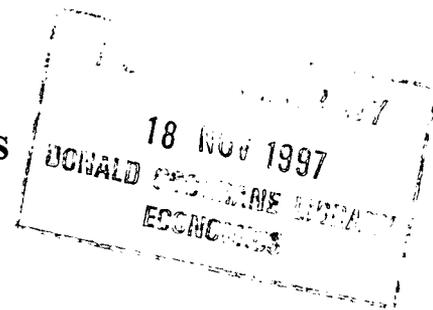


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**DETERMINANTS OF AUSTRALIAN
EXPATRIATE SUCCESS**

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Abstract

Research on expatriation has indicated that between 20 to 40 percent of expatriate managers do not successfully make the transition and return early (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Black, 1988; Tung, 1981). Based on the literature on person-situation fit, a model of expatriate success was developed and tested in this study. The findings of the study indicate that perceived career paths, willingness to relocate and role clarity affect expatriate success. The implications of these findings for organisations are discussed.

DETERMINANTS OF AUSTRALIAN EXPATRIATE SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

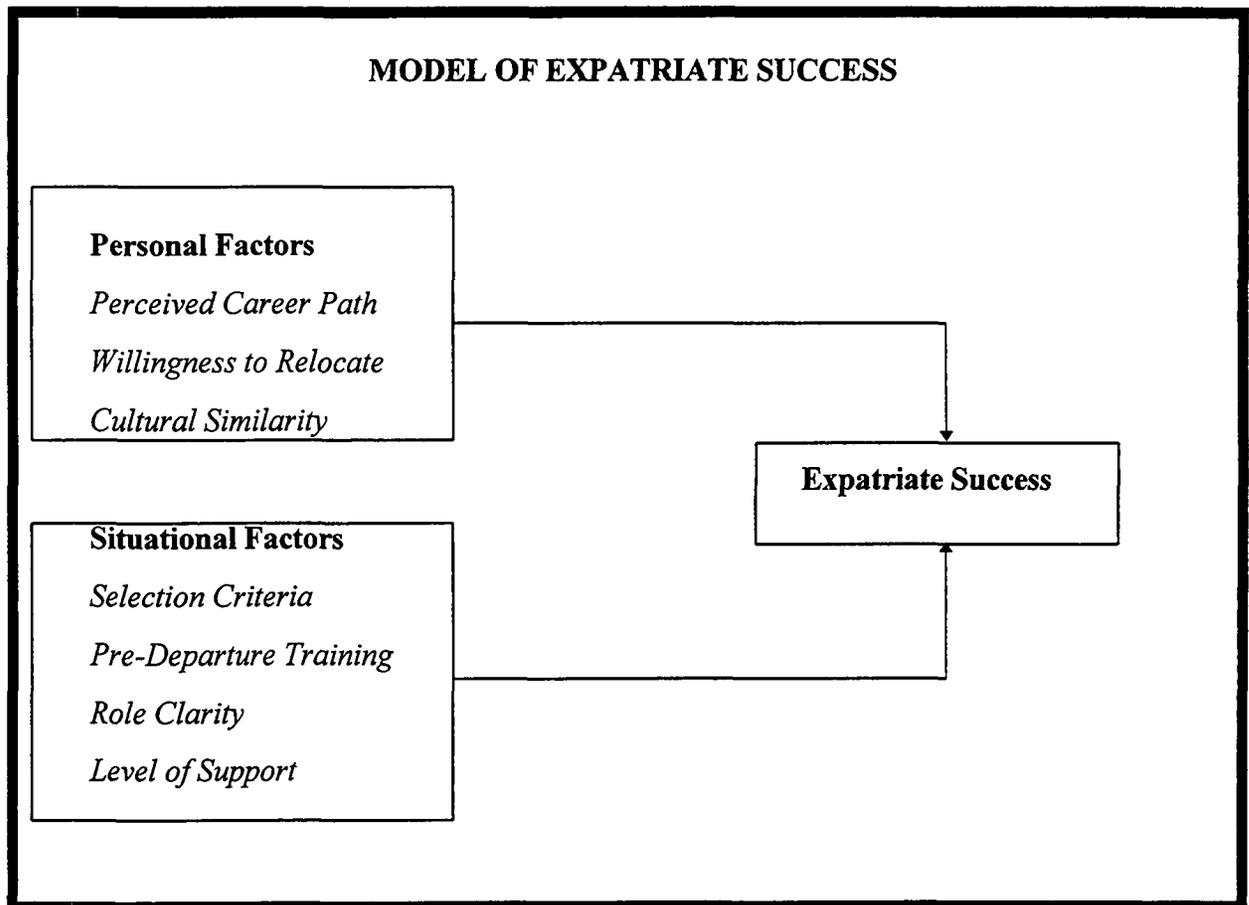
In today's international marketplace, successful implementation of a global strategy depends upon getting the right people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time. According to Black (1992), this involves the movement of people across national borders (Brett & Stroh, 1995). Unfortunately many expatriates are unable to adjust to the host country. This results in unsuccessful expatriate performance, low productivity in the overseas operation, problems with client relations, and operational inefficiencies (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Several studies have found that between 20 to 40 percent of expatriate managers do not successfully make the transition (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Tung, 1981; Black, 1988). Thus, organisations need to address all the fundamental issues that result in expatriate success in order to retain their international executives (Brett & Stroh, 1995).

