

Perceived Organizational Support for Communication and Expatriate Adjustments: A Case of a China-Based Multinational Corporation

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Abstract

Past research suggests that little scholarly research has addressed the impact of perceived organizational support (POS) on expatriate overseas adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005; Kawai & Strange, 2014), let alone studies examining POS from the perspective of Asian multinational corporations. Studies of examining expatriate adjustment have paid considerable attention to Western expatriates (Du-Babcock, 2000; Herleman et al., 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2007). The shift of economic growth to Asia has redirected the research focus to examine how expatriates from Mainland China (Cao, 2008; Xu & Du-Babcock, 2012), Taiwan (Chi & Yeh, 2006) and Japan (Peltokorpi, 2007, 2010) adjust to their overseas assignments. In view that an increasingly large number of Asian multinational corporations have expanded their global market operations on a large scale, the present study analyzed a series of in-depth interviews on how organizational communication support affects China-based MNC's expatriates when adapting to their overseas assignments.

Introduction

Expatriate adjustment has primarily focused on examining the relationships between cross-cultural adjustments and the identified predictors, such as language abilities, culture distance, and organizational support. Compared to language and cultural distance as the determining factors that are likely to affect expatriate adjustment, organizational support has received relatively little attention from researchers until a decade ago.

Early research examining the effects of organizational support on expatriate adjustment has primarily focused on cross-cultural adjustment and training (Aycan, 1997; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, & Bürgi, 2001), social support from host country employees (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999), logistical support from multinationals (Aycan, 1997; Black & Gregersen, 1991), and repatriation policies (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Studies by Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, and Yao (2009); Takeuchi, Wang, and Marinova (2005); and van der Heijden, van Engen and Paauwe (2009) stress the effects of perceived organizational support (POS) on expatriate performance by suggesting that this aspect remains relatively under-researched within the cross-cultural context, and that findings are inconclusive. Earlier research by Kraimer and Wayne (2004) reveals that support for career POS is a determining factor affecting expatriate intentions to complete their overseas assignments and expatriate adjustment (e.g., Culpan & Wright, 2002; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). A study by Van der Heijden, Johannes, van Engen, Marloes, and Paauwe (2009) showed that POS is positively related to both contextual performance and an intention to stay, but no significance was

found between career POS and task performance. Results of this line of research suggest that perceived organizational support facilitates expatriate adjustment and reduces the intention for pre-mature expatriation (see also Caligiuri, Tarique, & Jacobs, 2009; Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, & Yao, 2009; van der Heijden, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2009). This line of research has laid a solid foundation highlighting importance of POS to facilitate expatriate adjustment; yet, little research has examined the effect of organizational support from a communication perspective. To operationalize, the term of *organizational support for communication* in the present study will refer to the resources, facilities, and activities provided by the home and host country multinationals to enhance expatriate employees' communication efficacy.

Research on the effect of organizational support for communication has identified two factors that are likely to be the determining factors: the use of information communication technology (ICT) and corporate training. In response to Cox's (2004) critics that the impact of ICT on expatriate adjustment has not been well-researched, studies by Andersen and Foss (2005) and by Lee (2010), examining the impact of ICT on operations of multinationals, found that the use of ICT facilitated communication among managers across functions and geographic boundaries, while enhancing the coordination of multinational activities. These studies suggested that the use of ICT not only opened up communication by increasing the accessibility within the organization, but also promoted the international expansion of organizations and fostered inter-organizational linkages. More importantly, the use of ICT facilitates expatriates' communication with their headquarters without any geographical restrictions.

The second identified factor concerning organizational support for communication is corporate training. The importance of corporate training before and/or after departure has shown an impact on the success of overseas assignments and adjustments. Shen and Darby (2006) examined the effect of Chinese multinationals' training practices on expatriate adjustment. Their research found that Chinese multinationals provided limited training for expatriates and consequently that cross-cultural training only had a moderately significant impact on Chinese expatriates' adjustment (see also Gao, 2008). These studies have implicitly attributed to inconclusive findings suggesting that more empirical research is needed to examine the relationship between organizational support via corporate training and expatriate adjustment to overseas assignments.

