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# What makes organization-assigned expatriates perform in the host country? A moderated mediation analysis in the India-China context

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## ABSTRACT

While drawing from the convergence/divergence debate in international human resource management, this study applies goal-setting theory (GST) to investigate how does organizationally assigned expatriates' level of psychological empowerment is influenced by the organizational culture in an international assignment to impact their job performance. Further, it also explores the moderating role of host country language ability in this connection. Consistent with GST, the results indicated a positive and partial mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between organizational culture and job performance. Further, the findings suggested for the moderating advantage of expatriate's host country language ability in enhancing their job performance. The implication and contribution of the study has been discussed in the context of international human resource management (IHRM) and international management (IM).

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, India and China have emerged as the fastest-growing economies globally (Paul & Mas, 2016). This has led to a growing interest amongst multinational companies (MNCs) to station their business operations in Indian and Chinese markets (Shankar & Narang, 2020; Ferraris et al., 2021; Hu, Tang, Yin, & Liu, 2021). As globalization intensifies, international assignments have become essential for career enhancement, especially in MNCs (Shen & Jiang, 2015). The management of foreign subsidiaries is a prime concern for expatriates (MNCs) operating in an increasingly globalized world (Lauring, Selmer, & Kubovcikova, 2019). While globalization and cross-cultural diversity open up opportunities for development and increased cross-cultural interactions, expatriate adjustment is significant, and managing these workforces is a critical challenge in this context (Haldorai, Kim, Seo, & Cai, 2021; Singh, Pereira, Mellahi, & Collings, 2021). MNCs' work culture share a crucial role in making the organization-assigned expatriate (OAE) adjustment process successful through constructive implementation and coordination of global strategies (Peltokorpi, Sekiguchi, & Yamao, 2021). OAEs having a crucial role in aligning local and global MNCs operations (McNulty & Brewster, 2017) need to have a well-functioning relationship with host country nationals (HCNs) to maximize the potential of their job performance (Chang,

Gong, & Peng, 2012). However, language differences of the home and host country create language barriers that limit the interactions between expatriates and HCNs (Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016). The impact of the host country's culture on the OAEs' performance may vary according to the organization's cultural dimensions and organizational culture (Lin & Zhao, 2016). Besides, language differences of the home and host country affect OAEs' performance to a more significant extent (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999). Consequently, language can be considered an effective tool for these expatriates to connect to the host culture (Selmer & Lauring, 2015).

The extant literature suggests some personal and organizational factors such as personality traits (Harari, Reaves, Beane, Laginess, & Viswesvaran, 2018; Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012), family or spouse adjustment (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998), international experience (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013), language proficiency (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2020) affects expatriate performance in an international assignment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Kawai & Strange, 2015). However, the past literature hardly paid any scholarly attention to understanding the importance of organizational culture vis-a-vis performance in this context (Fey & Denison, 2003; Ramlan, Abashah, Samah, Rashid, & Radzi, 2018). Furthermore, the extant literature on the mediation role of psychological empowerment between organizational and expatriate performance reports is rare,

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emphasizing the need to investigate the potential mediator to boost expatriate's job performance. In a host environment, OAEs often face language barriers; nonetheless, very little research has focused on the influence of host country language proficiency on expatriate job performance cross-cultural adjustment (Takeuchi, 2010) and thus put forth the first research question—How does the work culture of an MNCs affects the performance of the expatriates in a host country?

Therefore, our study is an attempt to find answers to the issues as mentioned above in the literature in the context of India-China, while drawing upon the goal-setting theory (GST) as a comprehensive theoretical framework to examine how organizational culture influences expatriate's job performance (Locke, 1968; Lee, Locke, & Latham, 1989) in a foreign environment through the psychological empowerment process in the work setting. Further, the study focuses on the buffering role of host country language ability in this relationship. Research suggests that if an expatriate has the language ability to interact with the HCNs, their performance is likely to be influenced positively and affects overall organizational performance and a successful expatriation process (Selmer & Luring, 2015). We further hypothesize the critical role of host country language in influencing expatriate performance in an international work setting. Tenzer, Terjensen, and Harzing (2017) propose that expatriate–HCN interactions in MNCs are influenced by language ability in international business contexts. Research shows that the countries with low general levels of English proficiency tend to have more prevailing language barriers (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). The host countries with complex languages, such as learning mandarin in China, are challenging, but the expatriates who are willing to learn have the advantage of getting a quick adjustment to the host environment (Selmer, 2006). Applying GST in MNCs, we propose that expatriates' learning ability of the host country's language creates the context in which their self-efficacy level increases in understanding the host country's people, culture, and better clarity roles. Thus, it helps them to improve their job performance. Specifically, we examine the moderating effect of host country language ability on the relationships between their work culture and performance, mediated by psychological empowerment in expatriates. Keeping this in view, the further research questions advancing the present study are; what role psychological empowerment plays in enhancing expatriates' job performance? and does the host country's language ability matter for organization-assigned expatriates to perform better in a foreign environment?

