

A Conceptual Model to Strengthen Expatriate Outcomes in the Global Marketplace

Sandra C. Erickson

k7luh@yahoo.com

Doctoral Candidate, International Business,
College of Business and Informational Technology
Argosy University, 5250 17th Street
Sarasota, Florida 34235
(941) 379-0404

Expatriate failures and foreign relation failures are due, in large part, to an inability to understand, adjust to or be tolerant of foreign cultures. This paper argues that cultural knowledge about home and host country postings together with in-country support is crucial to successful outcomes in international exchange in today's global neighborhood. Cultural influences affect the way all people think and behave. Many managers, thinking deeply, have accepted the challenge of corporate and individual responsibility to effect positive change. Individual and corporate motivation can be used to build bridges between people, to increase trust, understanding, and tolerance while increasing the ability to better adjust to cultural diversity. This paper will provide a conceptual model to strengthen expatriate success outcomes in the global marketplace by elevating expatriate management to a core competency thereby increasing the Return on Investment (ROI) This paper presents ten strategic considerations to achieve this goal. This non-empirical paper is constructed from current theoretical knowledge on the subject combined with direct experience. Expatriate management is an equal issue of concern in both Western and Eastern economies. This paper will focus primarily on Asian/Pacific economies.

Literature is rich with data addressing the phenomenal growth due to expanding globalization. In turn, globalization has caused equal growth of the use and management of expatriates. Expatriate assignments provides significant challenges to the home country headquarters as the company moves technically qualified employees to meet the needs of the multinational corporation. There is a certain hopeful expectation that these employees have, in addition to their technology competencies, an understanding of diverse cultures, knowledge of motivation and a skill set that includes how to manage people appropriate to the assignment. Literature has proven that the expectation has not been met.

The major causal agent for expatriate low performance and expatriate failed assignments is the inability to adjust to foreign cultures. Marx (1999) opined both the question and answer clearly. She questioned why some international managers succeeded while nearly half of their counterparts failed. Marx (1999) posed the answer as culture shock – the failure to adjust to people with different motivations, behaviors, and ways of making decisions.

Researchers often define expatriate failure as premature return from a foreign assignment (Martinko and Douglas 1999; Oddou, 1991; Shay and Tracey 1997). There are other ‘failure’ reasons which include the employee’s lack of emotional maturity, insufficient technical skills and low interest or levels of motivation for being in a foreign country (Tung 1987). Copeland and Griggs (1985) stated that nearly 50 percent of expatriates who have completed their assignments (meaning they have stayed to the end) have actually performed well below expectation due, again, to the expatriate’s inability to adapt.

Research places the direct cost associated with expatriate failure as between \$150,000 to \$1 million per expatriate (Shannonhouse 1996). The industry cost effect of each “premature return” of lost business opportunities and low productivity are more difficult to measure but industry estimates staggering losses.

Expatriate failure has illuminated the fact that MNCs have vital financial interests at stake. Ineffective or marginally effective expatriates who complete their international assignments as well as those who return prematurely cost between three and five times as much as domestic ineffective (or marginally effective) employees (van Pelt & Kolinsky, 1990). Accepting the definition of failure in its broadest sense, global failure rates have been estimated at 16-40% (Shaffer et al., 1999), 20-40% (Solomon, 1996), 30-50% (Black, Mendenhall, & Odor, 1991) and 50% (Allerton, 1997). All of these numbers reflect a material decrease in the MNC’s return on investment (ROI) for expatriates. There is little to suggest that multinational enterprises (MNEs) question the importance of international assignments. After all, the use of expatriates and/or international assignments represents key strategic management decisions. Certainly, they have a clear understanding of the costs. The relevance to business is clear and weighty.

Who are these people? These expatriates? They are individuals and their families who are working temporarily and/or semi-permanent assignments in overseas locations. The modern expatriate is no longer just a mid-manager, middle-class male. They are often younger, better qualified, more likely to be female and they come from all over the globe (Gliatis & Guerrier, 1993). The current expatriate failure statistics have similarities in outcomes to the expatriate statistics of earlier years, regardless of home of origin, however. Managing expatriate effectively is crucial to business success and poor management has been correlated positively with business failures (Hoecklin, 1995; Brewster, 1996)

In short, as the world integrates further, expatriate management must be elevated to a core competency. This single fact creates a strong need for a more complete understanding of the factors that make expatriate assignments successful. Perhaps expatriate management needs to be repositioned from Human Resource Management to the departments of Finance or Strategic Planning. Without apologies to Human Resource Management experts, the elevation of Expatriate Management to a core competency requires its movement to the portfolio of a department with a seat at the top management table. The scope of this paper is not to address the current positioning of Human Resources in top management structure. That task will be addressed by others and in other forums.

