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Author(s): Daniel C. Feldman and David C. Thomas

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CAREER MANAGEMENT ISSUES FACING EXPATRIATES

Daniel C. Feldman* and David C. Thomas**
University of South Carolina

Abstract. This research explores expatriate assignments from a career development perspective. First, the article examines the impact of five organization-level career development programs and policies on expatriate effectiveness. Then, it explores the impact of five individual-level career management strategies on the success of expatriate transitions. Data from 118 expatriates in Saudi Arabia, Europe, South America, and Japan are presented to examine these career development issues.

Over the past twenty years, international job assignments have been increasingly used for a variety of organizational purposes—to solve staffing shortages, to exert control in overseas subsidiaries, and to develop management talent [Kobrin 1988; Edstrom and Galbraith 1977]. This enthusiasm for the use of expatriates, however, has been tempered somewhat by the difficulties associated with the premature departure of expatriates from their overseas assignments [Black and Mendenhall 1990; Zeira and Banai 1985], and by the difficulties associated with retaining and effectively utilizing expatriates upon their return [Sievking, Anchor and Marston 1981; Harvey 1983; Murray and Murray 1986; Tung 1984, 1988].

While the expatriate literature has extensively examined the factors that influence expatriates' work and social adjustment to their jobs (e.g., Black, Mendenhall and Oddou [1991]; Black [1988]), the relationship between the expatriate's job assignment and overall career path has not been widely studied. As Mendenhall, Dunbar and Oddou [1987] note in their recent review, very few empirical studies have been conducted on expatriation and career development. Indeed, their review notes that the overseas assignment is often a "haphazard, ill-planned affair" that all too frequently leads to poor job performance and job displacement. The careers literature suggests

*Daniel C. Feldman (Ph.D., Yale University) is Professor of Management and Business Partnership Foundation Fellow at the University of South Carolina College of Business Administration.

**David C. Thomas is a doctoral student in organizational behavior and international business at the University of South Carolina College of Business Administration.

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several reasons why international job changes are especially difficult for expatriates, are distinctive from other types of geographical relocations, and are worthy of special concern and attention.

First, Schein's [1971] work on career movement suggests that expatriates might have a more difficult time crossing the "inclusionary boundary" in organizations. This inclusionary boundary refers to a manager's position in the informal information and influence networks. The expatriate is in a foreign country and is on the periphery culturally as well as organizationally. In addition, all foreign cultures have different norms about openness to outsiders and willingness to trust newcomers. Thus, the informal information that is most critical in helping newcomers adjust may be the information least likely to be given readily to expatriate managers.

Second, Louis's work [1980] on organizational entry suggests that the changes, contrasts, and surprises of international moves may be distinctly more dramatic than those facing domestic job changers; they may be not simply ones of degree, but of type. Moreover, Louis notes that newcomers need to make sense of the new setting; they need to use other "locals" to help them understand and make attributions about the changes, contrasts, and surprises they find in their new environments. However, expatriates are faced with the special difficulty of sharing neither the same culture nor the same job experiences as co-workers; the frameworks for even detecting and interpreting the differences are dissimilar. These differences may make the international career transition even more difficult to achieve.

Third, Nicholson and West's [1989] work on career transitions makes salient the point that expatriates can be expected to need substantially longer periods of preparation for their new jobs than other job changers, and that their "encounters" with their new assignments and cultures can be expected to be more disruptive. Moreover, the literature on repatriates suggests that the transition-back stage is also more difficult for international job changers than for domestic job changers. Many repatriates who return report feeling disoriented with communities, co-workers, and friends as they flounder about waiting to be permanently placed on new assignments [Carter 1989; Harvey 1983, 1989].

In exploring expatriate moves from a careers perspective, then, there are three key questions that need to be addressed. First, what *organizational* career development programs and policies facilitate the career growth of expatriates? While the expatriate literature has certainly documented the factors that contribute to employee adjustment in the short run, there has been less attention paid to the longer term issues surrounding the relationship of the expatriate assignment to the overall career plan and future career opportunities. Moreover, while the expatriate literature has focused quite heavily on the pre-departure selection and training of expatriates, much less attention has been given to the management of expatriates' careers after their arrival overseas.

Second, what *individual* career management strategies are most effective in helping expatriates cope constructively with the challenges of international job assignments? While the expatriate literature has focused quite extensively on the types of assistance organizations can provide expatriates, much less attention has been paid to what expatriates themselves can do to better manage their own career transitions. The careers literature suggests that expatriates can be active participants in their own adjustment and not just passive recipients of corporate assistance, and that efforts on their own behalf may be as critical to their success as the guidance they receive from their employers.

Third, what are the *criteria* that should be used to assess the effectiveness of an expatriate move in terms of career development? Consistent with the career development perspective of this study, the criteria for an effective transition include not only variables concerned with adjustment to job change and culture change, but also variables associated with the development of skills and competencies needed for future assignments. The theme that runs throughout these “multiple adjustment processes” is the reduction of uncertainty (and corresponding gain in control) that expatriates experience as they make their transitions across jobs, cultures, and career paths [Brett and Werbel 1980; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991]. We consider each of these issues in more detail below.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

A great deal of the recent research on expatriates has focused on their adjustment to their new job assignments. Drawing heavily upon the literature on organizational socialization (e.g., Schein [1971]; Feldman [1976], [1981]; Louis [1980]) and on sojourner adjustment [Brien and David 1971], this research has examined the issues most salient in these areas, namely, anticipatory socialization and entry shock. For instance, this research has looked at such issues as selecting expatriates for their relational as well as technical skills, pre-departure training for or prior experience with the foreign language and culture, assistance for the spouse and children, and relocation assistance (e.g., Black and Stephens [1989]; Harris [1989]; Mendenhall and Oddou [1985]; Mendenhall, Dunbar and Oddou [1987]).