By doing so, our research contributes to the International Management (IM) and International Human Resource Management (IHRM) research in three ways by probing the critical mechanisms for a successful OAEs assignment. First, it amplifies the existing research on human resource management (HRM) and the language aspect of the host country by focusing on OAEs' performance and empowerment. Performance management is a core HRM function in MNCs designed to continuously improve the expatriates' performance and improve the company's overall performance (Biron, Farndale, & Paauwe, 2011; Budhwar, Pereira, Mellahi, & Singh, 2019; Pereira, Temouri, & Patel, 2020; Schmid & Kretschmer, 2010; Singh et al., 2021). From this perspective, OAEs' job performance influences the organization's performance and needs to be taken care of carefully. Furthermore, as the host country's language is considered a coordination mechanism in expatriate adjustment (Selmer, 2006), its role in improving expatriate performance is essential and cannot be overlooked. The present study also discusses practical implications regarding expatriates' host country language acquisition and its positive relationship with job performance that could be improved through different language training programs. Thus, this paper contributes to research in the context of job performance (Kang & Shen, 2016) and language-oriented HRM practices (Peltokorpi, 2015) in MNCs.

Second, the current study responds to a recent call to explore the theoretical lens (Andersson, Brewster, Minbaeva, Narula, & Wood, 2019). Much of the extant literature on expatriate management focuses only on the antecedent factors of a successful expatriation process in the

MNCs, ignoring the study of its consequences (van der Heijden, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2009). Thus, this present study explores OAE assignments' outcomes by integrating goal-setting theory with expatriation research, particularly in India-China. While past research shows a negative impact of language barriers on OAE–HCN interactions in the MNC context (Tenzer et al., 2017), there is still no clear understanding of how language affects the OAEs' job performance. So, there is a call for the researchers to dig into comprehensive, theoretically grounded research on language in an international context (Luo & Shenkar, 2017; Piekkari & Tietze, 2012). Thus, incorporating the GST with language research in MNCs, this study advances novel theoretical contributions to the international management (IM) and the international human resource management (IHRM) literature.

Third, we provide an empirical contribution by developing a comprehensive overview of the research model by considering two culturally diverse countries, India and China, highlighting the buffering role of host country language ability in influencing the mediating mechanism of impact of organizational culture on expatriate performance via psychological empowerment.

The remaining structure of this paper is arranged as follows. The following section presents the literature review of the variables proposed in our study in an expatriate context. Further, we theorize the connecting mechanism to the goal-setting theory that links organizational culture to expatriate performance through psychological empowerment and host country language ability. Then the hypothesized model is presented. The method section highlights the research setting, sample, and the measures of the independent, dependent, mediating, and moderating variables in the study and data analysis strategy. The empirical findings are presented in the next section, and the final section follows the concluding remarks with implications and future scope of research.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

Goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), an important theoretical construct underlying employee performance, suggests that goals have a motivational aspect and can direct employees' behavior. From this point of view, goal setting is crucial for organization-assigned expatriates to clarify expectations associated with an international assignment (Bader, Bader, Froese, & Sekiguchi, 2021). Additionally, the comprehensive study by Wang and Takeuchi (2007) reveals that expatriates have a clear learning goal orientation used to work hard, have deep processing of task-related knowledge, and show persistence efforts during the rime of obstacles. These goal settings are likely to enhance expatriate performance because expatriates need to learn behaviors appropriate in the host country to function effectively on international assignments. In the present research, we argue that organizational culture significantly enhances OAE's performance and psychological empowerment (Lee & Wei, 2011). This is because when OAEs are assigned specific and challenging goals and have the role clarity in performing their tasks, it essentially links to their enhanced empowerment and performance. As part of organizational culture, the 'goal setting' directly impacts job performance (Locke, 1968). The present study draws upon the GST as a robust theoretical framework to develop the direct and mediation hypotheses on the relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance mediated by psychological empowerment (London, Mone, & Scott, 2004). The theory holds the primary assumption that an individual's performance is higher when setting specific challenging goals than setting ambiguous goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). Stating that "goals have a pervasive influence on employee behavior and performance in organizations and management practices, GST proposes that when goals are transparent and challenging, it leads to higher employee performance. Previous research on goal-setting reported the higher performance level of employees who were provided with specific and difficult goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, apart from the organization's role in setting challenging goals

for its employees, the motivational impact of goals may be influenced by some individual factors like self-efficacy, which is a component of psychological empowerment (Aryee & Chen, 2006). Additionally, in line with pedagogical recommendations (Selmer & Luring, 2015), another hypothesis was proposed that the host country’s language ability moderates the mediating relations between organizational culture, psychological empowerment, and expatriate job performance. Fig. 1 presents the research model.

2.1. Organizational culture and job performance

GST suggests that individuals with challenging and specific goals succeed in their careers by performing well (Locke & Latham, 2019). Goal setting is at the heart of a healthy organizational culture. In the current study, organizational culture is operationally defined as the work culture of the MNCs where the expatriates are assigned to complete their international tasks. The work condition of the organization could be beneficial or toxic for the employees, depending on its organizational culture (Dextras-Gauthier & Marchand, 2018; Ogbeibu, Senadjki, & Gaskin, 2018). Several empirical studies during the 1990s on the culture-performance relationship showed that specific culture orientations are conducive to performance (Calori & Sarnin, 1991; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Using GST, expatriate job performance is understood as the task and contextual performance of the organization- assigned expatriates at their job in a host country. Another research on expatriate performance shows expatriates tend to perform better when they become fit with the organization’s job, people, and culture (Claus, Lungu, & Bhattacharjee, 2011). Similarly, studies found that organizational culture that supports innovation and goal orientations was related to higher performance (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993; Smart & St. John, 1996; Liu, Tsui, & Kianto, 2021). In light of these findings, we hypothesize the following per the first research question mentioned above:

