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Muhammad Awais Bhatti Sharan Kaur Mohamed Mohamed Battour

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# Effects of individual characteristics on expatriates' adjustment and job performance

Muhammad Awais Bhatti

*School of Business Management, College of Business,  
University Utara Malaysia, Sintok-Kedah, Malaysia*

Sharan Kaur

*Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur,  
Malaysia, and*

Mohamed Mohamed Battour

*Faculty of Commerce, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Researchers have been focusing on the predictors of expatriates' adjustment and job performance at different levels (individual level, organizational level and societal level), but still some of the predictors have been ignored or unclear in the expatriate literature. The purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive framework in order to better understand the role of individual factors in expatriate adjustment and job performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The review of past research is used to develop a conceptual framework.

**Findings** – This conceptual paper provides theoretical ground for individual factors which include Big Five, self-efficacy, previous international experience, cultural sensitivity and social network and proposes that expatriate adjustment (work, general and interaction adjustment) mediates the relationship between individual factors (personality traits (Big Five), self-efficacy, previous international experience, cultural sensitivity and social network) and expatriate job performance (rated by peer and supervisor).

**Practical implications** – This paper also provides practical implications for the managers and professionals involved in expatriates' selection, training and performance management. This paper suggests that managers involved in selection of candidates for international assignment should consider personality traits, level of self-efficacy, previous international experience, social network and cultural sensitivity at the time of selection of candidates for international assignment. Furthermore, managers should design pre-departure training programs in a way that enhances candidates' self-efficacy level, overcomes cultural sensitivity, and motivates them to expand social network. Finally, managers should explain to the candidates how they can use their personal skills and knowledge to gain work, general and interactions adjustment in order to achieve job tasks.

**Originality/value** – The proposed framework is developed based on the past theoretical review in order to cover the gap and contribute to the body of knowledge in expatriate literature. Based on the proposed framework, this paper invites researchers to empirically test the suggested propositions in order to further strengthen and develop understanding about individual factors including Big Five and other expatriates' adjustment and job performance predictors.

**Keywords** Expatriates' adjustment, Expatriates' job performance, The Big Five, Individual factors, Expatriates, Performance management

**Paper type** Conceptual paper



## Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the world has become a global village, with organizations rapidly expanding their business in other countries. When it comes to management of overseas subsidiaries, most business practices change from domestic to international; for example, the business expansion changes from domestic human resource management to international human resource management. In order to manage their overseas business, most multinational companies recruit expatriates, who play an important role in organizational performance. According to a Conference Board (1992) survey of 130 MNCs, half of these organizations had more than 50 senior managers currently involved in international assignments and 25 percent of these organizations had between 200 to 2,000 managers on international assignment. Another survey of 117 MNCs (Windham International, 1998) reported that the number of expatriates' assignments had increased and this number will increase in future. In addition, better performance of expatriates has become important to the success of multinational organizations (Selmer, 2006). Researchers have been focusing on expatriates' performance and adjustment (Paik *et al.*, 2007; Mezas and Scandura, 2005) to help the MNCs 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, MNCs have been allocating more resources and attention to managing expatriates' performance and researchers have also been investigating those factors that affect expatriates' performance.

In the 1980s the main focus of the researchers was expatriate adjustment (Black, 1988; Black and Gregersen, 1991) which gradually shifted to expatriate performance. In the beginning of 1990, researchers expanded their attention towards expatriate maladjustment or expatriate early return to their home country. Sanchez *et al.* (2000) reported that expatriates' early return to their home country is costly and a wasting of resources. Harrison and Shaffer (2005) argued that expatriates' actual return is different than their thoughts of quitting. Expatriates may think of quitting their job and returning to their home country but it has not happened all the time. Sometimes expatriates just think of quitting the job but their thinking processes do not lead to the final decision of quitting the job. Harrison and Shaffer (2005) argued that expatriates' thinking of quitting the job does not necessarily lead to quitting the job but it may have some negative impact on other aspects of job performance. Therefore, both situations (quit the job and return to home country or stay with a low state of effectiveness) highly influence organizational performance and lead to poor performance, low productivity in the overseas operation, poor relationship with the clients and operational inefficiency.

