

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ON JOB PERFORMANCE OF SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES WITH ORIGINS FROM CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The current empirical study observes the impact of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Cross-Cultural Adjustment (CCA) on Job Performance (JP) particularly Task Performance (TP) and Contextual Performance (CP) of Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIE) located in Central-Eastern Europe countries. The PLS SEM technique was implemented to analyze the data from a survey of 314 self-initiated expatriates. The findings showed that Emotional Intelligence has a strong impact on CCA and Task Performance. As to CCA it has an influence on contextual performance. Considering that there have been few empirical investigations on the influence of Emotional Intelligence and cross-cultural adjustment on job performance of self-initiated expatriates, the insights gained from current study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of expatriate research, particularly in the areas of international human resource management and cross-cultural management. The practical significance of the findings will be valuable to HR professionals and multinational companies, especially in the area of expatriate selection, recruitment, and intercultural training and development.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; cross-cultural adjustment; self-initiated expatriates; job performance

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has affected not only the economy and international trade but has also caused labor mobility and international migration to rise, which has contributed to the transformation of global careers and the emergence of transnational forms of human capital. As a result, it has caused a flow of human capital between developing and developed

countries (Baruch et al., 2013; Dickmann et al., 2018), which might explain the increase of international migration that reached 3.6% of the worldwide population in 2020 (United Nations, 2021).

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are Central Asian countries that were members of the former Soviet Union before declaring independence in 1991. Migration has always been a part of the

history of Central Asians, including internal and external, voluntary and forced, illegal and legal, temporary and permanent, and commercially and ethnically motivated migration (Lipkova et al., 2020; Schmidt & Sagynbekova, 2008). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, international migration has increased significantly (Myrzakhmetova & Aitbaev, 2016). Today, approximately one-third of Kyrgyzstan's employable population works overseas. The main destinations are the United States, Western and Central Europe, and CIS countries. According to reports, economic factors were the primary determinants of migration decisions. Low earnings and a lack of employment possibilities in Kyrgyzstan were the most often stated push factors (International Organization for Migration, 2021). There was a shortage of skilled personnel in the Kazakhstan labor market as well. Highly qualified professionals have been drawn to foreign nations since 2015 (Arbashiyeva & Spanov, 2022).

Talent management of self-initiated expatriates (SIE) has recently received increased attention as recruiting SIEs has become an increasingly appealing approach to solving the worldwide lack of skilled personnel (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Vaiman et al., 2015). However, previous studies were focused mainly on SIEs from developed countries (Fu et al., 2017; Kumar & Chhokar, 2019), although expatriates from developing countries are an alternative to traditional expatriates, thus enriching the pool of transnational human resources (Furusawa & Brewster, 2019; Luring & Selmer, 2018). And, despite the fact that SIEs have been studied from a variety of geographic locations: United States, Canada, Australia, England, South Africa, New Zealand, Singapore and Belgium (Huff et al., 2014); Portugal (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2019); France, Germany, Korea (Waxin, 2004); South Korea (Froese, 2012); Germany, Western China (Cao et al., 2014); UAE (Hussain & Deery, 2018), empirical studies on SIEs from Central Asia countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan are extremely rare. Moreover, empirical studies on the relationship between EI, CCA and JP were mainly addressed to assigned expatriates. However, self-initiated expatriation, in which a person finds work outside of one's own home-country, is a topic of comparable importance (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Khedher & Asadullah, 2019) since they contribute significantly to the international talent pool (Al

Ariss, 2010; Collings & Isichei, 2018; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Vaiman et al., 2015).