**Hypothesis 1.** Organizational culture will have a positive relationship with job performance.

2.2. The mediating role of psychological empowerment

We propose that psychological empowerment is a mediating mechanism between organizational culture and expatriate job performance. Psychological empowerment represents an employee’s belief that they can shape their work environment by their actions (Spreitzer, 1995; Bhatnagar, 2012; Matsuo, 2021). In the present study, expatriates’ psychological empowerment is defined as the extent to which they derive meaning from their international tasks, the confidence about their competencies in performing the job, and how they impact their work environment. We posit that the contextual factors (organizational goal setting) influence individual behaviors such as performance (Malik, Sarwar, & Orr, 2021; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Another study (London et al., 2004) proposes that the organizational culture that encourages individuals’ participation in goal setting improves their

performance by clarifying the expectations and strategies for goal accomplishment. When employees think the goals are meaningful, understand what is expected from them, and have the autonomy and confidence to do it, they become more committed to their work, enhancing job performance (Ibrahim, 2020; Maan, Abid, Butt, Ashfaq, & Ahmed, 2020). These factors are dimensions of psychological empowerment such as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact.

Furthermore, prior studies have suggested that the four psychological empowerment cognitions are not specific to cross-cultural encounters (Spreitzer, 1995) and drive expatriate adjustment and performance through autonomy, self-efficacy, and personal control at work (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Takeuchi, Shay, & Li, 2008). Thus, psychological empowerment stimulates motivation among expatriates to effectively adjust to working challenges (Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim, 2014), and it was found that dimensions of psychological empowerment combinedly relate to expatriate performance in a positive way (Wang, Zhan, McCune, & Truxillo, 2011). It has also been reported that psychological empowerment mediates the link between participative climates (organizational culture) and various work outcomes (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011), and a study by Johnson (2009) argues that work culture shapes the organizations and provides a better understanding of complex organizational components, such as empowerment. Therefore, in accordance with the second research question, we advance the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** Psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance.

2.3. The moderating role of host country language ability

Integrating GST with language research, we propose that OAE’s linguistic competence of the host country moderate the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance. The construct (host country language ability) defines the linguistic proficiency of expatriates in terms of their ability to speak, write, and understand the specific host location languages and be familiar with local non-verbal communication (Selmer & Luring, 2015; Peltokorpi & Pudelko, 2020). GST posits that individuals’ efforts are directly linked to their goals; when goals are challenging but achievable, they are higher (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). The expatriates who set higher performance goals were more passionate and showed persistent efforts in their international assignments (Gong & Chang, 2007). Connecting GST to language in this context proposes that specified and challenging goals in terms of host country language acquisition encourage the expatriates to show continuous effort in learning, which further helps them better understand the local community (Selmer, 2006). Thus, we argue that language barriers negatively influence the OAE –HCN relations and increase social categorization (Zhang & Harzing, 2016; Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2016).

Several studies on language in the MNC context have suggested that

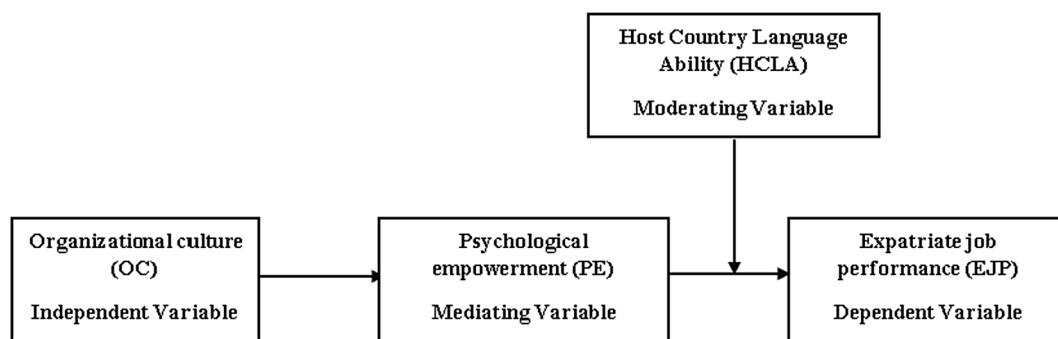


Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

language proficiency leads to inclusion and generates a sense of connectedness among the expatriates (Van der Laken, Van Engen, Van Veldhoven, & Paauwe, 2019). The newbie expatriates who often interact with HCNs in work or social settings become more acquainted with the host culture appropriate behaviors in the host country as HCNs act as the information sources between the OAEs and the local community (Puck, Holtbrugge, & Rausch, 2008). Expatriates with frequent interactions tend to exhibit more appropriate behaviors than others as they are better informed about the host country's settings as the more profound relationships with HCNs bridge the gap between the two cultures (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). It facilitates an appreciation and sensitivity of cultural differences and fosters adjustment, thus job performance (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Therefore, we suggest that when expatriates are psychologically empowered and acquire the host country's language, they tend to perform better as it helps them understand and adjust to the new culture. Consequently, the third research question leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** Host country language ability will positively moderate the relationship between psychological empowerment and expatriate job performance so that the direct effect is stronger when the host country language ability is high.

