



Effects of personality traits (big five) on expatriates adjustment and job performance

Expatriates
adjustment and
job performance

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Abstract

Purpose – Researchers have been focusing on the predictors of expatriates adjustment and job performance at different levels (individual level, organizational level, and societal level) but still some of the predictors have been ignored or unclear in the expatriate literature. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of personality traits (big five) on expatriates adjustment and job performance.

Design/methodology/approach – In this regards, data were collected from 201 expatriates working in Malaysia and analyzed by using structural equation modelling with Amos 16.

Findings – The findings of this study indicated that personality traits (big five) which include extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism positively influence expatriate adjustment which further influence expatriate performance rated by peers. In other words, expatriates adjustment (work, interaction, and general) mediate the relationship between big five personality traits (extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism) and expatriates job performance (task, relationship building, and overall performance).

Research limitations/implications – The findings of this study will help the researchers to further understand the importance of personality traits required for successful completion of international assignment. Furthermore, the findings also suggest human resource professionals to consider these personality traits before selecting an individual for international assignment. Finally, future research directions have been proposed.

Originality/value – Literature on expatriate adjustment and job performance is still at developing stage. This paper shed light on the individual characteristics which work as predictors for expatriates adjustment and job performance.

Keywords Expatriates adjustment, Expatriates job performance, Big five, Personality traits

Paper type Research paper

In the last two decades, the demand for international assignees has increased due to global business expansion. MNCs are recruiting highly competent employees and offering competitive compensation plans for international assignment. Cao *et al.* (2012) argued that after the latest recession, many national economies are unstable and unpredictable. Therefore, it is becoming more critical for MNCs to have the right person, at the right time, and in the right place. The purpose of huge investment and



putting in more resources is to make international operations successful, which ultimately depends on the improved performance of international assignees. Therefore, MNCs are focusing on the performance of international assignees because they realize the better performance of international assignees will help them to successfully operate their international operation and get competitive advantage in the global market. Altman and Baruch (2012) argued that expatriation plays a strategic role in the management of global talent and researchers have been focusing on adjustment of expatriates. In this regard, Selmer (2006) argued that better performance of expatriates has become important to the success of multinational organizations. Researchers have been focusing on expatriates' performance and adjustment (Paik *et al.*, 2007; Mezias and Scandura, 2005) to help the MNCs to perform better in the international market. Srivastava and Panday (2012) argued that expatriates' failure is related to the MNC's performance because associated is very high. Huff (2013) suggested that for better expatriates' performance in the foreign country, the role of expatriate adjustment and satisfaction is vital. In this regard, Bashir (2012) argued that engaging expatriates in the business is expansive practice and multinationals have been facing many problems regarding pre-return of expatriates due to lack of cultural adjustment in the host country. Templer (2010) argues that due to global business expansion and competition, there is a need to better understand the performance of international assignees. Therefore, MNCs have been allocating more resources and attention to manage expatriates' performance and researchers have also been investigating those factors that affect expatriates' performance.

In the past, organizations selected managers for international assignment based on their technical and firefighting skills but now due to global competition the selection criteria have changed. Harvey (1996) proposed three stages of the expatriate selection process. The first stage focuses on policy and objective of the organization whereas the second stage addresses the different factors among expatriates, for example, age and gender (Tung, 2008), international experience and current position (Kim and Slocum, 2008). Finally, the third stage addresses the individual characteristics, many of which can be assessed through personality and psychological tests (Downes *et al.*, 2010). Researchers have highlighted many factors that influence expatriate adjustment and job performance which are normally classified as individual factors, organizational-level factors, and social level factors. Some researchers have tried to explain the role of individual factors in expatriates' success (Caligiuri, 2000; Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997; Arthur and Bennett, 1995; Black, 1990) but there are few studies that have examined the effects of individual factors on expatriates' adjustment and job performance. To the best of our knowledge, there is no study that has examined the effect of personality characteristics on expatriate adjustment and job performance except Shaffer *et al.* (2006). Arthur and Bennett (1995) suggested that researchers should fill this gap by determining whether personality characteristics or individual factors predict expatriates' success. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) argued that even though there is much emphasis on expatriate management, there is still a gap between personality traits and expatriates' performance which researchers need to cover. Luring and Selmer (2012) pointed out that most previous research on expatriates was based on private organizations but ignored other organizations who also make use of expatriates. They further argued that the demand of academic expatriates is increasing day by day and universities are searching for more and more academic staff. But unfortunately, research on academic expatriates has been ignored by the past researchers.

This study will not only examine the role of personality characteristics in expatriate job performance but also highlight the effects of personality characteristics on expatriate's adjustment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of personality characteristics on expatriates' adjustment and job performance. In this regard, first this paper will explain the importance of personality traits in the expatriate adjustment and job performance. Second, based on the past literature, this paper developed its hypothesis and theoretical framework. Third, in the methodology section, this paper will discuss the different measurements used to collect the data and analysis techniques. Next, this paper will present the data and discuss the result. Finally, this paper will discuss the findings and future research directions. At the end, practical and theoretical implications will be discussed.

Personality traits

Researchers have conceptualized personality in a variety of traits and multi-level of abstraction (McAdams, 1995) and each level develops better understanding in terms of different human behaviour and experiences (John and Srivastav, 1999). Past researchers have found that personality traits, ability, and skills are important predictors for expatriates' success and adjustment (Ramalu *et al.*, 2011; Downes *et al.*, 2010; Kim and Slocum, 2008). Furthermore, Mount *et al.* (1998) found that personality traits influence employee's job performance. More specifically, conscientiousness predicts as general trait for job performance whereas agreeableness and neuroticism predict job performance where employees work in a group. Finally, extraversion predicts job performance when individuals are engaged in sales or in a management position. John and Srivastav (1999) argued that big five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness) do not have theoretical perspectives but reflect natural language that people use to describe themselves and others. They further highlighted that "the Big Five taxonomy serves an integrative function because it can represent the various and diverse systems of personality description in a common framework" (John and Srivastav, 1999). In this regard, Migliore (2011) argued that the five factor model is one of the strongest theoretically supported models in trait psychology which explain taxonomy of five personality traits.

