Cross-Cultural Adjustment: A Study Of Indian Expatriates Working In Thailand

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Abstract **-Thailand is an emerging economy in Southeast Asia and is seen as an attractive destination for foreign investment. This has led to an increasing number of expatriates coming on work assignments to Thailand. Most studies on cross-cultural adjustment thus far have employed expatriates from western countries as samples whereas studies on Indian expatriates' adjustment are limited. The purpose of this paper is to examine crucial antecedents of cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates working in Thailand. Specifically the study focuses on the relationship between five independent variables, namely, job satisfaction, family support, learning orientation, organization socialization, cross-cultural training and the dependent variable, cross-cultural adjustment. The study employed quantitative research design with a self-administered questionnaire survey to collect data from 334 Indian expatriates working in multinational and privately-owned organizations in Thailand. Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression as statistical tools to analyze the data from the survey. The findings revealed that job satisfaction is the strongest predictor of cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates followed by family support. Organizations employing Indian expatriates in Thailand need to have effective human resource policies and practices for socialization, communication and training so as to ensure smoother adjustment and successful completion of the assignment on the part of these expatriates.**

Index Terms- Expatriate, Cross-cultural adjustment, India, Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

It is now imperative for global corporations to attract, select and retain a cadre of mobile professionals [1] in order to deal with competition and obtain a competitive advantage. This requires that human resource departments possess a better understanding of the identities and potential of their employees. For many organizations operating on a worldwide basis, sending professionals abroad on international assignments is a strategy undertaken to remain competitive [2]. The benefits of these international assignments accrue to both the organization and the assignee. The organization benefits as these professionals transfer skills to the various subsidiaries, in addition, the assignee gains crucial cultural awareness, skills and knowledge for successful management of a global market. Expatriates, therefore, play a major role in transferring know-how as well as building relationships with those from diverse cultures. It is small wonder that over the past few decades, the range of organizations that use expatriates has expanded from the giant multinational corporations to small dot.com start ups as well as in the non-profit sector [3].It has been argued that despite the importance of cross-cultural management and adjustment, literature on the topic is not substantial [4] with most studies thus far having used western expatriates as samples [5].The way individuals respond to different cultural contexts differs and many gaps still exist in our understanding of the diverse factors affecting adjustment, especially in the context of Asian cultures.

Despite experiencing political conflict over the past couple of years, Thailand is an emerging economy with the availability of incentives for indirect investment and a robust supply network. Over the past four decades, an increasing number of expatriates and foreign workers have come to Thailand to complete their work assignments. Many multinational corporations have played a crucial role in transforming Thailand into an emerging economy [6] and as an attractive destination for foreign investment. In a survey conducted by HSBC in 2014, Thailand was reported to be the best destination for expatriates looking for an improved lifestyle at a low cost[7]. Bickerstaff (2014) notes that there are around 67 million people in Thailand, and more than four million of them (or one in every 16 people) are not Thai citizens. The author estimates that there are roughly 300-400,000 expatriates in Thailand drawn from distant countries all over the globe [8].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The key definitions and concepts related to cross-cultural adjustment are discussed in the following sections.

A. Cultural Distance: determines the differences and similarities between cultures [9]. For instance, the higher the cultural difference between two countries, the more difficulty will an expatriate face in adjusting to the host country's culture. Hofstede (1980) is the most cited author who has provided a cultural dimensions framework

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whereby cultural distance can be analyzed[10]. He identified 4 cultural dimensions as follows:

Power Distance: the extent to which a society expects and accepts inequalities

Uncertainty Avoidance : the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by unknown situations

Individualism/Collectivism: the extent to which people in a culture like to work alone or as a group

Masculinity/Femininit y: cultures that value assertiveness and materialism are masculine, whereas cultures that embrace cooperation, security and quality of life are feminine.

