The Influence of Intercultural Communication Barriers on Job Performance among Expatriates of MNCs in Malaysia

Y. S. A. Rahman, I. A. Hussain*
School of Business, Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: I. A. Hussain, School of Business, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
ibiwani@staffemail.apu.edu.my

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of power distance and high context and low context communication styles against intercultural communication barriers. Using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's Context Theory as the underpinning theories, the study examined the influence of power distance and HC-LC communication styles on expatriates' performance among expatriates who are working in MNCs in Malaysia. The study was a quantitative study that used self-administered questionnaires to collect data from respondents and analysed data using SPSS. 113 respondents participated in the survey questionnaire from 33 countries across MNCs of various industries in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Using Pearson correlation analysis, the study's results found a significantly positive relationship between power distance and expatriates' job performance. The study also revealed that HC-LC communication styles have a strong and positive influence on job performance among expatriates. The results further demonstrated that HC-LC communication styles had a stronger correlation with expatriates' job performance than power distance orientation.

1. Introduction

Expatriates' performance is undoubtedly important to ensure the general success of multinational corporations. This can be seen from the growing attention given to well-constructed management of expatriates to ensure successful international assignments (Bhatti et al., 2013; Cerdin & Brewster, 2014; Guttormsen & Francesco, 2019). Alas, expatriate's failure rate is sharply increasing with the expansion of international business (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014). Significantly, the rate of expatriates' failure on an international assignment is gradually increasing, and it is estimated that 16 -70% of expatriates fail in their task varying across host countries (Sims & Schraeder, 2004). This is supported by a reliable finding of the National Foreign Trade Council and Management (2014) that showed 16% - 40% of the international assignments end in failures. It is also alarming that American expatriate's failure rate was estimated to be 20% - 40%, which in this case, 3 to 4 times higher than European or Asian's expatriates' failure rates (Yeaton & Hall, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2017). However, the lack and varied understandings as to what influences expatriates job performance demonstrates a paucity of research as they are found to be inconsistent and inconclusive. Similarly, there is a lack of studies on expatriates' performance in the context of communication in resonance conducted within Malaysia. There is also very limited research on cultural dimensions in the context of communication and its direct effects on international assignee's performance. In line with the global trend, this study is intended to provide multinational organisations established in Malaysia with the findings and insights of the effects of cross-cultural communications barriers on the performance of expatriates.

1.1 MNCs and expatriates in Malaysia

Multinational companies (MNCs) are known by many as international enterprises, transnational corporations, a global enterprises, just to name a few (Rehman, 2018). There are many cogent studies that demonstrated how MNCs used expatriates in developing global managers and disseminating knowledge in their organisations (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004). Equally important, the increasing demand for global talent has led more MNCs to increase the number of employees assigned internationally to enhance the reverse flows of knowledge (Mansor & Adnan, 2014). With the growth of the global economy and development, MNCs have been extending their footprint into all corners of the world, accelerating the need for knowledge to facilitate new markets penetration as well as to develop international management competencies (Rehman, 2018). Malaysia, being one of the preferred destinations in ASEAN for FDI, has always tried to maintain the competitiveness of FDI determinants whereby many policy instruments have been imposed to attract a large number of MNCs to establish their operations. The flow of expatriates to Malaysia is also supported by the government's initiatives as the Malaysian government puts great importance on the expatriates and the cohort's adjustment. One of the initiatives taken by the government is the establishment of Talent Corp Foreign Talent Facilitation that is responsible for enhancing expatriate facilitation. In the recent year, another enhancement was made to the Expatriate Division Services online portal whereby several refinement features were introduced, including online applications, cancellations, and online payment for immigration fees. These digitisation and automation efforts were made to improve the processing of expatriate-related procedures (KPMG, 2019). As the demand for expatriates' deployment into this country increases owing to Malaysia's hospitable conditions and promising economic prospects, more organisations are becoming mindful and heedful of the cultural perspectives and mannerisms that may pose puzzling and awkward situations for their expatriates. Many expatriates who are considered as high performers in their home operations would usually find the mental maps they have depended on before do not apply or may not necessarily be appropriate and relevant to the host country where they were assigned to—ultimately influence both the individual expatriate and organisation's performance (Halim, Abu-Bakar, & Mohamad, 2019). Therefore, there is a stream of academic literature that has evolved since the 1980s (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) following the globalisation pace, making studies on expatriates one of the cardinal areas of research in the international business (IB) domain ((Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). Since the 1950s, studies have shown that the expatriate's historic conceptualisation is borne out of business engagement, whereby in the organisational context, expatriates refer to individuals working abroad to assist the company meet their organisational goals (Tharenou, 2013). Historically, the word 'expatriate' was used to characterise Westerners who have resided abroad with ranging duration (Lennie & Griggs, 1985). This concept suggests that the number of expatriates worldwide is exceptionally immense, most probably exceeding 20 million (Clarke et al., 2016). On the contrary, Naeem et al. (2015) concluded that expatriates are typically different from other types of travellers like migrants or tourists based on the reason of travel and the duration of time staying abroad. In this context, the usual length of time spent for expatriates is between six months to five years in a particular place, with the intention of returning home coupled with a purpose or motive for being in a different particular country, to begin with (Sims & Schraeder, 2004).