Researchers have highlighted many personality characteristics and argued that these characteristics played an important role in individual success. Among all personality characteristics, five factors are widely acceptable and most commonly used by researchers and practitioners to evaluate individual personality. These five factors are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness or intellect. Researchers labelled these five factors as the big five. MacDonald (1998) argued that big five personality characteristics are universal adaptive mechanisms for human beings to do two things: reproduce and preserve life. Furthermore, Caligiuri (2000) pointed out that an individual having these five personality characteristics may have the ability to build good professional relationships, achieve goals, get promoted, improve performance and so forth. These five factors may help an individual to adjust him/herself in the new culture, society, etc. For example, Buss (1991) highlighted that an individual having these five characteristics may achieve high economic success in terms of finding a partner and having children, good relationship with neighbour (preserve life), ability to learn social hierarchies (extraversion), willingness to cooperate (agreeableness), reliability of work and commitment (conscientiousness) ability to handle stress (emotional stability), innovation and problem-solving skills

(openness, intellect). Furthermore, Wolff and Kim (2012) reported that big five personality traits (extraversion and openness) broadly influence expatriates' networking capability. More specifically, agreeableness related to expatriate internal networking compared to external networking.

Theory of evolutionary personality psychology demonstrates that individuals may vary on these five skills they process and important for expatriate adjustment. McCrae and Costa (1997) suggest that the five personality characteristics are "universality might be attributed to species wide biological bases of traits [...] representing a purely psychological consequences of the shared human experiences of living in groups, using abstracts thought, or being conscious of your own morality" (McCrae and Costa, 1997, p. 509). Therefore, the similar personality characteristics are important for expatriates during their international assignment regardless of their race, nationality, or host country. Caligiuri (2000) suggested that individuals possessing five personality characteristics will be better suited for the international assignment because they can better adopt work and non-work lives in the host country. Hogan *et al.* (1996) pointed out that possessing certain personality characteristics will explain how suitable the individual is for the given task. Neubert and Taggar (2004) argued that the relation between job performance and the five factors is more a consequence of social aspects of the workplace than ability. Stupak and Stupak (2004) commented on Neubert's model and argued that personality traits may influence job performance but these factors (conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion) help the individuals to show up to work and get along with his/her co-workers. Furthermore, Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argued that, although a few studies have examined the effects of the big five on expatriate's job performance, the findings of these studies are still unclear.

The following paragraphs will further explain each factor in the big five personality traits and their relationship with expatriate's job performance and adjustment.

Extraversion

Extraversion refers to some more specific personality traits like talkative, energetic, and assertive. Neubert and Taggar (2004) argued that extraverted individuals expose low level of arousal if the workplace is social environment and less level of stimulation at home. In contrast, introverts express high level of arousal outside the workplace where stimulation is low. Lepine and Dyne (2001) found that extraversion is positively related with cooperative behaviour. In addition, Judge *et al.* (2002) found that extraverted individuals perform well in the workplace because they get more chance to practise arousal. Wolff and Kim (2012) reported that extraversion was broadly related to expatriates' networking capability. Buss (1991) proposed that individuals can achieve better reproductive success and preservation of life if they adjust themselves in the social environment through extraversion. Migliore (2011) argued that a low score on extraversion explains that an individual who likes to stay in the background is considered less talkative, reserved in speech, and less action oriented. Extraversion may help an expatriate to adjust among host country nationals (HCNs) by using assertive skills and energetic behaviour which reflect positive behaviour. Therefore, when HCNs perceive that expatriates have assertive behaviour, they might feel comfortable to share their cultural knowledge and experience with expatriates. Furthermore, Caligiuri (2000) suggested that these individuals can get better personal success through hierarchy of social environment. Caligiuri (2000) further argued that these personalities' traits will help the individuals when they go for international assignment to socialize into their host country. More specifically, sometimes HCNs

might be reluctant to get close to expatriates due to their perception which considers expatriates as strangers. On the other hand, expatriates also face a similar situation and consider HCNs as strangers perhaps due to individual and social differences. In this critical situation, those expatriates who are extroverted take the initiative to open talk and build relationships. In addition, those individuals who take the initiative to build relationships with HCNs and other expatriates can adjust in the host country culture faster than others (Black, 1990). Therefore, extraversion is important for individuals to learn the work and non-work culture in order to adjust in the host country.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness highlights personality traits like sympathetic, kind, and affectionate. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argue that agreeableness should be related to effort to get along. Lepine and Dyne (2001) found that agreeableness is positively related to cooperative behaviour. Therefore, agreeableness can help expatriates to effectively communicate and build better relationships with HCNs and in return can reduce the stress related to both work and non-work aspects of international assignments (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). Buss (1991) suggested that although individuals can achieve a better social position in the host country through extraversion, social alliance can be built through other personality characteristics (agreeableness). Wolff and Kim (2012) reported that agreeableness broadly related with expatriates' internal networking capability. Agreeableness can help the individual to form and maintain social alliance to support his/her social and professional life. In addition, Black (1990) proposed that expatriates who are more agreeable (i.e. resolving conflict, developing mutual understanding) report greater cross-cultural adjustment which further relates to expatriate job performance. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) pointed out that individuals who are more flexible are less offensive to others, and more easily fit in and adjust to a new culture. In other words, expatriates with agreeableness behaviour might reduce the argument level and develop social consensus in the society, which helps expatriates to adjust in the host country culture and perform better during international assignments. Migliore (2011) argued that a high score on agreeableness explains adoptability and value getting along with others, whereas low scores explain reluctance to get involved. Referring to Black's (1990) research on Japanese expatriates working in the USA, general, work, and interaction adjustment are positively related to agreeableness. In the study of Ones and Viswesaran (1999), agreeableness is the second most important predictor for interpersonal relations with HCNs and the third most important predictor for expatriates' adjustment and performance. In other words, individuals with flexible behaviour find it easy to adjust in terms of general adjustment, work adjustment, and integration adjustment.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness refers to personality traits like organized, thorough, and planful. Hogan *et al.* (1996) argues that these qualities may be helpful for expatriates to achieve their goals, get along, and find meanings. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) argue that those expatriates who are motivated to achieve conscientiousness spend more time on task completion and meet job expectations while facing personal problems (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). Therefore, this task oriented behaviour may lead to effective work adjustment and task achievement (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). Hough (1992) argues that expatriates who are motivated to get along with HCNs are predictable and engage in extra-role behaviours. As a result of these activities, expatriates can build better