The major focus of this study is to identify the variables that affect expatriate success in overseas assignments. A review of the literature indicated that past empirical research has only included one or two variables in each study. What is missing is a comprehensive model of expatriate success. This study fills this gap in the literature by presenting a model and assesses which of the main organisation and situation specific variables affecting expatriate success are the most significant. Specifically, this research assesses the extent to which seven independent variables; ie, Perceived Career Path, Willingness to Reocate, Cultural Similarity, Selection Criteria, Pre-departure training, Role Clarity and Level of Support affect the dependent variable Expatriate Success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of person-situation fit, or congruence, is considered essential for success in any job (Holland, 1985; Nadler & Tushman, 1980; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). In studying this concept of person-situation fit, researchers have focused on two groups of factors; personal and situational. Research on "Personal Factors" has explored the relationship between individual characteristics and broad occupational attributes (Holland, 1985; Super, 1957; Mount & Muchinsky, 1978; Spokane, 1985). On the other hand, research on "Situational Factors" has focussed on the fit between specific characteristics of the organisation or culture and individuals employed in the organisation (Downey, Hellriegel & Slocum, 1975, Torbian, 1982). Empirical research has typically supported the hypothesis that congruence between individuals' personalities and the demands of their occupations are associated with positive affect (Mount & Muchinsky, 1978; Spokane, 1985) and a high likelihood of remaining in their jobs (Meir & Hasson, 1982). Similarly, research by Lofquist and Dawis (1969) indicated that satisfaction results from a harmonious relationship between the individual and the environment, suitability of the individual to the environment and vice versa. Literature on expatriation has indicated that cultural similarity enhances the levels of satisfaction with the foreign assignment (Black et al., 1991; Torbian, 1982). Hence, the model tested in this study looks at the effect of both "personal" and "situational" factors on expatriate success (see Figure 1). The literature reviewed in this paper examines seven important personal and situational variables affecting expatriate success.

Figure 1



The Dependent Variable

Expatriate Success

An expatriate is an executive of a multinational company who works on overseas assignments (Mamman, 1995). *Expatriate Success* refers to an expatriate who has adjusted well in the foreign country and in the foreign assignment, has remained in the foreign country for the agreed length of time, has a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards the assignment, has achieved the expected outcome of the assignment and therefore has accomplished a worthy performance, and is willing to relocate again for another foreign assignment (Black & Gregerson, 1990; Feldman, 1991, 1988).

Feldman and Thomas (1992) define a successful expatriate as one who adjusts well to the new culture, meets or exceeds performance standards, has enhanced his/her skills, has remained in the foreign country for the agreed upon length of time, has maintained a positive attitude and has high job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

On the other hand, research by Bochner and Kelly (1974) and Wiseman (1977) tends to focus on the expatriate's ability and competence which helps to sustain effectiveness. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) describes an expatriate as effective, or competent if he/she meets the expectations and standards during the international assignment. Hence, expatriate effectiveness or success could be defined as an expatriate who has adjusted well or "fits" into the situation (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991) and has remained in the foreign country for the agreed length of time (Black & Gregerson, 1990; Feldman, 1991). It also means the expatriate has a positive attitude towards the assignment in terms of satisfaction, internal work motivation and the general feeling of influence and

mastery over the new environment (Feldman, 1988). Expatriate success includes the expatriate's confidence and willingness to relocate again (Black & Gregerson, 1990; Feldman, 1991, 1988).

