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The Relationships between Metacognition, Expatriate Adjustments, and Performances under Global Forms of Employment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how metacognition influences on expatriates' adjustments and their outcomes under global forms of employment. This study is designed to test the impacts of metacognitive ability on expatriate adjustments by using structural equation modeling analysis. The metacognitive mechanism on the relationship between expatriate's adjustment and performance is also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Metacognition, Expatriate Adjustment, Expatriate Assignment Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past half century, a rapid globalization has brought about not only new growth opportunities to firms, but also new challenges such as cross-cultural effectiveness and international human resource management (HRM). Specially, researchers on expatriate HRM spotlight "psychological or sociocultural adjustment as the vital construct underlying the rewards and costs of expatriate experiences to individuals, their families, and their firms" (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005, p.257). While many conceptual and empirical studies have explored an expatriate adjustment subject at the cognitive-level of analysis, only a few studies have reviewed the expatriate adjustments at the metacognitive-level of analysis so far. Moreover, no existent empirical research directly examined the relationships among metacognitions, expatriate adjustments, and performances regarding expatriate's international assignments. Thus, this study aims to explore how metacognitions have influential to expatriates' adjustments and their performances under global forms of employment. In particular, this study intends to examine the following research questions:
1. How do metacognitions affect expatriate adjustments such as cross-cultural, interactional, and work adjustments?
2. How do expatriates' adjustments affect their performances such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee retention, job performance, and so on?
3. How does the metacognitive mechanism work on the relationship between expatriates' adjustments and their performances?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Is Metacognition?

This study attempts the metacognitive-level of analysis, rather than the cognitive-level of analysis. Cognition can be described as "the knowledge structure that people use to make assessments, judgments, or decisions" (Mitchell, Busenitz, Lant, McDougall, Morse, & Smith, 2002a, p.97). On the other hand, metacognition can be illustrated as a higher-order process.
that governs the knowledge structure that people use in making an assessment, judgment, or a decision (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009). In short, metacognition is the awareness and controlling of one's own cognitive process. Thus, it is expected that the functional role of metacognition (i.e., higher-order process) on human behavior may be quite different from the role of cognition (i.e., lower-order process) on it. Nevertheless, only in very limited disciplines such as education (e.g., Schoenfeld, 1987; Borkowski and Muthukrishna, 1992) and psychology (e.g., Flavell, 1976; Davidson et al., 1994), metacognition has been studying so far.

**Dimensions of Metacognition**

Metacognition can be categorized into the following five dimensions: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, metacognitive strategy, goal-orientation, and monitoring (Nelson, 1996; Haynie & Shepherd, 2009; Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski, & Earley, 2010). In order to measure an expatriate’s metacognitive ability, this study employed "Measure of Adaptive Cognition (MAC)," developed by Haynie & Shepherd (2009), after slightly revising the measure items to adapt to the purpose of this study. Hence, this study adopts Haynie & Shepherd's (2009) the original definitions for each metacognition dimension as follows: goal orientation is described to be "the extent to which the individual interprets environmental variations in light of a wide variety of personal, social, and organizational goals" (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009, p.699). Metacognitive knowledge is defined as "the extent to which the individual relies on what is already known about oneself, other people, tasks, and strategy when engaging in the process of generating multiple decision frameworks focused on interpreting, planning, and implementing goals to manage a changing environment" (Haynie & Shepherd, p.699). Metacognitive experience is conceptualized as "the extent to which the individual relies on idiosyncratic experiences, emotions, and intuitions when engaging in the process of generating multiple decision frameworks focused on interpreting, planning, and implementing goals to manage a changing environment" (p.699). Metacognitive choice (also called as metacognitive strategy) is illustrated to be "the extent to which the individual engages in the active process of selecting from multiple decision frameworks the one that best interprets, plans, and implements a response for the purpose of managing a changing environment" (p.700). Finally, metacognitive monitoring is elucidated as "seeking and using feedback to reevaluate goal orientation, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and metacognitive choice for the purposes of managing a changing environment" (p.700).

**Why Do Expatriate Adjustments Matter?**

"The estimated range of failure for overseas assignments is somewhere between 16% and 70% depending on the relative novelty of the host country (Sims & Schraeder, 2004) and the cost of failure at any given firm varies from $65,000 to $1 million (Shannonhouse, 1996)" (Strubler, Park, & Agarwal, 2011, p.103). Consequently, the frequent failures of expatriate assignment can destroy the relationship between home and host, weaken firm legitimacy, and also negatively affect expatriate’s mental health (Fisher & Hartel, 2003).

**Dimensions of Expatriate Adjustment**

According to the adjustment model proposed by Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou (1991), Expatriate adjustment consists of three primary dimensions. Cultural adjustment is defined as “comfort associated with various non-work factors such as general living conditions, local food, transportation, entertainment, facilities, and health care services in the host country” (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, p.257). Interaction adjustment is conceptualized as “comfort associated
with interacting with host country nationals both inside and outside of work” (Bhaskar-Shirinivas et al., p.257). Work adjustment is illustrated as “comfort associated with the assignment job or tasks” (Bhaskar-Shirinivas et al., p.257). These definitions have been "clearly operationalized (Black & Stephens, 1989) and consistently validated (e.g., Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999)” (Bhaskar-Shirinivas et al., 2005, p.257).