To bridge this gap, the purpose of the present study is twofold. First, the study examines how ICT enhances perceived organizational support for Chinese expatriates by facilitating their interaction with their headquarters without a geographical boundary. Second, the study investigates the perceived importance of corporate training (pre-departure and on-the-job training) for expatriate adjustment.

It is hoped that the present study investigating the effect and importance of organizational support for communication on Chinese expatriates' assignment success can be useful for both researchers and practitioners in two ways. First, because the extant expatriate adjustment literature has mainly focused on the successful expatriate adjustment using a large-scale survey quantitative approach, the present study in adopting qualitative research method seeks to examine the identified factors via in-depth interviews that reflect the nuances for the Chinese expatriates in adapting to their overseas assignments across different geographical locations. Although the results of quantitative-based studies answer the research enquiry as to whether differences exist between the identified factors (e.g., language competence, intercultural communication competence, cross-cultural adjustment), the quantitative research methods fail to address the essence of "why" there are differences, and in "what ways" they occur. Second, there has been relatively extensive academic interest in Western expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. Du-Babcock, 2000; Huang Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Wang

& Nayir 2006; Peltokorpi & Froese 2009, 2012; Selmer, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Wan & Takeuchi 2007). Yet, little evidence has been examined in terms of Asian expatriates' adjustment processes in a Western context. With the rise of Asian economic superpowers in the global business arena, China-based MNCs now tend to send large numbers of expatriates to their overseas business units. The analysis of the present study draws on an approximate 35,000-word corpus derived from interviews with 35 Chinese expatriates who were sent by a China-based multinational corporation to reside in their subsidiaries for a period of 1 to 5 years. This study should enrich an understanding of the effect and importance of organizational support for communication to facilitate China-based MNC expatriates in successfully adapting to their international assignments.

Review of Literature

In the present study, organizational support for communication takes the forms of corporate language (English) working environment policy, corporate training (language and culture) to expatriate employees and local employees, and information communication technology (ICT). In the next section, I first review studies investigating perceived organizational support and expatriate adjustment. Then, I review the effects of corporate training and the importance of information communication technology on enhancing communication efficacy between company headquarters and their Chinese expatriates.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Expatriate Adjustment

POS is a valued resource assuring that employees' help will be available from the organization when support is needed to "carry out one's job effectively" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698). Early research on types of organizational support for expatriates' international assignments include pre-departure training and adjustment-related support variables (e.g., Aryee, Chay & Chew, 1996; Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi & Bross, 1998; Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999; Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994), financial support variables (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Guzzo et al., 1994), and career support variables (Aryee et al., 1996; Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Selmer, 2000). As noted by Guzzo et al. (1993), when the organization cares for the benefits of employees, the employees in return display positive attitudes and work outcomes. This is particularly true for expatriate managers. A study by Guzzo et al. (1993) shows that the typical incentives provided by organizations for their expatriates includes financial incentives for tax equalization, cost-of-living allowances, emergency leave programs, and foreign language training courses (see also, Guzzo et al., 1994). Aside from monetary incentives, MNCs often provide pre-departure organizational support in the form of language and/or cross-cultural training programs to their expatriates (see, for example, Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

Early research found evidence to suggest that organizational support has a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment (Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Shaffer et al., 1999), organizational commitment (Guzzo et al., 1993, 1994), and an intention to complete overseas assignments without a pre-mature return to the home country (Shaffer et al., 2001). Kraimer and Wayne (2004) decomposed the POS framework into three main dimensions; namely, career POS, finance POS, and adjustment POS. Their 2004 study examined three dimensions of POS impacting on expatriate success, with results showing that the career POS and adjustment POS had positive correlations with expatriates' commitment to the parent company, and that "financial POS positively related to commitment to the foreign facility and task performance" (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004, p. 231). Other research has also shown that expatriates with a high POS are likely to feel that their work is appreciated and acknowledged, and consequently they are likely to exhibit a lower intention to leave and contribute to job turnover (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Aside from organizational support from the home country organizations, host country organizational support is also critical to the success of expatriate adjustment. The concept of host country organizational support concerns the domain of work, human interaction and general living conditions (Black & Gregersen, 1991). That is, the success and effect of the host country organizational support lies in the extent to which expatriates are comfortable with living in their host country (Black & Gregersen, 1991), or “the degree of fit between the expatriate and his or her environment in a direction of reduced stress and effectiveness” (Aycan, 1997, p. 451). Taken together, this finding shows that the higher the POS from the home and host organization of assigned expatriates, the better their cross-cultural adjustment.

