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## **Expatriate Work Adjustment and Job Performance of Expatriates: A Case Study of Nokia and ZTE Companies**

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### **Abstract**

*Through the application of a comparative case study and qualitative research design, the goal of this study is to identify main factors that influence expatriate job performance in multinational corporations, such as Nokia and ZTE companies, as well as challenges that they face in a new society, and to find out better alternatives for managing expatriates. The methods used in this study for data collection were qualitative with semi-structured group interviews. The data have been analyzed with NVivo software.*

*We found our five-stage presented model entirely support expatriate management. The research also found a new term "Personality Traits" that added new value to literature as innovative aspect of this study. The study explored how we can achieve effective implementation of overseas projects by managing expatriates' job performance in multinational companies. Then, from literature review and interview results we provide propositions and some measurements on how the progression of each stage - subsidiary support, cross-cultural motivation, training, spouse adjustment and work adjustment - would influence the job performance for effective project implementation.*

***Keywords: Expatriate, cultural distance, training, work adjustment, motivation***

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The globalization rate is increasing which allows the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) not only to participate in the International Market but also to sustain their competitive advantage. In order to sustain their competitive advantage in the international market, MNCs should come up with better ways to maintain success way of effective cross-cultural adjustment for expatriates (Poonpol, 2010). The rapid speed of globalization in the 21st century, economy has led organizations to heavy put reliance on better management of international projects in order to compete in the global marketplace (Harrison et al, 2004).

This study seeks to identify the most important factors that affect the success rate of an expatriate abroad by conducting comparative case study qualitative research design.

Answering this question will provide evidence for how to identify and subsequently train employees properly to achieve optimal performance in their assignments. A key assumption herein is that the expatriate failure rate constitutes an important measure of the effectiveness of expatriation management itself.

There are very high rates of expatriate failure in the world - especially in China. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between five stage model's concepts: subsidiary support, cross cultural motivation, expatriate training, work adjustment and spouse adjustments for the expatriate's effective job performance in project implementation. We hope to find the important concept that helps expatriates perform well in their assignment abroad, at the same time decrease the failure rate among expatriates.

With increasing global competition and the internationalization of the world markets, the expatriation assignment is becoming more and more important and it has led to the key factor of success for MNCs (Hassan and Diallo, 2013). We hope that after finishing our research we will be able to give better suggestions to MNCs that we have chosen as our object of research, essential ways for the managing expatriates effectively. This study has theoretical and practical significance. Because previous studies have focused investigations on the issues of expatriate characteristics, expatriate adjustment, culture differences and other concepts related to expatriate management, in this research besides other important concepts we will use training and spouse adjustment as an important tools for expatriate management during project implementation.

Bartlett mentioned, the rise of MNCs could be partly explained by the fact that costs associated with the development and marketing of new products are too great to be amortized only over one market (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1991). In sense, MNCs are firms that need to be both global and local at the same time.

With regards to Internationalization theory, firms internationalize for the variety of reasons, but the assumption is that firms internationalize in an effort to boost profits and performance. Hereby, International Human Resource Management faces a lot of challenges that require much affords to fight with. A consequence of this for most MNCs is a human resource department that develops and administers the following policies and practices but across a wide variety of nations, each with its own social, cultural, legal, economic, political and historical characteristics, staffing, training, development, etc. (Morgan, 1986).

According to scholars when MNCs set human resource strategies, they must perform the delicate balancing act (Adler, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Laurent, 1986 etc.). They need to strive for consistency in the way they manage their employees, and at the same time adapt to the business practices and more of each different country or region in which they operate.