interpersonal relationships, and effective interaction adjustment which further leads to better performance. In this regard, Migliore (2011) argued that high scores in conscientiousness explain focus, being careful, and reliable, whereas low scores in conscientiousness explain distraction, having flexibility, and being casual. Leiba-O Sullivan (1999) explained that conscientious motivated expatriates can develop effective perceptual questioning skills which help them to adopt the foreign culture easily. Lepine and Dyer (2001) found that conscientiousness is positively related to cooperative behaviour. Hertz and Donovan (2000) found that among big five factors, conscientiousness is highly correlated with job performance. Hogan *et al.* (1996) proposed that expatriates' reputations affect their status in the host country and social acceptance. When expatriates get a good reputation in the host country, their chances to become leader or achieve promotion increase. Therefore, when expatriates develop their impression as conscientiousness, their reputation in the organization grows (Caligiuri, 2000). Many researchers have highlighted the role of conscientiousness in the context of domestic employees' performance and found that conscientiousness positively influences work performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Furthermore, Ones and Viswesvaran (1997) proposed that the concept of conscientiousness should be generalized in expatriate's performance. Ones and Viswesvaran (1999) found that conscientiousness is highly correlated with adjustment and retention among all other big five factors.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism or emotional stability explains personality traits like tense, moody, and anxious. Richards (1996) argued that neuroticism is normally related with living and working in an unfamiliar environment. Researchers have suggested that emotional stability plays a vital role in expatriates' adjustment in the host country (Black, 1988; Gudykunst, 1988). Hogan and Shelton (1998) argue that neuroticism enables the expatriates to achieve goals, to get along and to find meaning. Furthermore, neuroticism helps expatriates to effectively handle problematic situations in a new environment (Ormel *et al.*, 2001). Furthermore, Migliore (2011) argued that high scores in neuroticism explain emotional reactive behaviour related to negative feelings like anger and anxiety, whereas low scores explain emotional stability and calmness. Emotional stability might help an individual to face and tolerate the cultural differences and get along with their peers. Therefore, if an expatriate tolerates the difference between host country and parent country, they can develop relationships faster which helps them to adjust in the host country and perform better. Hogan and Holland (2003) explain that emotional stability makes the individual confident and positive, which helps them to meet job expectations and get along with HCNs. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) pointed out that emotionally stable individuals are more likely to deal with unpleasant situations and handle the problems. The ability to deal with the unpleasant situation and problems helps the expatriates to adjust in the host country and perform better. Deller (1997) argues that emotionally stable expatriates may overcome the psychological discomfort which helps them in all forms of psychological adjustment. Ones and Viswesvaran (1999) found neuroticism is the second most important predictor for expatriate adjustment among all big five factors. Therefore, expatriates should be emotionally stable in order to cope with the stress and adjust in the host country.

Openness to experience

Openness to experience refers to personality traits like having wide interest, imaginative, and insightful. Buss (1991) highlighted that expatriates' perception and

action towards differences is important in order to solve the problem of survival and reproduction. Therefore, individual ability to correctly assess the social environment in order to ensure self-preservation is vital. Caligiuri (2000) argued that “expatriates ability to correctively assess the social environment is more complicated given that host country may provide ambiguous or uninterruptable social cues”. In addition, Migliore (2011) argued that high score in openness to experience explains broad intellectual curiosity with an individualistic and non-confirming way of thinking, whereas low score explains preference for familiarity, and narrow intellectual focus. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) suggested that those individuals who have high level of openness can adjust their behaviour according to different situational and cultural cues. Researchers have suggested that expatriates should correctively assess the host country culture in order to adjust and perform better in the host country (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). Furthermore, researchers proposed that openness and intellect is related to expatriate adjustment (Black, 1990; Cui and van den Berg, 1991). Wolff and Kim (2012) reported that openness broadly related to expatriates’ networking capability. Therefore, if expatriates have a tendency to experience new culture, values, and beliefs, their reaction towards host country differences might be positive. Furthermore, an expatriate with wide interest and imaginative personality might adjust in the host country faster and improve his/her performance with higher productivity. In this regard, Arthur and Bennett (1995) argued that openness is an important quality for expatriates which helps them to adjust and perform well during the international assignment, but empirical research has produced conflicting results about this relationship (Caligiuri, 2000).

The concept of big five has been widely used in domestic job performance but these personality traits are ignored when it comes to expatriate job performance. A few researchers have tried to explore the effects of big five on expatriate job performance (Caligiuri, 2000; Mol *et al.*, 2005) but they have ignored the role of expatriate adjustment in their studies. Even though past researchers conceptually highlighted the role of big five as predictor of cultural adjustment and societally (Church, 2000), their empirical examination explains the relationship between big five and expatriate job performance. More specifically, researchers have never empirically examined the mediating role of adjustment between big five and expatriate job performance. In this regards, Cheng and Lin (2009) suggested that expatriates research should focus on personality along with motivation, adjustment, and cultural adoption. Mol *et al.* (2009) suggested that researchers should focus on explaining the clear role of big five in the process of expatriate job performance rather than proposing an ideal profile of the successful expatriate. Claus *et al.* (2011) pointed out that the role of big five in expatriate job performance is unclear due to conflicting results in past research. In this regard, Cheng and Lin (2009) found that big five are the most important category among all predictors of expatriate’s job performance, whereas Barrick and Mount (1991) found moderate correlation between big five and expatriate’s job performance. Therefore, conflicting results in past studies regarding the effects of big five on expatriate’s job performance and Church’s (2000) suggestion further support the proposed framework in this study.

