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The Moderating Effect of Psychological Adjustment on Task Satisfaction and Work Adjustment among Expatriate Academics in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study explores the task satisfaction and work adjustment relationship and test the moderating effect of psychological adjustment on task satisfaction and work adjustment relationship among expatriate academics in Malaysia. This empirical study attempts to enrich the understanding of the work adjustment, psychological adjustment and task satisfaction. A quantitative method was adopted in this study and responses from 251 expatriate academics in Malaysia were analyzed using SPSS 20. This result shows that psychological adjustment moderate the relationship between task satisfaction and work adjustment. The result showed that all of the hypotheses were supported. Most of the expatriate academics are satisfied with their work environments and increase their work adjustment. Psychological adjustment support the moderating effect of the study. The result indicate that university top management not only focus on maintaining expatriates' satisfaction to increase their level of work adjustment but also psychological adjustment which moderate the satisfaction and work adjustment relationship. This empirical study attempts to enrich the understanding of the work adjustment among expatriate academics within Malaysian context. This study adopt a cross-sectional research design and examine the opinions of expatriates at only one point in time. Longitudinal research design should be done for a better result.

Keywords: Expatriate Academics, Task Satisfaction, Work Adjustment, Psychological Adjustment

Introduction

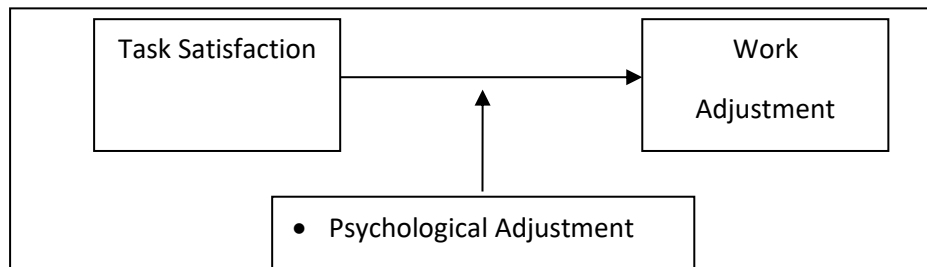
The increasing rate of unemployment, individual development, limited opportunities among home country institutions and even the motive of venture may be the examples for rising popularity of “self-directed international assignment”. Universities, consequently the academicians, are among the most valuable assets of countries and they are also the ones who are frequently defined as “volunteer expatriates” or expatriate academics (EAs). With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Adrienne and Mary, 2013), much of the focus has been on expatriates working in universities in the developed world. The top universities in the world are largely confined to advanced economies, where the teaching and research environments, and general living standards, are very often superior. Malaysian public universities have opened its market towards globalization. In Malaysia the study on EAs also needs to be developed since the number of this group is increasing however, the study is still limited. The present study is focusing on the moderating effect of psychological adjustment between satisfaction and work adjustment relationship among expatriate academics in public universities in Malaysia.

Satisfaction, Work Adjustment and Psychological Adjustment

It is anticipated that high work adjustment comes from the high level of satisfaction during the time spent living and working abroad. As a multidimensional phenomenon, expatriate adjustment can be identified in psychological, socio-cultural and work domains. Most of EAs are usually affected on conflicts due to several reasons such as lack of psychological adjustment and lack of socio-cultural adjustment. Perhaps the general perception that most EAs are usually familiar and prepared to perform all the academia job aspects such as teaching, research, supervision, publishing, consultancy as well as community works led to the negligence of continuous improvement of developmental programs for them. Consequently, many of them ended up alone in the process of juggling between new job demands, new norms and culture of the organizations in foreign country. Selmer (2001) in his study shows that the mean score of psychological adjustment measured by the subjective well-being variable was above the mid-level point. It shows that there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between all adjustment variables (Selmer, 2001). Bizot (1993) suggested that those individuals whose needs are satisfied outside of work may be better able to tolerate poor fit at work, or those with poor fit may consciously or unconsciously seek satisfaction in non-work activities rather than seeking to change jobs. Thus while the characteristics of the job abroad and the foreign work environment are expected to have direct effects on expatriate work adjustment, the social surroundings may have additional indirect effects on the individual's perceived level of work adjustment (Breiden et al., 2005). The case for academic expatriates who move to academic institutions positioned in emerging economies. However, previous studies shows that academic expatriates in emerging economies have to cope with requests for last-minute teaching, difficulties with classroom management, no support structures, and a lack of assistance with work arrangements (Sabrine El Baroudi and Svetlana N. Khapova, 2021). Studies on adjustment among expatriate academics specifically remains relatively sparse (Selmer and Lauring, 2013 & Richardson, C. and Wong, H.W.. 2018), with most of the attention being paid to non-academic expatriates. Thus it is postulated that,