The reason behind both situations (quit job and return to home country or stay, with a low state of effectiveness) are assumed to be due to lack of expatriate's adjustment in the host country. Poor expatriate adjustment in the host country in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment might lead to frustration, isolation, low motivation, and unhappy feelings with the host country's work and social environments. In other words, for better expatriate performance during international assignment and long-term stay in the host country with a high state of effectiveness, expatriate work, general and interaction adjustment play vital roles. Therefore, investigation of those factors which influence expatriates' work, 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 and personal characteristics of the expatriates. The organizational level factors include organizational contextual characteristics and HR practices. Finally, social level factors include the broader cultural and institutional context of expatriate adjustment and job performance. Varner and Palmer (2005) explain the importance of individual factors in expatriate selection and argue that managers should consider the individual factors during expatriate's selection process because these individual factors help expatriates to adjust in the host country. Caligiuri (2000) explains that theory of evolutionary psychology can be applied to expatriate success because of two reasons. First, because variation in the personality traits allows individuals to successfully fill different niches or positions and second, because personality traits (Big five) are universal adaptive mechanisms that can be applied, regardless of the individual's nationality or assignment country. Graf (2004) explains the importance of an effective profile based on such skills as intercultural communication competences and intercultural sensitivity that are unlearnable or learnable in long run, as compared to skills such as language and knowledge about foreign cultures that can be learned in a short time. Furthermore, Van Vianen *et al.* (2004) differentiate between surface and deep level cultural differences. According to Van Vianen *et al.* (2004) the surface level of cultural differences is important for general adjustment, whereas deep level cultural differences are important for work and interaction adjustment. In other words, if the managers analyze or compare expatriates' personal characteristics with the host country culture and nature of the job, the expatriates' adjustment and job performance will be better.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the body of knowledge and practice related to international human resource by highlighting individual factors which are assumed to affect expatriate work, general and interaction adjustment and job performance. Based on a major theoretical review of what has been advanced in expatriate literature, logical explanation and arguments, this paper proposes a conceptual framework with propositions and invite researchers to empirically test these propositions.

A 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 gaps still exist. Arthur and Bennett (1995) suggested that researchers should fill this gap by determining whether personality characteristics or individual factors predict expatriates' success. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) argued that even though much emphasis is placed on expatriate management, there is still a gap between personality traits and expatriates' performance which researchers need to cover. This study will not only explain the role of personality characteristics on expatriate job performance but also highlight the effects of personality characteristics on expatriate's adjustment.

The following paragraphs will explain the theoretical perspectives on individual factors which includes personality traits (Big Five), self-efficacy, previous international experience, social network and cultural sensitivity, expatriate adjustment (general, work, and interaction adjustment) and expatriates' job performance.

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**Personality traits**

Researchers have conceptualized personality in terms of traits and multi-level of abstraction (McAdams, 1995) and each level develops better understanding in terms of different human behavior and experiences (John and Srivastav, 1999). Furthermore, John and Srivastav (1999) argued that the Big five personality traits (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) do not have theoretical perspectives but reflect natural language that people use to describe themselves and others. They further highlighted that “the Big Five taxonomy serves an integrative function because it can represent the various and diverse systems of personality description in a common framework” (John and Srivastav, 1999).

Researchers have highlighted many personality characteristics and argued that these characteristics played an important role in individual success. Among all personality characteristics, five factors are widely acceptable and most commonly used by researchers and practitioners to evaluate individual personality. These five factors are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness or intellect. Researchers label these five factors as the Big Five. MacDonald (1998) argued that the big five personality characteristics are universal adaptive mechanisms for human beings to do two things: reproduce and preserve life. Furthermore, Caligiuri (2000) pointed out that an individual having these five personality characteristics may have the ability to build good professional relationships, achieve goals, get promoted, perform better and so forth. These five factors may help an individual to adjust him/herself in the new culture, society etc. For example Buss (1991) highlighted that an individual having these five characteristics may achieve high economic success in terms of finding a partner and having children, have good relationships with neighbors (preserve life), ability to learn social hierarchies (extroversion), be willing to cooperate (agreeableness), reliability of work and commitment (conscientiousness), ability to handle stress (emotional stability), innovation and problem-solving skills (openness, intellect).