The careers literature, too, has been concerned with employee adjustment to job changes (e.g., Feldman and Brett [1983]; Pinder and Schroeder [1987]). More centrally, though, it has also been concerned with the relationships between consecutive job assignments and the sequencing of those assignments—how much one job assignment develops the skills and competencies needed on the next assignment, how job changers are prepared and trained for their job transitions, and so forth. A review of the careers literature (e.g., Feldman [1988]; Wanous [1980]; Hall [1976]) suggests that there are at least five organizational strategies that can facilitate (or impede) expatriates’ success during their job transitions.

First, there is the issue of free choice. The careers literature suggest that job changers who feel coerced into taking transfers and promotions against their will or because of implicit threats of being “dead-ended” will have more negative attitudes toward, and more trouble adjusting to, their new job assignments [Black and Stephens 1989]. Moreover, the research on domestic transfers suggests that there are very few couples who are unwilling to relocate at all, but who may not be able to move to a particular location at a given time [Brett and Werbel 1980]. Theoretically, giving employees free choice over whether to accept expatriate assignments should allow unwilling expatriates to self-select out from undesired assignments, and to increase the willingness of those expatriates who do self-select in to persevere through the inevitable problems that foreign relocation entails.

H1: Expatriates who perceive they have free choice over whether to accept their overseas assignments are more likely to have successful expatriate assignments.

Second, the careers research suggests that realistic job previews play a major role in job transitions [Wanous 1980], i.e., that managers who have unrealistic expectations about their lives overseas will have more problems adjusting and coping with the difficulties of international assignments. The research on realistic job previews suggests that they serve to deflate falsely high attitudes before departure and “vaccinate” expatriates against being overly discouraged by initial disappointments.

H2: Expatriates who experience realistic job previews are more likely to have successful expatriate assignments.

Third, expatriates often have strong concerns about their ability to get a desirable repatriate assignment upon their return [Feldman 1991; Kendall 1981; Salzman 1986]. A major career development issue for managers making international career moves is whether they will be put in “holding patterns” while they are away [Murray 1973]. There seem to be at least two major reasons for these holding patterns: lack of adequate succession planning [Greenberger 1982] and uncertainty about the length of the overseas stay of the expatriate [Harvey 1983, 1989]. Moreover, many expatriates return only to find jobs that do not utilize the skills and experiences they acquired overseas on their next assignment [Tung 1984]. Thus, planning for the repatriate career move is a very important element in the transition planning for expatriates [Dotlich 1982].

H3: Expatriates who know what their repatriate assignments will be are more likely to have successful expatriate assignments.

Fourth, much of the recent careers research (e.g., Kram [1985]) suggests that having a mentor in the home office can be beneficial in terms of receiving social support, protecting the expatriate’s interests while he/she is gone, and scouting out potentially desirable repatriate assignments. Thus,

the careers research suggests having a mentor or advocate back home can increase the likelihood the expatriate's career goals and plans will not fall through the cracks in his/her absence [Harris 1989].

H4: Expatriates who have a mentor or advocate back home are more likely to have successful expatriate assignments.

Fifth, the careers literature suggests that the relationship between a job change and the manager's long-term career plans plays a critical role in career development [Brett and Werbel 1980]. If job changers see a connection between their current assignments and their longer term career paths, they may be more likely to invest the time, energy, and commitment to make their overseas tours of duty successful. Indeed, the importance of this issue is highlighted by recent studies suggesting that as few as 4% of the companies surveyed felt that an overseas assignment has a positive effect on a manager's long-term career [Harris 1989].

H5: Expatriates who see a strong connection between their overseas assignments and their longer term career paths are more likely to have successful expatriate assignments.

These five organizational career development strategies, then, should facilitate transitions expatriates make from domestic to foreign assignments. In the next section, we explore the expatriate career development problem from the individual employee's perspective.

INDIVIDUAL CAREER MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The research on the careers of expatriates has certainly documented that international job changes are stressful. However, much of this research has implicitly used what Jahoda [1982] calls "the deprivation model." Job transitions are assumed to have negative psychological consequences; moreover, employees are treated as relatively passive agents over whom events unfold. The issue of what expatriates *themselves* do to manage their careers while they are overseas has not been frequently raised or addressed. The careers literature gives us a framework for better understanding the coping behaviors expatriates use on their new assignments, and the relative effectiveness of those coping behaviors.

The stress and coping literature has generally made a distinction between two broad types of career self-management strategies: problem-focused coping and symptom-focused coping [Folkman and Lazarus 1980]. Problem-focused coping includes behaviors used to take advantage of opportunities in the new environment or to avoid threats in the new setting (e.g., getting task help), while symptom-focused coping refers to efforts to emotionally distort or block out the threatening stimuli (e.g., psychological withdrawal). In the research on employees making geographical transfers and/or getting promoted, for instance, researchers have found that problem-focused coping

facilitates worker adjustment more than symptom-focused coping [Feldman and Brett 1983; Brett, Feldman and Weingart 1990]. Problem-focused coping should more directly change the environment to make it more benevolent to expatriates, while symptom-focused coping should decrease expatriates' abilities and energies for correctly diagnosing and fixing major problems.

