

Malaysians' Willingness to Support Japanese Expatriates

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ABSTRACT

Expatriates' success studies have always focused on the expatriates' home country preparation, cross cultural adjustment ability and host country environment. This study examined the host country nationals' perspective, particularly their willingness to support Japanese expatriates. Malaysians' openness to change, openness to linguistic diversity and perceived reciprocity were found to significantly explain their willingness to support Japanese expatriates. The outcome of this study provided information to companies on strategies they can use in improving host country nationals' willingness to support expatriates.

Keywords: individual values, openness to linguistic diversity, perceived inequity in employment, social capital desirability and willingness to support expatriates

INTRODUCTION

Being an expatriate in a foreign country is not an easy task as one needs a lot of learning and adjustment, perhaps some sacrifices as well. How well an expatriate can cope in his or her international assignment is very likely affected by the host country's infrastructure, political

condition, economy, and social capital condition (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Hurn, 2007). Expatriates' failure rates are estimated to range from 25% to 70% (McGinley, 2008), and this significantly heightens tangible (e.g. financial) and intangible (e.g. low moral) cost to multinational companies. As a result, expatriate management research continues to receive attention in search for potential solutions (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011). Among the factors that have been reported to be responsible for assignment failures were spouse/partner dissatisfaction, inability to adapt, other family concerns, poor candidate selection,

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poor job performance and job does not meet expectations (GRT, 2010).

Acceptance from the host country may affect the expatriates emotionally, which may compromise their overall well-being in the host country. Coming from a different culture altogether requires the expatriates to adjust to the host country's culture and customs upon arriving in the host country. Adjusting may be learned via cognitive learning, whereby the expatriates would learn about the culture of the foreign country while in their home country and put it into practice while in the host country. Another method of adjustment is via affective learning, whereby the expatriate will experience first-hand the local culture by mixing and mingling with the Host Country Nationals (HCNs). A study in Finland shows that the most crucial area of adjustment is the interaction with the locals (Suutari & Burch, 2001). In the same research, it was found that on average, expatriates perceived the host-company support as necessary with regard to issues both outside and at the workplace.

As HCNs are the best source of information for the local norms and culture, it is very important to build a network with the HCNs. Mahajan and De Silva (2012) found that HCNs support is critical and acts as a buffer to reduce the negative impact of unmet role expectations on the expatriate adjustment. In their study, they argued that HCNs can be a useful source of support for expatriates to adjust in the host country and made them more effective in their jobs. Hence, this paper intends to understand the

willingness of HCNs (i.e., Malaysians) in supporting the expatriates. Several factors that might affect HCNs' willingness to support expatriates are individual's values, social capital desirability, openness to linguistic diversity and perceived inequity in employment.

Previous studies on expatriates focused on the perspective provided by expatriates (i.e., adjustment, language and family) (Shay & Baack, 2006; Feldman & Tompson, 1993; Harvey, 1997; Fish & Wood, 1997). To date, only a few studies have been conducted based on HCNs support. First, Varma *et al.* (2009) identified Chinese (HCNs) support to expatriates in China based on factors such as collectivism, *guanxi* and interpersonal affect. Secondly, Liu and Shaffer (2005) investigated from the social capital perspective, whereby HCNs network density, depth of relationship, and access to information and resources were reported to significantly influence expatriates' success. Two aspects of HCNs ability; HCNs interpersonal skills and HCNs cultural empathy, were strong inputs to expatriates' effectiveness. These researchers showed that HCNs played a significant role in guaranteeing expatriates' success. Thus, there exists a gap in understanding ways to increase HCNs support to expatriates.

Japanese Expatriates in Malaysia

According to Economic Report 2010/2011 (The StarBiz, 2011), as of July 2011, the number of expatriates in Malaysia stood at 31,371. They were mostly employed in the

services (64.8%) and the manufacturing (22.2%) sectors; they came from India (17.8%), China (10.2%), and Japan (7%). Japanese companies such as Matsushita began the electrical and electronics industry of Malaysia in 1965, seeking to supply the domestic market with consumer goods. At present, Japanese companies have expanded from manufacturing companies to complete supply chain management. Recently, further expansion of their involvement in Malaysia was made through the setting up of research centres such as Sony Research and Development Centre in Bangi, Selangor, in September 2011 (Harian Metro, 2010).