The theory of evolutionary personality psychology demonstrates that individuals may vary on their possession of these five skills and which are important for expatriate adjustment. McCrae and Costa (1997, p. 509) suggest that the five personality characteristics are “universality might be attributed to species wide biological bases of traits [...] representing a purely psychological consequences of the shared human experiences of living in groups, using abstracts thought, or being conscious of your own morality”. Therefore, similar personality characteristics are important for expatriates during their international assignment, regardless of their race, nationality, or host country. Caligiuri (2000) suggested that individuals possessing the five personality characteristics will be better suited for the international assignment because they can better adopt work and non-work lives in host country. Hogan *et al.* (1996) pointed out that possessing certain personality characteristics will explain how well the individual is suitable for the given task. Neubert and Taggar (2004) argued that relation between job performance and the five factors is more a consequence of the social aspect of the workplace than ability. Stupak and Stupak (2004) commented on the Neubert model and argued that personality traits may influence job performance but these factors (conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion) help the individuals to show up to work and get along with his/her co-workers. Furthermore,

Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argued that although a few studies have examined the effects of the big five on expatriate's job performance, the findings of these studies are still unclear.

The following paragraphs will further explain the each factor in the big five personality traits and their relationship with expatriates' job performance and adjustment.

### **Extroversion**

Extroversion refers to some more specific personality traits such as talkative, energetic, and assertive. Neubert and Taggar (2004) argued that extroverted individuals show a low level of arousal if the workplace is a social environment and a lesser level of stimulation at home. In contrast, introverts express a high level of arousal outside the workplace, where stimulation is low. Buss (1991) proposed that individuals can achieve better reproductive success and preservation of life if they adjust themselves in the social environment through extroversion. Extroversion may help an expatriate to adjust to host country nationals by using assertive skills and energetic behavior, which reflect positive behavior. Therefore, when host country nationals perceive that expatriate having assertive behavior, they might feel comfortable about sharing their cultural knowledge and experience with expatriates. Furthermore, Caligiuri (2000) suggested that these individuals can achieve better personal success through hierarchy of social environment.

Caligiuri (2000) further argued that these personality traits will help the individuals when they go for international assignment to socialize into their host country. More specifically, sometimes host country nationals might be reluctant to get close to expatriates due to their perception which considers expatriate as strangers. On the other hand, expatriates also face a similar situation and consider host country nationals as strangers, which might be due to individual and social differences. In this critical situation, those expatriates who are extroverted take the initiative to talk and to build relationships. In addition, those individuals who take initiatives to build relationships with host country nationals and other expatriates can adjust in the host country culture faster than others (Black, 1990), which further helps the expatriates to perform better during their international assignment. Therefore, extroversion is important for individuals to learn the work and non-work cultures in order to adjust in the host country.

Buss (1991) explains evolutionary personality psychology and suggested that individuals who can build relationships within their social environment through extroversion, would achieve higher success in their personal and professional life. By using assertive skills, these extroverted individuals navigate in the hierarchy of social environment to accomplish personal tasks. Expatriates socialize in the host country through host country nationals and extroversion helps expatriates to develop good relationships with host nationals and other expatriates. In addition, expatriates learn about the social culture of the host country by establishing good relationships with host country nationals. Therefore, extroversion is necessary to learn about work and non-work social cultures of host country, which further helps them to perform better during their international assignment:

- P1.* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between extroversion and expatriates job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Agreeableness

Agreeableness highlights personality traits such as sympathetic, kind, and affectionate. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argue that agreeableness should be related with effort to get along. Therefore, agreeableness can help expatriates to effectively communicate and build better relationships with host country nationals and in return can reduce the stress related to both work and non-work aspects of international assignments (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, expatriate ability to establish and maintain work and non-work social alliances with host country nationals and other expatriates helps with adjustment in the host country and improves job performance. Buss (1991) suggested that although individuals can achieve better social position in the host country through extroversion, social alliance can build through other personality characteristics (agreeableness). Agreeableness can help the individual to form and maintain social alliances to support his/her social and professional life.