In this research, we examine five different types of individual career self-management coping behaviors, ranging from the very problem-focused to the very symptom-focused. These strategies are analogous to those identified by Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis and Gruen [1986] in their study of coping:

1. active attempts to get task help;
2. active attempts to get socially integrated into the new work environment;
3. psychological reappraisal, i.e., trying to see the more positive side of problems and then taking advantage of the benefits the job does offer;
4. psychological withdrawal, i.e., trying to focus on the temporariness of the assignment or trying to insulate one's self from the foreignness of the experience as much as possible;
5. palliative coping, i.e., eating, drinking, smoking, and sleeping more than usual to deaden the intensity of one's feelings.

Given that the more problem-focused the career management coping strategy is, the more effective the career transition should be, we would make the following hypotheses:

- H6: Getting task help, getting socially integrated into the new work environment, and using psychological reappraisal will be positively related to success on the expatriate assignment.
- H7: Engaging in psychological withdrawal and using palliative coping will be inversely related to success on the expatriate assignment.

Criteria of Effective Expatriate Assignments

As noted earlier, while several of the typical job adjustment variables used in the organizational socialization literature are relevant here [Van Maanen 1976], the nature of expatriate moves requires consideration of some additional outcome variables as well. Success on expatriate assignments requires adjustment to new cultures as well as to new tasks and new steps in career paths [Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991]; thus, variables associated with these "multiple adjustment processes" are also included in the study [Feldman 1981].

One of the distinctive features of the expatriation experience is the need to meet conflicting performance expectations of home office superiors and host national superiors [Mendenhall and Oddou 1988]. Corporate headquarters personnel often rely on global types of performance indicators such as return

on investment, cashflow, and marketshare; however, factors such as the devaluation of the domestic currency, inflation, and local labor unrest can lead to widely disparate views of the expatriate's performance. Thus, performing at the level of quality and quantity expected by both sets of superiors is critical in terms of obtaining desirable career assignments in the future.

The second criterion explored in this study is the ability to develop constructive relationships with host national colleagues. A major career development goal of expatriate moves is the development of a manager's ability to direct a culturally diverse workforce, and the enhancement of a manager's ability to interact successfully with foreign nationals [Tung 1984, 1988].

A third, and related, criterion is the enhancement of the expatriate's work-related skills, especially in terms of understanding the interdependencies among the firm's domestic and international operations [Savich and Rodgers 1988]. For organizations to justify the expense of using overseas expatriates instead of host nationals, and for expatriates to feel their overseas assignments are worth the disruption caused, expatriates should be developing unique skills overseas they could not develop at home.

Probably the most frequently used criterion of effective expatriation is the intent to remain the originally agreed upon length of assignments [Black and Gregersen 1990; Feldman 1991], and that is the fourth criterion employed here. Because the costs of aborted expatriation assignments are high, both in terms of financial burdens to the organization and potential career plateauing to the individual [Kobrin 1988], being able to persevere the original length of the tour of duty is an important career development concern to organizations and employers alike.

Consistent with the socialization literature, a successful expatriate experience also entails the expatriate having positive job attitudes towards the new assignment in terms of job satisfaction, internal work motivation, and feelings of influence and mastery over the new environment [Feldman 1988]. In terms of career development, this fifth criterion of positive job attitudes should lead to greater feelings of attachment to the job and the organization, a greater commitment to work through the inevitable problems of international moves, and a greater willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure task success. In this study, we will be examining three attitudes, in particular, that the careers literature has identified as being indicators of adjustment: job satisfaction [Hackman and Oldham 1976]; internal work motivation [Pinder and Schroeder 1987]; and mutual influence [Feldman 1976].

Lastly, many expatriates experience very high levels of stress from adjusting to new jobs, communities, co-workers, and friends, as well as coping with the dislocations spouses and children feel in their new environments [Stewart 1982]. Moreover, expatriates typically experience the highest levels of stress in the "encounter stage" of the transition [Nicholson and West 1989],

when the need to learn at work and to cope with family pressures at home are greatest. Thus, the sixth criterion used here is stress levels sufficiently moderate so that job changers can sustain satisfactory job performance, job attitudes, and membership in the organization [Harris 1989; Feldman and Brett 1983].

Thus, in exploring the impact of the five organizational career development practices and the five individual career management strategies, we will be looking at the relationships of these variables with the outcome variables identified above.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

All participants in the study were expatriates currently working outside of their home country. Respondents were sent surveys through the mail with stamped, self-addressed envelopes for return. Participants were not asked for any specific identifying information or their names; participation was voluntary. Of the 297 surveys mailed, 123 were returned; 118 were usable, for a response rate of 40%.

Data were collected from three groups of expatriates. The first group of research participants were expatriates in Saudi Arabia; participants' names were drawn randomly from the membership list of the local expatriate association. The second group of research participants were expatriates in Japan; here, as well, participants' names were drawn randomly from the membership list of the local expatriate association. The third group of research participants were expatriate employees of one *Fortune* 100 multinational corporation; the names and addresses of these employees were made available through the office of the vice president of human resources. Because of the small sample sizes from Europe and South America, and because all the participants in these areas were employees of one corporation, these two samples were combined for subsequent analyses.

Almost the entire sample consisted of white males (three females, two ethnic minorities). The respondents' mean age was 45 (Saudi mean = 47; Japanese mean = 42; Europe/South America mean = 43.5). The typical respondent was college-educated, married with two children, and had been on the expatriate assignment 2.5 years. With the exception of age, one-way ANOVA results indicated that there were no significant differences between subsamples on demographic variables.

Expatriates worked in a wide array of functional areas, but were somewhat concentrated in the functional areas of general management, marketing, finance, and operations/engineering. The typical respondent self-reported himself as an upper-middle manager. The average respondent had lived overseas six years, and in two foreign countries, before this current expatriate assignment. One-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences

among subsamples on functional area, number of years of prior overseas work experience, or number of foreign countries in which one lived previously.