The current study intends to investigate relationships between Emotional Intelligence (EI), Cross-Cultural adjustment (CCA), and Job Performance (JP), particularly task and contextual performance of self-initiated expatriates (SIE), from Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan). The present study will answer the following research questions: What is the relationship between EI and CCA of SIEs? What is the relationship between emotional intelligence, task performance, and contextual performance? What is the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment, task performance, and contextual performance of SIEs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Living in a country that is distinct from one's home country regionally, socially, and culturally can be tough for expatriates, particularly when there are notable differences between the home and host countries (Baruch et al., 2013; Dickmann et al., 2018) from a socio-cultural perspective (Konanahalli & Oyedele, 2016a). Despite the fact that SIEs relocate on their own, study the area prior to departure, and find jobs in advance, they nevertheless face challenges when engaging with the new environment, locals, and working conditions. In addition, they don't have any pre-departure preparation (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Presbitero, 2020) compared to assigned expatriates. (Baruch & Altman, 2002). As a result, some expatriates endure failure and unsatisfying work when working and living overseas, which is mainly due to challenges in adapting to a different cultural context (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Hussain & Deery, 2018). Scholars found that one of the reasons for expatriates' failure is difficulty in adjusting to a new cultural environment, and stated that maladapted persons endure significant levels of psychological stress and helplessness as a result of the transition to a new location. Therefore, SIEs may not be able to perform at their full ability, resulting in lower levels of job performance (Kraimer et al., 2001). On the contrary, well-adjusted SIEs are less stressed, more engaged, excited about their work, and wholly immersed in it; they believe they are attuned to the culture of the host nation, both at work and in other areas; and they tend to perform better, leading to higher performance

(Jyoti & Kour, 2017).

When people move to a different culture, they typically face stress because the rules and behaviors are foreign and unclear (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Bhaskaran & Jubi, 2014; Hoffman & Sergio, 2020). Furthermore, some researchers admit that cultural differences can cause misunderstandings as each culture expresses its emotions differently (Marsh et al., 2003). Emotional intelligence helps cope with different challenging situations they may experience in a new environment by encouraging the accurate expression and control of emotions, preventing confrontations and labelling when forming judgments on the host country's culturally unfamiliar settings (Gullekson & Vancouver, 2010; Konanahalli & Oyedele, 2016b; Kumar, Rose, & Ramalu, 2008; Lin et al., 2012; Wechtler et al., 2017); to better understand others' differences and forecast the implications of their actions on others (Zakaria, 2019); to adjust to new work and nonwork environments; and to interact better with others and be more social (Koveshnikov et al., 2014; Ling, 2019; Shaffer et al., 2006). Furthermore, researchers found that EI directly influences CCA (Liao et al., 2021).

EI was found to be a key factor in improving job performance among various factors that influence expatriates' job performance (Bhatti et al., 2014; Luring & Selmer, 2018; Law et al., 2008a). EI helps individuals perform better at work by helping to control their emotions, manage stress and conflict situations, interact better with colleagues (Brackett et al., 2011; Mochalov & Furmanova, 2014; Gullekson & Dumaisnil, 2016; Luring & Selmer, 2018); collaborate effectively in team (Lopes et al., 2006) as well as ensure high performance even under pressure by adjusting to organizational change (Shamsuddin & Rahman, 2014). Moreover empirical studies (Aqqad et al., 2019; Joseph et al., 2015) of the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance have confirmed the impact of EI on job performance.

Among the different factors that influence expatriates' job performance, CCA has been found to be a crucial determinant of JP (Bhatti et al., 2013; Ramalu et al., 2011; Lee & Sukoco, 2010). Expatriates must adjust to employment, the host environment, and interactions with local individuals after they arrive in a new environment (Black & Porter, 1991). "Success" of

expatriates has been investigated using notions such as expatriate adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999) since unadjusted expatriates are less productive at work (Black, 1988; Caligiuri, 1997). Meanwhile, expatriates who adjust well to work and to the general environment will more effectively perform at work, as when stressed by the difficulties related to learning organizational roles or facing difficulties in day-to-day life, the expatriate may experience psychological stress, which can lead to a decrease in productivity (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Kraimer et al., 2001). In addition, a research (Shi & Franklin, 2014) of more than 800 business expatriates sent to and from China showed a relationship between job performance and cross-cultural adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in 2021 with an initial cohort of 314 respondents. Most of the respondents (almost 75%) filled out the questionnaire in English; the percentage of female respondents ($\approx 52\%$) is slightly higher than males. The high proportion of self-initiated expatriates who participated in the survey is younger than 35.

