SUPPORTIVE CHANNELS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT: REFLECTIONS ON SRI LANKAN EXPATRIATES IN ASIA

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Abstract - This study explores the impact of extended organizational supportthrough human resource management practices and social support on cross-cultural adjustment of Sri Lankan expatriates in Asia. It has integrated a series of activities, which were already well researched in an isolated manner in different contexts. Thereby the main purpose of this study was to investigate how organizational support and social support given throughout expatriation (including both pre-departure and on-assignment period) can intensify cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates.A questionnaire method was employed to survey 55 Sri Lankan expatriates. Hierarchical regression analysis was mainly employed to analyze data. The results provided thatorganizational support through HRMPs of selection, training and compensation make influence on at least one dimension of cross cultural adjustment of Sri Lankan expatriates on individual basis.Findings of this study confirmed that bundling of HRMPs are more sensitive on cross-cultural adjustment than that of the individual impact of HRMPs. The available positive influence of social support channels on cross-cultural adjustment indicates the necessity of being mindful to give strategic orientation for welfare programs of organizations.

Index terms - Expatriates, cross-cultural adjustment, organizational support, social support, HRM practices

I. INTRODUCTION

International business organizations tend to use expatriates as one of the key channels through which they develop talent work group in correspondence with today's global business requirements. Ever changing nature of competition and diversities have left a more challengeable task of managing expatriates,specially in early stage of international business organizations (Dowling and Welch, 2004). In this study, a series of activities, which were already well researched in an isolated manner in different contexts have been incorporated together to see more accurate results for the question of "what are the most appropriate mechanisms by which international organizations can certify expatriates' easy adjustment at nervous cultural setting". Despite the fact that organizational support (OS) given throughout the expatriation is one of the key elements of expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (CCA), little knowledge is available about the extent to which human resource management practices(HRMPs) and social support (SS) practices make that CCA process easier. Thereby, the main purpose of this paper is to discuss how and to what extent does organizational support (through HRM practices) and social support(byspouse, work and non-work related friends) intensify CCA of expatriates.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The impact organizational support

Researchers have closely identified that proper implementation of HRMPs would bring a positive and long lasting bond with the organization which very apparently true even in the case of expatriates too. Thereby, three HRM practiceshave been identified namely selection, training and compensation to discuss their linkage with CCAof expatriates. As in the literature, careful and fair selection practices and procedures, accurate information about real nature of the international assignment is vital, from which both pros and cons are encountered. This allows expatriates to be proactive on psychological preparation to new cultural settings (Stroh et al., 1998). Based on the categorization of Caligiuri&Lazarova (2002), selection was to be considered as sources of giving both information and emotional support for selected expatriates. Effectivepre-departure training enhances familiarities to the new culture, reduce uncertainties, and improve comfort ability, proficiency with expected behavior, accuracy of cultural assumptions, and socially acceptable value systems at host culture.Compensation information showswhether organizations are ready to value the international contributionand provide rewards for comfortable life pattern.

Further, as in MacDuffie, (1995), HRMPs that are combined with each other lead to better outcomes e: g performance, because of the inherent nature of the internal fit of the practices. This holistic effect of HRMPs implies that the system (as a whole) is greater than the sum of its parts (Chanwick, 2010). Thereby, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Organizational support through HRMPs of (a) selection (b) training (c) compensation will be positively related to cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates

Hypothesis 2: System impact of HRMPs of selection, training and compensation will be positively related to cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates

The impact of social support

Social relationship and their linkages with expatriates' cross cultural adjustment, is well researched in many country contexts but not yet to be concluded due to incomplete findings (Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 1998; Johnson et al., 2002). This study provides a clear inside of SSby getting four social networks separately. Spouse support, work- related friends support and non-wok related friend support and their consequent impact on CCAof expatriates would be tested. Research evidences are still inconclusive on the effect of spousal support at different assignment stages. Spouse attempt of collecting information on general living condition and related cultural matters on behalf of the partner expatriate, enhance emotional fitments to overcome negative feelings of accepting the assignments and new cultural setup at host countries (Caliguiri et al., 1998; Hervey, 1998). Further, spouse can precede with lesser family demand on housework engagements of family needs, house cleaning, involvement with children and meal preparation that may be an advantage for the assignee to get ready to departure for the assignment. If such expectations are low, the higher the freedom assignees have to organize their time, energy and attention on necessities of the assignment. In addition, researchers pointed out that spousal emotional support on-assignment stage is to be positively linked with expatriates' work adjustment owing to giving a fair evaluation on job success, giving about well-being, and managing the family issues by herself/ himself and releasing expatriate for task accomplishment (Lu and Cooper, 1995).

The assistance of work-related friends is supportive to reduce psychic cost of relocation with keeping good mental fitness. Past experienced expatriates from other departments and sharing positive and negative experiences and pros and cons of the assignments would be an emotional support for them.Non-work-related friends' support expressed instrumental supports including residential arrangements (helping to find a good tenant), emotional support like willingness to extend their helping hand to rest of the family members (caring older parents and support on their health issues), assurance of continuing assignees' responsibilities and obligations on social activities during his or her absent period is supportive to improve mental fitness of adjustment.Based on the above facts, the following hypotheses are made:

Hypothesis 3: Social support by (a) spouse (b) work related friends (c) non-work related friends support will be positively related to CCAof expatriates

III. METHODS

Data collection and Sample

The sample organizations and data collection were drawn from the company registry of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce for 2016-2017. Information was obtained through a web based questionnaire sent to 55 return expatriates who had worked in Asia and completed at least three-year period, during the period of 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2017. The response rate was 63%.

Scale and variables

Pre-tested questionnaires were considered with some modifications to measure OS.The survey covered: selection (eleven items), training (eight items) and compensation (nine items).Spouse support was instrumented based on Anderson (2008). The work of Aycan (1997), established the foundation for the work and non-work related friends support question development. Adjustment of expatriates, the dimensions of work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment were measured on the 14-item scale that is widely used in international assignment research (Black and Gregersen, 1991). Questions were standardized on a five-point Likert Scale.

Measurement validation

Several measurements were done to ensure validation of this study. First, a reliability analysis was employed to assess the internal consistency of the constructs of OS (α= 0.874), SS (α= 0.824), and CCA (α = 0.831). In the means of testing possible multicollinearity issues of the study, bi-variate association between variables as well as variance inflation factor (VIF) values were monitored (Hair et al., 2006). It was ensured that correlations among variables were not greater than 0.7, as shown in Table I. The largest VIF measured for the independent variables in this model was 3.67 which was less than 4.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

Table 01. Mean, SD and Correlations among variables

	M	SD	S	T	CO	WF	NWF	WA	GA
Selection (S)	4.25	0.43							
Training (T)	4.36	0.46	0.535*						
Compensation (CO)	4.20	0.65	0.493*	0.403*					

Work-related friends (WF)	3.35	0.38	0.792*	0.328*	0.75				
Non-work related friends (NWF)	4.54	0.72	0.745*	0.753*	9*	0.352*			
Work adjustment (WA)	4.20	0.34	0.574*	0.347*	0.52	0.459*	0.882		
General adjustment (GA)	3.02	0.23	0.543*	0.343*	2*	0.333*	*	0.439*	
Interaction adjustment (IA)	3.92	0.34	0.463*	0.685*	0.53	0.963*	0.548	0.329*	0.3
					4*		*		84
					0.63		0.839		*
					8*		*		
					0.34				
					5*				

Note: *p <0.05; **p <0.01(two tailed)