1.2 Job Performance

Over the last decades, there have been many attempts made by scholars and researchers to explain and clarify the conceptualisation of job performance, although the common measure in academic studies is that performance involves actions resulting from the actions and what employees gain from their actions and behaviour (Sonnentag & Frese, 2002). Comprises of job explicit behaviour, task performance is largely facilitated through task knowledge, task habits and task skills and requires more cognitive ability given that it includes the fundamental job responsibilities included in the respective job description (Pradhan & Jena, 2017). In other

words, task performance, also called in-role performance, technical proficiency, and job-specific proficiency, can be elaborated as one's competency (i.e., proficiency) in performing central job tasks. This includes work quality, work quantity, and job knowledge (Koopmans et al., 2011). Borman and Motowidlo (1997), on the other hand, categorised job performance into two: contextual and task performance. Task performance/dimension basically refers to an individual's competency with which one carries out activities that constitute the company's "technical core" while contextual performance/dimension, on the contrary, involves activities that do not contribute to the technical core yet act as the supporting factors to the social, organisational and social environment in which organisational objectives are pursued (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). With all the varied concepts introduced by past scholars, Sing and Mahmood (2017) concluded that the efforts directed towards the generalisable models of performance have been small-scale. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that what constitutes performance differs amongst jobs and thereby demonstrates the many job performance indicators (Kartar-Singh & Nik-Mahmood, 2017). In the context of expatriates, Harrison and Shaffer (2005) claimed that job performance captures the amount of effort (energy) and time that an expatriate dedicated to his/her duties. Arguably, from the viewpoints of both organisations and expatriates, job performance is generally an important and direct measure of expatriate effectiveness (Gilad et al., 2010).

1.4 Cross-cultural communication barriers

In a culturally diverse workplace, especially MNCs, cross-cultural communication presents a plethora of conflicts that are bound by cultural barriers/filters. According to Rani (2016), barriers to communication are basically anything that hinders effective transmission and comprehension of information, thoughts, and ideas. One of the notable barriers to communication is cultural barriers, as aligned to the purpose of this study. Undeniably, numerous cross-cultural communication barriers are elicited as the distinctly different cultural elements involved in the communication process may lead to different cultural interpretations and meanings (Georgakopoulos & Jaeckle, 2007; Okech et al., 2015). This is supported by Browayes and Price (Understanding cross-cultural management, 2008), who highlighted the barriers of cross-cultural communication, including communication and thinking style can result in misunderstandings. A study conducted by Okoro (2012) also maintained that miscommunication is more prevalent among employees and managers coming from different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, thus further reinforcing the notions made by previous authors mentioned. Abugre and Debrah (2019) suggested that understanding the conflicts in cross-cultural communication is especially important as it is critical for knowledge flows in MNCs, MNCs' overall performance and global leadership success, among the multiple work outcomes of international assignees (Kuznetsov & Kuznetsova, 2014; Liu et al., 2015). According to several compelling studies, the barriers to cross-cultural communication are rooted in power distance prevalent (Ybema & Hyunghae, 2009; Khatri, 2009; Ghosh, 2011; Ray, 2014; Nnia, 2015) and also can be explained in the form of binary variance like low vs high context cultures (Adair & Brett, 2005; Cañado & García, 2007; Douchet et al., 2009; Nnia, 2015).