Hutchings and Murray (2002) reported the dire need for increased cross-cultural awareness in international business due in large part to the fast pace of internationalizing organizations. There is a growing literature base in the field of MNEs addressing the need for individuals and organizations to be cross-culturally sensitive, adaptive and responsive. However, few studies have been fielded to provide evidence of expatriate experiences with specific reference to selection or grooming of the resource pool, in country support and the relationship between knowledge of cross-cultural concepts and business performance culture.

To place business, and therefore the use of expatriates in perspective in the Asian Pacific arena, let us briefly address trading partners of countries of the area and their expanded foreign production or facilities with the U.S. and other cultures. These are 2004 statistics and in rank order. Taiwan trading partners are Japan, U.S., China, Hong Kong and Korea. Japan's trading partners are U.S., China, EU, ASEAN countries and Korea. Singapore's trading partners are Malaysia, U.S. Japan and China. China's trading partners are the U.S., Hong Kong, Japan, E.U. The U.S. government also provided the following data relating to its trading partners in the Asian Pacific arena. China is the U.S. 3rd largest trading partner at 10.0%, Japan is the U.S. 4th largest trading partner with 8.9%, Taiwan is the 8th U.S. largest trading partner with 2.5%, Malaysia is the 10th U.S. trading partner with 1.7% and Singapore is the 15th largest U.S. trading partner with 1.5% of total trades (Bureau of Foreign Trade 2004).

Such business supports the use and management of expatriates. As firms grow, so does the use of expatriates as U.S. distributors are replaced with direct sales and branch offices. The expansion included people who were expert in exporting activities as well as corporate policies (Chi, 2005).

For interest's sake, examples from one Taiwanese firm, Hewitt Associates LCC (2004), revealed the following various expatriate positions:

- 8.1% executives
- 38.3% directors
- 39.5 managers
- 14.1% specialists.

This breakdown is indicative of other Asian Pacific firms. This part of the globe has yet to reach its full growth as a competitive business environment. Its future includes a far reaching internationalization and therefore globalization. It is important to note that the majority of Asian Pacific large corporations such as the electronic companies and banking businesses have realized significant growth outside of their borders. With the high costs of expatriate failure and retention losses, it is imperative for careful review of the methods that would result in positive expatriate overseas adjustments.

And China, as the Chinese economy has expanded and most multinationals have sought to place China within their global strategy, the use of expatriates kept pace. However, the failure rate of expatriates posted to China could be twice that of other countries (Stuttard (2000). Stuttard noted that one of the multinational corporations studied reported upward to 80% failure in China. Yet, business success will depend heavily on expatriate performance.

As would be expected, most research about expatriate management reviews the adjustment process to understand how and why the individual have difficulty adjusting or success in adjusting to foreign assignments. Black and Gregersen (1999) noted the fact that an individual may be successful in one environment or culture but may not be able to adjust successfully in other cultures.

There is significant data studying adjustment theory. Black & Mendenhall (1990) stated that adjustment ability was the most important element regarding expatriates. An acceptable definition of adjustment is the state of change that occurs in the individual towards a direction of fit and reduced conflict (change) between the environmental demands and the individual's attitudes and behaviors (Berry, 1992). Time does not permit a literature review of all the works that addresses adjustment theory. Researchers present different types of adjustments necessary to successfully enter into a new environment. At the end of the day, the ability to make the mental adjustment to accept change is the key to being able to embrace the day and face the problems in a constructive, positive manner. Both job performance and early return are factors of adjustment ability (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). Acceptance of change requires effort. Erickson (2000) crafted a simple equation for the complex construct of change as $A + B = C$. One must identify what is the current (**A**) attitude, what is the (**B**) behavior that is activated by the attitude and what are the (**C**) consequences. So $A + B = C$.

There are many personality traits or dimensions that might predict adjustment and performance. Extraversion (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988; Parker & McEvoy, 1993) agreeableness (Black, 1990) and openness to new experiences (Abe & Wiseman 1983) are three traits clearly identified as important predictors of cross cultural adjustment.