Such a quick expansion created a void in technological knowledge among the locals and thus the demand to increase technology competency was in dire need. Hence, expatriates from Japan were required to make the knowledge transfer and manage the subsidiaries, while at the same time grow the locals' management skills to take over the subsidiaries at a later date. A sudden influx of expatriates may create uncertainty amongst the HCNs. These uncertainties could cause the HCNs to refrain from supporting the expatriates willingly. Less support from the HCNs negatively affects both the expatriates and HCNs; expatriates may find it difficult to adjust while HCNs may not benefit from the knowledge transfer. Thus, research that looks at ways to increase HCNs' (i.e. Malaysian) support for Japanese is relevant and timely.

International Assignment

When parent company's employees are sent out for international assignments, they are called the expatriates in the host country (Dowling *et al.*, 2008). There are several reasons for the international assignments. Expatriates are meant to fill up senior management roles in the host country, when the host country is lacking of qualified managers to manage and navigate the company's operation (Hocking *et al.*, 2007; Dowling *et al.*, 2008). Foreign direct investment encourages the parent company to diversify their business operation around the world as part of their global expansion (Stanek, 2000). However, to maintain a unified corporate culture, the parent company would send their employees to hold the helm of the overseas subsidiaries in order to have a similar business direction (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Dowling *et al.*, 2008).

Often we would hear expatriates return to their home country prior to their assignment completion. According to Tung (1981), there are several reasons for expatriates to return home early; one is the inability to adjust to the new environment. Besides his or her own adjustment to the new culture, the expatriates' spouse and family adapting to the host country also plays a critical factor in the expatriates' premature return. HCNs play a significant role in the expatriates and their family's adjustment to the host country.

Host Country Nationals

Host country nationals (HCNs) refer to employees who are citizens of the country

in which an organisation's branch or plant is located, but the organisation operates from its head office's home country. HCNs have been substantial in determining expatriates' success. First, Vance and Ensher (2002) found input given by HCNs as instrumental in modifying training materials to expatriates. There are several levels of HCNs workforce, which are operation level, middle management level and upper management level. These different levels of HCNs require different levels of expatriates' knowledge to cope

with their needs and gain their support. Vance and Enshers' (2002) research showed that using HCNs input to create a training scheme for the expatriates while undergoing their international assignment proves to enhance the validity of expatriate training and overall expatriates' performance effectiveness. Each of these HCNs categories relates to the specific world view and belief system of the particular HCNs corresponding to an expatriate assignment.

TABLE 1
Levels of HCNs and their input towards an expatriate's training scheme (Vance & Ensher, 2002)

HCW Employee Level	HCW Input Categories
Operative Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General HCW management style preference • Information about workplace norms and preference specific to the assignment • Socioeconomic context
Supervisory & Middle Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions • Experience-based input for design expatriate training • Mentoring as a form of on-the-job coaching
Upper Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience-based input for design of expatriate training • Input for design of diversity and cross-cultural awareness training for parent company (e.g. delivered at MNC headquarters) • Integration of parent company strategic planning and goals with needs of host country operation to form more realistic expatriate goals and performance expectations

Note: HCW stands for Host Country Workforce

Second, HCNs' support in terms of informational support and social support have also been reported to influence expatriate success (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012). HCNs' informational support is not well-received by expatriates, as HCNs' credibility in that aspect has not been proven. Despite that, social support by HCNs is well received as they have been in the host country longer than the expatriates.

However, Mahajan and De Silva (2012) investigated HCNs support from an expatriate's perception, overlooking the HCNs' perspective. In fact, HCNs' willingness to support is more directly contributed to expatriates' well-being as they will make expatriates feel welcome. Thus, subsequent reviews focus on the HCNs' willingness to help expatriates and the factors influencing their willingness to help.