Expatriates adjustment

Altman and Baruch (2012) argued that it is a stressful situation for expatriates to leave their home country, temporarily reside in another country, and adjust to the new culture and work. Past researchers have different views about adjustment and they

have defined adjustment in terms of subjective well-being (Campbell, 1981) or unhappy feelings of expatriates about their circumstances (Munton and West, 1995). Furthermore, Selmer (1999) defined adjustment as socio-cultural characteristics in achieving effectiveness in interpersonal exchange with HCNs. Black's (1988) definition of adjustment is mostly acceptable, which explains that adjustment refers to psychological discomfort which can be categorized as work, general, and interaction adjustment, and past research provides strong evidence that well-adjusted expatriates are more effective in their international assignment (Downes *et al.*, 2010). With reference to expatriate adjustment, Cao *et al.* (2012) conducted research on self-initiated expatriates and found that career attitudes, career network, and cultural intelligence positively influence expatriate adjustment in the host country which further influences their career success.

Work adjustment refers to expatriate comfort with the job; general adjustment refers to expatriate's comfort with non-work factors like food, language, transportation, entertainment, etc. Finally, interaction adjustment refers to comfort associated with interaction of expatriates with HCNs inside and outside the work (Black, 1988). Black and Stephens (1989) have operationalized the three dimensions of adjustment and Shaffer *et al.* (1999) have validated these three dimensions. Past researchers have highlighted the concept of expatriate adjustment and explained that expatriate adjustment is a multidimensional construct (work, general, and interaction) (Bhaskarr *et al.*, 2005; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). Cultural adjustment related to non-work and work adjustment related to work, whereas interaction adjustment related to work and non-work environments (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). Srivastava and Panday (2012) suggested that when expatriates generally adjust in the host country, it becomes easy for expatriates to adjust in the work environment. Kraimer *et al.* (2003) found that expatriate's adjustment positively related with job performance and when expatriates properly adjust to the general environment in the host country, their job performance will be similar to how they perform in their home country (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). In addition, if the expatriates develop better relationships with local employees, this will be helpful for expatriates to meet the performance expectations of the company (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). Furthermore, Mol *et al.* (2005) pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment positively related with expatriate's job performance. Some of the researchers have empirically examined all expatriate adjustment dimensions (Thomas and Lazarova, 2006; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010) but the majority of the researchers have focused on work and interaction dimensions (Caligiuri, 1997; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2005).

Downes *et al.* (2010) pointed out that well-adjusted expatriates focus on their job task and there will be a better chance to be effective throughout the assignment. Huff (2013) argued that expatriate performance was not only based on their satisfaction with their work life but their living in the foreign country as well. Bashir (2012) argued that engaging expatriates in the business is expansive practice and multinationals have been facing many problems regarding pre-return of expatriates due to lack of cultural adjustment in the host country. Florkowski and Fogel (1999) pointed out that even though many researchers have highlighted the role of expatriate adjustment in expatriate success, expatriate adjustment role is still unclear. In addition, Maruyama (1992) argued that if expatriates fail to adjust to the host country, their level of cultural insensitivity, indifference, and ignorance increase. Furthermore, Templer *et al.* (2006) suggested that expatriate's adjustment is a key indicator for expatriate's success in their international assignment. Claus *et al.* (2011) highlighted that past research focused on job performance in expatriates' contexts but mostly researchers ignored the

expatriate adjustment in their studies (Tucker *et al.*, 2004; Liu and Shaffer, 2005; Shay and Baack, 2006; Osman-Gani and RockstuhI, 2008). In addition, Tucker *et al.* (2004) argued that the relationship between inter-cultural adjustment and expatriate job performance is complex and not well understood. Claus *et al.* (2011) argue that even though expatriate's adjustment and job performance are linked to each other logically, empirical research still has a lack of empirical evidence. Shaffer *et al.* (2006) highlighted that a few past studies have examined the effects of big five on expatriate performance but they have ignored the role of expatriate adjustment in terms of work, general, and interaction adjustment. Bhatti *et al.* (2012) argued that expatriate literature has a lack of empirical evidence about expatriate adjustment and researchers should empirically investigate the mediating role of expatriate adjustment between individual factors and expatriate job performance.

Job performance

Harrison and Shaffer (2005) argued that job performance is a function of the amount of time and energy (effort) that an expatriate devoted to his/her job. Theory of job performance explained that job performance is a multidimensional construct which consists of a task dimension and a contextual dimension. Researchers have highlighted many factors that influence expatriate job performance such as goal orientation, self-efficacy, self-monitoring, task and people orientation, relational ability, and international experience (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006; Wang and Takeuchi, 2007). Caligiuri (1997) argued that early return of expatriates influences their job performance. This study will only focus on personality traits and investigate the influence of personality traits on expatriate adjustment and job performance. In order to measure expatriate job performance, researchers have been using different sources like peers, supervisors, subordinates, etc. which can be HCNs or third country nationals (TCNs). Paik *et al.* (2007) argued that the performance of expatriates heavily depends on the host country workforce and researchers have neglected this area. Jassawalla *et al.* (2004) argue that expatriate adjustment mostly depends on how they deal with cross-cultural conflicts with the host country workforce. They further argue that those expatriates who successfully handle their conflicts with the host country workforce are more likely to experience smooth adjustment in their workplace. Templer (2010) highlighted that global business expansion required more expatriates for international assignment which forced HRD professionals to effectively manage and better understand expatriate performance.