Phatak (1995) stated that foreign assignments should start with careful selection processes that go beyond technical competency and focus on traits and characteristics which are correlated with success and are complementary to specific locations. Phatak was referring to the cultural norms and belief systems of the geographic assignment. Phatak identified other but equally important traits: cultural empathy; adaptability; diplomacy; language ability; a positive attitude; emotional stability and maturity as predictors of success. Black and Gregersen (1999) went further by adding selection criteria to include indicators such as (1) a drive to communicate with the local people; 2) broad-based sociability in establishing social ties with local residents, rather than sticking to a small circle of fellow expatriates; 3) cultural flexibility, as characterized by a

willingness to experiment with different customs; 4) a cosmopolitan orientation, defined as a mind-set which can intuitively understand that different cultural norms have value and meaning to those who practice them and 5) a collaborative negotiation style as opposed to one that is confrontational. While specific choices of personality traits or dimensions in academic research vary, the conclusions do not. There needs to be careful attention to personality traits in selecting candidates for international assignment.

Dowling, Welch (2005) opined that there was no validated psychological testing that measured such traits. They suggested that extensive interviewing for adaptability screening could, in fact, be part of the process to increase the probability of a successful international assignment. Selmer (2002) found that previous experience and/or study about foreign cultures such as part of university coursework would assist in decreasing adjustment issues. Such previous experience, therefore, could be a valuable selection criterion for foreign assignment.

Recalling that the families' inability to adjust to foreign assignments is a major contributor to failed assignments, the limited work done examining the family is very valuable. Birdseye and Hill (1995) opined that families were an important part of the set of individually related elements in foreign assignments. The expatriate will be significantly affected by the family's possession or lack of similar skill sets for the assignment.

The most important skill in the set includes language ability to assist in helping the employee and his /her families feel less isolated and to build the network needed to succeed. (Dolainski, 1997). Abe and Wiseman (1983) noted that both Americans and Japanese expatriates had decidedly positive cultural adjustments when they were able and willing to use host country languages.

This skill is most necessary in high context versus low-context cultures. Japan, China, Korean, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia are all high-context cultures (Marx, 2001). In high-context cultures, there are greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders. In explanation, context is referring to verbal norms as well as behavioral values of the cultures. High context cultures establish a social trust first, valuing personal relations and making agreements on the basis of trust. In addition, conversations and negotiations are slower and structured indirectly, building up to a point with conclusions stated last (Rodrigues, 2001). Low- context countries include the U.S., English, German Italian, Scandinavia, and Switzerland to name a few. Those countries are prone to want to do business first, reach agreement by specific, legalistic contracts, value efficiency, expertise and performance. The contrasts can be very problematical in business practices and negotiation, even in social settings.

Base knowledge of cultural diversity is primary among the skill set necessary for successful adaptation. One of the earliest and commonly cited theoretical contributions that studied cultural sensitivity was Hofstede's cultural dimensions work (Hofstede 1980a, 1980b, 1984, 1988). Geert Hofstede was a researcher from the Netherlands who developed a paradigm to study the impact of national culture on individual behavior. He studied values and beliefs of 116,000 IBM employees from forty countries.

Hofstede developed a model that consisted of four national, cultural dimensions by which a country can be classified; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. In later research, he added a fifth dimension, one of time orientation. There is rich research and literature that address this classic work so it cannot be omitted from this discussion. It is the base rock of any consideration of cultural differences in global management models. There is a considerable body of literature that takes issue with Hofstede's model. However, there can be no doubt that he did indeed cause deep and thoughtful dialogue on this most important topic.

The following is an attempt at a very brief explanation of Hofstede's dimensions that he claimed were the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1994 p5).

1. Power distance: is the degree to which social inequality is viewed as a societal norm. It also refers to the equity of the distribution of a nation's wealth. Low power distance in a culture emphasizes equality as a value among society or individuals. A low power distance would display low tolerance for inequitable distribution of wealth. Conversely, a high power distance expects such concentration of wealth in the hands of a few while the masses live in poverty.
2. Uncertainty avoidance/aversion to risk: is the degree to which a culture could tolerate uncertainty or risk. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to encourage innovation and risk taking. High uncertainty avoidance is found in culture that value predictability and tends to avoid change. This dimension would explain why some countries or cultures are able to deal with turbulence and significant societal change while others are inclined to minimize risk and maximize certainty.
3. Individualism/collectivism: this refers to the degree that a culture would determine appropriate or value/expect team of community (collective) effort rather than efforts to benefit the individual. Cultures that stress individualism appear to be more goal-orientated, accept competition and assertiveness. Individuals are expected to determine their success and reach their own goals in life. Conversely, cultures that stress collectivism discourage individual competition and emphasize team (community) collaboration for the good of society as a whole. Clearly, the interests of the individual are secondary to the interest of the community or society as a whole.
4. Masculinity/femininity tendency: is the degree to which a culture has specific behavior characteristics that they have determined to be masculine or feminine. A cautionary note is necessary. The masculine tendencies that are referenced here are toward being goal and competition oriented, perhaps with a high emphasis on monetary values rather than intrinsic values. The feminine tendencies place more emphasis on social issues such as human rights, ecology, healthcare and education (46-49).