#### 2.4. Moderated mediation relationship

The moderating effect of OAE's host country language ability suggests the indirect relations between organizational culture, expatriate job performance mediated by psychological empowerment, and their ability to host country language acquisition. As already noted, when the work culture of the MNC in the host country is conducive to providing challenging goals, inculcating an empowerment culture, it affects the expatriate's performance positively (Lee & Wei, 2011; Malik et al., 2021). Psychological empowerment works as a coordinating mechanism through which expatriates derive meaning from their work and significantly impact their task performance (Matsuo, 2021). The foresaid mediating process tends to be weaker for expatriates with low host country language ability because of the language barrier, resulting in low motivation to perform in an expected way (Peltokorpi & Pudelko, 2020). Thus, it suggests that even if expatriates are psychologically empowered, their performance becomes weaker when they have low proficiency in the host country's language. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4.** Host country language ability will moderate the indirect relationships between organizational culture and job performance mediated by psychological empowerment so that the indirect relationships are stronger when host country language ability is high.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research setting

Data were collected from two locations of a Chinese MNC - Guangdong in China and Gurgaon in India. We contacted senior executives of the company who permitted data collection. Using the snowball methodology, we were able to ask the initial contacts to recommend us to other contacts who would be willing to participate in the study. We ensured that all the participants met the criterion for being in the study and participated fully voluntarily and were made aware that their responses would be entirely anonymous and collated for analysis purposes. We focused our study on India and China for two reasons: first, the low general English proficiency among Chinese expatriates may influence their performance in India, and the same way, low proficiency in mandarin affects the Indian expatriate in China. Second, despite the increased movements of organization-assigned expatriates in the MNCs, very little research on language-related performance has been conducted in India-China.

#### 3.2. Sample and data collection

The data were collected online to reach distant locations and participants and increase the response rate (Lefever, Dal, & Matthíasdóttir, 2007). Purposive and snowball sampling method was used, and the potential respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Our assessment criteria included the corporate expatriates from foreign MNCs and assigned to India and China to complete temporal tasks (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shirinivas, 2004), write, and speak English. The criteria mentioned above were used to pick out potential participants for our study. A total of 367 questionnaires were administered to the participants who volunteered; however, we received 301 (124 Indian and 177 Chinese organization-assigned expatriates) validated surveys for this study.

#### 3.3. Sample characteristics

The average age of Indian and Chinese respondents was 42.15 years (SD = 4.01), where 91% were male, and 33.01 years (SD = 2.67), where 86% were male, respectively. The average tenure for Indian expatriates at the present MNC was 8.13 years (SD = 5.09) and 3.73 years (SD = 3.01) for Chinese expatriates. Out of 301 (124 Indian and 177 Chinese) respondents, 52% had undergraduate, 34% had post-graduate, and 14% possessed Ph.D. degrees. The respondents worked in six MNCs from India and China. In the sample, most respondents worked in real-estate (47%), manufacturing (41%), and service (12%), industry sectors.

#### 3.4. Measures

Standardized measures were used for data collection. Multi-item scales were used to measure the variables (organizational culture, psychological empowerment, host country language ability, and expatriate job performance) and were assessed on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

##### 3.4.1. Independent variable

The 30-items organizational culture assessment scale was adapted from Sahskin and Rosenbach (1999). The scale has five dimensions (managing change, achieving goals, coordinating teamwork, building a solid culture, and customer orientation). A sample item is, "In this organization. Employees are often expected to reach goals which they believe are" ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

##### 3.4.2. Mediating variable

We adapted a 12-items psychological empowerment scale developed by Spreitzer (1995). It has four dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact), and each dimension has three items. A sample item is, "The work I do is important to me" ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ).

##### 3.4.3. Moderating variable

We adapted Selmer (2006) five-item scale that assessed the host country's language ability. A sample item is "I cannot manage a conversation in the local language" (reverse polarity) ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

##### 3.4.4. Dependent variable

We adapted the expatriate job performance scale of Lee and Donohue (2012) and include six dimensions: task performance, management, and administration, teamwork and leadership, demonstrating effort, communication performance, and maintaining discipline. The 32-item scale examines the job performance profile of the expatriates. A sample item is "In this organization, expatriates consistently demonstrate efforts" ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

#### 3.5. Data analysis strategy

SPSS 20.0 was used to analyze descriptive statistics such as the mean,

standard deviation, and correlation. Additionally, SmartPLS was used for mediation and moderation analysis since it requires no distributional assumption and has greater statistical power for detecting statistically significant relationships (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins & Kuppelwieser, 2014). PLS algorithm and bootstrapping were carried out to examine the mediating effect; the bootstrapping technique acquires a full-mediation model and computes the confidence intervals (CIs) of indirect effects (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Furthermore, PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was used to test the moderated-mediation effect as it evades conceptual and mathematical limitations associated with traditional approaches (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). Additionally, PROCESS macro allows for simultaneous testing of hypothesized relations and estimates the significance level of indirect effects by bootstrapping procedures. Initially, the common method variance (CMV) was addressed by applying Harman’s single factor test, and then the structural model was established, followed by the measurement model (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017).

4. Results

4.1. Common method variance

Common Method Variance (CMV) is a technique to reduce the social desirability effect. The CMV could be a problematic issue for any study if data were collected from a single source and if the first factor explains more than 40 percent of the variance (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). The present study used Harman’s single factor and as a statistical procedure to deal with the possibility of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). It was found that a single factor emerging from exploratory factor analysis using the principal axis factoring method accounted for only 21.05% of the variance among measures, less than the established cut-off value of 50%. Thus, demonstrating that CMV is minimized in this study. However, another strategy, namely controlling for the effects of a single unmeasured latent method factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003), was also employed to substantiate the above procedure. It was found that the common latent factor had a measurement factor loading of 0.48, meaning that the common factor accounted for only 23.04% of the variance among measures. This value is also below the threshold of 50%, thus indicating the data to be free from possible biases of social desirability or shared variance among measured variables.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics (Means, standard deviations, and correlations) of all the four variables (organizational culture, expatriate job performance, psychological empowerment, and host country language ability) are presented in Table 1.