Measures

Organizational Career Development Measures. The organizational career development measures are new to this research, and were developed using the procedure outlined by Nunnally [1978]. A pool of forty-two items was generated to assess the five organizational career development strategies. Based on an examination of the pattern of intercorrelations and the item-to-total correlations, the pool of items was reduced to thirty-seven.

Free Choice is a six-item, 5-point Likert scale; it measures the extent to which expatriates felt they were given some choice and control over accepting the current expatriate assignment. A sample item from this scale is, *In some ways, I felt that if I didn't accept this expatriate assignment my career in my company would be adversely affected* (reverse scored). The α is .76.

Realistic Job Previews is a three-item, 5-point Likert scale; it measures the extent to which expatriates felt they were given honest and complete information about their overseas assignments. A sample item from this scale is, *I knew what the good points and bad points of this expatriate assignment would be when I was sent overseas*. The α of the scale is .79.

Definite Repatriate Plans is an eight-item, 5-point Likert scale; it measures the extent to which expatriates had concerns about their job assignments after their overseas tours of duty. A sample item from this scale is, *I'm not anticipating any big problems getting back into my old routines when I return from my expatriate assignment*. The α for this scale is .86.

Mentoring is a six-item, 5-point Likert scale; it measures the extent to which expatriates feel they have an advocate back at their domestic site who is looking out for their best interests. A sample item is, *I have a mentor back home who is looking out for my best interests while I am overseas*. The α of this scale is .87.

Long-Term Career Plans is a fourteen-item, 5-point Likert scale; it measures the extent to which expatriates see a clear connection between their current expatriate assignment and their overall career plan. A sample item is, *This expatriate assignment fits in logically to my career path*. The α of the scale is .93.

Individual Career Management Coping Scales. The coping scales used in this research are adapted from items developed by Feldman and Brett [1983] and Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis and Gruen [1986]. The items were reworded to make them more appropriate for an international context. A pool of forty items was generated initially. Again using the procedure suggested by Nunnally [1978], the pattern of interitem correlations and item-to-total correlations was examined, and the pool of items was reduced to twenty-seven items.

Expatriates were asked to indicate to what extent they had used each of a list of coping strategies in adjusting to their foreign assignments. Responses ranged from *Not at All* (1) to *A Lot* (4).

Getting Task Help was a three-item scale ($\alpha = .62$) which measured how proactive expatriates were in getting assistance on their actual assignments. Sample items were, *hired additional staff to assist me*, and, *got additional training in areas where I needed more expertise*.

Social Integration Efforts was a nine-item scale with an α of .82. It measured the extent to which expatriates were proactive in getting integrated with the local culture. A sample item was, *confined my non-work activities to an expatriate enclave, pretty separate from the local culture* (reverse scored).

Psychic Reappraisal was a four-item scale with an α of .67. It taps the extent to which expatriates tried to find the positive side of their assignments. A sample item is, *told myself that I would come out of the overseas experience a better person*.

Psychological Withdrawal was a five-item scale with an α of .67. It taps the extent to which expatriates tried to push the difficulties of the expatriate assignment from their minds; sample items were, *refused to think about how much I missed my life back home*, and, *tried to pretend that the problems didn't exist*.

Palliative Coping was a six-item scale with an α of .62. It measures the extent to which expatriates tried to cope with their anxieties through eating, drinking, and sleeping too much. A sample item is, *tried to make myself feel better by eating or drinking more than usual*.

Outcome Variables. As noted earlier, the present research uses multiple criterion variables to tap expatriate effectiveness.

Overall Performance is a four-item, 5-point Likert scale; it is a self-report measure of the expatriate's accomplishments on his/her assignment. A sample item is, *My performance reviews as an expatriate have been lower than before I came overseas*. The α for this scale is .77.

Relationships with Host Nationals is also a four-item, 5-point Likert scale; it is a measure of the expatriate's success in establishing rapport with host nationals. A sample item is, *I've become genuinely fond of the host nationals I work with and will miss them when I leave*. The α for this scale is .72.

Skill Acquisition is a five-item, 5-point Likert scale; it taps expatriates' perceptions of their success in learning about managing people from different cultures and competing effectively in a global environment. A sample item is, *As a result of this assignment, I have a better feel for the business relationships between international and domestic operations*. The α for this scale is .60.

Intent to Remain is a four-item, 5-point Likert scale; it taps expatriates' intentions to remain on their assignments the originally agreed upon length

of time. A sample item is, *I fully intend to see this assignment through to its conclusion*. The *alpha* for this scale is .62.

To measure the job attitude criterion, three outcome variables employed in previous research were utilized: *Job Satisfaction* [Hackman and Oldham 1975]; *Internal Work Motivation* [Hackman and Oldham 1975]; and *Mutual Influence* [Feldman 1976]. The *alphas* of these scales were .71, .73, and .81, respectively. All three scales were four-item, 5-point Likert scales.

Stress was measured using Gurin, Veroff and Feld's [1960] original ISR survey items, as adapted by Brett and Werbel [1980]. The first subscale, *Psychological Stress*, measures psychological symptoms of stress such as depression and boredom. It has seventeen Likert items and uses a 4-point scale. The second subscale, *Physiological Stress*, measures physiological symptoms of stress such as loss of weight, stomach distress, and headaches. It has sixteen Likert items and uses a 4-point scale. The *alphas* of these scales are .83 and .79, respectively. A high score on these variables indicates greater occurrence of stress symptoms.