Personal Factors Affecting Expatriate Success

Perceived Career Path

The literature indicates that there is a clear relationship between the expatriate and future career opportunities (Feldman & Thomas, 1992). The expatriates general performance and commitment to the assignment may be influenced by perceptions of the career path resulting from the assignment (Naumann, 1992). Research by Edstrom and Galbraith (1977) illustrated that most expatriates thought their foreign assignment would provide the development necessary for executive level positions in the future. It appears that the longer term issues of integrating the expatriate assignment into logical career paths can be as important as the shorter run issues of language training and pre-departure training in facilitating expatriate success.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived Career Opportunities enhance expatriate success.

Willingness to Relocate

Studies show that willingness to relocate affects expatriate success. Many researchers agree that when managers returned early from expatriate assignment, the reason most often was poor spouse or family adjustment (Tung, 1981; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Brett & Stroh, 1995). Reluctant expatriates have also been shown to have greater difficulties adjusting than do those who were eager for the new experience (Feldman & Thomas, 1992). Naumann (1992) describes this phenomenon in terms of attitudes. Positive attitudes lead to intentions to stay and complete the intended assignment and negative attitudes are likely to cause withdrawal cognitions.

Hypothesis 2: Expatriates willing to relocate will be more successful than reluctant expatriates.

Cultural Similarity

Moving to a foreign country often involves changes in the job the individual performs and the corporate culture in which responsibilities are executed. It can also involve dealing with unfamiliar norms related to the general culture, business practices, living conditions, and political systems in addition to speaking a foreign language on a daily basis (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). In many cultures new comers are viewed with distrust and scepticism, therefore building relationships could be impossible (Naumann, 1992). This could hinder the completion of assignment requirements and cause frustration and discomfort to the expatriate, leading to premature return.

Torbian (1982) found that expatriates expressed high levels of dissatisfaction in their overseas assignments for India/Pakistan, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, East Africa, and Liberia because the cultural barriers and living standards caused job dissatisfaction, stress and pressure. It is a proven fact that people trust those who resemble themselves (Cummings, Harnett & Stevens, 1971; Everett & Stening, 1983). Thus, a review of the literature indicates that the closer the similarity between two cultures, the easier it would be to achieve successful expatriation (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991).

Hypothesis 3: Cultural similarity strengthens successful expatriation.

Situational Factors

Selection Criteria

Research on selection criteria shows consistent neglect of important criteria that assist in the success of overseas assignments (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou, 1987). Despite the evidence that many other factors influence expatriate success, most organisations only focus on technical competence. Why firms focus on only one important skill necessary for overseas success is reflected in a statement by a respondent in Baker and Ivancevich's (1971) study: "Managing a company is a scientific art. The executive accomplishing the task in New York can surely perform as adequately in Hong Kong". This narrow focus in the selection process may reflect why Tung (1981) found that only 5 per cent of the firms in her sample administered tests to determine the degree to which candidates possessed cross-cultural skills (Black, Mendenhall, Oddou, 1991). She closed by saying it was surprising organisations never focused on "relation abilities" when it appears vital for expatriate success. Given the negative experiences many firms encounter, there is certainly room for improvement (Tung, 1981).

A variable that needs to be considered in conjunction with selection criteria is whether the spouse and other family members will be able to cope (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou, 1987). A spouse or family member who is not adjusting, experiencing culture shock and/or is displaying inappropriate actions for dealing with relocation stress will affect the chances of expatriate success (Grain & Cooper, 1981; Gaylord, 1979; Harvey 1982; Tung, 1982). This implies that not only should the expatriate's personal qualities be considered, but so too should the personal qualities of the family. For example, a spouse could have his/her own career going very successfully and may be reluctant to relocate. This, plus other factors, could affect an expatriate's ultimate ability to adjust. The current study will test whether the other important criteria such as family requirements, language and technical suitability are being included in the selection process (Dowling, Schuler, Welch, 1994).

Hypothesis 4: Detailed selection criteria enhances expatriate success.

Pre-Departure Training

The type of pre-departure training provided to expatriates may also affect the achievement of success. Studies investigating the relationship between pre-departure training and cross-cultural adjustment found support for a positive relationship between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural skill development and job performance (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Fiedler, Mitchell & Triandis, 1971). Unfortunately, most of the studies have neglected to assess socialisation as a means of assisting expatriate success. Companies that conduct pre-departure training programs, do not provide the expatriate with comprehensive and in-depth training. Such pre-departure training usually focuses on informing the employee about the environment, cultural background and some language training. This type of training also eliminates a vital component, previously noted as especially important in successful expatriate performance, i.e. the need to involve the spouse and children in preparation for adjustment (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou, 1987).