In addition, Black (1990) proposed that expatriates who are more agreeable (i.e. resolving conflict, developing mutual understanding) report greater cross-cultural adjustment, which further relates to expatriate job performance. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) pointed out that individuals who are more flexible are less offensive to others, more easily fit into and adjust in the new culture. In other words, expatriates with agreeableness behavior might reduce the argument level and develop social consensus in the society, which help expatriates to adjust in the host country culture and perform better during international assignments. In other words, individuals with flexible behavior adjust easily in terms of general adjustment, work adjustment and interaction adjustment:

- P2. Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between agreeableness and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness refers to personality traits such as organized, thorough, and playful. Hogan *et al.* (1996) argues that these qualities may helpful for expatriates to achieve their goals, getting along, and finding meanings. Many researchers have highlighted the role of conscientiousness in the context of domestic employees' performance and suggested that conscientiousness plays an important role in enhancing job performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Furthermore, Ones and Viswesvaran (1997) proposed that the concept of conscientiousness should be generalized in expatriates' performance. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argue that those expatriates who are motivated to achieve conscientiousness spend more time on task completion and meet job expectations while facing personal problems (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). Therefore, these tasks-oriented behaviors may lead to effective work adjustment and task achievement (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). Hough (1992) argues that expatriates who are motivated to get along with host country nationals are predictable and engage in extra role behaviors. As a result of these activities, expatriates can build better interpersonal relationships and effective interaction adjustment, which further leads to better performance. Leiba-O'Sullivan (1999) explained that conscientious, motivated expatriates can develop effective perceptual questioning skills which help them to adopt the foreign culture easily. Hogan *et al.* (1996) proposed that expatriates' reputations affect their status in the host country and social acceptance. When

expatriates get a good reputation in the host country, their chances to become leader or achieve promotion increase. Therefore, when expatriates develop their impression of being conscientious, their reputation in the organization improves (Caligiuri, 2000) which helps them to adjust in the host country and improve job performance:

- P3. Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Neuroticism

Neuroticism or emotional stability explains personality traits such as tense, moody, and anxious. Richards (1996) argued that neuroticism is normally related with living and working in an unfamiliar environment. Researchers have suggested that emotional stability plays a vital role in expatriates' adjustment in a host country (Black, 1988; Gudykunst, 1988). Hogan and Shelton (1998) argue that neuroticism enables the expatriates to achieve goals, to get along and to find meaning. Furthermore, neuroticism helps expatriates to effectively handle problematic situations in a new environment (Ormel *et al.*, 2001). Emotional stability might help an individual to face and tolerate the cultural differences and get along with their peers. Therefore, if an expatriate tolerates the difference between host country and parent country, they can develop relationships faster, which helps them to adjust in the host country and perform better. Hogan and Holland (2003) explain that emotional stability makes the individual confident and positive, which helps them to meet job expectations and getting along with host country nationals. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) pointed out that emotionally stable individuals are more likely to deal with unpleasant situations and handle the problems. The ability to deal with unpleasant situations and problems helps the expatriates to adjust in the host country and perform better. Deller (1997) argues that emotionally stable expatriate may overcome the psychological discomfort, which helps them in all forms of psychological adjustment. Therefore, expatriates should be emotionally stable in order to cope with the stress, to adjust in the host country and achieve better job performance:

- P4. Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between neuroticism and expatriate job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Openness to experience

Openness to experience refers to personality traits such as having wide interest, being imaginative and insightful. Buss (1991) highlighted that expatriates' perception and action towards differences is important, in order to solve the problem of survival and reproduction. Therefore, individual ability to correctly assess the social environment to ensure self-preservation is vital. Caligiuri (2000) argued that "expatriates' ability to correctively assess the social environment is more complicated given that host country may provide ambiguous or uninteruptable social cues". Ramalu *et al.* (2011) suggested that those individuals who have high level of openness can adjust their behavior according to different situational and cultural cues. Researchers have suggested that expatriates should correctively assess host country culture in order to adjust and perform better in the host country (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997).