Host Country Nationals' Willingness to Support

Expatriates' rate and ease of adjustment in the host country is dependent on how similar or dissimilar the culture is compared to their home country (Selmer, 2007). Host country's human resource department will generally provide some levels of support to help expatriates' adjustment (Dowling *et al.*, 2008; Hill *et al.*, 2012). However, the expatriates' immediate HCNs that have direct contact with expatriates on a daily basis may not be from the human resource department. Thus, the expatriates need support from their direct HCNs to guide them about local living conditions, learn about the working environment and provide other necessary information. These are the social support structures mentioned in Mahajan and De Silva's (2012) research.

However, the role to support expatriates is not part of the direct HCNs' job scope. Therefore, HCNs' support is on a voluntary basis; some of the factors that may motivate higher willingness to help include individual's values (collectivism tendency, openness to change, self-enhancement), social capital desirability (relational investment, perceived reciprocity), openness to language diversity and inequity in employment.

Individual Values

Values are what a group of people believe to be good, right, and desirable. It is an assumption of how things are supposed to be. Norms are the social rules that govern people's actions toward each other.

Different sets of values and norms will affect how people position the importance of work values when working with people of different cultures (Hofstede, 1982). One of Hofstede's (1982) cultural dimensions is Individualism vs. Collectivism. Hofstede defines individualism as the degree to which people in a country prefers to act as an independent individual rather than as a member of groups and the reverse for collectivism. Collectivist society is bound to form their own 'in-group' and often consider their supervisor; in this case, the expatriates, as part of their 'in-group' (Clugston *et al.*, 2000). From Hofstedes' cultural dimensions, Malaysians are found to be at the low end of individualism, which translates into high collectivism (Clugston *et al.*, 2000). Since high collectivist individuals were reported to treat their expatriate supervisor as part of the in-group (Clugston *et al.*, 2000; Wang *et al.*, 2002), HCNs who are high in collectivist tendency are more likely to help their expatriate supervisor. Thus, the first hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between collectivist tendency and the willingness to support expatriates.

Schwartz (2007) defines value as what is important to oneself in life in a varying degree of importance, and he mentioned that individual's values influence how people act and react to circumstances. Each of Schwartz's ten values is defined below (Schwartz, 2007):

- (1) Self-Direction. Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring.
- (2) Stimulation. Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
- (3) Hedonism. Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.
- (4) Achievement. Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
- (5) Power. Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
- (6) Security. Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.
- (7) Conformity. Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
- (8) Tradition. Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self.
- (9) Benevolence. Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').
- (10) Universalism. Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.

Schwartz's ten values were further divided into 4 major dimensions: (1) self enhancement, (2) openness to change, (3) self transcendence and (4) conservative, as shown in Fig.1. As an employee in any firm and any country in the world, the main objective is to have the opportunity to learn (Chan & Pearson, 2002). Chan and Pearson's research on work goals among Malaysians also found that in parallel to have the opportunity to learn, employees also deemed that the high importance of the job is a requirement in their assignment.

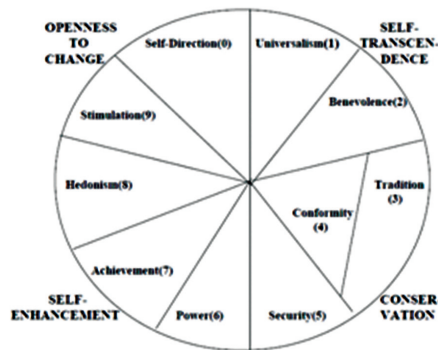


Fig.1: Theoretical model of relations among ten motivational types of value (Schwartz, 2007)

The eagerness to learn when opportunity arises can be related to openness to change as each opportunity may be different from the current work

that the Malaysians are undertaking. HCNs that put priority on self-enhancement and openness to change are likely to view supporting expatriates as a pathway to

gain new learning opportunities or career advancement. Thus, hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 were constructed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between openness to change and the willingness to support expatriates.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between self-enhancement and the willingness to support expatriates.