Table 11. Gender, Age, Marital Status

Gender	N	%
Female	163	51.91
Male	151	48.09
Age		
18-25	64	20.38
26-30	113	35.99
31-36	89	28.34
more than 36	48	15.29
Marital Status		
Divorced	21	6.69
In a relationship	72	22.93
Married	104	33.12
Single	114	36.31
Widowed	3	0.96

Source: Author's editing

Almost half of them ($\approx 49\%$) hold a master's degree. About 81% of all respondents are from Kyrgyzstan; Kazakhstan is the homeland of more than 9% of respondents. All respondents filled out

the same questionnaire. Less than half of respondents (36.62%) stayed abroad from one to 3 years, 33.12 % of respondents stayed more than 5 years, 28.03 % of respondents stayed between 3 -5 years, and minor part of respondents stayed abroad for less than 1 year. Close to half of respondents (44,27%) have 1-3 years of international work experience. Just over one third of respondents (33.12%) have 4 and more years of international work experience.

Table2. Education level

Education level	N	%
Bachelor's degree	51	16.24
Doctoral	24	7.64
Master's degree	154	49.04
Professional qualification	85	27.07
Length of stay abroad	N	%
Duration		
1-3	115	36.62%
3-5	88	28.03%
Less than 1 year	6	1.91%
More than 5 years	104	33.12%
No answer	1	0.32%

Source: Author's finding.

In order to be confident about the self-initiative characteristic of the surveyed expatriates the author asked respondents the following screening question: "Have you acquired the current job independently?" (self-initiated). The mentioned question was adapted from the study of Selmer and Luring (2009). Previous studies (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Doherty et al., 2011; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) also used similar targeted strategies to reach relevant targets. All the respondents answered positively to the question.

Emotional Intelligence was measured by applying the 16-item scale of EI proposed by Wong and Law (2002) that was created with the purpose of being used in a work environment (Bozionelos & Singh, 2017). The model has been widely used by scholars (Law et al., 2008b; Shih & Susanto, 2010; Sy et al., 2006).

14 items were used to measure Cross-Cultural Adjustment, which were developed by Black

(1988). Previous studies (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Palthe, 2004) claim that Black's model has become a basis for many researches about cross-cultural adjustment and it has been accepted by most scholars conducting research in this field.

The job performance scale offered by Black and Porter (1991) complies with the purpose of the current research. The scale measures expatriates' job performance from two different perspectives (i.e., Task and Contextual Performance) and consists of 7 items. Previous studies (Bastida, 2018; Takeuchi et al., 2019) analyzing expatriates widely (Carmeli, 2003; Lee et al., 2013; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Ramalu et al., 2011) used the same scale for measuring Performance. Respondents' attitudes towards assumptions covering different aspects of EI, CCA and JP are measured using a 7-points Likert scale.

The following hypotheses were developed before we evaluated the responses:

H1: Emotional Intelligence has a significant positive influence on Cross-Cultural Adjustment.

H2: Emotional Intelligence has a significant positive influence on Task Performance.

H3: Emotional Intelligence has a significant positive influence on Contextual Performance.

H4: Cross-Cultural Adjustment has a significant positive influence on Task Performance.

H5: Cross-Cultural Adjustment has a significant positive influence on Contextual Performance.

The correlation between the variables was examined using the Pearson correlation matrix. Given that Pearson's correlation coefficients ranged from 0.223 to 0.620 at the two-tailed significance level of 0.01, the findings of our investigation verified that the dataset did not have the multicollinearity problem. In Table 3, the values of the Pearson's correlation coefficients between each variable and the dependent variable are provided.