Furthermore, researchers have proposed that openness and intellect are related to expatriate adjustment (Black, 1990; Cui and van den Berg, 1991). Therefore, if expatriates have a tendency to experience new culture, values, and beliefs, their reaction towards host country differences might be positive. Furthermore, an expatriate with wide interests and an imaginative personality might adjust in a host country faster and improve his/her performance with higher productivity. In this regard, Arthur and Bennett (1995) argued that openness is an important quality for expatriates, to help them to adjust and perform well during international assignment:

- P5.* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between openness to experience and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy explains that an individual's perception about their ability to achieve certain tasks motivates them to achieve their objectives at the 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 individuals with low self-efficacy lead to poor performance, absenteeism, and high intention to search for another job, whereas individuals with high self-efficacy leads to better performance and high organizational commitment. Only a few studies examine the effects of self-efficacy on job performance at domestic level and none of them examined this relationship for expatriate or international assignment (Claus *et al.*, 2011). Expatriates with a 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 that individuals high on self-efficacy tend, more, to initiate tasks, be consistent in their efforts to achieve tasks and persist with problems in the face of failure. Osman-Gani and RockstuhI (2008) argue that self-efficacy influences job performance through social network. Therefore, expatriates who are high on self-efficacy better adjust themselves in a host country in order to achieve their job tasks and enhance job performance:

- P6.* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### 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 behavior in intercultural communication". Expatriates' 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 relationships and understanding with host country nationals, which further improves job performance. In this regard, Shin *et al.* (2007) and Adler (1997) suggested that expatriates need to adjust their behavior in the new culture in order to reduce stress and job uncertainty. Mol *et al.* (2005) highlighted that cultural

sensitivity is an important personal characteristic for better expatriate job performance. In addition, cultural understanding and appreciation ability might help expatriates to solve critical cultural issues. Claus *et al.* (2011) stated that expatriate cultural sensitivity helps them to deal with the complexity of cross culture and develop a global mind-set. Expatriates' positive emotions towards cultural differences helps them to get along with the host country nationals and establish work and non-work alliances. These alliances further help expatriates to get support at the work place, which helps them to improve job performance:

*P7* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between cultural sensitivity and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### **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 individual about performing different tasks and handling different critical situations. Learning from past mistakes and practicing a certain set of activities to achieve certain goals may help an individual to improve their work and family life. More specifically, past experience might help an individual to improve his/her job performance. In this regard, Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that previous job experience helps individuals to develop traits/ knowledge which is vital for job performance and is an important element in the domestic selection process. International experience includes experiencing work and social life in the host country, which is different from home country in terms of language, working style, behaviors, culture, etc. Expatriates with previous international experience might adjust in the host country and perform better as compared to others with a lack of previous international experience. Furthermore, expatriates develop their skills and traits while working in the international assignment, which helps them to adjust in a host country and improve job performance. Therefore, when it comes to a new international assignment, expatriates use their skills and knowledge traits, which they learned during previous international assignments, to adjust and achieve job tasks in the new international assignment. In addition, expatriates with previous international experience might have experienced cultural shocks, different working styles, behaviors etc., in their previous job and so when it comes to a new international assignment, expatriates use these learned skills to adjust and perform better in the host country:

*P8.* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between previous international experience and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### **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". Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) argues that past studies failed to explain the role of social support in expatriate adjustment and job performance. Wang and Rabindra (2004) explained that expatriate social network consists of relationship between expatriates

and host country nationals and friends. Social network helps expatriates to gain access to the information related to the host country in terms of food, culture, language, working styles, behaviors, etc. Expatriates use this information to adjust in the host country and accomplish their job tasks. Therefore, if the expatriate has a wide social network, they can get more information about host country and job tasks. In this regard, Johnson *et al.* (2003) suggested that when expatriates acquire information about job and way of life from their social network, they adjust themselves in the foreign culture faster. In addition, Li and Rothstein (2009) argue that social networks play an important role in expatriate social life and career development. Kilduff and Krackhardt (1994) explain that better relationship with well-known persons in an organization boosts expatriate performance reputation. Therefore, well-known and reliable social networks not only boost the expatriates' reputation in the host country but also provide reliable information. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) argue that social networks play important role on expatriate adjustment and job performance. Researchers have highlighted the concept of social network and explain 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 expatriates intercultural adjustment and job performance:

- P9.* Expatriates' adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediates the relationship between social network and expatriates' job performance (peer and supervisor rated).