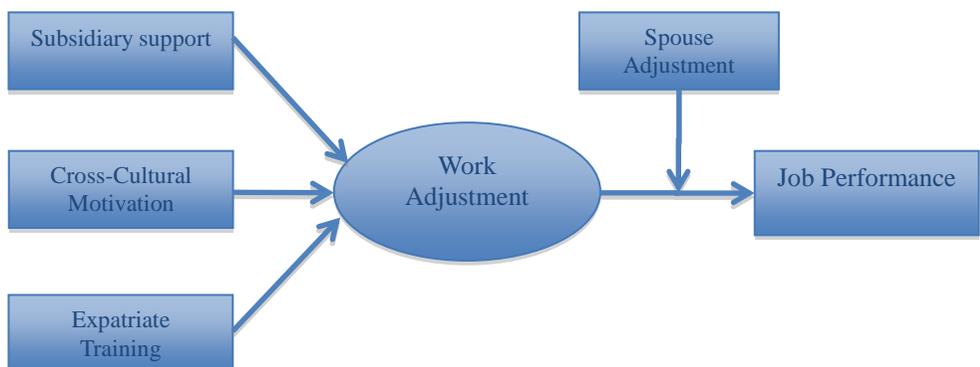
The internationalization of business activities has become one of the most prevalent phenomena of current operations in MNCs (Hodgetts and Luthans, 2000). Thus, the demands of qualified expatriates to serve in overseas marketplaces have increased. Managing expatriates has become one of the most effective ways to become successful globally.

The most widely known research in the attempt to compare national cultures in terms of broad cultural and value differences is the pioneering work of Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1983, 1984, 1991). He identified five dimensions of work-related value differences, which impact the way people, think and behave in work-related situations across cultural borders. These are “power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and long-term versus short-term orientation”.

The strength of Hofstede’s dimensions is that they are based on both a theoretical and a broad international database. In summary, one of the most difficult aspects of foreign assignments, according to Hofstede, is to understand cultural differences. It is also difficult to understand different groups within a nation.

**Effective expatriate management model:** In the following part, we delineate a multilevel model of expatriate effectiveness for the project implementation goal. We propose that four contextual attributes—foreign subsidiary support, culture distance, spouse adjustment and training—moderate the relationship between expatriate work adjustment and job performance for the project implementation. Finally, our model also controls for the direct relationships of individual-level perceptions of both support and culture distance with work adjustment, which have been theorized and supported in prior stress-focused expatriate research (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al, 2005), and training which also have been theorized in prior research on expatriate management (Treven, 2003). The literature shows that the companies rarely provide expatriate training and spouse adjustment. Thus we decided to cover training and spouse adjustment in our research, because the issue of expatriate trainings as well as preparation process needs to be examined in a number of important aspects.

**Figure-1: Expatriate management model**



Although previous research has focused on multiple indicators of expatriate effectiveness, but we found out that two of the most critical indicators are expatriate work adjustment and job performance (Harrison et al, 2004, Shaffer et al, 2006). These two indicators represent distinct facets of expatriate effectiveness. Specifically, work adjustment captures the extent to which

expatriates subjectively feel comfortable handling assignment duties like facilitating work meetings, negotiating with vendors and many others. By contrast, expatriate job performance captures the extent to which expatriates actually carry out their work assignments and duties in an effective manner. Arguably, from the perspectives of both expatriate and organization, overall job performance is the most important and direct measure of expatriate effectiveness. However, as we explain below, work adjustment can also serve as an intermediate index of expatriate effectiveness, which holds the potential to promote expatriate job performance and, further, mediate the relationship between expatriate cross cultural motivation, training and family adjustment in project implementation.

### **Concepts and propositions**

#### **A. Expatriate cross-cultural motivation, work adjustment and effectiveness:**

International projects are quite challenging and require expatriates to devote substantial effort to adapt and perform effectively, in part because of the different cultural context of the foreign operation. Motivation consists of the psychological processes that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence in the action (Kanfer, 1990), and it involves the processes by which individuals marshal personal resources (e.g. skills, time, attention) to choose and accomplish work-related goals. In previous literature motivation is identified proximal cognitive predictors of some motivational processes, such as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (i.e. interest in a task) (Deci et al, 1989). To be more specific, employees who are both more efficacious and intrinsically interested in their tasks are more likely to actively engage in work-related tasks as well as devote more effort and time toward task accomplishment (Kanfer, 1990, Kanfer et al, 2008).