At the end of the questionnaire, two pages were provided for expatriates to comment on their experiences abroad. These comments from the expatriates are the basis of the qualitative data presented in the results and discussion sections. The means and standard deviations of the variables used in this study appear in Table 1, which also contains a correlation matrix of these variables.

RESULTS

Initially, canonical correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between the career development variables as a set with the entire set of outcome variables, and the relationship between the individual coping strategies as a set with the entire set of outcome variables. Canonical correlation analysis is appropriately employed when trying to determine the amount of variance one set of variables accounts for in a second set of variables.

In both cases, a single set of canonical variates was significant. The career development variables, as a group, accounted for 31.79% of the variance in the outcome variables as a group ($p < .001$). The coping variables, as a group, accounted for 25.1% of the variance in the outcome variables as a group ($p < .01$).

Multiple regression analyses were then used to examine the effects of the various organizational career development programs and the individual self-management coping strategies on individual outcome variables. These results are presented and discussed below.

Organizational Career Development Programs

The results of the multiple regression analyses relating organizational career development programs to outcome variables are presented in Table 2.

While the results for Hypotheses 1 through 4 (Free Choice, Realistic Job Preview, Repatriation Concerns, and Mentoring) were generally in the predicted

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Principal Variables

| | Mean | S.D. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
|--------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|-----|------|------|-----|------|-----|
| Career Variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Free Choice | 15.58 | 2.89 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Realistic Preview | 9.36 | 1.33 | .02 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Repat. Plans | 24.11 | 4.06 | .37 | -.11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Mentoring | 16.33 | 5.34 | .01 | .22 | -.27 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 Long-Term Career | 45.33 | 4.23 | .02 | .12 | -.05 | .20 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping Strategies | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 Task Help | 6.90 | 2.20 | -.04 | .07 | -.10 | .04 | .07 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 Social Integration | 21.80 | 3.76 | .12 | .04 | .01 | .08 | .16 | .12 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 Reappraisal | 13.04 | 2.60 | .00 | -.09 | -.03 | .03 | .25 | .13 | .38 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 Psychic Withdrawal | 10.41 | 3.38 | .09 | -.18 | .02 | -.07 | -.05 | .04 | .09 | .30 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 Palliative | 7.56 | 2.09 | .13 | .02 | .22 | -.17 | .02 | .09 | .04 | .05 | .31 | | | | | | | | | |
| Outcomes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 Performance | 10.38 | 2.32 | .09 | .04 | .19 | -.17 | .11 | .11 | .09 | .12 | .08 | .15 | | | | | | | | |
| 12 Rel. Host Nationals | 9.97 | 1.63 | -.07 | .08 | -.06 | .04 | .19 | .11 | .27 | .25 | -.07 | .02 | .19 | | | | | | | |
| 13 Skill Acquisition | 20.75 | 2.59 | .03 | .03 | .11 | .03 | .29 | .11 | .12 | .35 | .13 | .07 | .00 | .27 | | | | | | |
| 14 Intent to Remain | 11.33 | 1.87 | .20 | -.02 | .30 | -.16 | .03 | -.15 | -.03 | .06 | .23 | .15 | .07 | -.01 | .03 | | | | | |
| 15 Mutual Influence | 13.97 | 2.26 | .01 | .06 | -.11 | .21 | .13 | .01 | .17 | .10 | -.08 | .03 | -.33 | -.01 | .30 | -.07 | | | | |
| 16 Internal Motivation | 17.36 | 1.97 | .17 | .00 | .22 | .12 | .28 | -.03 | .05 | .15 | .16 | .11 | .01 | .06 | .23 | .21 | .15 | | | |
| 17 Job Satisfaction | 16.56 | 2.48 | -.16 | .07 | -.21 | .23 | .36 | -.03 | -.17 | .11 | -.13 | -.26 | -.28 | -.05 | .19 | -.20 | .31 | .04 | | |
| 18 Psych. Stress | 32.15 | 7.17 | .13 | -.01 | .37 | -.29 | -.01 | .16 | .05 | .03 | .23 | .35 | .33 | -.01 | .16 | .25 | -.15 | .20 | -.34 | |
| 19 Physio. Stress | 22.14 | 4.36 | .08 | .01 | .13 | -.16 | -.06 | .10 | -.13 | .02 | .17 | .25 | .05 | -.03 | .15 | .19 | -.04 | .00 | -.24 | .51 |

r > .19 significant at p < .05 n = 118

direction, it is clearly the relationship between the expatriate assignment and long-term career plans (H5) that is strongest. Perceiving a connection between the expatriate assignment and long-term career plans is significantly, and positively, related to overall performance, relationships with host nationals, skill acquisition, intent to remain, job satisfaction, and mutual influence. It is also negatively and significantly related to psychological stress problems, i.e., expatriates who see less of a relationship between their expatriate assignments and their long-term career paths have more psychological stress symptoms.

The qualitative comments we received from the expatriates highlight and amplify this finding which emerged from the statistical analysis. A frequently repeated theme from the study participants was that, *U.S. companies do not seem to pay a premium for foreign experience*, and, hence, there are strong conflicts between investing in the current expatriate assignment and investing in longer term careers. As some participants noted:

The most difficult part of the assignment from a job perspective is the feeling of 'out of sight, out of mind' you get from the home office. At times this can be a real detriment to effective performance on the current assignment.

I do believe that I would have moved much higher if I had not gone overseas

[Being an expatriate] has hurt my overall career Many promises are made when employees accept overseas assignments regarding career paths, but few are kept My feeling is you should accept a foreign assignment because you want to try something but not because it will help your career.