Social Capital Desirability Level

Social capital refers to an individual's sacrifices (time, effort, consumption) made in an effort to promote cooperation with others (Oxoby, 2009). The intention to promote cooperation with others, in this context the expatriates, is defined as the desire level. Measurement on social capital, based on the exchange theory by Cheung and Chan (2010), showed that social capital fulfilment has positive relationships towards high morale among Japanese workers. The exchange theory, explained by Cheung and Chan (2010), is when one invests in a social relation and expects to draw benefits from them; this increases the desire level in social capital development within an organisation. Dayton-Johnson (2003) indicated that employees can also invest in social capital by devoting time and energy to building relationships and reputations. The investment they make today in social capital gives them a claim to the future returns resulting from cooperating in those relationships. Reciprocity refers to the expectation of conditional help received

from other people, in response to the help provided to them. Thus, HCNs who see the importance of building social capital and understand there might be future return or reciprocity, are likely to support the expatriates. Riding on these findings, hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5 were built as below:

Hypothesis 4: There is a positive relationship between relational investment level and the willingness to support expatriates.

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between perceived reciprocity and the willingness to support expatriates.

Openness to Linguistic Diversity

Individuals with openness to linguistic enjoy working with people who speak a different language and will make extra effort to understand them (Lauring & Selmer, 2012). It is unavoidable for Japanese expatriates to use their mother tongue when speaking to their fellow Japanese colleagues. HCNs, with the openness to language diversity, will be more tolerable towards the use of uncommon language at workplace. Also, they are unlikely to perceive language barrier as a hindrance to support expatriates. Thus, hypothesis 6 was built as below:

Hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between openness to linguistic diversity and the willingness to support expatriates.

Inequity in Employment

Among HCNs, expatriates are known to be given a better compensation package than HCNs. An expatriate receives extra benefits like monthly allowances, relocation allowances, housing allowances and family support allowances (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Dowling *et al.*, 2008). Expatriates' salary is about five times higher when compared to HCNs' salary and this tends to create discontent among the HCNs, where they perceive this as a differential treatment even though both are equivalent in terms of education background and area of expertise (Bates, 2001).

Besides compensation packages, another form of benefits that expatriates obtained is important information crucial to the company's management or operation usually distributed to them primarily. Japanese tend to keep the information a breadth from their HCNs middle manager making them frustrated for courteously being locked out of formal and informal communication circuits (Ybema & Byun, 2009). Thus, those HCNs who perceive they are not fairly treated (inequity in employment) are less likely to support expatriates. Thus, hypothesis 7 was raised, as below:

Hypothesis 7: There is a negative relationship between perceived inequity in the employment and the willingness to support expatriates.

Measurement

Eight variables were measured in this study using the Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. First, Collectivist Tendency was measured using a 6-item scale adopted from Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000). Some sample items were "Group welfare is more important than individual rewards", "Group success is more important than individual success" and "Being accepted by members of your work group is very important."

Second, Openness to Change was measured using an 8-item scale adopted from Schwartz (2007). Some sample items were "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to me. I like to do things in my own original way" and "I think it is important to do lots of different things in life. I always look for new things to try."

Third, Self Enhancement was measured using a 7-item scale adopted from Schwartz (2007). Some sample items were, "It is important to me to be rich. I want to have a lot of money and expensive things" and "It's very important to me to show my abilities. I want people to admire what I do."

Forth, Relational Investment was measured using an 8-item scale adopted from Cheung and Chan (2010). Some sample items were "I like helping strangers without receiving compensation" and "I like doing volunteering work without receiving compensation."

Fifth, perceived reciprocity was measured using a single-item measure adopted from Cheung and Chan (2010). The item was, "How willing will the Japanese expatriates whom you helped help you in return?"

Sixth, Openness to Language Diversity was measured using a 4-item scale adopted from Luring and Selmer (2012). Sample items were, "I enjoy doing jobs with people despite of languages barriers" and "I make an extra effort to listen to people speaking different languages."

Seventh, Perceived Inequity in Employment was measured using a 5-item scale of Geurts *et al.* (1999). Sample items were "I invest more in my work than I get out of it" and "I exert myself too much considering what I get back in return."