4.3. Statistical analysis

4.3.1. Measurement model

The measurement model was used to analyze the relationships between each latent variable and its associated indicators. Compared to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), confirmatory composite analysis

Table 1  
The descriptive and correlational analysis.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Organisational culture	7.10	1.07	1	0.52**	0.58*	0.61*
2. Psychological empowerment	4.69	1.91		1	0.56*	0.39**
3. Host country language ability	3.61	0.47			1	0.31**
4. Expatriate job performance	8.01	2.01				1

Note: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01.

(CCA) is a recently proposed alternative approach applied to confirm measurement models when using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair, Howarda, & Nitzlb, 2020). To test the validity of the constructs, both convergent and discriminant validities were used.

Construct validity was established by assessing the constructs’ convergent and discriminant validity (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). Convergent validity was assessed by the standardized estimates, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 2, the CR values are greater than 0.70, and AVE values are above 0.50, indicating a satisfactory convergent validity for the present study. Further, discriminant validity was reported using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016). Table 2 shows that the HTMT value is <0.85 (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019), confirming that discriminant validity was achieved.

4.3.2. Structural model

The structural model was used to check collinearity among the predictors before testing the hypotheses. Collinearity was measured by a variance inflation factor (VIF), and the value must be <3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2006). Our mediation and the moderated mediation analysis involves more than one construct predicting a criterion variable, thus requiring a collinearity test. The SmartPLS results in Table 3 indicate that all VIF values were lower than the threshold value, thus demonstrating the absence of collinearity in this study.

Outcomes of the structural model were evaluated to rule out the predictive relevancy, the relationships among the constructs, and the strength and quality of the structural model. The model was assessed by measuring four essential standards, such as i) coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>), ii) Path coefficient (b value), iii) T-statistic value, iv) Effect size (f<sup>2</sup>), and v) the predictive relevance of the model (Q<sup>2</sup>). R<sup>2</sup> values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered high, moderate, and low, respectively, for the analysis (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). Hence, the R<sup>2</sup> value in this study is moderate (as presented in Table 3). Significantly, the Q<sup>2</sup> values should be larger than zero as an indication that the exogenous variable has predictive relevance to the endogenous variable (Hair et al., 2011), as suggested by (Cohen, 1992), effect sizes (f<sup>2</sup>) of 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 for regression is considered as large, medium, and small, respectively. Table 4 presents the output of the structural model.

Bootstrapping technique was used to test the proposed hypotheses. Further, the t-value, p-value, and the confidence interval bias-corrected were considered for acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses. The results of the study found that organizational culture is positively related to expatriate job performance (β = 0.54, t = 8.015: LLCI = 0.617, ULCI = 0.982, p < 0.01). Hence, hypothesis H1 was supported (Table 4) in the line of the first research question proposed in this study. Further, organizational culture and psychological empowerment were found to be positively and significantly related (β = 0.69, t = 8.764: LLCI = 0.83, ULCI = 1.25, p < 0.001) and psychological empowerment and expatriate job performance were also found to be positively related (β = 0.44, t = 3.212: LLCI = 0.16, ULCI = 0.42, p < 0.001).

The result of mediation analysis, as shown in Table 5 that reveals that psychological empowerment positively mediated the relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance (β = 0.41, t = 4.893: LLCI = 0.216, ULCI = 0.521, p < 0.01). Hence, hypothesis H2

Table 2  
Convergent and discriminant validity.

Construct	CR	AVE	HTMT Ratio			
			1	2	3	4
1. Organisational culture	0.86	0.51	–			
2. Psychological empowerment	0.91	0.53	0.39	–		
3. Host country language ability	0.94	0.67	0.47	0.76	–	
4. Expatriate job performance	0.94	0.58	0.41	0.79	0.81	–

**Table 3**  
Collinearity assessment (Inner VIF Values).

Mediation Analysis		Moderated mediation Analysis					
Criterion: Psychological empowerment		Criterion: Expatriate job performance		Criterion: Expatriate job performance		Criterion: Expatriate job performance	
Predictor	VIF	Predictor	VIF	Predictor	VIF	Predictor	VIF
Organizational culture	2.01	Organizational culture	3.07	Psychological empowerment	1.95	Organizational culture	1.99
		Psychological empowerment	1.51	Host country language ability	1.97	Host country language ability	1.41
				Psychological empowerment* Host country language ability	1.54	Organizational culture*Host country language ability	1.96
						Psychological empowerment	1.89
						Psychological empowerment* Host country language ability	1.34

**Table 4**  
Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and effect size (f<sup>2</sup>).

Construct	R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	Q <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	Decision
Organizational culture	—	—	0.376;0.351;0.358	Large; Large; Large
Psychological empowerment	0.454	0.147	0.175;0.181	Medium; Medium
Host country language ability	0.562	0.121	0.153	Large
Expatriate job performance	0.578	0.142	—	—

is supported in accordance with the second proposed research question. The mediation is considered a partial mediation as the impact of organizational culture on expatriate job performance was still significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) even after inserting the mediating variable.