In prior work on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), intrinsic motivation (Deci et al, 1989), and motivational cultural intelligence (Ang et al, 2007), we propose that expatriates who have higher cross-cultural motivation will be more likely to proactively direct and sustain efforts toward adjusting and adapting to their international project implementation process. Further, there is more specific empirical evidence that motivational cultural intelligence positively relates to expatriate work adjustment (Ang et al, 2007).

Beyond initial evidence that cross-cultural motivation related positively to work adjustment (Ang et al 2007) also found that cross-cultural motivation influences positively to job performance. However, prior research has yet to empirically examine the mediating mechanisms through which expatriate cross-cultural motivation might promote expatriate job performance in international project. Further, better-adjusted expatriates are more likely to perform more effectively, because they are more comfortable with various aspects of their jobs and therefore are less fatigued and have more personal resources available to devote to accomplishing and implementing the project effectively. Therefore, we predict:

***Proposition 1.*** *Expatriate cross-cultural motivation to be positively related and influenced to work adjustment and job performance of expatriates for effectively implementation of the project.* Better-adjusted expatriates are more likely to perform more effectively, because they are more comfortable with various aspects of their jobs and therefore are less fatigued and have more

personal resources available to devote to accomplishing work tasks (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005, Shaffer et al, 2001). Work adjustment is one of the most proximal predictors of overall expatriate performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al, 2005). Wang and Takeuchi's (2007), study of expatriates in China provides indirect support for our expectation that work adjustment mediates between cross-cultural motivation and job performance in that they showed that work adjustment mediated between broader motivational traits for instance goal orientation and expatriate job performance. Hereby, we predict:

**Proposition2.** *Expatriate work adjustment mediates the positive relationship between expatriate cross-cultural motivation and expatriate job performance.*

**B. Moderating role of subsidiary support:** Given the complexity inherent in international projects, it is not surprising that some expatriate theories and research have addressed the role of organizational support in expatriate effectiveness (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al, 2005, Black et al, 1991, Harrison et al., 2004). According to Kraimer and Wayne (2004), three dimensions of organizational support are most relevant and appropriate to expatriate success: (1) adjustment support (i.e., helping expatriates and their families adapt in their international project), (2) career support (i.e., offering guiding related to their career), and (3) financial support (i.e., providing monetary incentives and assistance). Kraimer and Wayne (2004) found that individual perceptions of adjustment, financial, and career support are directly and positively related to expatriate work adjustment and commitment during project implementation. Accordingly, we conceptualize subsidiary support as a multidimensional construct consisting of adjustment, financial, and career support dimensions. That is, the three dimensions more fully include overall subsidiary support than does each dimension individually. Following trait activation theory Tett and Burnett, (2003), we propose that if subsidiaries are less supportive, it will increase the salience of trait-relevant cues and represent situations that are more relevant to cross-cultural motivation.

It is possible that higher levels of subsidiary support can also serve as a stress-buffering mechanism, enabling expatriates to allocate more effort toward accomplishing job-related tasks (cf. Bacharach, Bamberger, and Doveh, 2008), thus enhancing the relationship between cross-cultural motivation and work adjustment. Although we are not aware of prior empirical researches that examined the moderating influence of supportive contexts, the theoretical rationale stated above leads us to summarize that:

**Proposition3.a)** *Foreign subsidiary support moderates the relationship between expatriate cross-cultural motivation and expatriate work adjustment in a project, in such a way that cross-cultural motivation relates more positively to work adjustment when a foreign subsidiary is less, rather than more, supportive.*

**Moderating role of cultural distance:** Cultural distance is an important antecedent of MNCs performance. Some researchers claimed that when there is a greater cultural difference between home and host country of expatriates, they would have more difficulty in adjusting (Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991). Researchers have recognized that foreign subsidiaries differ in the extent that they require expatriates to adapt to new cultural

environments (Harrison et al, 2004). These differences are captured in what has been termed 'cultural distance' (Shenkar, 2001) a construct that denotes differences in basic aspects of culture between a host and home country, including core values, beliefs, customs, and rituals, as well as legal, political, and economic systems (Adler, 2008, Hofstede, 1983). According to models of expatriate adjustment in previous researches, adjustment is more challenging when the host country is more culturally distant (Black et al, 1991, Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). In our study, we conceptualize cultural distance as a foreign subsidiary-level construct to capture the collective consensus of expatriates that the host country in which their subsidiary located is culturally different from their own home countries.