In order to cover the gap in expatriate literature (as discussed in the above paragraphs), the following hypotheses have been developed:

- H1. Expatriates adjustment (general, work, and interaction) mediate the relationship between extraversion and expatriates job performance (peer rated).
- H2. Expatriates adjustment (general, work, and interaction) mediate the relationship between agreeableness and expatriates job performance (peer rated).
- H3. Expatriates adjustment (general, work, and interaction) mediate the relationship between conscientiousness and expatriates job performance (peer rated).
- H4. Expatriates adjustment (general, work, and interaction) mediate the relationship between neuroticism and expatriate job performance (peer rated).

H5. Expatriates adjustment (general, work, and interaction) mediate the relationship between openness to experience and expatriates job performance (peer rated) (Figure 1).

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to examine the effects of personality traits on expatriate adjustment and job performance. The data were collected from 230 expatriates working in Malaysia and their peers which include TCNs and HCNs. In order to avoid common method bias problem, two different questionnaires were developed and respondents (expatriates and their peers) were asked to respond to a set of statements according to their level of agreement or disagreement. Questionnaire 1 consisted of 182 true-false statements related to personality traits (big five) and adjustment (interaction, work, and general) which was distributed to the expatriates. Questionnaire 2 consisted of statements related to expatriates’ job performance which was distributed to expatriates’ peers. Holopainen and Bjorkman (2005) critically reviewed the past literature and argued that the major problem in expatriate literature is common method bias. The majority of studies examining the relationship among personality traits and expatriate performance were conducted through a survey which was sent to the expatriates to respond to. When the same expatriate provides information about dependent and independent variables, it creates the common method bias problem. This study is free from common method bias because the information about the independent and mediating variables is provided by the expatriates and information about the dependent variable is provided by the expatriates’ peers. Therefore, 230 questionnaires were distributed to expatriates and their peers and 207 questionnaires were returned after completion. A total of six questionnaires were discarded due to illogical responses. Finally, 201 questionnaires were used for analysis.

Measurement

In order to measure the personality traits which is the independent variable in the above proposed model, Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) was used. Hogan *et al.* (1992) developed HPI to measure the personality traits (big five). HPI divided Extraversion into two subscales as sociability and ambition. The sociability scale consists of 24 items. Sample items include “I am often the life of the party” whereas

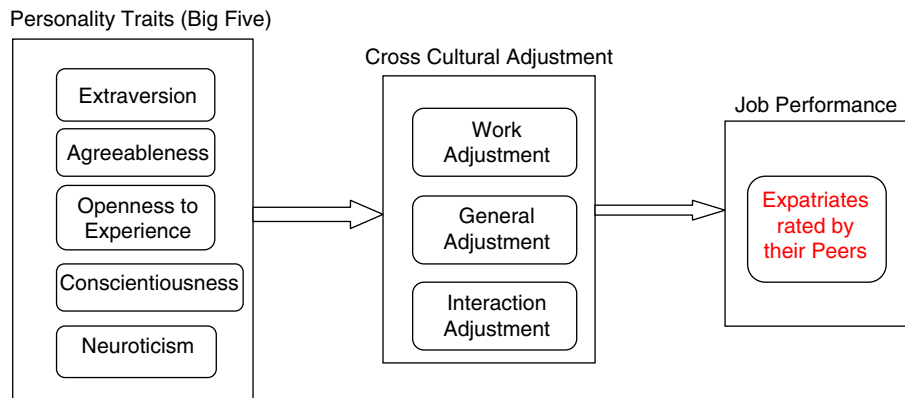


Figure 1.
Theoretical framework

ambition scale consists of 29 items. Sample items include “I know what I want to be”. The combination of sociability and ambition represents extraversion score.

Agreeableness was measured by using 22 items. Sample items include “I am sensitive to other people’s mood”. In addition, Conscientiousness was measured by using 37 items. Sample items include “I do my job as well as I possibly can”. Furthermore, emotional stability was measured by using 37 items. Sample items include “I am seldom tense or anxious”. Finally, openness or intellect was measured by using two subscales, intellectance and school success. Intellectance was measured by using 25 items. Sample items include “I enjoy solving riddles”. School success was measured by using 14 items. Sample items include “I have a large vocabulary”.

Expatriated adjustment was measured with 12 items by using Black’s (1988) scale. Black (1988) classified expatriate adjustment into three categories and measured them as general adjustment (four items), interaction adjustment (four items), and work adjustment (four items). Finally, expatriate performance through peers was measured with ten items developed by Caligiuri (1997). Factor analysis of these items divided the scale into three subscales named as task completion (four items), relationship building (four items), and overall performance (two items).

Demographic data of respondents

A total of 201 questionnaires were returned from the expatriates’ pool, represented by 153 male and 48 female. The lower number of female respondents might be due to the fact that females are reluctant to go for international assignment. All of them had been working in their current organizations for more than two years. A total of 192 respondents had previous international experience. Expatriates were citizens of 12 countries which include Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, England, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, and Thailand. A similar number of questionnaires were returned from expatriates’ peers, represented by 120 female and 81 male. The high number of female respondents might be due to the large size of the female workforce in the country (Malaysia). All the peers had been working with expatriates for more than two years.

Analysis and results

Structural equation modelling (SEM) with Amos-16 was used to test the proposed model. SEM is a family of statistical models that seek to explain the relationship between multiple variables (Hair *et al.*, 2007). SEM has become one of the popular statistical tools to test the relationships proposed in a parsimonious model (Cheng, 2007). In addition, Byrne (2001) pointed out that this technique is appropriately used: “when the researcher has some knowledge of the underlying latent variables structure. Based on knowledge of the theory, empirical research, or both, he or she postulates relations between observed measures and the underlying factors a priori and then tests this hypothesized structure statistically”. Cheng (2007) suggested that SEM is a better statistical technique than other multivariate techniques including multiple regression, path analysis, and factor analysis. In addition, Hair *et al.* (2007) claim that “SEM has been advocated because it can expand the explanatory ability and statistical efficiency for model testing with a single comprehensive method”. SEM researchers propose a two-step procedure when testing theoretical models (Medsker *et al.*, 1994). The first step is to examine and validate the measurement model, with the second step testing the structural model and conducting hypothesis tests (Garver and Williams, 2009). In the first step, measurement model (factor) analyses evaluated the contribution of

each item to the construct (latent variables) being assessed. Then in the second step, the structural model was tested to determine the strength of the hypothesized relationships between the constructs.