**Hypothesis 3** stated that relationships between psychological empowerment and expatriate job performance are moderated by host country language ability; the effect is stronger when language ability is high. As shown in **Table 5**, the interaction effect is significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $LLCI = 0.009$ ,  $ULCI = 0.117$ ), thus supporting the hypothesis 3 (please also see **Fig. 2**).

The result of the PROCESS macro interprets the strength of the relationship between and job performance through psychological empowerment is conditional on the value of host country language ability. The moderated mediation is proven when the magnitude of the conditional indirect effect of organizational culture on job performance via psychological empowerment is significant and is different at high versus low levels of host country language ability. We operationalized high and low host country language ability as (+1) and (−1) standard deviation (SD) from the mean score of studied variables. **Table 6** presents the bootstrapping results that, when host country language ability was higher (+1 SD), the indirect effects of organizational culture on job performance via psychological empowerment were stronger ( $B = 0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI: 0.25, 0.41). The indirect effects became weaker ( $B = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95% CI: 0.09, 0.14) when host country language ability was lower (−1 SD), indicating the indirect effect of organizational

**Table 5**  
The structural model: direct effect, mediation effect, and moderation effect.

Path	Hypothesis	$\beta$	SE	t-stat.	p-values	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
Direct effect: Organizational culture → Expatriate job performance	H1	0.54	0.09	8.015	0.001	0.617	0.982	Supported
Mediation effect: Organizational culture → Psychological empowerment → Expatriate job performance	H2	0.41	0.05	4.893	0.001	0.216	0.521	Supported
Moderation effect: Expatriate job performance ← Psychological empowerment, host country language ability as a moderator	H3	0.19	0.02	4.810	0.001	0.009	0.117	Supported

**Note:** N = 301; Bootstrap sample size = 2000; BC 95% CI = Bias-corrected 95% Confidence Interval; LLCI = Lower limit of confidence interval; ULCI = Upper limit of confidence interval; VIF = Variance inflation factor.

culture on expatriate job performance through psychological empowerment becomes stronger when host country language ability is high (please see **Fig. 3**). Thus, supporting hypothesis 4 ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $LLCI = 0.22$ ,  $ULCI = 0.48$ ) and the final research question that host country language ability moderates the mediated relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance through psychological empowerment.

### 5. Discussion

The present study developed a moderated mediation model in India and China by applying GST in IHRM research, wherein OAEs' job performance influenced by the MNCs' work culture is mediated by psychological empowerment. The aforesaid mediating relationship was further moderated by the OAEs' host country language ability level. In line with hypothesis 1, it was found that organizational culture positively influenced expatriate job performance in the host environment. Previous study reveals that a combination of individual (cross-cultural competencies, emotional intelligence), organizational (previous international experience, organizational culture, training, and incentives, and contextual factors (social-relational skill are relevant for a successful expatriation (Canhilal, 2015; Lee, Malik, Rosenberger, & Sharma, 2020). Thus, the present study's findings are consistent with earlier research findings demonstrating that organizational culture positively influences expatriate job performance (Black & Stephens, 1989; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). The present findings also support the empirical study carried out by Sotirofski (2014), stating that a conducive organizational culture that embraces change is one of the critical factors influencing psychological empowerment.

The findings hold up the second hypothesis that psychological empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance. These findings are per the GST, wherein the mediating role of psychological empowerment was found positive between a participative work culture and behavioral outcomes such as job performance (Lee & Wei, 2011; Locke & Latham, 2002; London et al., 2004). Another recent study by Amor, Xanthopoulou, Calvo, and Vázquez (2021) revealed that psychological empowerment mediated the positive relationship between structural