Moreover, several expatriates noted that staying “too long” in their assignments hurt them in sustaining a career advancement path comparable to their domestic cohort. Being overseas too long, they felt, could lead them to being labeled permanent expatriates or to their experiencing difficulty readjusting to domestic assignments in the U.S.:

I stayed too long [8 years] in my assignment and lost opportunities back in the U.S. . . . For those considering an overseas assignment, I recommend a short stay so as to not get out of the promotion circles or, at least, [to have] a definite plan as to how the overseas assignment will fit into their goal.

Living overseas [10 years] makes resettlement in the U.S. difficult to envisage—where to live and work, etc., are major questions that are difficult to answer.

Expatriates whose companies had gone through a merger or acquisition in their absence were especially cognizant of these issues:

TABLE 2
Multiple Regression Analysis of Careers Variables on Outcomes

| D. V. - Performance $R^2=.12$ $F=2.74^*$ | | | | D. V. - Job Satisfaction $R^2=.34$ $F=10.67^{***}$ | | | |
|--|------|---------|-------|--|------|---------|---------|
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Choice | .06 | .09 | .84 | Choice | .00 | .00 | -.04 |
| Realistic Preview | .06 | .06 | .56 | Realistic Preview | .00 | .00 | -.05 |
| Repat. Assign. | -.03 | -.07 | -.53 | Repat. Assign. | .06 | .17 | 1.64 |
| Mentoring | .09 | .14 | 1.22 | Mentoring | -.01 | -.02 | -.27 |
| Long-Term Career | .08 | .25 | 2.02* | Long-Term Career | .11 | .49 | 4.96*** |

| D. V. - Relations Host Nationals $R^2=.13$ $F=3.17^*$ | | | | D. V. - Intrinsic Motivation $R^2=.05$ $F=1.07$ | | | |
|---|------|---------|--------|---|------|---------|-------|
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Choice | -.06 | -.09 | -.98 | Choice | -.06 | -.13 | -1.37 |
| Realistic Preview | .03 | .03 | .29 | Realistic Preview | -.02 | -.04 | -.35 |
| Repat. Assign. | -.05 | -.13 | -1.10 | Repat. Assign. | -.07 | -.22 | -1.78 |
| Mentoring | .06 | .12 | 1.13 | Mentoring | .02 | .06 | .53 |
| Long-Term Career | .10 | .38 | 3.35** | Long-Term Career | .04 | .20 | 1.71 |

| D. V. - Skill Acquisition $R^2=.11$ $F=2.60^*$ | | | | D. V. = Mutual Influence $R^2=.16$ $F=4.08^{**}$ | | | |
|--|------|---------|--------|--|------|---------|---------|
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Choice | .04 | .06 | .58 | Choice | -.07 | -.11 | -1.20 |
| Realistic Preview | -.19 | -.21 | -2.10* | Realistic Preview | .06 | .06 | .62 |
| Repat. Assign. | -.05 | -.11 | -.94 | Repat. Assign. | .02 | .04 | .35 |
| Mentoring | .04 | .08 | .76 | Mentoring | .00 | .00 | .01 |
| Long-Term Career | .08 | .31 | 2.75** | Long-Term Career | .11 | .38 | 3.44*** |

TABLE 2
(continued)

| D. V. - Intent to Remain | | | | D. V. - Psychological Stress | | | |
|--------------------------|------|---------|--------------------|------------------------------|------|---------|--------------------|
| $R^2=.16$ $F=3.92^{**}$ | | | | $R^2=.21$ $F=5.58^{***}$ | | | |
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Choice | -.04 | -.07 | -.70 | Choice | -.13 | -.08 | -.87 |
| Realistic Preview | -.03 | -.04 | .42 | Realistic Preview | -.20 | -.08 | -.83 |
| Repat. Assign. | .00 | .00 | .01 | Repat. Assign. | -.15 | -.13 | -1.17 |
| Mentoring | .09 | .19 | 1.74 | Mentoring | -.15 | -.11 | -1.06 |
| Long-Term Career | .08 | .32 | 2.88 ^{**} | Long-Term Career | -.18 | -.26 | -2.36 [*] |

| D. V. - Physiological Stress | | | |
|------------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| $R^2=.06$ $F=1.23$ | | | |
| Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Choice | -.07 | -.07 | -.68 |
| Realistic Preview | -.10 | -.06 | -.65 |
| Repat. Assign. | -.13 | -.19 | -1.54 |
| Mentoring | .04 | .04 | .36 |
| Long-Term Career | -.02 | -.03 | -.29 |

* $p < .05$
^{**} $p < .01$
^{***} $p < .001$

We have just completed a merger which has resulted in many [layoffs] This resulted in my losing key contacts in the U.S., including the person that I was dependent on for 'getting me home'

While I've been away, our company has been merged with another large company. Therefore, many mentors and contacts are no longer in the company. This will also complicate the job finding process when I return to the U.S.

One-way ANOVA results indicate there were no significant differences between expatriates in different countries on any of the organizational career development variables.

Individual Career Management Strategies

The multiple regression results on the individual coping strategies appear in Table 3. The results are generally supportive of the hypotheses.

In terms of the active coping strategies, trying to get socially integrated and psychological reappraisal are more strongly related to expatriate effectiveness than seeking task help (H6). Social integration is positively and significantly related to building relationships with host nationals, and is negatively related to both psychological and physiological stress symptoms (i.e., expatriates who cope by social integration have fewer stress-related problems). Psychological reappraisal, too, has a moderate positive impact on the outcome variables. Psychological reappraisal is significantly positively related to skill acquisition, job satisfaction, and internal work motivation.