Finally, Malaysians' willingness to support expatriates was measured using a 4-item scale adapted from Caplan *et al.* (1980) that measure social support. Sample items included "I will help Japanese expatriates when things get tough without being asked" and "I am willing to listen to Japanese expatriates' personal problems if approached".

DATA COLLECTION

A Japanese subsidiary located in Bandar Baru Bangi was chosen as the study site. This Japanese subsidiary was chosen because of the large number of expatriates working in this company. The recent upgrade of the subsidiary's Research and Development

(R&D) facility further increased the intake of Japanese expatriates.

The respondents chosen for this research were the employees working in the R&D sector that has direct contact with Japanese expatriates. As of March 2013, the R&D sector consisted of 557 employees spread across 20 departments. However, only 14 departments have Japanese expatriates. There were a total of 57 Japanese expatriates working in these fourteen departments. Out of this, only departments that have more than 10% Japanese expatriates were chosen as respondents, in which, nine departments fulfilled the criterion. This was conducted under the assumption the employees in departments with a ratio lower than 10% expatriates have less chances of communicating with Japanese expatriates. Thus, the total respondents invited for survey participation were narrowed down to 236 employees. Of these, 170 completed the questionnaires.

Respondents' Profile

A total of 236 questionnaires were distributed and 170 respondents completed the questionnaires. Of these, 91 were males and 78 females (one refused). As for age, majority of them (73%) were 30 years and below. More than half (59%) worked in this company for less than two years. Only 20 (out of 170) respondents held managerial positions. Many respondents were Malays (48%) and Chinese (46%).

TABLE 2
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Frequency (N=170)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	91	53
Female	78	46
Missing	1	1
Age		
21 to 25	56	33
26 to 30	67	40
31 to 35	28	16
36 to 40	15	9
Above 41	4	2
Years Working in the Company		
Below 2	101	59
3 to 5	25	15
6 to 8	8	5
9 to 11	17	10
More than 11	19	11
Position in the Company		
Non-managerial	150	88
Managerial	20	12
Ethnic		
Malay	81	48
Chinese	79	46
Indian	6	3
Others	3	2
Missing	1	1
Total	170	100

Reliability of Constructs

The Cronbach's Alpha Test was used to measure the internal consistency of measures to the degree of the homogeneity of the items to the primary construct. As can be seen from Table 3, all Cronbach's Alphas were more than 0.60, ranging from 0.61 to 0.83. Full items were used to test reliability for collectivism, openness to

change, self-enhancement and relational investment. As for linguistic diversity and inequity in employment, the alphas were 0.31 and 0.10 respectively, when all the items were included. Thus, one item was removed from linguistic diversity and two items were removed from inequity in employment, and alphas improved to 0.74 and 0.61, respectively.

TABLE 3
Reliability, Mean, and Standard Deviation Score

Description	No of Items	Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Collectivism	6	0.69	3.62	0.63
Openness to Change	7	0.82	3.97	0.57
Self-Enhancement	7	0.83	3.56	0.65
Relational Investment	8	0.82	3.74	0.64
Reciprocity	1	-	3.46	0.82
Linguistic Diversity	3	0.74	3.73	0.66
Inequity in Employment	3	0.61	3.40	0.60
Willingness to Support	4	0.72	3.63	0.60

Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses in this study. First, the willingness to support expatriate was entered as the dependent variable. Next, the remaining constructs were entered as independent variables. The regression model was significant ($p=0.00$, $F=11.62$). The adjusted R^2 was 0.31, which means 31% of the variance in the willingness to support Japanese expatriates were explained by the combination of all the constructs (see Table 4).

The standardised regression coefficients were used to determine the relative impact each of the independent variables had on the willingness to support Japanese expatriates and allowed a comparison to be made between variables

of differing magnitudes and dispersion. From Table 4, there are three significant variables and four insignificant variables. First, openness to change has a positive coefficient of 0.21, with a significant of level 0.005 ($p<0.05$), suggesting openness to change has a positive relationship with the willingness to support Japanese expatriates. Thus, H2 is supported. Next, reciprocity has a positive coefficient (0.26), with a significant level of 0.00 ($p<0.05$), proving that H5 is supported. Lastly, H6, openness to linguistic diversity presented a positive coefficient of 0.33, with a significant level of 0.00 ($p<0.05$), which is supported as well. Conversely, H1, H3, H4 and H7 produced a significant level that is bigger than 0.05, indicating that these hypotheses are not supported.