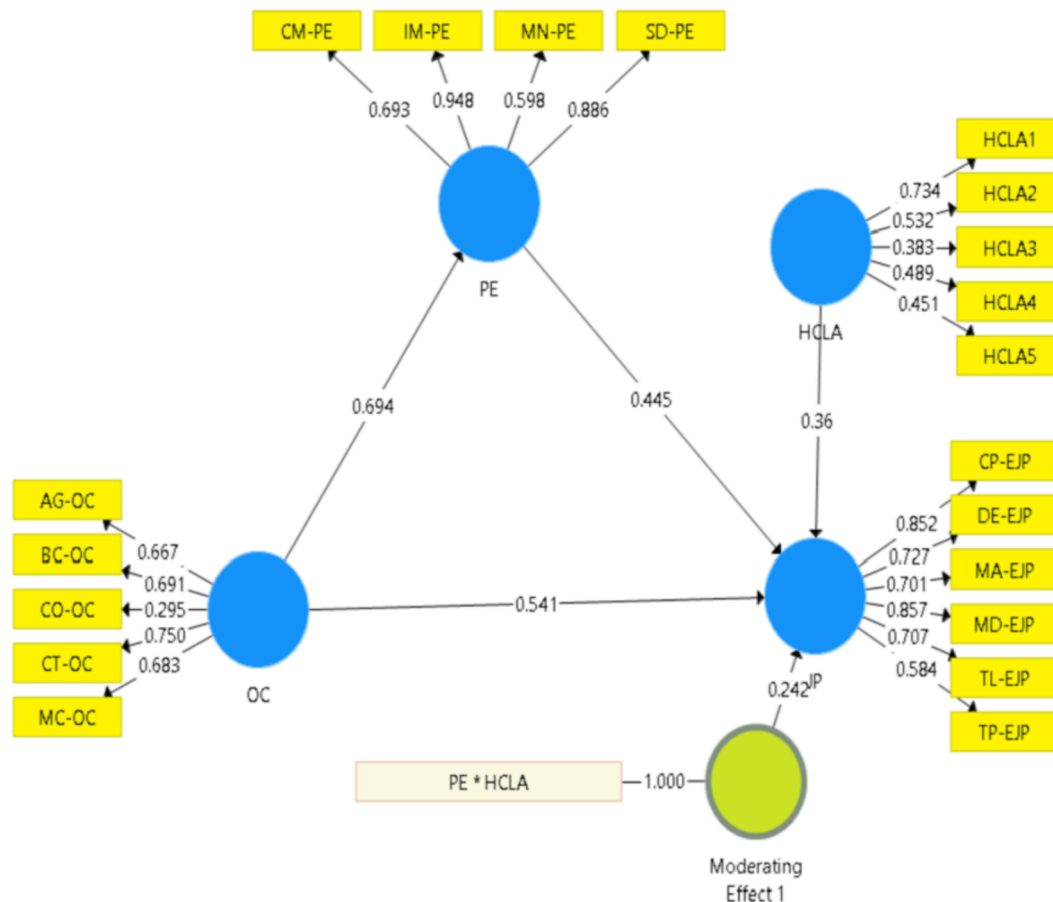


Fig. 2. PLS Moderated Mediation Model.

Table 6  
The moderated-mediated results.

Hypothesized Path	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
<i>Moderated mediation effect/Conditional indirect effect:</i>	0.24	0.07	6.35	0.001	0.22	0.48	Supported
H4: Organizational culture → [Psychological empowerment] → Expatriate job performance; Host country language ability as a moderator							
High: +1 SD	0.41	0.09	4.09	0.001	0.25	0.41	Significant
Moderate: mean	0.29	0.07	3.91	0.001	0.11	0.26	Significant
Low: -1SD	0.17	0.03	2.07	0.001	0.09	0.14	Significant

Note: N = 301,  $\beta$  = standardized regression weights. Level of significance is at  $p < 0.001$ .

empowerment and task performance. When individuals are given the autonomy to participate in their goal setting, they tend to be more psychologically empowered, thus exhibiting higher performance. In other words, the work culture that promotes participative goal-setting and empowerment in the organizational setting results in a higher-performing workforce, which supports the earlier findings (Seibert et al., 2011; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000).

Subsequently, the findings of this empirical study supported the prime proposition that host country language ability will positively moderate the relationship between organizational culture and expatriate job performance mediated by psychological empowerment. The present study’s findings align with GST (Locke et al., 1981) and support the qualitative study conducted by Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016), which suggests that host country language ability allows expatriates to develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships with HCNs which in turn facilitate expatriate performance. Although GST primarily focuses on task performance through goal-setting from an internal motivation perspective, the proficiency in host country language skills through social exchange process between OAE-HCN may enhance expatriates’ self-

esteem and help them have a friendly relation with the HCNs society as an external factor (Selmer & Lauring, 2015), consequently enhancing their performance (Chen & Wei, 2020)

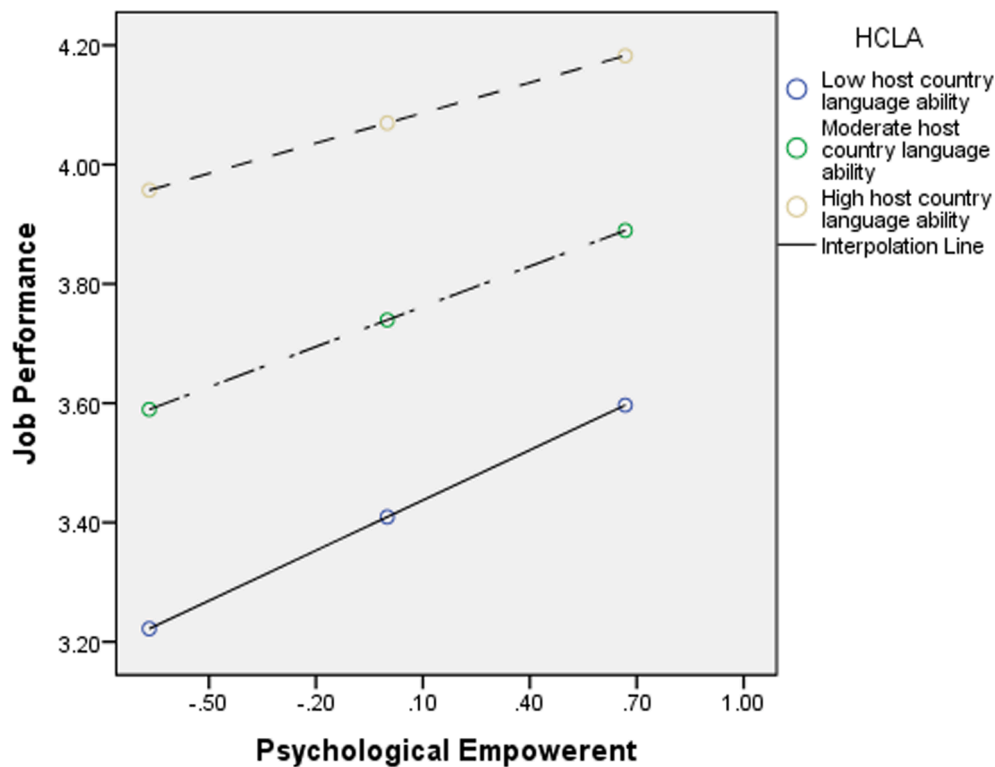
### 5.1. Implications

The present study has several contributions to expatriate literature in terms of theory and practice.