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized research model of this study. This model demonstrates how metacognitions affect expatriates' adjustments and their performances. Also, it shows how the process of metacognitive mechanism works on the relationship between expatriate adjustment and outcomes.

The Relationship between Metacognition and Expatriate Adjustment

Metacognition is a higher-order process that control over the knowledge structure that people use in making an assessment, judgment, or a decision (Haynie & Shepherd, 2009). Metacognitions can be described as “the dynamic consideration of cognitive functioning focused on how decision heuristics and strategies develop, adapt, and are employed over the duration of the task process” (Haynie et al., 2010, p.218). Within this context, metacognitive ability can be considered as an expatriate’s resource that is informed based on what they understand to be true about host country’s culture, nationals, and works. Also, metacognition can be regarded as an expatriate’s capability that adjusts one’s own cognitive response to realize a desired outcome from their expatriate assignments. According to these arguments, it is anticipated that metacognitive ability is a basis for expatriates to establish an effective adjustment for host country’s culture, people, and works. Therefore, I proposed the following hypotheses:

H1a: Metacognitive ability is positively related to expatriate’s cultural adjustment.
H1b: Metacognitive ability is positively related to expatriate’s interaction adjustment.
H1c: Metacognitive ability is positively related to expatriate’s work adjustment.

The Relationship between Expatriate Adjustment and Performance

In addition, a well-adjusted expatriate could be committed to realizing the desired expatriate outcomes such as higher job satisfaction, employee retention, organizational commitment, and job performance in host country (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006). In turn, expatriates who achieve a higher individual-level performance eventually can contribute to the higher success of organizational-level performances such as growth in sales, net profit margin, and growth in market share in their host country. Based on these grounds, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H2a: Expatriate’s cultural adjustment has a positive influence on individual-level performance.
H2b: Expatriate’s interaction adjustment has a positive influence on individual-level performance.
H2c: Expatriate’s work adjustment has a positive influence on individual-level performance.

H3: An expatriate who accomplishes positive individual level performance, consequently will have positive influential to the organizational level performance in host country.
Figure 1: Hypothesized research model
The Impacts of Metacognition on Expatriate Adjustments

The Metacognitive Mechanism on the Relationship between Expatriate Adjustment and Performance

Metacognitive monitoring can be identified as "seeking and using feedback to re-evaluate goal orientation, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, and metacognitive choice for the purposes of managing a changing environment" (Haynie & Shepherd, p. 470). Metacognitive strategy is defined to be "the extent to which the individual engages in the active process of selecting from multiple decision frameworks the one that best interprets, plans, and implements a response for the purpose of managing a changing environment" (Haynie & Shepherd, p. 700).

Considering these metacognitive processes, it is supposed that expatriate’s monitoring as to one’s own performance could produce self-feedback in evaluating one’s own metacognitive ability and re-establishing effective metacognitive strategy. Subsequently, it is assumed that the process would generate a positive circulation in the expatriate's metacognitive mechanism.

Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4: Expatriate’s monitoring regarding one’s own performance will positively influence an expatriate on establishing more effective metacognitive strategy; in turn, a positive circulation will be generated in the metacognitive mechanism.

METHODS

Sample and Measurement

The primary data for testing the hypotheses will be obtained through a survey research method. The targeted sample for this study is expatriate employees who are working in Maquiladora area along the border between the United States and Mexico. The survey questionnaire will be developed, consisting of items related to metacognitions (goal orientation, metacognitive experience, knowledge, choice, and monitoring), expatriate adjustment (cultural, interactional, and work adjustment), individual level performance (job satisfaction, employee retention, organizational commitment, job performance), and organizational level performances (growth in sales, net profit margin, and growth in market share in host country). For each item, respondents will be asked for indicating the extent to which they disagree or agree with a statement on a seven-point Likert scale, anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7).

Data Collection Procedure

Before conducting actual survey research, a pilot test will be carried out to monitor any problematic questions, to pre-examine the fits of the hypothesized model in this study, and to check the length of time to complete the survey. The targeted respondents for this a pilot test is international students studying at the Universities because it is assumed that the situations of international students and expatriate employees are highly similar.

In order to minimize common method variance, the data is collected through multiple methods and sources such as post mail surveys, online surveys, and interviews and also the convergence of multiple measures is tested.

Data Analysis

Data will be processed by using IBM SPSS and AMOS soft-ware. The hypothesized model in this study will be examined through a structural equation modeling analysis (SEM). However, a SEM can be tested only after adequate measurement and construct validity are established.
The Impact of Metacognition on Expatriate Adjustments

(Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Hence, validity issues such as discriminant and construct validity will be assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) before the SEM analysis.

**IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION**

Given the recognized individual and the potential organizational costs of failed expatriate assignments, numerous studies highlight the importance of expatriate effectiveness. For example, Carraher, Sullivan, & Crocitto's (2008) study demonstrate that having a host-country mentor has a significant positive effect on the expatriate effectiveness. However, most of studies focus on how a third party can effectively assist expatriate's adjustment, but relatively little studies focus on how expatriates can acclimate themselves to the new environment and work in the host country. Therefore, it is expected that this study can give a contribution to international HRM literature, implying that firms can reduce the costs from expatriate’s failure through an education to enhance an expatriate’s self-metacognitive ability.

**REFERENCES**


More references available upon request.