Table I shows the scores for India and Thailand as per Hofstede's study [10]:

Table I. Cultural Dimensions-India And Thailand

Country	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism/ Collectivism	Masculinity / Femininity
India	77	40	48	56
Thailand	64	64	20	34

* all scores range from 0-100

As observed in the table, even though India and Thailand are Asian countries which share many similarities, the gaps in the scores indicate a need for cultural adjustment in order to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstanding in personal life as well as the world of work.

B. Expatriates' Cross-cultural Adjustment: an Overview

Intercultural adjustment has been defined as the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country [11]. In some previous studies on intercultural adjustment, some researchers considered adjustment as a unitary concept while others treated it as a multidimensional concept. However, initiated by [12], researchers began to focus on a dimensional view of intercultural adjustment with three interrelated, but conceptually distinct, facets:

1) Work adjustment: this factor includes adjustment to task, supervision, and performance standards
2) Interaction adjustment: adjustment to social interaction, and communicating with host country nationals inside and outside the industry
3) General living adjustment: adjustment to weather, living conditions, healthcare, food, shopping, and so forth.

C. Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

The research model in this study is reproduced from [13] study of Taiwanese expatriates working in the US. Five important factors namely job satisfaction, family support, learning orientation, organization socialization and cross-cultural training for cross-cultural adjustment are described in the following sections.

Job Satisfaction: is an emotional response to an employee's job. Satisfied workers are less likely to quit their jobs. Previous researchers have found five main factors of job satisfaction, namely, work design, pay, promotion, supervision and co-workers [15, 16]. Previous research has also found a positive link between job satisfaction and cross-cultural adjustment [13,16].

Family Support: Extant literature has found that the support and satisfaction of spouse and other family members has a positive influence on cross-cultural adjustment. Family members' attention to the expatriate, their willingness to talk, give recommendations, general care and concern can help toward a smoother adjustment. It also found that family support is positively related to cross-cultural adjustment[12]. In fact, inability of the family to adjust has been cited as a frequent cause for expatriate failure [17].

Learning Orientation**:** This is described as a holistic process involving all thinking, feeling, perceiving and behavior [18]. Learning gives a person an opportunity to adjust to change and a new appreciation of the world. Hence the ability to learn would serve as a strong platform for successful assimilation in new cultures.

Organizational Socialization: This is defined as a process whereby individuals learn the behavior, values, beliefs and social knowledge which enable them to carry out their roles within an organization. The social support received from colleagues, especially other expatriates, can reduce stress and provide a sense of belonging, thus helping expatriates to successfully manage the cross-cultural adjustment process [19]. Cross-cultural Training*:* This factor is a means to enhance the knowledge and skills of expatriates to enable them to function effectively in an overseas culture. Cross-cultural training involves many methods such as lectures, video films, experiential exercises, field work and behavior modification. Training, especially those specific with the cultural background of the expatriate, in the form of history, language, ethics and culture, play an important role in creating awareness and integration with the host culture [20].

Many previous studies were deficient in integrating all of the related factors into expatriate adjustment. The five factors influencing cross-cultural adjustment selected for this study are investigated both as extrinsic and intrinsic factors [13]. The research framework is seen in Figure I:

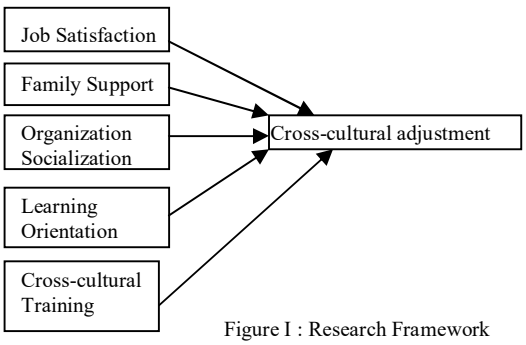


Figure I : Research Framework

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Based on the literature review and the above framework, the following hypotheses are posited in this study:

H_{a1} Job satisfaction affects the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand

H_{a2} Family support affects the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand

H_{a3} Learning orientation affects the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand

H_{a4} Organizational socialization affects the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand

H_{a5} Cross-cultural training affects the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is depicted as descriptive research which adopted a survey method by using self-administered questionnaires. The data obtained from the survey was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 20.