The opinion that cultural distance attenuates the relationship between cross-cultural motivation and work adjustment is also consistent with Kanfer and Ackerman's (1989) resource allocation model.

Cross-cultural motivation may be less positively related to effective behavior that promotes work adjustment in more culturally distant subsidiaries, because such subsidiaries pose less familiar task requirements on expatriates during the project implementation, which render the effort triggered by cross-cultural motivation less relevant. Hence, we conclude that:

***Proposition 3. b) Foreign subsidiary cultural distance moderates the relationship between expatriate cross-cultural motivation and work adjustment for effective implementation of project in such way that cross-cultural motivation relates more positively to work adjustment when cultural distance is lower, rather than higher.***

**C. Cross-cultural training for expatriates:** In the area of cross-cultural awareness in international projects, a very significant focus has been upon the training and preparation of managers, executives and other professionals (Harris and Moran, 1987). The prescriptive and empirical work has widely supported the use of cross-cultural training for expatriates and accompanying family members as an effective means of improving expatriate project success and overall MNCs productivities (Black and Mendenhall, 1991).

According to the literature, Shen (2004) proposed three types of international trainings: preparatory training for expatriates; post-arrival training for expatriates; training for host-country nationals (HCNs) and third-country nationals (TCNs).

These three types of training is very important for expatriates, in preparatory training important step is candidate selection and after that expatriates should be provided with technique trainings. In post-arrival training expatriates should be provided with language training and management trainings for coping effectively with cultural misunderstandings except some cultural distance matters. Black and Mendenhall (1991) have posited that less training of expatriates such as language training may be appropriate where the expatriate comes from a culture that is similar to that of the host country.

Beside this, Cultural training helps individuals to adjust quicker to the new culture and to be more effective in their job performance in project implementation. Treven (2003) also believes that expatriate managers are more successful when they are provided with training,

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since lack of it may lead to failure in their project in a foreign country. Hence we predict that:

**Proposition 4.** *Providing training relates more positively to expatriate work adjustment and job performance.*

**D. Spouse and Children Adjustment:** Paying a significant attentions and support to expatriates families is essential for MNCs which leads to a better job performance. Well-adjusted spouse and children will influence expatriates in a positive manner with the facilitation of acculturation and adjustment procedure (McCaughey and Bruning, 2004). Expatriates may have apprehensions about whether their children`s education will have necessary continuity as well as how the family will adapt to customs of another culture. According to Tung (1987), managers indicated that the spouse`s inability to adjust was the number one reason for expatriate failure. The major concern for expatriates` decisions is their families. Often, it is the spouse normally takes on household responsibilities and child cares concerns, such that every element of which may require operating by new and different rules, different environment and life style. Spouse may be required to make the greatest degree of adjustments with little support from the organizations (McCaughey and Bruning, 2004).

The degree of spouse adjustment is the psychological tool to provide non-work related comfort for expatriates. In our research we will separate adjustment of expatriate from family or spouse adjustment. We will clearly observe each of them and check their consequences. The proposition relating to spouse adjustment is proposed below:

**Proposition 5.** *Expatriates` spouse and children adjustment will positively moderate the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and job performance.*

**Methodology:** This study was based on methodology of comparative case study design by using first hand data with qualitative data collection procedures.

The research setting of this study will be two companies in telecommunication industry: Nokia-Finland based Company and ZTE Chinese based Company. In this case study we tried to identify management styles of these MNCs towards expatriate performance in foreign country. We conducted interviews with twelve employees from both companies. During the interview we were able to record the answers and later on to analyze them in NVivo software.