### Expatriates adjustment

The concept of big five has been widely used in domestic job performance but these personality traits are ignored when it comes to expatriate job performance. A few researchers have tried to explain the role of big five in expatriate job performance (Caligiuri, 2000; Mol *et al.*, 2005) but they have ignored the role of expatriate adjustment in their conceptual papers. Cheng and Yeh Yun Lin (2009) suggested that expatriate research should focus on personality along with motivation, adjustment, and cultural adoption. Mol *et al.* (2009) suggested that researchers should focus on explaining the clear role of big five in the process of expatriate job performance rather than proposing an ideal profile of a successful expatriate. Claus *et al.* (2011) has pointed out that the role of big five in expatriate job performance is unclear due to conflicting arguments in past research.

Past researchers have different views about adjustment and they have defined adjustment in terms of subjective well-being (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 most acceptable, explaining that adjustment refers to psychological discomfort which can be categorized as work, general and interaction adjustment.

Work adjustment refers to expatriate comfort with job; general adjustment refers to expatriates' comfort with non-work factors such as food, language, transportation, entertainment, etc. Finally, interaction adjustment refers to comfort associated with interaction of expatriates with host country nationals inside and outside 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 a multidimensional construct (work, general, and interaction) (Bhaskarr Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). Cultural adjustment related to non-work and work adjustment related to work; whereas interaction adjustment related to work and non-work environments (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). In addition, if the expatriates develop better relationships with local employees, this will help expatriates to meet the performance expectations of the company (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). Furthermore, Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment plays an important role in expatriates' job performance.

Florkowski and Fogel (1999) pointed out that even though many researchers have highlighted the role of expatriate adjustment in expatriate success, the expatriate adjustment role is still unclear. In addition, Maruyama (1992) argue that if expatriates fail to adjust themselves in host country, their level of cultural insensitivity, indifference and ignorance increase. Furthermore, Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriates' adjustment is a key indicator for expatriates' success in their international assignments. Claus *et al.* (2011) highlighted that past researchers were focusing on job performance in expatriates' contexts but most researchers ignored expatriate adjustment in their studies (Tucker *et al.*, 2004; Liu and Shaffer, 2005; Shay and Baack, 2006; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 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 expatriates' adjustment and job performance linked to each other logically, empirical research there is still a lack of empirical evidence. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) highlighted that a few past studies have tried to link big five with expatriate performance but they have ignored the role of expatriate adjustment in terms of work, general and interaction adjustment.

### **Job performance**

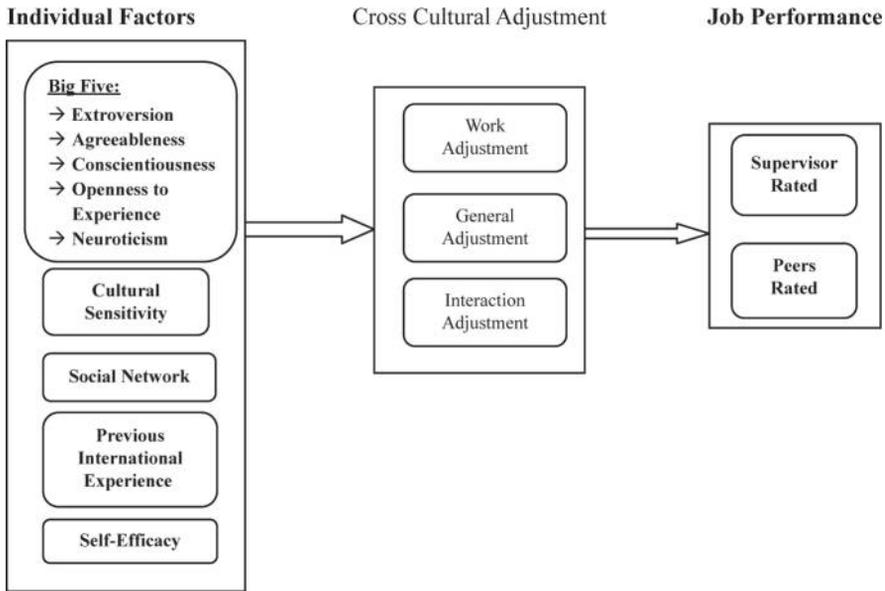
Harrison and Shaffer (2005) argued that job performance is a function of the amount of time and energy (effort) that an expatriate devoted to his/her job. Theory of job performance explained that job performance is a multidimensional construct which consists of task dimension and contextual dimension. 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 Takeuchi, 2007). Caligiuri (1997) argued that early return of expatriates influences their job performance. This study will only focus on personality traits and explain the role of personality traits on expatriate adjustment and job performance. In order to measure expatriate job performance, researchers have been using different sources such as peers, supervisors, subordinates, etc., who 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 cross-cultural conflicts with host country workforce. They further argue that those expatriates who successfully handle their conflicts with host country workforce are more likely to experience smooth