A. Population and Sample

The population of this study was Indian expatriates working in Thailand. Indian expatriates were contacted through a number of firms, chambers of commerce, Indian-Thai associations, as well as religious organizations. The total number of Indian expatriates who received an invitation to participate was 772. However, only 381 questionnaires were returned, of which 334 were considered valid for data analysis. The breakdown of the sample and firms was as follows:

Foreign-owned multinational corporations	-	52
Indian-owned multinational corporations	-	86
Private firms	-	181
Others	-	15

B. Instrumentation

To measure cross-cultural adjustment, 11 questions [21] measuring general, interaction and work adjustment were adapted. For job satisfaction, Hackman and Oldman's [22] questionnaire consisting of 15 items that measured general job satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale, were used. To measure family support, 9 items that measured family support [23] and 8 questions to study learning orientation was used in this study [24]. To measure organization socialization, 9 questions from [25] and [26] studies on socialization were adapted. Four questions from [27] were used for the cross-cultural training section of the questionnaire in this study.

C. Pilot Test Results

Internal consistency reliability estimates were produced for the dependent variable scale and five independent variable scales. This was done to verify the accuracy of the measurement process as revealed in Table II.

Table II Instrument Reliability

Instrument Reliability		
Variables	**Number of Questions**	**Cronbach's alpha**
Cross-cultural adjustment	11	0.83569
Job satisfaction	15	0.84125
Family support	9	0.84645
Learning orientation	8	0.84436
Organizational socialization	9	0.84540
Cross-cultural training	4	0.84289

IV. FINDINGS

A. Descriptive

From the data collected, we can summarize that the majority of respondents were male (81%) and were aged 30 or younger (21%), 31-40 (43%), 41-50 (33%) 51 and older (3%). A total of 39% were single and 61% married. Slightly over half the sample (54%) had no previous overseas experience. The current positions of respondents were: Professional, technical, and administration (43%), Supervisory (36%), Middle management (17%) and Executive Level (4%). Only 33% indicated that they had pre-departure training before coming to Thailand. The industries they were employed in were Finance &Banking, Chemicals, Retail, Construction, IT, Consulting and Education.

Table III presents the summaries of total means and standard deviations for six variables: cross-cultural adjustment, job satisfaction, family support, learning orientation, organization socialization, and cross-cultural training.

Table III. Means and standard deviations

	Factor	**Mean**	**SD.**
1	Cross-cultural adjustment	5.34	.87
2	Job satisfaction	5.45	.75
3	Family support	5.27	1.09
4	Learning organization	5.08	.86
5	Organizational socialization	4.02	.56
6	Cross-cultural training	4.74	1.78

A comparison of the above factors illustrates that the factor with the highest value was job satisfaction. The others were the ability to achieve cross-cultural adjustment, family support, learning orientation, cross-cultural training and organization socialization, in this rank order.

B. Pearson's Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to see the relationships or correlations between dependent variable (cross-cultural adjustment) and independent variables (job

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satisfaction, family support, learning orientation, organizational socialization, and cross-cultural training).

Table IV shows that all the independent variables, i.e., Job Satisfaction (JS), Family Support (FS), Learning Organization (LO), Organizational Socialization (OS) and Cross-Cultural Training (CCT) have positive correlations with the dependent variable, i.e., Cross-Cultural Adjustment (CCA). The correlation values of all variables are significant because none of them has significant value that is more than 0.5.

Table IV. Correlations Matrix

	J.S.	F.S.	L.O.	O.S.	C.T.	C.A.
JS	1.000	0.287**	0.098	0.347**	0.245**	0.618*
FS	0.287**	1.000	0.127**	0.233**	0.174**	0.507*
LO	0.098	0.127**	1.000	0.104*	0.139**	0.215*
OS	0.347**	0.233**	0.104*	1.000	0.367**	0.332*
CCT	0.245**	0.174**	0.139**	0.367**	1.000	0.417*
CCA	0.618**	0.507**	0.215**	0.332**	0.417**	1.000

Notes: **With the Significance of 0.01 (2-tailed).
*With the Significance of 0.05 (2-tailed).