Table 02: Organizational support and cross-cultural adjustment

	WA		GA		IA	
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Selection	0.224*		0.642		0.346*	
Training	0.329*		0.324		0.422*	
Compensation	0.293		0.282*		0.347	
Selection X Training		0.428*		0.462		0.472
Selection X Compensation		0.634		0.223		0.242
Training X Compensation		0.342		0.324		0.329
Selection X Training X Compensation		0.549*		0.472		0.192*
R^2	0.347	0.362	0.352	0.422	0.424	0.121
ΔR^2	0.023	0.103	0.223	0.123	0.211	0.241
F	16.34*	15.53*	19.244	6.244	5.321	3.343

Notes: *p< 0.05; **p < 0.01; Standardized beta weights are shown, WA= work adjustment, GA= general adjustment, IA=interaction adjustment

As in table 2 model M1, M3 and M5, organizational supportive practices of selection, training and compensation were entered together to see the consequent impact on three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment. All HRM practices were significant on at least one dimension of cross-cultural adjustment. More considerably both selection and training were significant predictors of work adjustment (β=0.224, p< 0.032 and β=0.329, p< 0.025 respectively) and interaction adjustment (β=0.346, p< 0.021 and β=0.422, p< 0.023 respectively).Compensation itself ensures the general adjustment of the expatriates (β=0.282, p< 0.013). Hence, H1 was partially supported.Thereby, supporting the conclusion that selection, training and compensation practices could have a positive impact on at least one aspects of CCAof Sri Lankan expatriates in Asia. In addition to the analysis H1, a subsequent detailed analysis was made (in M2, M4 and M6) to see the combined impact of each of the HRM practices on cross-cultural adjustment. Selection, training and compensation were multiplied with each other to get interaction terms and the same steps as in H1 was employed. The results confirmed that a significant interactive effects of selection and training on work adjustment by a higher degree (β=0.428, p< 0.012). More interestingly, combination of all three practices together weresufficient to ensure both work adjustment (β=0.349, p< 0.009) and interaction adjustment (β=0.192, p< 0.031). Thereby, concluding the results, the sensitivity of selection, training and compensation on wok adjustment seemed to be better than that of the combination of selection and training. Thereby H2 was partially supported.

Table 03: Social support and cross-cultural adjustment

	WA	GA	IA
Spouse support	0.279	0.542*	0.154*
Work-related friends support	0.439*	0.361	0.265*
Non work related friends support	0323	0.165*	0.215
R^2	0.434	0.145	0.433
ΔR^2	0.343	0.241	0.235
F	23.52*	14.45*	11.23*

Notes: *p< 0.05; **p < 0.01; Standardized beta weights are shown,WA= work adjustment, GA= general adjustment, IA=interaction adjustment

As depicted in table 3, identified social support networks also made an impact on at least one dimension of cross-cultural adjustment. Consequent results of spousal support on interaction adjustment (β=0.154, p< 0.019), and general adjustment (β=0.542, p< 0.029), work-related friends support on both work adjustment and interaction adjustment (β=0.439, p < 0.009 and β=0.265, p<0.024 respectively), as well as non-work friend support on general adjustment (β=0.165, p < 0.015) were proved. Thus, hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As the core purpose of this research, the researcher carried oud an exploration on how organizational

support (through selection, training and compensation) and social support (spouse, work-related friends, non-work related friends) can intensify CCAof expatriates.Organizational support through HRMPs makes influences on at least one dimension of cross-cultural adjustment of Sri Lankan expatriates in Asia. As indicated in the Table 2, this study findingwas not in line with existing knowledge of selection and its general adjustment support (Vallone et al., 2001), and training and its general adjustment support (Wang et al., 2012). According to Chandrekumara& Sparrow (2003), in general, Sri Lankan firms hold their management practices on job oriented perspective more. e.g. functional based job-person fit, business-drive training is more visible. It is natural to have such short-term work achievement orientation in order to survive in the market, especially among firms still are in the early stage of internationalization. Also, specifically, in the case of international business firms, HRM practices are not advanced to tap into global competitiveness. This might be reflected in managing expatriates too. However,it is still need to consider the possibleimplementation of a compensation package in a way of improving work related adjustment and interaction adjustment of expatriates. Selection and training were not supportive on general and interaction adjustment. Further attention is required to ensure whether this is because of the inadequacy of the constructs or the way they implement. Further, bundling of HRMPs revealed that, as far as Sri Lankan international business firms take strategic decisions to ensure internal consistency among the identified HRM practices which would bring more sensitive results on CCAof expatriates. Our results support the view of Becker and Gerhart (1996).