Corporate Language (English) Working Environment Policy

Past research has suggested the strategic importance played by corporate language policy in multinationals (e.g., Maclean, 2006; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1997, 1999). Feely and Harzing (2003) point out that language barriers can pose negative consequences to foreign market expansion and may weaken the headquarters-subsidiary relationship. Luo and Shenkar (2006) propose that a [corporate] language system be designed to align with organizational strategy to enhance communication efficacy and knowledge-sharing. To enhance their communication efficacy, multinational corporations should make systematic efforts to institutionalize corporate language policy and provide language training (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999).

When institutionalizing corporate language policy, the choice of corporate language is likely to be influenced by the language that is spoken by employees in multinationals. Companies increasingly choose English as their corporate language in a multiple-language environment (Charles, 2007; Nickerson, 2002). For example, Lenovo, a Chinese MNC, announced that English was chosen as its corporate working language after it purchased the PC unit of IBM (Chen, 2004). English seems to be the *de facto* “global” language and might be the most practical option for most Chinese multinationals. Crystal (2003) noted that about 80 percent of the world’s electronically stored information is currently in English. The e-mail system is an important platform for multinationals to maintain both inter- and intra-organizational communication.

English has also regained its supremacy as the main foreign language since 1960s (Lam, 2002). In this connection, it is natural to speculate that most Chinese multinationals are likely to adopt English as their preferred corporate language. Because of this, an English-language work environment is chosen as an important factor to be examined in relation to how Chinese expatriates perceive the importance of implementing English as a corporate language policy for their overseas assignments. To ensure the success of implementing the corporate language, employee’s competence in English is the key that may contribute to the success of an English-language work environment. Consequently, the importance of expatriate language competency should be emphasized by the multinational organization (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Wright, Kumagai, & Bonney, 2001) as “expatriates become the interface, through language, between headquarters and the local subsidiary” (Marschan-Piekkari, et al.,1999, p.386).

Corporate Training

The second aspect of the organizational support is corporate training. Caligiuri (1997) noted that expatriate employees receiving pre-departure corporate training tend to perform well in their overseas assignments and can develop intercultural competencies, thereby facilitating the coordination between

their headquarters and the foreign subsidiary. An extensive expatriate literature has identified training on a variety of subjects that facilitate expatriate adjustment. These corporate training initiatives include language training (Tung, 1982), cross-cultural training (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2004; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1986; Selmer, 1997), and technical and management training (Tung, 1982).

Although Chinese multinationals' training practices have received notable research attention in recent years, little research has been done systematically, so the results are not conclusive. Shen and Darby's (2006) study, exploring the reasons for Chinese multinationals providing limited training to expatriates, suggests that the perceived ineffectiveness of training, insufficient time for training, and the lack of training for experts in certain areas, are likely to explain the limited pre-departure corporate training by Chinese multinational corporations. Although Shen and Darby's study explored the reasons for the lack of training, they did not address its effect on corporate training. Gao's (2008) study reveals that cross-cultural training only had a moderately significant impact on Chinese expatriates' adjustment.