Table I shows that the reliability of all scales is above 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2007) which indicates that all scales have higher internal consistency level.

Fornell and Larcker (1981) argued that the convergent validity of all scales should be at least 0.50. All variables have at least 0.50 or all values are > 0.50 which shows that all scales have adequate convergent validity.

Discriminant validity

All items in the results are greater than squared covariance or > 0.60 as proposed by which demonstrate that all variables are discriminate each other and statistically significant.

Notes for the model (Table II)

Table III shows the measurement model fit. Six indicators have been selected to explain the model fit. In this model comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.954 higher than the acceptable baseline (CFI ≥ 0.90) indicates adequate fit (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009).

Table I.
Reliability of the scale

Constructs	Internal consistency
Extraversion	0.854
Agreeableness	0.801
Conscientiousness	0.721
Neuroticism	0.901
Openness to experience	0.659
General adjustment	0.854
Work adjustment	0.739
Interaction adjustment	0.910
Task performance	0.864
Relationship building	0.931
Overall performance	0.814

Table II.
Computation of degree of freedom (default model)

Number of distinct sample moments	1,021
Number of distinct parameter to be estimated	235
df (1,021-235)	786

Table III.
Measurement model fit

Overall model measure	Overall model score	Acceptable model fit	Acceptable baseline
CFI	0.954	Passed	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.849	Passed	≥ 0.80
RMSEA	0.041	Passed	< 0.10
CMIN/df	1.568	Passed	< 3
TLI	0.957	Passed	≥ 0.89
IFI	0.961	Passed	≥ 0.90

With reference to adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), the value is 0.849 which fulfils the acceptable baseline (AGFI ≥ 0.80) indicates good fit (Cheng, 2007). Furthermore, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.041 shows model fit value which should be < 0.05 indicate a good fit (Byrne, 2001, p. 85) and higher up to 0.10 can indicate average fit (Chen *et al.*, 2008) but above a value of 0.10, the fit is said to be poor (Byrne, 2001, p. 89). The χ^2 /degree of freedom (CMIN/df) is 1.568 also indicate good fit CMIN/df < 3 (Cheng, 2007; Byrne, 2001; Chau, 1997). In addition, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) is 0.957 indicate adequate fit (Loibl *et al.*, 2009). Finally, IFI is 0.961 which also consider adequate fit (Lai, 2009) (Table IV).

Table IV shows the standardized model fit. Six indicators have been selected to explain the model fit. In this model CFI is 0.932 for the proposed model, 0.932 for competing model A and 0.933 for model B which touch the acceptable baseline (CFI ≥ 0.90) indicates adequate fit (Cleveland *et al.*, 2009; Chen *et al.*, 2008; Cheng, 2007; Chau, 1997).

With reference to AGFI the value is 0.875 for proposed and competing model A 0.877 and model B 0.875 which fulfils the acceptable baseline (AGFI ≥ 0.80) indicates good fit (Cheng, 2007; Chau, 1997). Furthermore, RMSEA is 0.037 shows model fit value which should be < 0.05 indicate a good fit (Byrne, 2001, p. 85) and higher up to 0.10 can indicate average fit (Chen *et al.*, 2008) but above a value of 0.10, the fit is said to be poor (Byrne, 2001, p. 89). The χ^2 /degree of freedom (CMIN/df) is 2.010 also indicate good fit CMIN/df < 3 (Cheng, 2007; Byrne, 2001; Chau, 1997). In addition, TLI is 0.901 for proposed model and 0.845 for competing model A indicate adequate fit (Loibl *et al.*, 2009). Finally, IFI is 0.901 which also consider adequate fit (Lai, 2009).

Notes for the model (Tables V and VI)

The final step is to compare the proposed model with two competing nested models (Hair *et al.*, 2007) to ensure that no other model is acceptable. Therefore, three models were examined, for which the model parsimony, fit indexes, and theoretical justification were compared. The first model is the proposed model with the χ^2 842.321,

Overall model measure	Proposed model	Competing model A	Competing model B	Acceptable model fit	Acceptable baseline
CFI	0.932	0.932	0.933	Passed	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.875	0.877	0.875	Passed	≥ 0.80
RMSEA	0.037	0.037	0.037	Passed	< 0.10
CMIN/df	2.010	2.013	2.010	Passed	< 3
TLI	0.901	0.741	0.901	Passed	≥ 0.89
IFI	0.910	0.845	0.910	Passed	≥ 0.90

Table IV.
Structural model fit

	Proposed model	Competing model A	Competing model B
Number of distinct sample moments	1,021	1,001	1,000
Number of distinct parameter to be estimated	235	230	254
df	786	771	746

Table V.
Computation of degree of freedom

the second model, competing model A, added the direct paths and has lowest χ^2 with 801.359 and df 482 but at the same time competing model A has the highest number of parameters. Therefore, the alternative was the parsimonious. Furthermore, the results showed that most paths were not statistically significant. The third model is competing model B with χ^2 826.347 which is lower than the proposed model and good model fit as compared to the proposed model. However, "good model fit alone is insufficient to support to proposed structural theory" (Hair *et al.*, 2007, p. 757). Therefore, the proposed model has been accepted (Tables VII and VIII).