We used descriptive research to systematically identify management traits that influence expatriate performance in MNCs. An attempt is used to determine how factors of expatriate management as training, cross-cultural motivation, cultural distance influenced to expatriate adjustment and performance in a new environment.

The qualitative research method is used because of its naturalistic approach to research findings. Researchers suggested that a phenomenological perspective identifies an emergent theme through constant comparison that we used in our methodology.

Qualitative research involves closeness with people in its natural state dealing with real situations as well as outline documentation based how research-based practices work.

Following these suggestions we compared our case studies expatriate management styles for their supports and performance in foreign country.

**Table-1:** Participants-expatriates from Case Companies

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Position	Months in Temporary Assignment	Years worked in Company
<b>Nokia Company</b>					
A	35	Indian	Senior Manager	60	7
B	40	Korean	Senior Manager	72	14
C	39	Finnish	Senior Manager	30	15
			Marketing		
D	35	Indian	Manager	23	5
E	32	Chinese	Designer	15	4
F	39	Indian	IT	18	9
				<b>218</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Total</b>					
<b>M</b>				<b>36.3</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>ZTE Company</b>					
G	45	Chinese	Technical Manager	84	9
			Technology		
H	37	Chinese	Manager	60	12
I	31	Chinese	Tech-Support	26	6
J	38	Indian	IT	35	8
K	42	Chinese	Market Developer	50	14
			Marketing		
L	27	Chinese	Manager	3	5
<b>Total</b>				<b>258</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>M</b>				<b>43</b>	<b>9</b>

**Measurements:** Six major themes had been captured in this as a) cross cultural motivation, b) organizational support, c) culture distance, d) training, e) job performance, f) spouse adjustment. These themes are from the highest responses emerging from the aggregation of nodes and represent the most common themes illustrating major factors contributed to the expatriate effective performance.

The analysis also identified one more theme that contributes to expatriate effective job performance in overseas assignment. This emerged theme is Personal trait for effectiveness, which consists of keys as flexibility, enthusiasm and passion. By using NVivo9 Word frequency query we identified that participants repeated several words frequently enough. This query helped us to identify the most important themes and new themes in research. Accordingly, participants from Nokia Company mostly discussed following themes during

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interview process:

**Table-2:** Nokia participants word frequency query

<b>Word</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Culture	7	50	1.34
Training	8	45	1.2
Support	7	39	1.04
Different	9	30	0.8
Assignment	10	22	0.59
People	6	20	0.53
Language	8	19	0.51
Motivation	10	17	0.45
Adjustment	10	15	0.4
Position	8	14	0.37
Skills	6	13	0.35
Career	6	11	0.29
Performance	11	10	0.27
Selection	9	10	0.27
Challenges	10	6	0.16
Enthusiasm	10	6	0.16

Themes that appeared to have less impact and less significance to the research purposes were discarded. If we look back to the Nokia's frequency words, we see that three themes as Culture, Training and Support are considered as important factors in expatriate management policy. Word frequency had been applied also for ZTE interviewees to compare expatriate opinions on specific theme in both Companies.

**Table-3:** ZTE participants word frequency query

<b>Word</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Culture	8	48	2.37
Support	7	28	1.38
Training	7	23	1.14
Skills	6	13	0.64
Challenges	10	11	0.54
Family	6	11	0.54
Motivation	10	10	0.49
Selection	9	10	0.49
Adjustment	10	9	0.44
Different	9	8	0.4
Language	8	8	0.4
Technical	9	7	0.35

Individualism	13	6	0.3
Career	6	5	0.25
Environment	11	5	0.25
Development	11	4	0.2

Data analysis process consisted of (a) organizing data, (b) transcribing interviews, (c) obtaining general sense of data and generating ideas, (d) analyzing data in NVivo9 (storing, organizing, coding, identifying themes), (e) interpreting data and (f) representing findings. Some of these frequent words match with research model’s dimensions that are considered as major themes and some of them match as subthemes to the research major themes. In this section research analyses are followed by analyses of major themes in support of literature and nodes that had been coded from data by using NVivo9 to find key words or subthemes to the main themes. Following are Themes from the coded data of Free Nodes and frequency that emerged from interview results:

**Table-4: Major Themes and New Theme**

Themes	New sub-themes
Culture	Company culture, different, culture awareness
Training	Pr-departure, post arrival, did not choose, recommend
Support	Housing, family, financial
Adjustment	Culture differences, communication, language
Motivation	Career, social status, interest, family support, financial
Selection	Skills, high qualification
Culture	Company culture, different, culture awareness
<b>New theme</b>	
Personality Traits for effectiveness	Enthusiasm, passion, flexibility

**Theme 7: Personality Traits for effectiveness:** The emerged new theme in this research is considered to be personality traits as the important factor that influences expatriate effective performance in overseas project implementation. Analyses of NVivo9 especially in coding the nodes section, helped to identify new sub-themes to this theme as enthusiasm and passion, flexibility that emerged from participants’ responses. Accordingly, 33% of participants considered personality traits is an important factor to be successful in overseas assignment.

Analyses of NVivo9 especially in coding the nodes section, helped to identify new sub-themes to this theme as enthusiasm and passion, flexibility that emerged from while analyzing participants’ responses. A significant finding of this theme is that majority of

research participants appear to have strong feeling and suggestion about relationship of personality traits as enthusiasm, passion and flexibility to expatriate effective performance. Hereby, researcher summarized that these new sub-themes that emerged from analyses as enthusiasm, passion and flexibility are considered as personality traits that contribute to expatriate work adjustment and job performance in overseas project implementations. Because in overseas assignment in MNCs, employees are from all over the world with different culture backgrounds and it is suggested from case participants to have strong passion and enthusiasm to cope with those challenges and need to have flexibility traits in order to be adaptable in upcoming situations. Accordingly, as mentioned in earlier steps of the research, 33% of participants considered personality traits as an important factor for expatriates to be successful in overseas assignment. Hence, findings supported to invent new strongly supported 5<sup>th</sup> proposition as:

**Proposition 6:** *“Personality traits of expatriate as enthusiasm, passion and flexibility positively relate to expatriate work adjustment and effective job performance”*

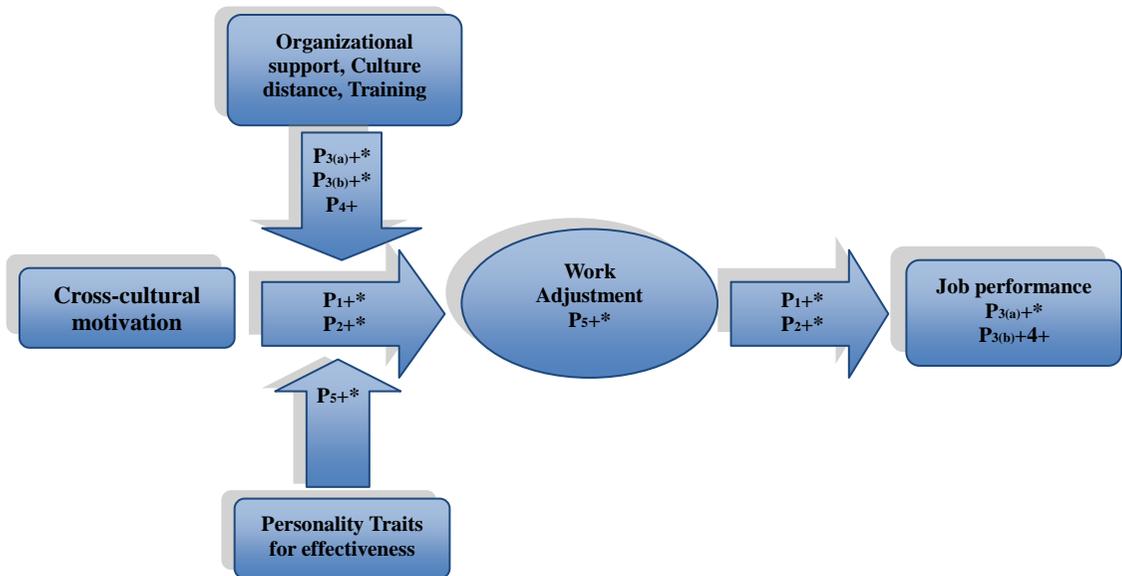
## **Results**

We proposed several propositions related to the theoretical expatriate management model, and further we sought to prove to what extent propositions are true and related to the theoretical model.