The importance of this body of work was reiterated by Morden (1995) when he opined that Hofstede, as well as others, had developed experience and knowledge about cultural interpretation and adaptation that is crucial to international management models. No corporation should consider crossing borders without closely reviewing this seminal work and then developing the necessary skills and competencies based on some version of this classic material.

The Eastern cultures, Pacific Rim countries, have vastly different traits than Western cultures, hence, making it difficult for expatriate adjustments, not impossible, just difficult. The differences, however, must be understood as different not better or worse. The differences will impact an expatriate's ability to become fully effective with acute sensitivity towards management i.e. problem solving, assertiveness, relying on one's own views, team work, developing incentive programs, contracting, risk taking, conflict management and a host of other situations.

On the Hofstede scale of dimensions, please note the following: On a scale from 0 – 100.

Power Dist• Indivd/Collectivism• Mas/Fem• Uncertainty Avoidance• Lt/St

China	75	10	50	35	95
H K	64	20	52	25	90
Japan	50	42	90	89	75
Singapore	70	25	42	5	42
Taiwan	52	12	40	62	82
Thailand	60	15	30	60	50
USA	35	90	58	40	25

www.geert-hofstede.com retrieved February 10, 2007.

Recall: Power Distance – unequal power in society or organizations is accepted

Individual/Collectivism – individual is more important than the whole

Masculinity/Femininity – profit, assertiveness, and achievement orientation are more important than societal needs such as health, education, harmony

Uncertainty Avoidance – measures the degree of tolerance for insecurity

Long term/short term - time orientation

What does this mean for expatriates? There is so much information that time will not permit anything but cursory examples:

- A business example of Individualism/Collectivism –
This polarization will profoundly affect negotiations, decision making and motivation. Negotiations in individualistic countries will often have a sole representative which may be perceived by collectivism countries as an affront and lacking in status. Collectivism countries have group representatives in negotiation with most of the talking done by less senior officials. Most negotiations include silent listening skills with the task of relationship building being placed well before decision making. Decision making and/or any contractual arrangements will be decided upon the relationship primarily. Motivation or performance-related pay for an individual doesn't make sense so is entirely ineffective in a collectivism society.
- A community example of individualism/Collectivism –
The Japanese government purchased vast storage facilities for high protein wheat in the center of Montana, U.S.A., a most rural setting. The grain was collected, transported to the coast via rail and shipped to Japan via Japanese vessels. Five expatriate managers with their families were sent to live and work in the small city next to the grain elevators. The families included wives and teen age children. No member of the expatriate delegation socialized with local, community individuals. The teen age children were used to metropolitan life, many cultural and musical opportunities and schools that required many hours of study and preparation. They moved as a group, sitting apart while demonstrated a silent and unsmiling demeanor. The demeanor was interpreted as disapproval and isolationist behavior which resulted in dissatisfaction by both the guests and the host school and community. The wives and/or mothers did not go out into the community even when invited for dinners or gatherings. The men socialized at dinner in large groups that did not include the wives or children. The assignment was not successful and the families returned to Japan with months. The men returned within a year. Both the community and the expatriates missed an excellent opportunity to learn about each other. The city soon after seated an Advisory Commission on International Relationships so no further opportunities would be missed (Erickson, 2000).

The process of international cultural interpretation and adaptation could be easily applied to leadership and expatriate areas. These areas are particularly susceptible to being culturally conditioned due to the fact that the ones who crafted theories about motivation, leadership and management are conditioned themselves by their own culture. Since their writings are representative of their own experiences within their countries and education there should be no surprise that models and theories developed within one culture may have difficulty being successfully transplanted to another culture.

Some managers with an understanding of Western management techniques place great emphasis on individual performance and faster promotion. This emphasis is in great conflict with Eastern management techniques where young managers spend years following the lead of older, more experienced manager with little knowledge of their promotion prospects. They spend significant time in each functional area of management and become management generalists. The impact is that while Eastern managers often are sent overseas for experience they do not tend to incorporate new methods into the corporation and as they move upwards into corporate positions of responsibility they simply repeat management styles of their elders.