The relationships between language skills, expatriate adjustment and its effectiveness have comparatively received less attention from researchers (Peltokorpi, 2010; Selmer, 2006a). Nevertheless, there is some evidence focusing on the relationship between language fluency and expatriate adjustment. Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer and Luk (2005) conducted a research study using the meta-analysis approach and found that language competence is positively correlated with both work and interaction adjustment. Xu's (2010) study also confirms these findings by suggesting that English competence affects Chinese expatriate overseas adjustment in their overseas assignments. Other research suggests that English, as the default language in international business, influences overall management systems, particularly in the organizational communication systems of Chinese multinationals. Therefore, language competence has been considered a predictor of the effectiveness regarding international assignment adjustment (Caligiuri et al., 2009; Luring, 2008; Mol, Born, & Molen, 2005, Selmer & Luring, 2015). Taking the results of these studies together, it is evident that fluency in the designated corporate language (either local language or in English) is an important factor for expatriate adjustment since language seems to be an essential instrument through which expatriates develop their understanding of a new culture (Selmer, 2006a; Selmer & Luring, 2015).

Cross-cultural training is another aspect of common corporate training that receives relatively more attention than that of language training. It is expected that expatriate employees receiving pre-departure cross-cultural training adjust better in their overseas assignments. The research shows that the higher the organizational support in corporate training, the better the cross-cultural adjustment. In cross-cultural training the focus is on the comparison of cultural distance in terms of how the expatriate perceives discrepancies between the host and the native culture. Past research has confirmed that the cultural distance between home and host countries are likely to affect expatriate adjustment in working attitudes, values, and customs (see, for example, Reus & Lamont, 2008; Selmer, Chiu, & Shenkar, 2007; Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005; Toh & DeNisi, 2007). The assumption is that the greater the cultural distance, the harder the adjustment would be (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). A study by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) has revealed significant and negative relationships between cultural distance and the adjustment. In general, adjustment to a new environment is believed to become more critical as the cultural distance between home and host country increases (Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004).

Information Communication Technology

The third aspect of organizational support for communication is information communication technology (ICT). Multinational companies cannot operate effectively without information communication technology. Conrad and Poole's (2005) study suggests that ICT has several important effects. ICT not only opens up communication and increases accessibility to essential information, but it also promotes the international expansion of organizations and fosters inter-organizational connections. Watson Wyatt (2008) identified information communication technology as an important foundational tool for an organization to develop its communication system. The use of information communication technology facilitates communication between expatriates and headquarters without the constraints of time differences and geographic distances. ICT usually takes the form of telephone, e-mail, voice mail, instant messenger, video-conferencing, and electronic boardrooms. These e-communication channels help the multinational corporations to overcome spatial and temporal barriers between headquarters and subsidiaries.

Based on the literature reviewed, the present study intends to examine the relationship of Chinese expatriates' perceived organizational support for communication and their adjustment to overseas assignments in three aspects. First, the study examines how perceived corporate language (English) working environment policy facilitates Chinese expatriate adjustment. Second, the study investigates how corporate training enhances Chinese expatriates' intercultural communication competence, thereby facilitating their overseas adjustment. Third, the study explores the extent to which ICT facilitates expatriate adjustment overall.

Research Method

The present study is exploratory research based on an epistemological position using a qualitative method. The choice of qualitative method (using semi-structured interviews) relates to the lack of current knowledge about the influence of organizational support on expatriate adjustment. Semi-structured interviews were considered as the most suitable way to collect data in allowing the researcher to understand the phenomenon from the individual perspective of those who are involved in it (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative Data Collection by Face-to-Face Semi-Structured Interviews

Involved in the present study were 35 Chinese expatriates employed by a China-based MNC and stationed in over 25 countries for a period of 1 to 5 years. The objectifying interview approach (Redding, 1990) was employed in which the interviewer engaged in interactive dialog with the interviewees. The in-depth interviews also allowed the researcher to examine the nuances that are usually lacking in quantitative data collection. The qualitative data were collected by recording interviews and field notes to collect a rich, dense, and comprehensive data set, which also provided detailed, first-hand, and multi-dimensional qualitative data. For full confidentiality, all names used in this study are pseudonyms.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is based on the data derived from interview transcripts. Interviews were conducted in Chinese, transcribed verbatim in Chinese and then translated into English for analysis. In total, approximately 35,000 words of a corpus were compiled for analysis. The data were subject to interaction analysis by using Nivo10, a tool that analyzes text-based qualitative data. This software can

be used not only for “code and retrieve” analysis, but also for combining qualitative and quantitative data. The analysis coded and categorized data by researcher-identified thematic iterations. The analyses were coded and categorized according to four identified thematic iterations: (1) language competence; (2) culture related challenges; (3) organizational support in relation to ICT support; and (4) kinds of and effectiveness of the corporate training support.