### 5.2. Theoretical implications

First, the present paper integrates GST with the work culture of the MNCs with OAEs job performance, thus theoretically linking organizational culture to one of the most salient HRM functions of MNCs: job performance. By doing so, this study provides a novel theoretical perspective to the IM and IHRM research in an expatriate context. Further, we considered an expatriate’s psychological empowerment as an individual motivating factor leading to this work outcome by emphasizing its mediating role. Thus, we demonstrated the moderating





Interaction between psychological empowerment and host country language ability predicting job performance

Fig. 3. Moderation effect (Scatter plot).

role of host country language ability in strengthening the proposed mediating mechanism theoretically and empirically. MNC managers are recommended to institutionalize the HR strategies linking organizational culture to expatriates' performance in an international assignment (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009).

Second, we introduced host country language ability as a moderator in the relationship mentioned above, thus contributing to the literature on language in the MNC context. Although MNCs are multilingual entities (Welch & Welch, 2015; Kwon, 2019), few studies have reported the linkage of language research to HRM practices in the international work setting (Peltokorpi, 2015). However, our findings suggest that if the expatriates have a low host country language ability, their job performance becomes lower, thus furnishing theoretical insights to the research of host country language ability in the expatriation management context. Furthermore, our study recommends that corporate language is not always sufficient; knowledge of the local language has a considerable advantage for expatriates (Selmer & Lauring, 2015).

Third, this paper contributes to IHRM literature considering job performance as a core HRM function that aligns individual goals to the strategic business goal (Jewell, Jewell, & Kaufman, 2020; Schmid & Kretschmer, 2010) in the MNCs context. Thus, it can be regarded as a drive mechanism to synchronize MNC level organizational practices in line with global-level strategies.

### 5.3. Practical implications

The findings can be helpful for organizational practitioners and researchers in the concerned field. First, it suggests the crucial role of organizational culture in shaping the performance of the expatriates in a host country, as the work culture of MNC in an international setting is much more complex due to its global and multicultural nature. Thus, organizations should develop a goal-oriented and empowerment-driven

culture to witness a successful expatriation process. Conversely, even expatriates are psychologically empowered, and such motivation tends to be less effective for the expatriate's lack of ability on host country language acquisition. Secondly, we recommend the OAEs should demonstrate a willingness to learn the host country language during their expatriation, and in the same line, MNCs are recommended to encourage the use of host country languages to enhance job performance. Thirdly, the findings suggest that MNCs should pay more attention to a goal-oriented work culture with language-based HRM practices (Peltokorpi, 2015) by recognizing the significant role of host country languages in the successful expatriation process. A recent study by Guo, Rammal, and Pereira (2021) from three multinational enterprises (MNEs) suggests that traditional cross-cultural training practices are redundant as expatriates on various staffing patterns have a different understanding of local cultural and social values. Thus, it recommends that MNCs spend time and effort on language training as part of the cross-cultural training, combining pre-departure and post-arrival activities (Peltokorpi, 2007; Puck et al., 2008).

### 5.4. Limitation and future scope of research

The limitations of this study open up exciting directions for future research. First, although the effects of common method bias were minimized (Podsakoff et al., 2003) using the procedural remedy as discussed in the result section, social desirability biases could still be an issue as data were collected through self-report measures. The shortcomings could be addressed by collecting data from multiple sources across the management levels (Peterson, Arregle, & Martin, 2012). Second, we cannot establish causal relationships, given the limitation of cross-sectional design in mediation analyses that may produce biased estimates (Maxwell & Cole, 2007). Future research could focus on longitudinal data to fully understand the causal mechanism. Third, the

study only focused on the Asian context, thus having limited generalizability in other countries. It is suggested to test the model in different cultural contexts to check if the findings could also be applicable for other expatriates such as Western OAEs working in an Asian market. Fourth, we investigated the moderating effect of OAEs' host country language ability in the Indian and Chinese context, and future research may replicate this study by differentiating easy and difficult host languages across different countries. Finally, the rationale of this study was to integrate GST and language research in MNCs to explore expatriates' work performance in a challenging work cultural setup through psychological empowerment. Future research could include other potential mediating and moderating variables in a theoretical context with a unique host environment, contributing to the more profound understanding of the OAEs' successful expatriation process in MNCs.

## 6. Conclusion

The present research used the goal-setting theory as the underpinning theoretical lens to integrate expatriate performance research with language research, thus providing empirical support for future research. A theoretical framework was incorporated to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanism by interposing psychological empowerment and host country language ability as mediator and moderator, respectively. Moreover, this empirical investigation explored OAE's language ability's comparative advantage in enhancing job performance. Even though enhanced language ability of the host country may lead to a variety of positive outcomes such as increased satisfaction (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998) as well as higher performance (Kraimer, Seibert, & Liden, 1999; Puck et al., 2008), specific language training may be tiresome and time-consuming for the expatriates and expensive for some organizations. Hence, it is suggested that organizational practitioners consider providing language training according to the organizational demands and specific context.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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