Selmer (1998) wrote about U.S. expatriates in Hong Kong have difficulty in interaction adjustment because they are not fluent in the host country language. Many expatriates are functional in the host country language but lack the fluency that really makes the difference. Erickson (2000) reported interviews with an American expatriate (and his family) that have lived and worked in Hong Kong for over 20 years. They return to the U.S. frequently reporting extreme satisfaction with their arrangement. Their children are multi-lingual and demonstrate comfortable responses in the cosmopolitan setting of vibrant Hong Kong as well as their decidedly more rural roots in the U.S. They report their collective mind set included curiosity, ability to accept ambiguity, an ability to feel comfortable with social interactions with nationals and a willingness to learn as the key conditions to their successful transitions.

Literature and empirical studies have illuminated the significance growth of the use and management of expatriates during these past decades. Research has shown that the major causal agent for expatriate low performance and expatriate failed assignments as the inability to adjust to foreign cultures. There are differences of opinions as to how big the issue may be but never as to whether it is an issue.

The goal – the purpose of this presentation is to gain a greater understanding of the relationships between home firm actions and outcomes in the arena of expatriate effectiveness.

Expatriate management, precisely because of the value in industry and national interest, is no longer exclusively within the domain of human resources. Expatriate management must be elevated to an industrial core competency through complete mastery of global mindedness

The intent of this paper was to provide a conceptual model to strengthen expatriate success outcomes in the global marketplace by elevating expatriate management to a core competency thereby increasing the Return on Investment (ROI). MNCs (as well as mid sized firms who aspire to international status) can significantly assist in reducing “failed” international assignments and improving the firm’s performance. The following are ten strategic objectives toward achieving this goal

- One: MNCs must recognize that international assignments and/or the use of expatriates must become a strategic, competence so that performance corresponds to the firm’s operational goals in every functional area.
- Two: firms can select employees for the management track who have documented significant foreign experiences – through educational choices or self-motivation.

- Three: firms can identify upwardly mobile, technologically competent employees who have expressed career management goals and cause them to experience short term international assignment.
- Four: firms can seek employees who currently have foreign language skills or in lieu of that, the firms can provide language courses and cultural diversity programs for employees and their families.
- Five: firms can maintain extensive in-country support for those expatriates and their families.
- Six: firms can utilize women in foreign postings as many corporations recognize that characteristics often associated with women, i.e. personal development motivation, intrinsic work satisfaction, good communication, the ability to listen and relate to others are also associated with successful managers of either gender.(Tzeng, 2006). There must be recognition that those female expatriates must not be confused with spouses of expatriate men [i.e. family's inability to adjust to foreign cultures are documented as reasons for 'failures']. Women expatriates help facilitate discussion and often help enhance their companies' competitive position. (Fagenson, 1993; Izraeli and Adler, 1994; Kwolek-Folland, 1998; Vinnicombe and Colwill, 1995).
- Seven: firms can recognize that nearly 60% of trailing spouses are often professional people with serious careers they want to maintain. Firms can pro-actively assist in obtaining work visas or placement at job sites, universities etc for the spouse to remain active their chosen fields. When East goes West, that would not be an insurmountable problem to provide assistance for the spouse (Langley, 2006).
- Eight: firms can recruit older employees for foreign assignments capitalizing on the experience, emotional maturity, loyalty, position within the firm and age of the families to assist in adaptability thus ensuring more positive outcomes for expatriate and the company. Knowledge and experience are the twin predictors of acceptance. Cultural diversity is cultural diversity.
- Nine: the importance of maintaining constant communication and relationship building with the expatriate and the family for the entire duration of the foreign assignment must be boldly underscored. Relationships rule. In the absence of communication links for the expatriate and the family, feeling of isolation and detachment will most certainly impact the assignment (Erbacher, D'Netto, Espana, 2006). This constant communication relationship will keep the expatriate moving forward toward assignment goals stated Zucal (2006).

- Ten: the firm must recognize that currently, the use of expatriate provides the greatest opportunities and also the greatest challenges. To become a core competency, expatriate management must be afforded the resources and critical thinking of strategic management and/or finance. It must be given direction and careful handling. Nothing less will do.

Valuable future research will be to gain a greater understanding of the relationships and variables in outcomes in the arena of expatriate effectiveness, and leadership. The use of expatriates expresses huge investments for international companies. There is a need for clear measurement and understanding the benefits of this value generating process. Knowledge and experience are two pillars of success that has served well in the past and cannot but serve equally effectively in the future.

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