Findings and Interpretation

In this section, I report on the findings of how organizational support for communication affects China-based expatriate overseas adjustment from three aspects. Three forms of organizational support for communication are identified: corporate language (English) working environment policy, corporate training (language and culture) to expatriate employees, and information communication technology.

Corporate Language (English) Working Environment Policy

Recent research has revealed the importance of institutionalizing corporate language policy to enhance a better working relationship between corporate headquarters and subsidiaries. Having a language barrier has been identified as an important determining factor that weakens the headquarters-subsidiary relationship and the expatriate-local employee relationship. Past research has also suggested that multinational corporations make systematic efforts to institutionalize corporate language policy and provide language training (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999).

The findings of the present study confirm the importance of implementing English as a corporate language policy. Twenty of the 35 Chinese expatriate informants repeatedly mentioned the importance of the corporate fostering language (English) working environment policy and commented that “institutionalizing corporate language policy is the key to the success of internationalizing the company.” Although the Chinese expatriates recognized the importance of the corporate language policy, they also realized the difficulty in implementing this policy throughout the headquarters and subsidiaries. When asked about the reason for their unsatisfactory policy implementation, Chinese expatriates rationalized the reason that corporate language policy has not been very well received by observing that “the company was forced to enforce this policy in response to numerous complaints from overseas subsidiaries.” One non-Chinese foreign staff working in the headquarters’ office shared a story that “a subsidiary staff member sent about 60 emails to the headquarters to make an enquiry, but never received a reply.” His interpretation is that writing emails in English were likely to be treated as junk mail and were often neglected by headquarters’ staff “due to the inadequate English competence of the headquarter employees.” The non-Chinese staff’s observation is in line with the views of Chinese expatriate informants. Several Chinese expatriate informants commented that “the inadequacy of the current English-language work environment in the company is the major stumbling block impeding the internationalization.” The interviewees however admitted that “overall English language proficiency in the headquarters has improved over the years.”

To improve employees’ English language competence in headquarters, the company has enforced the policy that employees working in international business units are required to take the Business Language Testing Service (BULATS). According to one informant, although over 90% of the employees possessed basic English communication ability, less than 10% of them were able to engage in an interactive English conversation. Because of the inadequacy of the English proficiency of headquarters employees,

subsidiary employees felt isolated when they were visiting the headquarters. The interview data reveals that Chinese expatriates recognized the importance of English language communication skills; however, they anticipated that it may take from 3 to 5 years to bridge the gap.

In sum, the results of the qualitative data show that all 35 interviewed expatriates recognized the importance of fostering an English-language working environment as reflected by their rating of 5 or 6 on a 7-point scale. Expatriates, however, anticipated that it may take 3 to 5 years to reach satisfactory communicative competence levels across the company. This may explain why the interviewees thought that the English working environment did not facilitate their adjustment, although they acknowledged the importance of having an English working environment.

The inadequacy of the English competence of the headquarters staff has limited the direct interaction between the subsidiary employees and company headquarters. Consequently, Chinese expatriates felt that they needed to take on additional tasks by becoming a link-pin or go-between person to relay information between headquarters and subsidiaries. According to the Chinese expatriates, serving as a link-pin has impacted on their time and slowed down their progress. Another frequent comment is that the policies and regulations issued by headquarters are often in Chinese. Not being able to provide internal information in English frustrates subsidiary employees and Chinese expatriates. On the one hand, subsidiary employees felt that they were kept in the dark; and on the other hand, the Chinese expatriates felt their time was not used effectively as they need to translate and relay information to- and- from headquarters and subsidiary employees. Worst still, several expatriates stated, “the internal business processes uploaded onto the information system and the majority of the internal database is in Chinese language.” Therefore, subsidiary employees who do not know the Chinese language have limited access to information. As go-between people, Chinese expatriates had to work together with local staff enabling them to do their work and subsequently expatriates’ working efficiency was affected and slowed down.