Runzheimer's (1984) study showed a deficiency in the quality of pre-departure training provided by firms. The results of the study indicated that 20% of the organisations in the study, did not include the expatriate's family in their cross-cultural training program. Many multinational corporations send expatriates and their families abroad without any acculturation training because they believe that pre-departure training is ineffective and the culture is simply not known well enough, to develop an appropriate training program (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Tung, 1981; Vassel, 1983;

Zeira, 1975). However, acculturation is an important prerequisite for successful expatriate performance. The present study will examine whether the level of pre-departure training given to an expatriate and his/her family affects expatriate success.

Hypothesis 5: Pre-departure Training has a positive affect on expatriate success.

Role Clarity

The clarity of the role of the expatriate in the overseas assignment, is certainly an issue requiring attention from the expatriate's perspective. Roles include solving staff shortages, exerting control in overseas subsidiaries, and developing management talent (Kobrin, 1988; Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977). Researchers argue that moving to a different country creates a significant amount of uncertainty and people have a need to reduce uncertainty to a more tolerable level in order to ease adjustment (Brett, 1980). Mamman (1995) stated that the expatriate's role has three dimensions; (1) the host country's perception in terms of the social and economic benefit of the expatriate, (2) the status implications the expatriate will have and, (3) distinguishing the expected role from the enacted role of the expatriate. Furthermore, Black's (1988) study supported the argument that successful expatriation was justified, by dealing with and training, to overcome role ambiguity and role discretion. While these variables have been found to be highly significant, role conflict, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job feedback have generally received weaker but still significant support (Naumann, 1992). Unfortunately, there appears to be no empirical findings on the variable "role clarity". Hence, the following hypothesis is tested.

Hypothesis 6: Role clarity enhances expatriate success.

Level of Support

The level of support offered is a variable which affects expatriate success. Davidson and Kinzel (1995) describe three types of support influencing expatriates: financial inducements, general support and family orientation support. Financial inducements include tax equalisation, temporary living allowance and home leave allowance. Australian expatriates appear generally satisfied with their companies financial support even though the findings showed that Australian expatriates were rewarded less than American expatriates. General support includes emergency leave, social events, language and cultural training and general personal services. The findings indicate that companies need to focus more directly in their efforts in cultural adoption by reframing their cultural training. Unfortunately only 63% of the companies studied offer such productive training (Baliga & Baker, 1984). Finally, family oriented support involves assisting with spousal employment, assisting in locating schools for children and general cultural transition training. The findings indicate that expatriates generally believe that even though they should be given extensive preparation, their families do not need such training. This is surprising, given that "the expatriate's family is exposed to the host country's culture much more intensely than the expatriate" (De Cieri, Dowling & Taylor, 1991; Dowling, Schuler & Welch, 1994).

Companies appear to act on the premise that if the expatriate has access to all the usual pleasures and necessities of life, adjustment to a new cultural environment will happen by itself. However it is ironic that least support is offered in the highly significant areas of pre-departure training and orientation into the new cultural environment (Davidson & Kinzel, 1995).

Hypothesis 7: High levels of organisational support enhance expatriate success.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The sample for this study consisted of six hundred Australian expatriates. Two hundred companies conducting overseas operations were randomly selected from "Australia's Top 500 Companies 1995-1996 book". Three questionnaires were sent to the human resources manager in each organisation for distribution to expatriates. 112 completed and useable questionnaires were obtained, yielding a response rate of 18.7 percent. These questionnaires were received from Australian expatriates in twenty six different countries. 94.5 percent of the expatriates were male, 83.5 percent were married and 61.5 percent had dependent children. 65 percent of the respondents could speak more than one language. The mean number of months of overseas work experience was twenty five.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument for this study consisted of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section collected demographic information. In the second and third sections seven point Likert scales were used to collect information on personal and situation specific variables. Each variable was measured with a separate scale comprising of approximately eight items. The final section of the questionnaire consisted of an open-ended question in which the respondents were asked to provide any additional information they felt was relevant to the study.

RESULTS

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the goodness of fit of the model and the separate effects of the seven independent variables on the dependent variable (expatriate success). The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for all the variables are shown in Table 1. The correlation matrix indicates that the problem of multicollinearity between independent variables is very low.