Table 3: Hypothesized relationships

Variables	SEA	OEA	UOE	ROE	GA	SA	WA	TP	CP
SEA	1								
OEA	,560**	1							
UOE	,454**	,457**	1						
ROE	,453**	,464**	,619**	1					
GA	,183**	,184**	,155**	,162**	1				
SA	.079	.078	.093	.090	,598**	1			
WA	,130*	,191**	,223**	,213**	,641**	,620**	1		
TP	,304**	,289**	,295**	,294**	,124*	,149**	,244**	1	
CP	,320**	,268**	,242**	,277**	,171**	,187**	,265**	,880**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The proposed relationships were tested using the Partial Least Squares estimation technique of SmartPLS 3.0 software (Ringle et al., 2015). The hypotheses illustrate the relationships between Emotional Intelligence and Cross-Cultural

Adjustment as well as Task and Contextual Performance of self-initiated expatriates. The relationships proposed between variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 4: Hypothesized relationships

Relationships	β	Standard Deviation	T-Value	P-Value
H1. Emotional Intelligence → Cross-Cultural Adjustment	0.374	0.047	8.013	< 0.001
H2. Emotional Intelligence → Task Performance	0.372	0.106	3.509	< 0.001
H3. Emotional Intelligence → Contextual Performance	0.334	0.112	2.990	0.003
H4. Cross-Cultural Adjustment → Task Performance	0.162	0.055	2.940	0.003
H5. Cross-Cultural Adjustment → Contextual Performance	0.209	0.058	3.617	< 0.001

Source: Author's finding.

H1 defines whether EI has an impact on CCA. The results of the statistical analyses illustrate that there is a significantly strong influence of EI on CCA ($\beta=0.374$; $t=8.013$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The results of the statistical analyses show that there is a significantly strong influence of EI on TP ($\beta=0.372$; $t=3.509$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted.

The statistical analyses demonstrate that EI has effect on CP ($\beta=0.372$; $t=2.990$; $p = 0.003$). However, the author sets a threshold of $p < 0.001$ for significantly strong influence. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is rejected. In terms of the impact of CCA on TP, it was discovered that CCA

influences TP ($\beta=0.162$; $t=2.940$; $p = 0.003$). However, the author sets the threshold of $p < 0.001$ for significantly strong influence. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is not accepted. The statistical analyses show that CCA has significant and positive influence on CP ($\beta=0.209$; $t=3.617$; $p < 0.001$). The path coefficient is significant. Therefore, H5 is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The present empirical study was designed to investigate the relationships between Emotional Intelligence, Cross-cultural Adjustment, and Performance-related variables (i.e., Task and

Contextual Performance) of self-initiated expatriates from Central Asia Countries (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). Results of the current research demonstrated that Emotional Intelligence has a significantly strong influence on surveyed self-initiated expats' Cross-Cultural Adjustment in the examined sample. Thus, high EI may help self-initiated expatriates adapt better in a new environment, location. Our findings broadly support the work of previous studies (Koveshnikov et al., 2014; Wechtler et al., 2015) in this area, which found that Emotional intelligence directly influences cross-cultural adjustment (Liao et al., 2021), and confirms the argument that EI is a significant predictor of CCA (Dinglasa, 2020; Gabel et al., 2005).

It was found that there was a significantly strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Task Performance. As task performance includes core technical behaviors and activities related to the job (Griffin et al., 2000), it is encouraging to compare these findings with findings obtained in other studies (Aqqad et al., 2019; Bozionelos & Singh, 2017; Carmeli, 2003), which explored that EI has a relationship with task performance. Moreover, our results corroborate the idea of previous research (Schutte et al., 2001), which suggests that people with high emotional intelligence can approach tasks with more enthusiasm, which leads to increased self-efficacy and motivation. Furthermore, people with higher emotional intelligence may have a more favorable attitude, which may create the best conditions for productivity. So, this study concludes that emotional intelligence acts as a predictor of task performance.

As far as the relationship between emotional intelligence and contextual performance is concerned, previous research indicates that EI is a predictor of job performance and has relationship between EI and contextual performance (Aykan, 2014; Carmeli, 2003; Cichy et al., 2009; Saeid et al., 2010). Although the current study could not find a strong influence of Emotional Intelligence on surveyed expats' Contextual Performance because in the current research, a conservative significance approach was applied, it might be considered that our results are in line with previous studies. Previous studies attempted to find a significant relationship between two variables, whereas this study focused on a strong significant

relationship. However, findings from current research might be explained by the fact that contextual activities go beyond formal role requirements and are based on the decision of a person to participate or not to participate in contextual activities (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997), and that person's decision depends on individual differences. Moreover, as the task becomes more complex, the individual can direct their resources to the task performance, thereby participating less in contextual activities.