TABLE 4
Regression Analysis

Model	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
H1: Collectivism	-.049	.487
H2: Openness to Change	.208*	.005
H3: Self Enhancement	-.038	.591
H4: Relational Investment	.035	.620
H5: Reciprocity	.264*	.000
H6: Linguistic Diversity	.329*	.000
H7: Inequity in Employment	.095	.168
F	11.62	.000
Adjusted R Square	0.31	

* Significant at 0.01

DISCUSSION OF THE SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

First, parallel with Schwartz's (2007) value, that openness to change (self-direction, where independent thought and action guide a person to attain the target set; stimulation, excitement, novelty, and embrace challenge in life) drives a person's commitment in work assignment; it was also found to determine a person's willingness to support expatriates. This is consistent with the finding that Malaysians are receptive to the changes in their surroundings, especially when dealing with Japanese expatriates, even though their working styles are different (Ybema & Byun, 2009).

Second, Malaysians (HCNs) who perceive receiving future reciprocity from Japanese expatriates are found more likely to support expatriates. By giving support to expatriates, Malaysians foresee a better work cooperation with the Japanese in the long run, capitalizing on the relationship that has been built. This act is similar to the concept of *guanxi*, which is based on trust, favour, dependence, and adaptation. The result is consistent with the work done by Varma *et al.* (2009), where HCNs in China were reported to support expatriates in order to strengthen the in-group relationship.

Finally, those who are more open to linguistic diversity tend to demonstrate a higher willingness to help expatriates. Malaysians are a multilingual society due to their schooling system. Thus, Malaysians are exposed to several languages from

a young age. Working with Japanese expatriates exposes Malaysians to another language. The close language family tree between the Japanese language and Malaysian language (especially Mandarin) encourages the Malaysians to pick up some simple Japanese words and vice-versa, and this activity reduces the language barrier between the two cultures. This is supported by the findings from Luring and Selmer (2011), who found that language diversity tendency increases HCNs' communication frequency with expatriates.

DISCUSSION OF THE NON-SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

The relationship between collectivist tendency, self-enhancement, relational investment, and perceived inequity in employment with willingness to support expatriates were found to be insignificant. Those HCNs having high collectivist tendency were not found to demonstrate a higher willingness to support expatriates. This could be due to collectivist HCNs not treating Japanese expatriates as in-group members. Animosity among Malaysian as a result of the Japanese occupation period, in which Japanese army tortured and killed many Malaysians' unnecessarily could probably explain why collectivist HCNs do not include Japanese colleague as in-group. Animosity refers to hostility towards a country (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). It has been reported to significantly reduce trust towards products associated with a country that can provoke animosity (Jimenez & Martin, 2010). Similarly,

animosity might negatively affect trust on Japanese colleagues, which led to them being classified as outsider.

Those HCNs having self-enhancement value were found to be not willingly contribute to supporting Japanese expatriates. Although Yun *et al.* (2007) reported that those high in self-enhancement generally are concerned about their career success, in this case however, those aiming high in their career do not think that supporting Japanese expatriates will help them in their career advancement. The company probably used very objective measures when it came to promotion assessment.

Relational investment is one of the components under social capital desirability. The results revealed that those scoring high in social capital desirability are not supporting Japanese more. The literature suggests relational investment in terms of devoting time and energy in the relationship and expects to draw benefits from them in the future (e.g., Dayton-Johnson, 2003; Cheung & Chan, 2010). It is not the case in this study. This could be due to HCNs not thinking about investment in the relationship with Japanese expatriates will help in their career as Japanese expatriates stay only on a short term in Malaysia and may not be around for future return.