Table 2 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that, as a whole, the seven independent variables have a significant effect on expatriate success ($R^2 = .41$, $p < .001$).

Significance levels of the beta coefficients were inspected to determine which of the seven independent variables had a significant effect on expatriate success. Inspection of the significance levels indicated that three independent variables, willingness to relocate, role clarity and perceived career paths had a significant effect on expatriate success. The signs of the beta coefficients were also examined to determine the direction of the relationships between the significant independent variables and the dependent variable. These relationships were found to be in the hypothesised direction. Thus, Hypothesis 1, 2 and 6 were supported.

Table 1 Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	s.d.	Perceived Career Path	Willingness To Relocate	Cultural Similarity	Selection Criteria	Pre-Departure Training	Role Clarity
Expatriate Success	5.16	0.75						
Perceived Career Path	3.98	1.03						
Willingness to Relocate	5.46	0.80	0.24*					
Cultural Similarity	5.07	1.22	0.06	0.30**				
Selection Criteria	4.30	0.90	0.24*	0.06	-0.05			
Pre-departure Training	2.07	1.10	0.21*	0.06	0.11	0.18		
Role Clarity	5.15	0.92	0.06	0.04	-0.04	0.27**	0.05	
Level of Support	3.17	1.15	0.19	0.17	0.16	0.12	0.45***	0.07

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

Table 2 Summary Of Regression Analysis For Variables Affecting Expatriate Success

Variable	B	SE B	β
Constant	0.85	0.53	
Perceived Career Path	0.11	0.06	0.16*
Willingness to Relocate	0.33	0.07	0.38***
Cultural Smilarity	0.07	0.05	0.11
Selection Criteria	0.11	0.07	0.13
Pre-departure Training	-0.02	0.06	-0.03
Role Clarity	0.19	0.06	0.24**
Level of Support	0.09	0.06	0.14

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

DISCUSSION

Past research has looked at the expatriation process on an ad hoc basis, using only two or three independent variables in each study. Besides, a good theoretical rationale to understand expatriate success has not been developed. To fill this gap in the literature, this study first developed a conceptual model which incorporated both personal and situational factors. The model was based on the well established notion of person-situation fit (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969; Torbian, 1982). The model used in this study tested the effect of seven independent variables on the dependent variable expatriate success. The results strongly support the model. The strength of these findings is enhanced by the fact that the random sample included expatriates from two hundred organisations in Australia who had worked in twenty six different countries.

Hypothesis 1 stated that perceived career opportunities enhance expatriate success. This hypothesis was supported. The beta weight of .16 was significant at the .05 level. The findings support the notion that there is a clear relationship between perceived career paths and expatriate success (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Naumann 1992). Foreign assignments are perceived as providing the opportunities for development which assist in securing promotions in the future. This finding is of importance to organisations. Organisations should seriously consider repatriation programmes and should include career planning as an integral part of such a programme. Failure to do so would result in loss of valuable talent.

Hypothesis 2 stated that expatriates willing to relocate would be more successful than reluctant expatriates. This hypothesis was supported. In fact, the beta of .38 for this variable was the highest and was significant at the .001 level. Past research has indicated that family considerations constitute one of the important components of an employee's willingness to relocate (Tung, 1981; Black & Gregson, 1991; Brett & Stroh, 1995). Yet, most organisations appear to ignore the expatriate's family (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Tung, 1981). The findings of this study emphasise the importance of first determining whether an employee is willing to relocate before effecting the relocation. Mandatory relocations which form part of an organisation's job rotation policy, may not really yield the desired results if the employee is unwilling to relocate. In fact, reluctant expatriates have been shown to have greater difficulties in adjusting, than expatriates who were eager for the new experience (Feldman & Thomas, 1992).

Hypothesis 3 stated that cultural similarity strengthens successful expatriation. This hypothesis was not supported. Past research had indicated that moving to a foreign country involved dealing with *unfamiliar* norms, customs and business practices (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Torbian, 1982). However, most of this research was conducted in the United States and looked at American executives in overseas assignments. The findings of this study indicate that position in Australia is a bit different. Australia is considered one of the most multicultural countries in the world, with people from over fifty different countries speaking over seventy languages (AGPS, 1993; Smith & D'Netto, 1995; Dagher, D'Netto & D'Netto, 1996). Besides, as the population is relatively small compared to the United States of America (17 million in Australia as against 265 million in the United States of America), cultural integration in Australia is extremely high. This could explain why the expected effect of cultural similarity was not found. Australian expatriates appear to be *more familiar* with foreign cultures, languages and customs than American expatriates.