Hypothesis 1: Task satisfaction influence work adjustment

Hypothesis 2: Psychological adjustment moderate the relationship between task satisfaction and work adjustment among expatriate academic



Methods

A judgment sampling under purposive sampling was applied in this study. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore select a sample from which most can be learned (Merriam, 1998). Data for the study was collected through the sample of respondents who are working in public universities. The respondents' first selection criterion required expatriate academics that are currently attached to public universities in Malaysia. Secondly, they have possibly served in this country for more than six months. The longer the stay in Malaysia will assist to give more meaningful perceptions in terms of their personal experience on adjustment. Satisfaction (21 items) was measured using the original questions in Minnesota Satisfactoriness Scales (MSS; Weiss et al., 1967) and work adjustment (3 items) was measured used Black and Stephens (1989). A seven-point Likert scale was used, as respondents will be asked to rate their family adjustment, ranging from (1) highly unadjusted to (7) highly adjusted. The Mental Health Inventory (5 items) (Davies et al., 1988) is used to measure expatriates' level of psychological adjustment. Item responses are obtained using a 6-point scale from 1 (none of the time) to 6 (all of the time). Question 1, 3 and 5 are negatively worded. A sample item reads "How much of the time during the past month have you felt calm and peaceful?" Once all items were properly reversed coded and averaged, scores on the MHI-5 could potentially range from 1 to 6, where higher scores indicate a relative absence of distress and presence of well-being.

Sample

There were 300 copies of questionnaires were distributed and only 229 respondents responded. However, from 229 only 218 were deemed usable for further analysis because of incomplete responses (many missing value) questionable responses (no variation in the answer throughout the questionnaire). The final sample of respondents in this study included 251 expatriate academics. A detailed description of the demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Tables 1. From the table 1, majority of the respondents who completed the questionnaire were male 68.5% (n=172) with females accounting for 31.5% (n=79). This is consistent with the gender breakdown of expatriate academics in Malaysia as reported by the Ministry of Higher Education (2020). The age of expatriate academics was between 23 to 70 years old and most of them were 43 years old. Most of respondents held PhD followed by Master. It is important to note that the majority of expatriate academics in Malaysian public university had no prior international experience. However the pattern was somewhat different in regards to attending training provided by the university, 43% indicating

that they had attended training. In total, 80.9% of the sample were married, 15.1% were single and only 4% divorced. The citizenship breakdown of respondents were from India (51%) followed by Indonesia (38%). Respondents were asked about the length of time they had been working in Malaysia. The majority of the respondents had been working in Malaysia for 1 to 5 years.

Results

Reliability and Validity Assessment

In order to ascertain the internal consistency of the constructs, Cronbach's alpha was computed, with a value of >0.60 considered to be acceptable and a value of >0.70 good (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). As depicted in table 1, the Cronbach's alpha value for all variables was good (above 0.70) as well as the Composite reliability (above 0.70). All constructs had internal consistency >0.70, suggesting that all the constructs were highly reliable. In addition, substantial and significant factor loadings provide evidence of convergent validity with the recommended value of >0.50 (Hildebrandt, 1987). Even though five AVE values were below 0.5, it was assumed that the constructs were reliable and valid based on the other indicator validity, substantial and significant factor loadings (Ahmad, 2007).