Power distance

Hofstede defined power distance as the degree to which members of a culture accept power inequality distribution between classes, demonstrating how cultures distinctly differentiate between groups and individuals in accordance to authority, power, status, wealth, prestige and material possessions (Farh et al., 2007; Daniels & Greguras, 2014). On that account, the power distance index (PDI) for a country is calculated to see the range and degree of power distance of that particular country (Harada, 2017).

High and low context communications
This concept was introduced to explore the correlation between communication and culture and to understand the determinants that inhibit or facilitate effective communication between groups or individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Hll, 1976). High context communication culture is described as interdependent in which the meanings of words or phrases uttered may carry different interpretations as the context of the words used may have different connotations (Hall, 1962). More than often, the connotations when words are complemented with non-verbal communication can be altogether different (Nam, 2015). In order to put it differently, thoughts and feelings are not expressed in words because the meanings are implicit. This explains why high-context culture is characterised as a culture that requires individuals to understand and learn others from their nonverbal cues (Harada, 2017). As confirmed by Kitayama and Ishii (2000), East Asians' content in a language is relatively low. Therefore, informal and nonverbal responses provide the missing parts to bridge the communication.

1.5 Power distance and expatriates job performance
The majority of the body literature did not directly correlate power distance and expatriate's performance; however, relate power distance to subdimensions of expatriate's job performance (e.g., time taken to complete work, quality of relationships with HCNs, and ability to perform effective knowledge transferring) and more importantly with key indicators to expatriates' performance like expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment and job satisfaction that significantly and logically related. In a different light, it was found that not only power distance is recognised as an influential determinant of stress and motivation, but it also plays a contributory factor on expatriate's overall performance (Pinto, Cardoso, & Werther, 2017). Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) discovered that there is a significant positive relationship between power distance and expatriates' job satisfaction that positively affects expatriates' overall performance among western expatriates in Japan. The study also discovered that national culture and supervisor's nationality, as well as host country's communication patterns, were important determinants of expatriate's job satisfaction that eventually influenced the success of expatriates' international assignments. Caliguiri and Day (2000) focused among expatriates in a US-based MNC around the world concurred that components of power distance influenced expatriates performances; supervisor-subordinate national similarity influenced the extent of support and frequency of interaction in superior-subordinate dyads as well as performance ratings of expatriates. The study also found that expatriates with similar national values were rated better than their different counterparts in the context of both task and contextual performance dimensions. It was also affirmed by Lee (2015) that a positive association between power distance and relationship management, which in turn influenced expatriate managers' performance. Downes et al. (2002) argued that despite the distinct relationship found between power distance and expatriates' performance, the outcome of the study pointed a contrary result that US expatriates in Japan revealed, information and job clarity (from centralised power) and exceeded expectations about professional discretion like the ability to complete the job as superior orders had a positive impact on job satisfaction and future job performance as expatriates have higher motivation to perform and complete assignments (Downes, Thomas, & Singley, 2002). Moreover, Lee (2015) also argued that the hotel industry, which asks for input and gives subordinates freedom in how they perform their jobs, is perceived as incompetency and bad management on the expatriate side in highly hierarchical societies. In a low power distance context, expatriate managers are rejected by the local employees due to the hierarchy's strong atmosphere. Sambasivan et al. (2017) found that in Malaysia, which is characterised as high power distance orientation, it is vitally crucial for expatriates from the opposite end of the spectrum to be aware that feedbacks on their effectiveness may be indirectly given or muted than the expatriates have been culturally conditioned to expect. Therefore, this posed a consequential problem for expatriates to decipher the cross-cultural interactions appropriately

when communicating with Malaysian employees, clients, suppliers, or even government bodies, hindering good performance among expatriates. In exploring the effects of power distance and expatriates' ability to perform the knowledge transfer process, Jannesari et al. (2016) concluded that the high-power distance orientation among Chinese subordinates had an influence on the social interactions between the HCNs and the foreign expatriates.