- (1) Expatriate cross-cultural motivation to be positively related and influenced to work adjustment and job performance of expatriates for effectively implementation of the project.
- (2) Expatriate work adjustment mediates the positive relationship between expatriate cross-cultural motivation and expatriate job performance.
- (3) a) Company's support moderates the positive relationship between expatriate work adjustment and effective performance.  
b) Cultural distance moderates better relationship between expatriate work adjustment and job performance in such way when cultural distance is lower, rather than higher.
- (4) Providing training relates more positively to expatriate work adjustment and job performance.
- (5) Expatriates' spouse and children adjustment will positively moderate the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and job performance.

**Figure-2:** below is the initial model with all the analyzed propositions that were proposed in earlier stages of the research.

**Figure-2: Model with analyses of proposed relationships**



**Source:** Based on participants' responses

**Note:**  $P^*$  – Strongly supported;  $P$  – supported

Overall, research propositions related to cross-cultural motivation, company support and culture distance were strongly supported by participants from both companies with different positions and points of view. Analyses results found other propositions as training significantly important. However, new proposition - personality trait was supported strongly to relate positively on adjustment and effective performance. None of the research propositions were found useless or denied, all the proposed relationships at least to some extents were significant to expatriate adjustment process and effective job performance in overseas project.

**Conclusion:** This study aimed to find out how to manage expatriates in MNCs in order to implement effectively overseas projects. An attempt to contribute to literature with new model and analyzing propositions related to expatriate work adjustment and job performance. The study significantly supported all of our propositions, advancing our understanding between expatriates work adjustment and job performance. Relatively, propositions have been strongly and significantly supported. According to interview results, frequent challenges that expatriates faced in overseas assignment were related to lack of support, culture differences and cultural gaps. Hence, in order to manage expatriates in MNCs in such a way so that they could adjust easily, cope with challenges and perform effectively, companies need to first of all motivate, support

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and provide cross-cultural training to sensitize expatriates to values, norms and beliefs of host culture in initial stages of assignment.

Comparative case study design was used by selecting two companies in telecommunication industry: Nokia and ZTE. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between five stage model's concepts: cross cultural motivation, subsidiary support, cultural distance, selection, training and spouse adjustment for the expatriate's effective job performance in project implementation.

Qualitative approach was taken in order to gather first hand data from expatriates who currently worked in these companies. From both companies totally twelve expatriates were selected as a research participants. Accordingly, the data was analyzed in a proper way by using NVivo9 software. The software offered a complete toolkit for rapid coding, thorough exploration, and rigorous management and analysis of data. Based on the software analyses, researcher developed a new theme called personality traits for effectiveness to the multi-level model, which is proposed to be as an important factor for expatriate effective performance in overseas assignment. Hereby, following new theme, researchers developed new proposition: "personality trait for effectiveness positively relates to adjustment and job performance when candidate has more traits based on enthusiasm, passion and flexibility". Earlier propositions had been significantly supported and some of them were supported to some extent. The results supported that in order to implement overseas projects successfully, companies need to select those candidates who have personality traits as enthusiasm, passion and flexibility.

Research findings-"personality traits" that added new value to literature as innovative aspect of this study, lead to conclude that for managing expatriates in MNCs, managers need to first of all select the right person with personality traits as enthusiasm, passion to the new project, flexibility in upcoming challenges, secondly, motivate expatriates by providing family support and opportunity for future career development.

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