In contrast, the two symptom-focused coping strategies—psychic withdrawal and palliative coping—do seem to be negatively associated with expatriate effectiveness, as suggested by Hypothesis 7. Psychic withdrawal is negatively associated with relationships with host nationals, and positively associated with psychological stress symptoms. Palliative coping is negatively significantly related to intent to remain and job satisfaction, and is positively significantly related to physiological health problems.

The qualitative comments from study participants on their self-management coping strategies highlight two findings, in particular. First, we received the most comments on the usefulness of social integration and psychological reappraisal as means of managing the new job environments. Study participants noted how important it was to get to know the host nationals well, and to not be judgmental about cross-national differences:

Daily contact with host nationals is of paramount importance for them to realize that you have a job to do and that you are attempting to assimilate your methods to traditionally established principles . . . which in the long run might be less practical and more dilatory but achieve the desired result.

After talking to my colleagues, including non-Americans, I get the impression that success or failure in getting adjusted depends upon one's attitudes and expectations. Those who have had difficulty adjusting often make invidious comparisons between life here and life back home. Those who 'fit right in' seem to see opportunities to experience new and interesting things. They are also more willing to get involved in activities that bring them into contact with other people.

Second, while there were no significant differences across expatriates in different countries on the organizational career development variables, there were important significant differences across expatriates in different countries on two of the problem-focused coping strategies, namely, social integration and psychic reappraisal. Expatriates in Saudi Arabia were less likely to use social integration ($p < .001$) and psychic reappraisal ($p < .01$) as coping strategies than were expatriates in other countries. For example, on the item, *How much do you encourage your spouse to get involved in activities with host nationals?*, 51% of the expatriates in Saudi Arabia responded, *Not at all*; the corresponding percentage for the other samples was 4%.

The specific differences the expatriates in Saudi Arabia commented upon were restrictions on travel, on clothing, on women's job options, on the open practice of Christianity, and on freedom of speech. These restrictions seemed to influence expatriates there to try to isolate themselves, rather than integrate themselves, into the local culture:

In a country like Saudi Arabia, there is probably a far greater likelihood that someone would feel alienated from the general population than, for instance, someone in England, France, or Germany. Here, the culture, religion, language, and history of the host country are totally divergent from what we are used to in American and European societies, so that there is a greater opportunity to feel alienation from the local population.

Moreover, the expatriates in Saudi Arabia were able to sustain their buffers from the local culture by living in expatriate compounds that allowed expatriates to, *not (be) subject to the limitations that living with Moslems entails here*. Others focused on opportunities to travel out of the Middle East, *to recharge our Western batteries*. Indeed, many of the expatriates in Saudi Arabia used the military phrase "tour of duty" to describe their assignments, a phrase connoting conscious recognition of the temporariness of the assignment and a wistfulness for its end.

DISCUSSION

This article extends the current research on expatriate adjustment by focusing more directly on the career development aspects of international assignments. It suggests 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

TABLE 3
Multiple Regression Analysis of Coping Strategies on Outcomes

| D. V. - Performance | | | | D. V. - Job Satisfaction | | | |
|-----------------------|------|---------|-------|--------------------------|------|---------|---------|
| $R^2=.06$ $F=.289$ | | | | $R^2=.17$ $F=3.92^{**}$ | | | |
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Task Help | .07 | .05 | .54 | Task Help | -.04 | -.04 | -.46 |
| Social Integration | -.10 | -.18 | -1.76 | Social Integration | -.02 | -.05 | -.45 |
| Reappraisal | -.03 | -.03 | -.25 | Reappraisal | .22 | .27 | 2.65** |
| Psychic Withdrawal | -.06 | -.07 | -.59 | Psychic Withdrawal | -.08 | -.12 | -1.18 |
| Palliative Coping | -.20 | -.14 | -1.29 | Palliative Coping | -.29 | -.30 | -3.04** |

| D. V. - Relations Host Nationals | | | | D. V. - Intrinsic Motivation | | | |
|----------------------------------|------|---------|---------|------------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| $R^2=.33$ $F=9.49^{***}$ | | | | $R^2=.10$ $F=2.17$ | | | |
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Task Help | .07 | .07 | .77 | Task Help | -.07 | -.08 | -.80 |
| Social Integration | .21 | .48 | 5.45*** | Social Integration | .03 | .09 | .86 |
| Reappraisal | .07 | .07 | .81 | Reappraisal | .16 | .22 | 2.05* |
| Psychic Withdrawal | -.15 | -.20 | -2.16* | Psychic Withdrawal | .09 | .15 | 1.40 |
| Palliative Coping | -.08 | -.07 | -.76 | Palliative Coping | -.01 | -.01 | -.09 |

| D. V. - Skill Acquisition | | | | D. V. - Mutual Influence | | | |
|---------------------------|------|---------|---------|--------------------------|------|---------|-------|
| $R^2=.21$ $F=5.12^{***}$ | | | | $R^2=.05$ $F=1.09$ | | | |
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Task Help | .10 | .08 | .86 | Task Help | .03 | .02 | .20 |
| Social Integration | -.01 | -.03 | -.28 | Social Integration | .09 | .17 | 1.59 |
| Reappraisal | .44 | .43 | 4.35*** | Reappraisal | -.05 | -.04 | -.38 |
| Psychic Withdrawal | .03 | .03 | .32 | Psychic Withdrawal | -.13 | -.15 | -1.35 |
| Palliative Coping | .06 | .04 | .47 | Palliative Coping | .04 | .03 | .27 |