Table IV shows that the correlation between job satisfaction and cross-cultural adjustment is the most significant one ($r = 0.618$ where $p < 0.01$). The significance of the correlation between family support and cross-cultural adjustment comes in the second place ($r = 0.507$ where $p < 0.01$). The significance of the correlation between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural adjustment is in the third rank ($r = 0.417$ where $p < 0.01$). The significance of the correlation between organizational socialization and cross-cultural adjustment is in fourth place ($r = 0.332$ where $p < 0.01$). Finally, the least significant correlation is between learning orientation and cross-cultural adjustment ($r = 0.215$ where $p < 0.01$). Therefore, the research hypotheses H_a1 to H_a5 are accepted.

C. Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to see how well the proposed model predicted overall cross-cultural adjustment.

Table V : Regression of Proposed Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	R^2 Change	F	df 1	df 2	Sig.
	0.821	0.674	0.67	0.6321	0.674	90.245	4	307	0.000

a. Predictors : (Constant). CTA, LOA, FSA, OSA, JSA.

Table V demonstrates that the linear combination of the proposed model is significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment ($F = 90.245$, p value = 0.000 which is less than 0.05). The sample correlation coefficient is 0.821, which indicates that approximately 67.4 percent of the variance of the cross-cultural adjustment in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of the proposed model. In this study, there is a statistically significant linear relationship between each of the independent variables, which are job satisfaction, family support, learning orientation, organization socialization and cross-cultural training, and the dependent variable which is cross-cultural adjustment. In other words, the proposed model can explain cross-cultural adjustment in an acceptable manner.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that of all five factors, job satisfaction is the factor which has the most important influence on cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates in Thailand. These results are consistent with [13]. Job satisfaction was also a significant influencing factor in the study of expatriates working in Bangkok by [16]. In a study on Indian inpatriates working in Sweden [28] it was reported that these executives consider international experience and knowledge as the main motivators for their jobs. Enhancing job satisfaction provides two-way benefits; first the expatriate can complete the assignment successfully and second, the organization can create expatriates who are more cooperative and willing to increase the corporation's bottom line. Family support was the second most important influencing factor in the current study. A previous study [13] supported this finding; however there was no significant influence of family support in other studies [29, 16]. The collectivist culture of India makes social and emotional support from spouse, children and friends very important for cross-cultural adjustment. Even though the remaining three factors of Organizational Support, Learning Orientation, and Cross-cultural training were not as strong influencing factors as Job Satisfaction and Family support, they were all positively correlated with cross-cultural adjustment. Organizations employing Indian expatriates in Thailand need to provide cross-cultural training, especially in Thai language skills, clarify the organizational values and have effective human resource policies for preparing and assisting them in completing their assignments successfully. Thailand and India share many social and cultural values and elements of Buddhism and Hinduism are found in Thai art, sculpture, dance, drama and literature. These commonalities, as well as the small cultural distance, can also help make the cross-cultural adjustment of Indian expatriates a smoother process.

The study is not without limitations. The sample in this study was not extensive (334) and concerned only Indian expatriates in Thailand, thus, the level of the generalizability of this study is limited. Even in the same industry, different companies have remarkably different organizational cultures and practices. Therefore, a comparison of the factors influencing expatriates in different industries is also an interesting topic for future study. Unfortunately the scope of this study did not allow for the inclusion of cultural perceptions and personal characteristics of expatriate managers. Therefore, to avoid this shortcoming,, future research should explore individual characteristics and skills in more detail. In this study, the only method used to collect the data is the quantitative method via a questionnaire. Future studies could examine the same topic by using qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative research employing in-depth interviews, may increase the validity and credibility of the outcome and come up with new variables to describe the factors that expatriates face in their daily life and work and

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reveal other interactions which might affect their cross-cultural adjustment in Thailand.

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