adjustment at their workplace. Templer (2010) highlighted that global business expansion required more expatriates for international assignment, which forces HRD professionals to effectively manage and better understand expatriate performance.

In order to cover the gap in expatriate literature (as discussed in the above paragraphs), this study proposes the propositions shown in Figure 1.

**Conclusion and future research directions**

Global business expansion increases the demand for employees for international assignment and MNCs 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 (1999) on human resource 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 markets and competition. Therefore, developing economies adopt an international strategy for global expansion and recruit more expatriates for a successful and smooth global expansion process. Parallel to HR practitioners, researchers have also been trying to investigate the predictors of expatriate adjustment and job performance but unfortunately, personality traits as predictors to expatriate adjustment and job performance, have been ignored and not well conceptualized by the past researchers. Even though some researchers have tried to conceptualize the relationship between individual factors, including personality traits (Big Five), past studies still have a lack of clear directions for these relationships (Cheng and Yeh Yun Lin, 2009; Mol *et al.*, 2009). Claus *et al.* (2011) pointed out that the role of big five in expatriate job performance is unclear.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

One of the possible reasons behind lack of clear directions and poor conceptualization is that past researchers have been trying to link individual factors as predictors of expatriate performance, which is not a case. A few researchers tried to conceptualize the link between individual factors with expatriate job performance but were unable to operationalize this link, which leads to conflicting results. The individual factors might not help the expatriates to improve their performance but help them to develop work and non-work relationship with host country nationals, which further improves their job performance. Therefore, this paper conceptualizes that individual factors, especially big five, link with expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment. As compared to domestic human resource management, researchers in international human resource management emphasize on employee adjustment in the host country. Due to similar culture, language, wide social network, domestic employees may not face many problems in their own country, as compared to during international assignment. Therefore, individual factors and employee adjustment become more critical when it comes to international assignment. This paper invites researchers to operationalize these links and empirically test the suggested propositions to further strengthen the expatriate literature and confirm the conceptualization of links between individual factors, which include big five, previous international experience, social network, cultural sensitivity and self-efficacy and expatriate adjustment.

Since expatriate adjustment has become a critical factor for better expatriate performance during international assignment, researchers need to pay attention to the conceptualization and operationalization of the adjustment factor. Even though a few researchers have tried to link the individual factors with expatriates' adjustment, conflicting arguments about adjustment construct have led to poor conceptualization. For example, Campbell (1981) defined adjustment in terms of subjective well-being whereas Munton and West (1995) defined adjustment as unhappy feelings of expatriates about their circumstances. Furthermore, Selmer (1999) defined adjustment as socio-cultural characteristics in achieving effectiveness in interpersonal exchange with host country nationals. This paper proposed that adjustment should be classified as general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment, as defined by Black (1988). During international assignment, expatriates need work adjustment to build a comfortable work environment with host country nationals and other expatriates. Therefore, explaining the link between individual factors such as self-efficacy, extroversion, agreeableness, etc., and work adjustment will develop the understanding about these factors. Furthermore, general adjustment helps expatriates to have comfortable feelings about food, language, entertainment, etc. Therefore, highlighting the link between individual factors and general adjustment will explain how different individual factors help expatriates to achieve general adjustment. Finally, interaction adjustment help expatriates to build work and non-work relationships with host country nationals and other expatriates. Therefore, explaining the link between different individual factors with expatriate interaction adjustment will enhance the understanding about individual factors. Finally, conceptualizing the link between each form of adjustment (work, general, interaction) and job performance will develop the understanding how each type of adjustment improves expatriates' job performance. Therefore, this paper invites researchers to empirically test each conceptual link to further explain the role of individual factors in expatriates' adjustment and job performance.