Corporate Training (Language and Cross-culture) and Expatriate Adjustment

Corporate training in the present study takes on three forms: language training, cross-cultural adjustment training, and technical training. Tung (1982) noted that language training programs often teach expatriates the language of the host country. However, it seems unrealistic to teach expatriates the language of their host country in view of the unique situation that the researched multinational corporation sends expatriates to over 100 countries. Because of this, English has become a de facto corporate lingua franca. The second aspect of corporate training is cross-cultural training. Cross-cultural training has been well-recognized, and a body of research has examined the impact of cross-cultural training on expatriates’ overseas adjustment. The third aspect of corporate training is technical training. Since the nature of the researched company is a technology-based multinational corporation, in the present study technological and *professional knowledge training* are critical and therefore both are examined.

In this section, I examine the types of corporate training provided by the organization and how Chinese expatriates perceive the effectiveness of this corporate training.

In view of the importance of English-language communication skills to Chinese multinationals, English-language training is examined from the perspective of how Chinese expatriates perceive organizational support regarding language training. In addition, cross-cultural training and technological, professional knowledge training are also identified as constituting a corporate training variable for organizational support based on communication.

The essence of language training for expatriates is to enhance the language communicative ability of Chinese expatriates. As noted by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), the expatriate's ability in communicating using the host language with local nationals enhances interpersonal relationships. In other words, for expatriates, being fluent in the host language or a de facto corporate language leads to better opportunities enabling the expatriates to become group insiders (Takeuchi, Yun & Russell, 2002).

The importance of corporate language training was recognized by all the Chinese expatriate informants. Their views are in line with findings from past studies. For example, a study by Shaffer et al. (1999) shows that language skills have a positive relationship with interaction adjustment. Other studies by Selmer (2006a) and by Takeuchi et al. (2002) suggested that the proficiency of the host country language contributed to the expatriate's international assignments. Although the pre-departure corporate language training is crucial, several Chinese expatriates stated that on-the-job language training is as critical as that of the pre-departure language training. Chinese expatriates acknowledged that their English communication abilities became accelerated throughout their overseas assignments. Mr. U shared his story, explaining that in early years when he gave technical presentations to customers in English, he often had numerous rehearsals before making a formal presentation. One year later, however, he found that he was able to express himself smoothly at the presentation without referring to slides, and his confidence was immediately raised. Mr. C, an expatriate resides in Russia and Libya, also shared his personal story of self-development via English-language learning:

Language [English] cannot be trained within a short period of time. Environment is the most important determining factor. Before I was sent overseas, I spent a month learning English. After I arrived at foreign countries, I still was not able to communicate with local people. Fortunately, my first destination was Zambia, where English is the official language. People in Zambia spoke [English] with accents, which were different from American accent. In the beginning, I could not understand at all. After about four months, I had no problem in talking to them in English. And you know, when you [one] became familiar with the living environment, recognizing English words becomes easier and English communication ability is naturally improved.

Ms. Cui shared a similar case of her experience in developing communication competence. Being sent overseas for about eight years, she recognized the importance and usefulness of the pre-departure corporate training in both language and culture. She strongly believed that learning how to "communicate proactively" in the workplace is important. During the interview, she repeatedly mentioned the importance of "internationalization of the company at all levels." She also shared a cultural blunder that she experienced when she was in the Middle East. She stated, "As a female, I was not respected in the Middle East. I tried to shake hands with my clients in Iran but got rejected." Aside from the language and cultural training, the corporate training should also train the expatriates to have knowledge of the company. Ms. Cui further said, "Successful overseas assignment requires one to have adequate knowledge about the company. Chinese expatriates should be familiar with the company as Chinese expatriates are the company image carriers."