The results of the current study did not reveal any significant strong influence of CCA on surveyed expats' TP in the examined sample. Although the current study could not find a strong influence of CCA on surveyed expats' TP because in the current research a conservative significance approach was applied, it might be considered that our results are in line with previous studies. Previous studies attempted to find a significant relationship between two variables, whereas the current study focused on a strong significant relationship. Therefore, it can be said that the results of this study are in line with previous studies (Kraimer et al., 2001; Zakariya et al., 2019) which found a positive relationship between adjustment and job performance. Furthermore, despite the lack of a strong relationship between the two variables, the results of gender-based differences on CCA revealed that there is a significant influence of gender on cross-cultural adjustment, as the mean comparison tests showed that females show more inclination towards cross-cultural adjustment. Considering that the current study was female dominated (51.8 percent of respondents were female), it can be concluded that there could be a gender-based impact on the relationship between CCA and TP.

Another important finding was that CCA has a significantly strong influence on surveyed expats' CP in the examined sample. A comparison of the findings with those of other studies (Kraimer et al., 2001; Zakariya et al., 2019) confirms the relationship between CCA and expatriate CP. This significantly strong relationship may be explained by the fact that, as former Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan inherited collectivism. Collectivist societies are characterized by a strong sense of belonging to a group. They may rely on members of their group in times of need and, in turn, support those people allocated to their group.

Hence, CCA can lead to increased contextual performance of the expatriates. Moreover, similar to the results of this study, some researchers (Côté, 2014; Singh et al., 2021; Trubisky et al., 1991) suggest that people in collectivistic cultures value social interaction, and in conflict management, a harmony-inducing approach is preferable (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The influence of SIEs on the global workforce is substantial: nearly half to three-quarters of the global expatriate population are self-initiated. However, expatriates may find it difficult to live in nations that are physically and socially diverse from their home countries, particularly when there are significant socio-cultural disparities between the host and home countries. SIEs encounter obstacles while interacting with the new environment, locals, and working circumstances, despite the fact that they migrate on their own, study the place before leaving, and obtain employment in preparation. Consequently, expatriates may experience setbacks and underperformance while living and working abroad due to adjusting issues to a new environment. Furthermore, a new job environment or building relationships in a work environment may cause stress, which in turn affects performance negatively. The findings of our study revealed that Emotional Intelligence helps to better adjust to new cultural environments, and improve task performance. Moreover, cross-cultural adjustment helps to increase the contextual performance of SIE, which enhances knowledge and provides a deeper insight into the importance of emotional intelligence in cross-cultural adjustment, task performance, and CCA on the contextual performance of self-initiated expatriates by providing a piece of convincing empirical evidence.

The findings of the current study will benefit the knowledge base in the field of self-initiated expatriate research, particularly in the fields of cross-cultural management and international human resource management. As to practical benefits, the findings will be useful to HR managers, international companies, and expatriate firms by emphasizing the critical components of SIE job performance: task and contextual performance, especially in the area of expatriate recruitment, selection, and

placement; and intercultural training and development. Therefore, besides the contribution to theoretical development, the useful findings produced can be consumed in developing relevant policies and making recruitment and training options better. Furthermore, the research results suggest that SIEs should consider the importance of EI and CCA for their job performance. Furthermore, the findings of the present study can be used to predict and understand the effectiveness of self-initiated expatriates whose origins are from Central Asian countries (specifically Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). Finally, these empirical results also contribute to the base of knowledge in terms of contextual and task performance, in studies on cross-cultural management of self-initiated expatriates from Central Asian countries (specifically Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). Further research regarding the difference between expatriates in a country group would be worthwhile.

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