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Assessment for All Variables

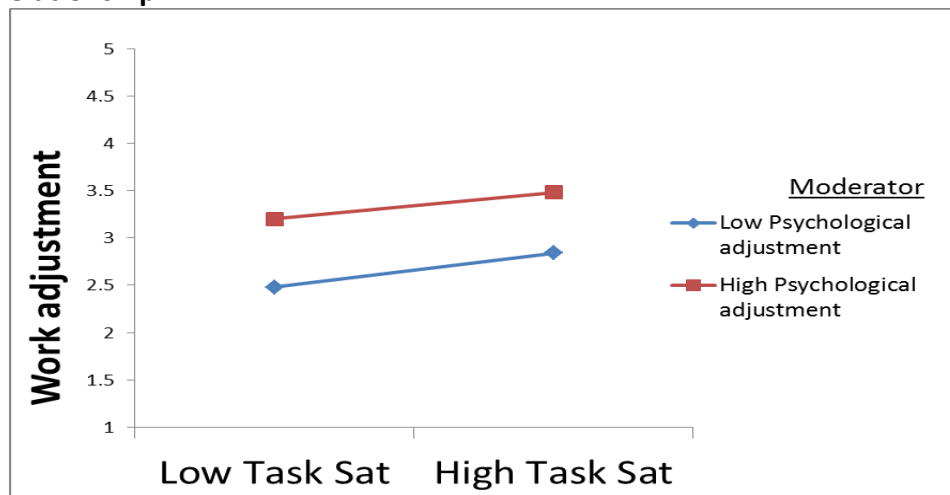
Variables	Alpha	CR	AVE
Work Adjustment	0.80	0.81	0.52
Task Satisfaction	0.90	0.91	0.40
Psychological Adjustment	0.70	0.74	0.41

Table 2: Regression analysis for direct relationship

Hypotheses	Beta	T Statistics	P Values	Hypothesis accepted/rejected
H1: Task Satisfaction influence Work Adjustment	0.195	2.231	0.027	Accepted

Regression analysis (Table 2) shows hypothesis 1 is accepted. Hierarchical regression in SPSS20 is used to test the moderating effects of psychological adjustment which is illustrated in the graph presented in figure 1. Figure 1 shows, the association between higher level of task satisfaction and work adjustment will be stronger with the existence of psychological adjustment as the moderator. So it can be concluded that psychological adjustment improve and moderate the relationship between emotional satisfaction and work adjustment. In other words, the higher the psychological adjustment, the stronger will be the relationship between task satisfaction and work adjustment among EAs. Thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Figure 1: Moderating effect of psychological adjustment on task satisfaction - work adjustment relationship



Discussion

In Malaysia, intercultural difficulties affect some psychological distraction of confusion, resistance or disappointment in interpersonal interaction and relationship. Expatriates may experience more challenges to build mutual cultural relationship with interethnic society of Malaysia. It is essential for expatriates to adjust not only their work adjustment but also their psychological adjustment in host country (McEvoy and Parker, 1995). This finding is consistent with the theoretical concept of subjective well-being, where the psychological aspects of international adjustment also, has been well developed, especially in relation to work environment. This study shows that the task satisfaction on work adjustment relationship will improve with the existence of psychological adjustment. Task satisfaction and work adjustment relationship may increase with the psychological adjustment moderation. This finding indicate that when expatriate academics gains familiarity with the general living conditions and socializing with host nationals, this will indirectly influence their satisfaction and work adjustment. When assessing the findings, it becomes clear that the expatriate adjustment outside of the work domain can have an impact on the work (Black et al., 1991).

Practically, Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) need to understand how important task satisfaction and psychological adjustment to support expatriate academics work adjustment. The findings of this study indicated the need for the university and ministry (MOHE) to become more explicitly aware of the importance of work adjustment among expatriate academics. Therefore the findings act as prescriptive guidance to assist the university and ministry not only allocating resources but also in diagnosing and correcting misfit in managing human resource (eg. Selection process, training) among expatriate academics.

Limitation and Future Direction

There are a few limitations that should be recognized that may provide for future research. Firstly, this study adopts a cross-sectional research design and examines the opinions of expatriates at only one point in time. Longitudinal research design should be done for a better result. Future research should extend this study to other industries (e.g factory, automotive, communication). It is also suggested to use a longitudinal approach in order to understand the dynamics of work adjustment among EAs. By measuring EAs adjustment over time, future studies will be able to present a more conclusive interpretation of the significant

impact of adjustment among expatriates. In conclusion, the findings have increased the knowledge in EAs study within Malaysian context. The findings of this study have managed to unravel new understanding related to psychological adjustment and work adjustment among EAs that gives theoretical as well as practical implications to the existing body of knowledge.

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