While most of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of corporate training before departure, some expatriates thought self-development and self-determination are the keys to successful overseas assignments. Mr. W, a country representative for South Africa, commented on his self-development during his expatriation:

When I was sent to overseas several years ago, I did not receive any corporate training. I however learned to adapt to the environment and well adapted to it. I think there are two factors playing important roles in my self-development, and they are: motivation and self-reflection. The complexity of the environment I was in provided me with challenges. The difficulties I had to face have motivated me to challenge myself and learn to resolve the problem. Self-reflection also made me recognize the way of how things work. So, I will not make the same mistakes twice.

Corporate Training Enhances Interaction with Headquarters. Corporate training cannot be undertaken in a one-way direction. To make corporate training effective, the training should not be given only to expatriates. Effective communication is multi-dimensional and involves all personnel who are engaged in this process. Therefore, the measure of successful corporate training should also include the efficiency and feasibility of the interaction with headquarters and subsidiary employees. In reviewing the interview notes, it was clear that 30 of the 35 Chinese expatriate informants found it difficult to communicate with headquarters' employees. Mr. J, a deputy regional manager reflected his frustration in dealing with the headquarters' personnel. He stated, ". . . The headquarters' employees have time to write emails. Why [did they] always use only one sentence for giving an order [making a request]? What's more, they often send an email today and demand the reply [answer or solution] the following day. They take everything for granted." Another repeated that frustration occurred when expatriates complained about the red-tape corporate policy issued by the headquarters. Mr. Y shared a red-tape corporate policy stipulated by the headquarters about recruiting local staff in subsidiary branches. He further commented, "My approval of hiring a local staff has to go through junior staff in headquarters before the approval finally reached the human resources director. I don't see why the process should be like that. The bureaucratic red-tape procedure instituted by the headquarters always slows down the process and consequently affects subsidiaries' work plans." Another interviewee shared his personal experience of making a simple request that took nearly two years for approval from headquarters. His request was to set up a website using the local language to promote company products so that these products could reach the general public of the subsidiary that he was located in. Because the company website is in both English and Chinese, and none of the headquarters employees spoke the local language, it took him nearly two years to receive "an approval green light." The informant further commented, "The subsidiary almost gave up before we were given notice of the good news." These comments made by Chinese expatriates are similar to the observations of headquarters' bureaucracy mentioned in Torbiörn's (1982) research on Western expatriates.

Corporate Training Enhances Positive Relationships Interacting with Locals. Another aspect of corporate training is to enhance the expatriate relationship with local employees. Fostering a positive, friendly relationship with local employees requires a special effort on the part of the Chinese expatriate. However, the interviewees' reflections regarding their interactions with local employees yielded inconsistent comments. Some interviewees felt that they could get along well with local employees, while others said, "The local people are lazy and can be deceiving." The reason for such contrasting observations reflects the situation of segregation between Chinese expatriates and local staff. Mr. A, a manager residing in India noted, "When I was in India, we once had a get-together event. At the dinner table, all the Chinese staff sat on my left and the local staff on my right." A similar situation was observed in the United States. In a formal internal conference, Chinese expatriates chose to sit next to each other, and foreign staff mingled in a cluster. The Chinese expatriates said that such a phenomenon was common in many subsidiaries, which did not mean that Chinese expatriates and local staff could not cooperate in their work. However, they added that their relationships with the locals were limited to the workplace; and they seldom had contact with local staff after work. Even a senior Chinese expatriate like

Mr. W admitted that it was impossible for him to establish relationships with local people in the same way that he could do in China.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Expatriate Adjustment

Studies by (Cox, 2004) and Xu (2010) conclude that ICT has the strongest impact on interaction with company headquarters and their relationships with locals. Several Chinese expatriates who were sent to underdeveloped countries made comments about how the efficiency of ICT provided the convenience of connecting with headquarters. A Chinese expatriate stationed in African countries recalled, "In the past, subsidiaries in African countries suffered from an undeveloped telecommunication infrastructure, and therefore, only urgent messages could be delivered to the headquarters at a high cost. At the present time, the company established an internal call center to deal with global requests and communication among subsidiaries and with the headquarters." Therefore, the advancement of ICT has greatly enhanced interaction between headquarters and subsidiaries. One Chinese expatriate further commented, "ICT has increased Chinese expatriates' communication efficiency with lower cost and higher convenience." ICT has facilitated Chinese expatriates' ability to work around the clock without the constraints of geographical locations at any time. Generally speaking, e-channel facilities have enhanced their interaction with headquarters.