All constructs are statistically significant with *p*-value ($p < 0.05$; Hair *et al.*, 2007). In order to see the effects of personality traits (big five) on expatriate adjustment and job performance, the researchers have explained the parameters of the

Table VI.
Results

	Minimum was achieved	Proposed model	Competing model A	Competing model B
χ^2		842.321	801.359	826.347
df		402	482	400
Probability level		0.000	0.000	0.000

Table VII.
Summary of effects

Variables	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
Extraversion → general adjustment	0.452	–	0.152
Agreeableness → general adjustment	0.342	–	0.142
Conscientiousness → general adjustment	0.268	–	0.168
Neuroticism → general adjustment	0.455	–	0.155
Openness → general adjustment	0.454	–	0.154
Extraversion → interaction adjustment	0.245	–	0.145
Agreeableness → interaction adjustment	0.258	–	0.158
Conscientiousness → interaction adjustment	0.525	–	0.125
Neuroticism → interaction adjustment	0.219	–	0.119
Openness → interaction adjustment	0.205	–	0.105
Extraversion → work adjustment	0.361	–	0.161
Agreeableness → work adjustment	0.291	–	0.291
Conscientiousness → work adjustment	0.359	–	0.359
Neuroticism → work adjustment	0.207	–	0.207
Openness → work adjustment	0.418	–	0.418
Extraversion → task performance	–	0.187	0.187
Agreeableness → task performance	–	0.082	0.082
Conscientiousness → task performance	–	0.117	0.117
Neuroticism → task performance	–	0.161	0.161
Openness → task performance	–	0.051	0.051
Extraversion → relationship building	–	0.164	0.164
Agreeableness → relationship building	–	0.059	0.059
Conscientiousness → relationship building	–	0.251	0.251
Neuroticism → relationship building	–	0.025	0.025
Openness → relationship building	–	0.169	0.169
Extraversion → overall performance	–	0.187	0.187
Agreeableness → overall performance	–	0.248	0.248
Conscientiousness → overall performance	–	0.131	0.131
Neuroticism → overall performance	–	0.110	0.110
Openness → overall performance	–	0.241	0.241

Hypotheses		<i>p</i> -value	<i>t</i> -value	Accept or reject
<i>H1</i>	Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between extraversion and expatriates job performance (peer rated)	0.001	4.61	Accept
<i>H2</i>	Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between agreeableness and expatriates job performance (peer rated)	0.020	2.32	Accept
<i>H3</i>	Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between conscientiousness and expatriates job performance (peer rated)	0.049	4.08	Accept
<i>H4</i>	Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between neuroticism and expatriate job performance (peer rated)	0.031	2.15	Accept
<i>H5</i>	Expatriates adjustment (general, work and interaction) mediate the relationship between openness to experience and expatriates job performance (peer rated)	0.049	2.49	Accept

Table VIII.
Result of analyses
and hypotheses

significant paths. The results also indicated that personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience) influence expatriate job performance through expatriate adjustment. In other words, expatriate adjustment plays a mediating role between personality traits and expatriate job performance.

The results of the study supported the *H1* and indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between extraversion and expatriate performance, *t*-value ($t = 4.610$; $t > 1.96$; Hair *et al.*, 2007). The results shows that extraversion directly affects the expatriate adjustment (general, interaction and work) (effect = 0.452, 0.245, 0.361). The results of this study also provide evidence about *p*-value ($p = 0.001$; $p < 0.05$; Garver and Williams, 2009) indicate that the path (extraversion has positive relationship with adjustment) is statistically significant.

The results of this study *t*-value ($t = 2.320$; $t > 1.96$; Hair *et al.*, 2007) indicated that adjustment mediates the relationship between agreeableness and expatriate performance and supported the *H2*. Agreeableness directly influences adjustment (general, interaction and work) (effect = 0.342, 0.258, 0.291). The *p*-value ($p = 0.020$; $p < 0.05$; Garver and Williams, 2009) indicates that the path (agreeableness effect adjustment) is statistically significant. In other words, agreeableness exerted indirect effect on expatriate performance mediated by adjustment.

The result of hypothesis *H3* indicates that adjustment mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and expatriate performance *t*-value ($t = 4.086$, $t > 1.96$; Hair *et al.*, 2007). The results of this study *t*-value ($t > 1.96$; Hair *et al.*, 2007; $t = 1.96$) indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between neuroticism and expatriate job performance *H4*. In other words, neuroticism directly influences the expatriate adjustment (effect = 0.455, 0.219, 0.207). The *p*-value ($p < 0.05$; Garver and Williams, 2009; $p = 0.049$) indicates that the path (neuroticism positively related with expatriate adjustment) is statistically significant.

Finally, the results of this study indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between openness and expatriate job performance with *t*-value ($t > 1.96$; Hair *et al.*, 2007; $t = 2.156$) and supported *H5*. In addition, the results also explain that openness positively influences expatriate adjustment (effect = 0.454, 0.205, 0.218) and

p -value ($p < 0.05$; Garver and Williams, 2009; $p = 0.031$) indicates that the path (openness positively related with expatriate) is statistically significant.

Discussion

Global business expansion increases the demand of employees for international assignment and MNCs have been investing maximum resources and efforts to manage their international assignees' performance. Ramalu *et al.* (2011) argued that organizations receive multiple advantages while having a diverse workforce and expatriates. A survey conducted by Windham International and National Foreign Trade Council Inc (1998) on human resource managers and international relocation experts reported that organizations continue to rely on expatriates and 41 percent of corporate revenues comes from outside the home country. Beechler and Woodward (2009) argued that organizations need expatriate employees in order to internationalization of market and competition. Therefore, developing economies adopt an international strategy for global expansion and recruit more expatriates for a successful and smooth process of global expansion.

