where they argue that social network helps expatriates to adjust in the host country.

Finally, the results of this study indicated that direct and indirect support influence expatriate job performance through expatriate adjustment. If the organization provides pre-departure training, on the job training, language training, information about host country, good compensation packages and organize cultural programmes, it can help expatriates to adjust in the host country and improve their performance. In this regard, Kraimer *et al.* (2003) suggested that organizations can help expatriates to adjust in the host country by providing language training and social opportunities to interact with host country nationals. The findings of this study are consistent with the theoretical view point of Toh and DeNisi (2005) in which they suggested that information, cooperation and emotional support might facilitate expatriate adjustment in the host country.

In conclusion, this study suggests that individual and organizational factors help expatriates to adjust in the host county and successfully complete their international assignment. Similar to local organizations where employee performance help organizations to improve their performance and achieve goals, expatriate performance also help MNEs to get competitive advantage in the international market. MNEs have realized that the expatriate's role is vital in their successful international operation. Therefore, MNEs are investing maximum resources to improve expatriate performance. The successful international operation of MNEs encourages other domestic organizations to expand their business across the border.

The ultimate objective of the study is to better understand the individual and organizational factors which enhance expatriate adjustment and job performance. Future studies should test this model in different cultural settings in order to replicate the findings of this Malaysian study. Furthermore, researchers should highlight other individual factors to better understand expatriate adjustment and job performance. In this study, we have collected data from expatriate supervisors about their job performance. Future studies could collect this information from expatriate peers or subordinates for further understanding of individual and organizational factors and their effects on expatriate adjustment and job performance.

### **Practical implications**

The findings of this study will help the HR professionals dealing with expatriate's performance, management of MNCs and expatriates working on international assignment. First, the findings of this study suggest that HR managers and MNC's management should provide direct and indirect support to the expatriates and their families in terms of language and cultural training, continuous communication with expatriates during international assignment, career development, logistical assistance, family mentoring, psychological counselling, job search, self-development and social activities. This direct and indirect support will help the expatriates and their families to perform their work activities in a comfortable environment, interact with the host country nationals easily and facilitate general adjustment. Direct and indirect support will not only help the expatriates to adjust in the host country with reference to work, interaction and general adjustment but will also help expatriates to achieve their job objectives, build better relationships with host country nationals and improve their overall performance. Furthermore, direct and indirect support will create a healthy environment for expatriates and host country nationals to work hard in order to achieve organizational objectives.

The findings of this study also indicate that the individual factors self-efficacy, previous international experience, social network and cultural sensitivity influence

expatriate performance (task, relationship building and overall performance) through adjustment (work, interaction and general). Therefore, recruitment managers and MNC's management should consider these factors before appointing any employee for international assignment. If the employees have low self-efficacy, limited social network, lack of previous international experience or cultural sensitivity then these can be over-come by offering different training sessions, for example cultural and language training, psychological counselling and mentoring. All these activities will facilitate expatriates in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment which will further help them to improve their job performance in terms of task achievement, relationship building and overall performance. In addition, all these initiatives will not only help the expatriates to perform better but will also improve the organizational performance.

Finally, the findings of this research suggest that better expatriate performance helps MNCs to perform better in their international operations which will ultimately improve the home and host country economic situation. The better performance of MNCs in their international operations through effective expatriate performance will encourage other domestic organizations to expand their operations globally. In addition, if the MNCs realised that international business operations can be successful by utilizing expatriate skills, knowledge and expertise, they will engage more expatriates in their international business operations and this is only possible when expatriates successfully complete their international assignment. The MNC's global operations will not only increase the foreign direct investment in the host country but also help other economies to control the unemployment rate. Furthermore, recruitment of expatriates for international operations will enhance the level of knowledge, skills and cultural sharing among the different economies. The cultural and skills sharing through expatriates will open new business avenues for multinationals.

### **Theoretical implications**

This paper provides theoretical grounds for individual and organizational factors, expatriates adjustment and job performance and explains that individual and organizational factors play important role in expatriates adjustment and job performance. Researchers should consider individual and organizational factors as predictors of expatriate adjustment which further enhances expatriate job performance. Furthermore, this paper suggests that researchers should classify expatriate adjustment as work, general and interactions adjustment in order to better understand the role of individual and organizational factors in expatriate job performance. Finally, this study opens new avenues for researchers to investigate other individual factors like personality traits (Big Five), organizational factors and social factors on expatriate adjustment and job performance.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation of the study is related to data collection. The data were collected from the expatriates working in Malaysian universities. There can be difference between education industry and other business organizations in terms of the working environment, selection process and management support. Future research with reference to data collection from business organizations might help to further generalize the findings of this research. The second limitation of this research is related to the respondents. As mentioned earlier, the respondents were citizen of different countries around the world which include Asia, Europe and Middle East. Even though Malaysia is a multicultural society representing 49 per cent Muslims (Malay),

25 per cent Christen (Chinese), 8 per cent Hindu (Tamil) and 18 per cent others, then many expatriates from other parts of the world can find similarity related to their culture. This research did not group the respondent in terms of their cultural differences and similarities with Malaysian culture. For example, an expatriate from Middle East might have difficulty to adjust with Hindu or Christian supervisor (Dean of school) as compared to a Muslim supervisor. In contrast, an expatriate from Europe might face difficulties in adjustment with Muslim supervisor as compared to others. Therefore, this study did not measure the cultural differences between expatriates and their supervisor. Future research should consider this factor especially in the country where the majority of the population belong to one race and the same religion. Overall, the findings of this research will help HR managers and MNC's management to effectively manage and improve expatriates adjustment and job performance.

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