Although ICT has brought efficiency and convenience to the Chinese expatriates in communicating with their company headquarters, there is a negative association with ICT and job satisfaction, as well as stress management that reflects the paradox of information communication technology. A few Chinese expatriates commented that, "ICT increases speed of message transmission and has enhanced the efficiency of their contact with headquarters, it however reduces the excuses to escape work." One expatriate also noted that, "I felt that I am 24 hours on call and I work like "7-11". Therefore, the time differences between the headquarters and subsidiaries have extended working hours.

Conclusion

The present study examines the relative influence of perceived organizational support (i.e., corporate training and information communication technology) on the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in their overseas adjustments. The study uses an epistemological, qualitative method to investigate the perceived needs and its effectiveness in corporate training (language and intercultural communication training) and information communication technology provided by the headquarters. The results reveal while Chinese expatriates recognize the importance of organizational support on their overseas assignment adjustments, they felt that the pre-departure cross-cultural training did not address the actual needs enabling them to facilitate their overseas adjustment. To enhance the efficacy of organizational support for communication, the expatriates suggest that in addition to the pre-departure training for expatriates, the company should also provide language and cross-cultural training for local staff and headquarters' key personnel. As for the support of information communication technology, Chinese expatriates residing in less-developed countries felt the headquarters should perfect intra-net system (e.g., internal call center) so that they could enjoy efficient communication system without being constrained by geographical boundaries or paying a high cost when communicating with the headquarters and their family members.

Limitations

There are some limitations observed in the present study. First, the case-study research method may have affected the generalizability of its findings to multinationals in general. For example, the present study deals with organizational support in providing language and cultural training, as well as information communication technology for Chinese expatriates' overseas adjustment, yet, complicated contextual variables appear to exist, such as industry variation, ownership nature, and organizational culture, that are likely to exert a difference in influencing expatriates' overseas adjustments. Second, although the richness of the field observations derived from qualitative interview data provides a nuanced analysis of the factors examined; the results should also be supported by quantitative data to increase their generalizability. Third, the current research examines expatriates from one home country (i.e. mainland China) and one industry (i.e., the telecommunication industry). It would be valuable to replicate the research in different cultural contexts and different industries to explore whether the findings of the present study are applicable to other Asian expatriates working in different industries and in a Western environment.

Implications

The present research has implications for both theory development and business practices. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the findings that address previously neglected factors in examining the importance of organizational support for communication in areas of language and cross-cultural training, as well as information communication technology. The present study provides an in-depth investigation of organizational support for communication by integrating communication studies and expatriate adjustment studies, thereby, providing an inter-disciplinary perspective to an examination of expatriate adjustment in multinational settings. Empirical findings in this research show that organizational support for communication does play a significant role in expatriate adjustment. The implication for business practitioners is in relation to corporate training. The interviews reflected that both the survival and implementation of English-language training and professional English-language training are critical. Consequently, the importance of a tailored English-language training program and a cross-cultural training program based on Chinese expatriates' job requirement can be developed by multinationals.

Suggestions for Future Research

Against the background of these findings and the limitations of the present study noted above, I suggest that additional research be conducted by extending similar research to examine the necessary organizational support in other Asian multinational corporations and different industries. It is also suggested that future research should include both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Last, conducting a longitudinal research by collecting data in various phases of expatriation (e.g., 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 24 months) can be critical to examine the essence of overseas adjustment in various stages of expatriation. Taking a longitudinal approach, future research can examine the communication efficacy of Chinese expatriates in relaying organizational policy and product knowledge transfer going forward. As noted by Breiden et al. (2006), overseas assignment is a continuous and dynamic process and adjustment stages should be monitored on the job in order to accurately reflect the adaptation of expatriates.

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