Perceived inequity in employment does not affect HCNs' willingness to support Japanese expatriates. Despite the fact that expatriates receive extra benefits like monthly allowances, relocation

allowances, housing allowances and family support allowances (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Dowling *et al.*, 2008), this aspect of inequity was found to be not affecting HCN's support for expatriates. This is probably due to Malaysians' high power distance tendency who generally accepts that some people (i.e., expatriates) deserve better treatment (i.e. remuneration) than others. Thus, inequity in employment is seen as normal and does not affect their assistance to expatriates.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study filled the gaps that existed in the research on how HCNs could contribute to the success or failure of international assignments. Previous studies were more focused on the expatriates themselves (i.e., adjustment, language training, and family) (Tung, 1981; Hill *et al.*, 2012; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Gabel-Shemueli & Dolan, 2011; Bar-On, 1997, 2006). HCNs' support in terms of informational support and social support was reported to influence on expatriates' success (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012). This study extends the work of Varma *et al.* (2009), which looked at Chinese HCNs' support to expatriates using determinants like collectivism, guanxi and interpersonal effect. This study adds value by providing empirical evidence that openness to change, reciprocity, and linguistic diversity determine HCNs' support to expatriates.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are three strategies MNC can use to improve Malaysians' willingness to support expatriates. First, since the findings indicate that Malaysians with higher openness to change value are keener to support Japanese expatriates, companies may want to inculcate this value in their organisation. Openness to change refers to prioritising tasks that allows them to explore and learn new things. One way to promote this value is by giving diversified tasks to Malaysians. Routine tasks made Malaysians quick to adapt to the nature of the job and thus reduced the occasion to mingle with the Japanese expatriates. This minimises the chances to support Japanese expatriates in any form. Thus, in order to maintain the relationship, giving a new task or a new challenge to Malaysians may help.

Secondly, the findings of this study also showed that if Malaysians perceived that they receive help in return for the support provided to the Japanese expatriates, they would be more willing to support expatriates. The company may ride on this factor to request the Japanese expatriates for transferring more new knowledge to Malaysian employees. That way, the Malaysian employees will be more willing to support the expatriate in adaptation issues, be it work or personal matters.

Finally, as the findings of this study showed that Malaysians with higher linguistic diversity tendency tend to support expatriates more. Thus, companies

are recommended to provide diversified linguistic training for employees to familiarise with the language that the expatriates are likely to use. With this in place, HCNs might have less of a phobia to linguistic differences, which might hinder their support to expatriates.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations in this study. First of all, due to time constraint, the respondents participated were from a single Japanese subsidiary. In order to obtain more concrete data representing Malaysians working in a Japanese subsidiary, the respondents should come from various Japanese subsidiaries within Malaysia. Secondly, from the sample collected, it showed that majority (almost 60%) of the respondents had been working less than two years in the company and only 20 out of 170 respondents were from the managerial positions. Thus, the results obtained might be biased due to the respondents' background. Lastly, only 31% of variance in the willingness to support Japanese expatriates were explained by the variables included in this study, suggesting 69% variances were explained by other potential variables.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Besides extending the study to other Japanese subsidiaries with more representative respondent sub-groups in terms of gender and position in the company, future studies may consider other potential

predictor variables like value-fit, goal-fit, and personality-fit. Values, goals, and personality congruence reflect the extent of similarity between the person's own values, goals, or personality as compared to the values, goals, and personality of the expatriate. Westerman's (1997) study indicated that value, goals, or personality congruence significantly predicted satisfaction with organisation. Individuals, who have higher fit with the organisation, demonstrate higher satisfaction working in that organisation. Following a similar reasoning, fit dimensions are also likely to explain the extent of help HCNs may extend to expatriates.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, this study has shown that Malaysians (HCNs) are generally willing to support Japanese expatriates. Malaysians' openness to change and excel-driven attitude (perceived reciprocity) make them more willing to support Japanese expatriates to achieve their personal and career goals. Besides that, Malaysians are multilingual and able to adapt to new languages used by expatriates, thus language barrier does not hamper them from supporting expatriates. With the information on ways to improve HCNs' support to expatriates, multinational corporations in Malaysia are more equipped in developing strategies for sustainable expatriate assignments.

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