Among the available social supportiveness, spouse support was helpful for expatriates to ensure interaction adjustment and general adjustment rather than work adjustment. A country where human development index is higher, literacy rate as well as gender equity is promoted in education and employment, spouse ability of fact findings on different culture is expectable and highly supportive in this context.However, another analysis of spouse' personal characteristics of age, educational background, employability, previous foreign experiences, number of children will make certainty which are beyond the scope of this study. This study found the impact of work-related friends' support on work adjustment and interaction adjustment. Positive work ethics and putting them into practices even into work group well-being is something common in Sri Lankan firms that might be reflected in the case of expatriates too. Strong work ties among work related friends in and outside the department must be tied up with collectivistic group norms e.g. caring, helpfulness, protection, trust, respect etc.Moreover, as viewed by Johnson, Kristof-Brown et al., (2003) non-work related friendship significantly explained the relationship with general adjustment possibilities rather than interaction or work adjustment in the case of Sri Lankan expatriates too.Since Sri Lankan society normally displays respect, obedience and caring on others, this kind of positive linkage is justifiable. Informal friendship networks have capabilities to improve psychological comfort owing to general adjustment even though some researchers viewed that possibility to have a negative impact with adjustment. However, this should be analyzed with time factor of separation period, as there is a possibility of losing friendship ties due to be absent for a long period from a community.

For the policy implications, as most of the internationalized Sri Lankan organizations are still at their early stages of internationalization, the more favorable direction to ensure work adjustment is not surprising. Because accurate functioning of work task is the key determinant by work adjustment leading tosustainable market survival. Thereby, it is suggestive to pay more attention to expatriates' perception of in-role and extra-role work environment which confirms role clarity, and less ambiguities in leading to higher job performances. In addition, orientation of execution of multifaceted selection criteria at multilayered selection process to bring knowledge and skills required to perform diversified, and challenging task at nervous cultural setting is worthy as correct selection of expatriates very decisive for many adjustment phases. Further, in the case of having limited funds to conduct expatriate supporting practices, it would be meaningful to select individuals with higher family support, having more communal support. To confirm such data basses, organizations should avoid conventional understanding of policies and procedures of organizing employee-family entertainment programs of organizations (e.g. annual trip with families). More specifically managers and HRM professionals need to thoughtful keep internal fitness in a way of catering to realize objectives of another function, which is call system-level fitness to maximize cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriates.Organizations should pay more attention on improving social interaction through selecting people maintaining good social contacts with host country or considering foreign working experiences to make appropriate selections. They are required to extend them with a more strategic focus in a way of developing professional linkages within the organization to enrich the work-related contacts further.As non-work friends support made efforts to ensure at least one direction of adjustment to the host society, provision for information and communication technology to increased networking with friends acrossborders (including host and home country) may be helpful. As a result, their view and understandingwill move beyond the conventional understanding which ensure social interaction and adaptation in a diversified space that covers a range of localities.

In conclusion, the adjustment process of Sri Lankan expatriates is partly influenced by organizational support through the HRMPs of selection, training and compensation. As bundled HRMPs influence on CCAby a higher degree, organizations should attempt keep internal consistency of HRMPs through which more formalized processes. Further, direct strategic orientation or indirect orientation through socials support networks to improve CCAabilities of expatriates is highly desirable in the Sri Lankan context.

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