1.6 High and low context communications and expatriates job performance

As compared to power distance, high and low context communication showed limited influence on expatriates' performance. Nevertheless, past studies have demonstrated the relationship between HC-LC cultures and expatriates' performance, directly and indirectly. According to Froese and Peltokorpi (2011), low context versus high context communication positively influenced expatriates' performance. In this case, it was highlighted that in the Japanese high context culture, communication styles are indirect, and performance evaluations are ambiguous. Such differences have increased misunderstandings and complicated work relationships and, thereby, lower expatriates' job satisfaction and performance (Foese & Peltokorpi, 2011). A study by Milliman et al. (2002) that involved two culturally different managers (American and Malaysian) has further proven the influence of behaviour and low context communication and expatriates' behavior and performance. The study explained how an American manager mistakenly commented that he was being fair and transparent by bluntly commenting on the Malaysian expatriate's performance issues in a performance appraisal meeting despite the facial expression shown by the expatriate. The miscommunication has led to further deterioration of expatriates' performance and the relationship between the two parties. The study highlighted that different cultural dimensions; high and low context communication, had implications on expatriate performance; premature return from an international assignment (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008). Another study by Varner and Palmer (2006) demonstrated the distinct relationship between high and low context communication and expatriates' performance in their research. The study disclosed that expatriates from low context cultures tend to get irritated and frustrated with what is deemed to be "meandering" communication that goes nowhere. This deduction was also corroborated by a later study by Tahir and Ismail (2007) performed among expatriates who were working in Malaysia. The study highlighted that expatriates found it strenuous and hard to have direct discussions or confrontations with the host nation employees when there were issues that required solutions and may cause delays to the expatriate's work pace (Tahir & Ismail, 2007).

2. Methodology

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between power distance and high/low context communications towards job performance among expatriates of MNCs in Malaysia. 120 survey questionnaires were distributed online to various MNCs in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor for the purpose of collecting primary data. This entailed to113 respondents, where 107 was deemed good for analysis. Predictors used in this study was power distance and high/low context communications, while job performance was the dependent variable. For power distance, five (5) items were used and adopted from Earley and Erez (1997), Voich (1995) and Dorfman and Howell (1988). Following were the items:

1. I find managers who regularly ask the opinions of their subordinates as incompetent or weak.
2. In work-related matters, managers have a right to expect obedience from their subordinates.
3. Expressing disagreements explicitly is deemed disrespectful.
4. Managers ought to make decisions without consulting their subordinates in most situations.
5. Managers should avoid off-the-job social contacts with employees as social interaction with subordinates may decrease a manager's objectivity (fairness) in dealing with them.

Items to measure high context and low context communications were adopted from Gudykunst et al. (1996).

1. I can distinguish between a sincere invitation and one intended as a gesture of politeness.
2. Even if I do not receive a clear and definite response from others, I can understand what they intended.
3. I prefer conveying difficult messages/negative feedbacks/advice to others indirectly.
4. I use silence to avoid upsetting others when I communicate.
5. If I think that my colleagues will be hurt by my refusal, I provide additional reasons for my response.

Items to measure job performance were adopted from Black and Porter (1991):

1. How do you rate yourself completing work tasks on time?
2. How do you rate the quality of your performance in regard to job responsibility?
3. How do you rate yourself at achieving or exceeding work goals?
4. How effective are you at maintaining good working relationships and coordination with the host nationals?
5. How effective are you at communicating with host nationals in decision making and problem-solving?
6. I always work in teams as a method to disseminate knowledge.
7. I regularly exchange my knowledge and experience with the host nationals.
8. Organisation success is contingent upon my ability to disseminate valuable knowledge throughout the host company.
9. The subsidiary substantially uses knowledge from the parent company.

All the above items were put to measure using the 5-point Likert Scale.