Hypothesis 4 stated that detailed selection criteria enhances expatriate success. This hypothesis was not supported. Past research had indicated that most organisations focus only on technical competence and neglect other important criteria such as cross-cultural skills (Black, Mendenhall,

Oddou, 1991; Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou, 1987; Tung, 1981). It appears from the results of this study that Australian expatriates have significant cross cultural skills. As discussed earlier, the high degree of multiculturalism in the Australian population appears to have increased cross cultural skills of expatriates even before they were transferred overseas. In addition, the mean of 4.21 for selection criteria (1 = well below average through 7 = well above average), indicates that Australian organisations are using detailed selection criteria.

Hypothesis 5 stated that pre-departure training has a positive effect on expatriate success. This hypothesis was not supported. Research on pre-departure training and cross-cultural adjustment had found support for a positive relationship between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural adjustment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Fiedler, Mitchell & Triandis, 1971). It is interesting to note that the mean value for this variable was only 2.1, indicating that Australian organisations offer very poor pre-departure training. In spite of such poor training, pre-departure training did not have a significant effect on expatriate success. There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. First, the culture of Australia is very similar to that of any of the "western" countries. This cultural similarity reduces the effect of pre-departure training when an expatriate goes to North America or Europe. Second, even though there is a cultural difference between Australia and Asian countries, the close proximity to Asia, the large number of Asian migrants in Australia and the significant number of Asian tourists each year, has obviously reduced the cultural gap between Australia and its neighbours. Besides, a considerable number of Australian expatriates are probably from different ethnic backgrounds. Twenty-five percent of Australians are first generation migrants and another twenty five percent have atleast one parent who is a migrant (Castles & Miller, 1993). This reduced cultural gap may explain why the hypothesised effect of pre-departure training was not found in this study.

Hypothesis 6 stated that role/assignment clarity enhances successful expatriation. This hypothesis was supported. The findings of this study provide empirical support to theoretical arguments that reducing role ambiguity enhances expatriate success (Black, 1988; Mamman, 1995). The beta of .23 for this variable was significant at the .01 level. The strong support for this hypothesis emphasises the need for organisations to provide clear job descriptions for all expatriates. While expatriates usually enjoy considerable control over decision making, role clarity is essential for expatriate success. Role clarity becomes even more important, since expatriates are usually situated far away from their home country and have limited access to information available at the corporate office.

Hypothesis 7 stated that high levels of support enhance expatriate success. This hypothesis was not supported. Davidson and Kinzel (1995) had argued that financial inducements, general support and family orientation support were essential for expatriate success. Their study had indicated that while Australian expatriates were generally satisfied with the financial inducements, general support (such as social events, language and cultural training) and family orientation (such as assisting in spousal employment, schooling for children and general cultural transition training) needed to be improved. However, this study found that these aspects of organisational support did not affect expatriate success. It is possible that as Australian expatriates possess a higher degree of cross cultural skills, they are able to develop their own social network in the host country and are also able to obtain support from this network. This reduces the need for organisational support from the parent country.

This study has a few limitations. First, the study included expatriates from only Australian organisations. Thus, the generalizability of the findings of this study will have to be done with

caution. Secondly, during the data collection phase, questionnaires could not be mailed directly to the expatriates, since participating organisations did not agree to provide names of expatriates. Hence, three questionnaires were mailed to the Human Resources Manager in each organisation, who then distributed the questionnaires to three expatriates in the organisation. It is possible that there is a small amount of bias in this method of distribution. Thirdly, since names of the respondents were not available, the follow-up letter had to be sent to the Human Resources Manager who may not have passed on the letter to the respondents. This probably reduced the final response rate.

The findings of this study have several implications for future research. This study included only Australian expatriates. Future research can test the model of expatriate of success, by including expatriates from different countries. Secondly, the findings of this study indicated that three independent variables (i.e., perceived career path, willingness to relocate and role clarity) affect expatriate success. Future research may try to identify other variables which affect expatriate success. Finally, research in the areas of workforce diversity, can test whether the cultural similarity variable has a differential effect for expatriates from ethnic backgrounds as compared to expatriates from non-ethnic backgrounds. It is possible that expatriates from non-ethnic backgrounds may require more pre-departure training than expatriates from ethnic backgrounds.

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