Parallel to HR practitioners, researchers have also been trying to investigate the predictors of expatriate adjustment and job performance but unfortunately personality traits as predictors to expatriate adjustment and job performance have been ignored by the past researchers. Even though some of the researchers have tried to conceptualize the relationship between individual factors including personality traits (big five), past studies still have a lack of clear directions for these relationships (Cheng and Lin, 2009; Mol *et al.*, 2009). Claus *et al.* (2011) pointed out that the role of big five in expatriate job performance is unclear due to conflicting results in past research. Furthermore, conflicting results in past studies regarding effects of big five on expatriates' job performance and Church's (2000) suggestion further support the proposed framework in this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of personality traits (big five) as predictors of expatriate adjustment (interaction, general and work) and job performance (task, relationship building, and overall performance). The findings of this study suggested that extroverted expatriates possess assertive and talkative skills which help them to adjust in their work and general environment. Furthermore, assertive skills also help expatriates to interact with HCNs positively and develop better relationships with them. In addition, this adjustment further helps them to perform their daily tasks more easily, build relationships, and improve their performance. Extraverted individuals perform well due to more time for practices arousal (Judge *et al.*, 2002), build better relationships with HCNs (Caligiuri, 2000) and successfully complete their assigned tasks (Black, 1990). Therefore, the theoretical viewpoint of Judge *et al.* (2002), Caligiuri (2000) and Black (1990) supported the empirical findings of this study.

Another factor among big five personality traits is agreeableness which demonstrates that an individual with agreeableness traits is kind, sympathetic, and affectionate. The findings of this study suggested that an individual with agreeableness personality traits can maintain better work and general adjustment. Furthermore, their kind and sympathetic behaviour helps them to interact with HCNs more positively. These adjustment factors further help expatriates to build better relationships with HCNs and perform their task successfully. Finally, adjustment also helps expatriates to improve their overall performance. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the theoretical viewpoint of Shaffer *et al.* (2006) in which they proposed that agreeableness helps expatriates to build better relationships with HCNs, cross-cultural adjustment, and performance improvement (Black, 1990).

With reference to conscientiousness, the findings of this study indicated that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between conscientiousness and job performance. The empirical findings of this study support the theoretical viewpoint in past studies which explain that an individual possessing personality traits like playful and organized is motivated to spend more time on task completion (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006), get along with the host country (Hough, 1992), cooperative behaviour (Lepine and Dyne, 2001), and better job performance (Hurtz and Donovan, 2000).

Neuroticism or emotional stability helps expatriates to adjust in the host country and improve their performance as indicated in the findings of this research. The findings of this research further indicated that emotional stability of an individual helps him/her to adjust in their work and general environment. Furthermore, emotional stability helps expatriates to interact with HCNs more positively and tolerate the cultural differences. Therefore, these adjustments further help expatriates to build better relations with HCNs, complete their task successfully and improve their overall performance. Empirical findings of this study provide support for the argument by past researchers in which they highlighted that emotional stability might help expatriates to achieve goals (Hogan and Shelton, 1998), handle problematic situations and tolerate cultural differences (Ormel *et al.*, 2001) meeting job expectations (Hogan and Holland, 2003).

Finally, the concept of openness to experience explains that an individual having wide interest and imaginative thoughts helps him/her to solve the problem of survival and reproduction (Buss, 1991). The findings of this study indicated that expatriates with wide interest and imaginative thoughts can adjust in the work and general environment faster than those who lack this personality trait. Furthermore, expatriates who like to experience new things or culture might interact with others more positively while ignoring the cultural differences. In this regard, Ramalu *et al.* (2011) proposed that expatriates who like to experience new culture can adjust their behaviour according to the new culture and situation. Furthermore, this personality trait help expatriates to build better relationships with HCNs which helps them to compete their task and improve their performance (Caligiuri, 2000). Therefore, the findings of this study are consistent with past researchers' theoretical viewpoints.

Limitations and future research direction

This study examines the effects of big five on expatriate adjustment and job performance. Future studies should examine other personality traits and their effects on expatriate adjustment and job performance. Another direction for future research is performance evaluation of expatriates. Researchers have examined the 360 degree performance feedback at domestic level but this area has been ignored in expatriate assignment. Past researchers have examined the expatriate performance through supervisor but this study only considers expatriate peers' feedback about their performance. As a part of 360 degree performance feedback, supervisor and spouse may provide clear insight about expatriate performance. Therefore, future studies should collect data from expatriate supervisor or spouse to further understand the effects of big five on expatriate adjustment and job performance. One of the important factors is cultural similarities and differences between host and home country. This study did not consider the cultural similarities between expatriates' home country and Malaysian culture. There could be a possibility that expatriates from Indonesia and Singapore may not have an adjustment problem due to cultural similarities (language, food, weather) as compared to expatriates from Egypt and Pakistan.

Therefore, future studies should consider cultural factors between home country and host country and investigate how cultural similarities and differences influence expatriate adjustment in the host country and how personality traits help expatriates to cope with these cultural similarities and differences. Finally, this model was tested in Malaysia and data was collected from those expatriates working in Malaysia. Future research should test this model in other countries with different cultural settings.

Implications

This paper provides theoretical grounds for personality traits, expatriates' adjustment and job performance, and explains that personality traits play an important role in expatriates' adjustment and job performance. Researchers should consider personality traits as predictors of expatriate adjustment which further enhances expatriate job performance. Furthermore, this paper suggests that researchers should classify expatriate adjustment as work, general, and interactions adjustment in order to better understand the role of personality traits (big five) in expatriate job performance. The findings of this study suggest that managers and practitioners involved in managing expatriates selection, training, and performance should pay attention to expatriates' personality traits. In this regard, they should conduct different types of test to evaluate personality traits (big five). Furthermore, considering the factors such as extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience will help them to make the selection process more successful and will reduce expatriate failure during international assignment. Therefore, managers engaged in the candidates selection process should consider personality traits because individual factors help expatriates to adjust in the host county. This study also suggests managers involved in expatriate training such as pre-departure training should design training programmes by considering personality traits. For example, enhancing expatriate emotional stability, more focus on cultural training to overcome cultural sensitivity of the candidates, and explaining the role of conscientiousness during their international assignment. Finally, highlighting each individual's personality traits (big five) and explaining how they can use their personality traits to have work, general, and interaction adjustment in the host country will improve the expatriate's performance during international assignment. Finally, this paper helps managers and HR professionals to better understand the role of personality traits in expatriate adjustment and job performance.

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