TABLE 3
(continued)

| D. V. - Intent to Remain | | $R^2=.15$ | $F=3.25^{**}$ | D. V. - Psychological Stress | | $R^2=.19$ | $F=4.36^{**}$ |
|--------------------------|------|-----------|----------------------|------------------------------|------|-----------|---------------|
| Independent Variables | B | β | T | Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Task Help | .00 | .00 | .04 | Task Help | .44 | .14 | 1.46 |
| Social Integration | .01 | .02 | .23 | Social Integration | -.20 | -.17 | -1.67 |
| Reappraisal | .03 | .03 | .31 | Reappraisal | .22 | .08 | .80 |
| Psychic Withdrawal | .05 | .07 | .67 | Psychic Withdrawal | .38 | .18 | 1.73 |
| Palliative Coping | -.42 | -.39 | -3.97 ^{***} | Palliative Coping | .84 | .24 | 2.48* |

| D. V. - Physiological Stress | | $R^2=.15$ | $F=3.40^{**}$ |
|------------------------------|------|-----------|---------------|
| Independent Variables | B | β | T |
| Task Help | .24 | .12 | 1.27 |
| Social Integration | -.13 | -.18 | -1.72 |
| Reappraisal | .19 | .11 | 1.08 |
| Psychic Withdrawal | .17 | .13 | 1.24 |
| Palliative Coping | .51 | .24 | 2.46* |

* $p < .05$
 $**p < .01$
 $***p < .001$

success. In addition, it suggests that expatriates can be active participants in their own adjustment processes, and that their adjustment to new cultures rests as much on what they do to help themselves as on what companies do to assist them. However, like many other pieces of exploratory research, this article opens up several questions and avenues for future research as well.

In terms of organizational career development programs, the whole notion of building logical chains of international and domestic assignments seems to be the most critical variable. Much more research is needed, then, on what specific organizational interventions would achieve this end. In this article relatively molar measures of career development assistance were employed; subjects were asked their perceptions of the amount of choice they were given, how realistic their job previews were, etc. Future research would benefit from a closer examination of the specific career development programs and policies that govern expatriate career pathing in organizations, and their relationships to expatriate effectiveness.

Along the same line, future research would be enhanced by organization-provided performance evaluation data, turnover data, and rates of promotion or advancement for returning expatriates (especially in comparison to comparable domestic job changers at the same organizational level). Such data would provide some convergent validity for these findings, and to some extent might mitigate self-report biases and social desirability response biases in the coping scales. Moreover, since reliabilities for some of the measures new in this research are somewhat low, further scale refinement may be needed. The results on the individual self-management coping strategies were generally supported. However, several important issues on individual coping strategies need additional attention.

First, somewhat surprisingly, expatriates did not frequently use getting task help as a coping strategy, and that coping strategy was not especially helpful in facilitating adjustment. Several expatriates noted that they were sent overseas to transfer new technology or to manage start-up operations. This is perhaps one reason why seeking task help was less frequently used as a coping strategy; expatriates did not perceive the host nationals as having the expertise to help them. Another possible explanation is that managers being transferred or promoted may be less willing to seek out task help because it may be misconstrued as a sign of weakness or insecurity [Brett, Feldman and Weingart 1990; Ashford 1986]. These authors argue that attempts to get task help when one doesn't know the culture may lead to embarrassing situations that worsen, rather than help, newcomers' adjustment. Further research on why expatriates do not directly seek out much task help, and why task help is relatively ineffective, is certainly warranted and needed.

Second, much more research on the differential effectiveness of coping strategies over time is needed. For example, when expatriates are new on their assignments, psychic reappraisal may be the most effective coping strategy. It may help expatriates get adjusted and in a better frame of mind

to tackle work problems, and allow them to learn more about the local culture before making major decisions or interventions. Social integration may be more effective somewhat later, after expatriates have a better handle on local norms and behavior patterns. Longitudinal research of expatriate strategies *after* their arrival abroad has noticeably lagged the research on expatriate activities *before* departure, and that imbalance needs some further attention.

Third, an important issue that needs further study is the notion that the very act of problem-focused coping is itself often unpleasant [Roth and Cohen 1986; Leana and Feldman 1988]. Having to go around asking for help from people whom one is supposed to be supervising, for example, is itself stressful and a drain on energy; while it may help expatriates extricate themselves from adverse situations, in the short run it often increases psychological distress. Thus, problem-focused coping may not result in the increases in work effectiveness and work adjustment that one might ordinarily expect. Future research is needed to discover the circumstances under which expatriates' attempts at problem-focused coping are offset by the increased feelings of frustration and psychological distress engendered by those very attempts.

Fourth, with larger samples the interactions between coping strategies and national cultures can be examined. For instance, in terms of culture distance [Kogut and Singh 1988], perhaps social integration is a more effective strategy for expatriates in culturally similar countries than for those in more alien environments. Along the same lines, there may be individual differences that might predispose expatriates to use certain coping strategies or be more successful in their use of different coping strategies. For example, Leana and Feldman [1988] note that internal locus of control, Type-A behavior pattern, and self-esteem would predispose individuals toward feelings of control, high energy, and self-worth that would foster an active stance towards new situations. Flexibility, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity might also be predicted to predispose individuals towards problem-focused coping. The work of Kobasa [1979] suggests that "hardy" individuals who are self-reliant and feel challenged, rather than enervated, by new circumstances should also be more likely to use active coping.

By examining expatriate moves in the context of career transitions, then, this article suggests some ways for corporations and expatriates alike to create conditions for successful overseas assignments. For corporations and expatriates alike, it is important that expatriate assignments not become "career cul-de-sacs" that take expatriates off the path to higher level management and provide no visible way out.

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