Researchers have examined the 360 degree performance feedback at domestic level but this area has been ignored in expatriate assignment. Past researchers have examined the expatriate performance through supervisor, but this theoretical review proposed that researchers should examine expatriate performance through supervisor and host country nationals or peers, which includes third country nationals. As a part of 360 degree performance feedback, supervisor and peers may provide clear insights about expatriate performance. Sinangil and Ones (2001) pointed out that the area of expatriate management from a host country national's point-of-view has been ignored. Awais *et al.* (2012) highlighted the importance and role of host country nationals in expatriate performance and suggested that host country nationals' feedback about expatriate performance is vital. Therefore, future studies should test the proposed model and evaluate expatriate performance through host country nationals or peers, in order to better understand the expatriate performance. Furthermore, empirical examination of the proposed model in multiple settings may further contribute to the body of knowledge in expatriate literature.

### Implications

This paper provides theoretical support for the individual factors as predictors to expatriate adjustment and job performance and proposes that expatriate adjustment (work, general and interaction) mediate the relationship between individual factors (Big five, self-efficacy, previous international experience and social network) and job performance (rated by peers and supervisor). This theoretical review has also developed propositions and proposes that future researchers should empirically test this proposed model in order to further strengthen the expatriate literature. The conceptual link of individual factors to expatriates' adjustment and job performance explain that managers and practitioners involved in managing expatriates' selection, training and performance should pay attention to an expatriate's individual factors. In this regard, they should conduct different types of test to evaluate individual personality traits, self-efficacy level, and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, considering factors such as candidate social network and previous international experience will help them to make the selection process more successful and will reduce expatriate failure during international assignment. Therefore, managers engaged with candidates' selection processes should consider individual factors because individual factors help expatriates to adjust in the host country. This paper also suggests that managers involved in expatriate training, such as pre-departure training, should design training programs by considering individual factors. For example, enhancing expatriate self-efficacy level, more focus on cultural training to overcome cultural sensitivity of the candidates, motivate them to expand their social network and explaining the role of social network during their international assignment. Finally, highlighting each individual's personality traits (Big five) and explaining how they can use their personality traits to have work, general and interaction adjustment in the host country will improve the expatriate performance during international assignment. It might be a difficult task to recruit and select candidates who have all individual factors. In this situation, managers engaged with selection and training can work as filters. For example, during a selection process, if any candidate has all personality traits and previous international experience but lacks social network or cultural sensitivity, the Manager can design pre-departure training in such a way that

motivates the employee to expand their social network and overcome cultural sensitivity. Finally, this paper helps managers and HR professionals to better understand the role of individual factors in expatriate adjustment and job performance.

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### About the authors

Dr Muhammad Awais Bhatti is currently working as Associate Professor in the School of Business Management, College of Business, University Utara Malaysia. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business and Accountancy, MBA in Marketing, Human Resource Management and Information Technology, and PhD in Training and Development. His area of expertise includes international business, strategic management, human resource development and human resource management. He is a professional trainer and designs training programmes for

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managers and executives around the world. He also reviews work for the *European Journal of Training and Development*, *Journal of Business and Management* and many more. His devotion towards training and research activities enabled him to publish books in the area of business research and data analysis and journals in different fields, mainly in the area of training and development, internationalization, e-learning and business research. Muhammad Awais Bhatti is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: awaisbhatti\_786@yahoo.com

Dr Sharan Kaur is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Sharan has ten years of corporate experience in the area of human resources management, in particular, training, development and computerization. Her early success as a practitioner includes winning the Best Performance (Kaizen) Award from Sony Corp., Japan in 1998 for the computerization of the HR functions. Prior to joining the education industry, Sharan won the Value Award for her effort in putting more than 120 people on the development pipeline in the British retail company she was attached to. Currently, she lectures in strategic management and human resource development. Her research areas include training and development, knowledge management and innovation.

Dr Mohamed Mohamed Battour is currently working as Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Commerce, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, MBA, and PhD (Marketing). His area of expertise includes marketing, internet marketing, consumer behavior, and customer relationship management.

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