3. Findings

Out of 113 respondents, 66.4% of respondents were male and in the middle-aged group (ages 36-55 years). 44.9% of them were under long term international assignments (defined as 1 to 3 years), 29% was found to be undertaking the length of minimum 3 years assignment, and 26.2% of the respondents were under short-term assignees to stay of less than 1 year. The demographic analysis also shows that the majority of the respondents hold middle management roles, i.e., senior (or semi-executive) positions, and this is represented by almost half of the respondents (48.6%). On the country of origin, Indonesia stood out with a double-digit percentage (13.1), while the second top home country was Germany, represented by 8.4%. At the same time, the USA and the Philippines were both at 5.6%. Russia, Taiwan and Yemen all comprised 4.7% of the respondents. 3.7% of the respondents were from Singapore, while France, India, Australia, Egypt, Iran and Czech Republic (Prague) each had 2.8% respondents. Austria, Colombia, Japan, Nigeria, Norway, Saudi Arabia and South Korea accounted for 1.9% of respondents while Argentina, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Ghana, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Seychelles, Syria and Thailand contributed 0.9% of the total respondents.

Results from descriptive analysis on power distance, high and low context communications towards job performance items indicated a disagree and strongly disagreed while high and low context communications demonstrate majority at agreeing. Job performance items demonstrated all items' at medians and showed that the respondents have low power distance orientation, high context communication style and good job performance level. A reliability test was also performed to measure the internal consistency of scale with the samples. Findings from the reliability test indicated that Cronbach's Alpha for power distance item was 0.84 while

high and low communications were 0.82 and job performance 0.79, and explained a respectable amount of variance explained by the internal consistency reliability of scale with the sample.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis indicated that there was a strong, positive relationship between power distance and job performance, **r = 0.514, p < 0.01**, with a high power distance index associated with a high level of job performance. The correlation was found to be a significant and positive relationship between HC-LC communications and job performance, **r = 0.639, p < 0.01**. This explained that high context communicators would have a higher level of job performance.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Output for Interrelations of Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev	Power distance	HC-LC communication	Job performance
Power distance	11.92	4.31	1		
HC-LC communication	16.23	4.27	0.787**	1	
Job performance	35.93	3.69	**0.514****	**0.639****	1

*Note: ** = p ≤ 0.01, * = ≤ 0.05*

Table 2.0 below explains the coefficient of determination, r^2, to get an idea of how much variance the two variables share and generally, a higher r^2 is an indicator of better goodness of fit for the observations. Based on the Pearson correlation coefficients, the r^2 squared indicated 0.264 shared variance for power distance. This means power distance helped to explain 26% of the variance in the respondents' scores on the job performance level. HC-LC communications towards job performance showed 0.40 invariance and explained that 40% of the variation in the job performance level of the respondents could be explained by their HC-LC communication styles.

Table 2.0: Summary of coefficient of determination Analysis

Variables	R^2	Strength of relationship
Power Distance and Job performance	0.264	Strong
HC-LC Communications and Job performance	0.4	Strong

4. Discussion

The results have provided support and evidence for the theory that power distance is a significant predictor of expatriates' job performance. The variable was extensively conceptualised as a strong and distinct dimension associated to dimensions of job performance among expatriates. Findings from the analysis also revealed that the significant correlation value obtained was r = 0.514, p < 0.01. It showed that this hypothesis was supported. This also disclosed that power distance has a strong, positive correlation with expatriates' job performance. Several possible explanations for this could largely be related to Malaysia as a host country, the cultural similarity between the expatriates and the host nationals (Malaysians), and the interrelation of national values between power distance and collectivism. Hassan and Diallo (2013) said that it is human nature to gravitate toward the familiar. Verbal and non-verbal pattern similarity and value similarity greatly influenced successful cross-cultural adjustment and on expatriate's job performance. The cultural and value similarities can facilitate better adjustment to the host country and expatriates' work adjustment. Also, Zakaria et al. (2019) found that adjustment to the host country was a crucial factor influencing expatriates' job performance. It was elaborated that expatriate adjustment to the host country was significantly related to both task and contextual performance. The problems and issues

related to expatriates' difficulties in adjusting to the host country's culture are mostly cited as the reasons for expatriates' premature return and failure (Osasuyi & Mwakipsile, 2017; Malarvizhi et al., 2018). Once the expatriates experience issues during their expatriation, this increases the risks and is more likely to cause poor job performance and results in other issues like turnover and low organisational commitment (Zakariya et al., 2019). Equally important, the power distance dimension is also closely related to another cultural dimension: collectivism/individualism. In the context of this study, prior studies have suggested that there is a strong correlation between power distance and individualism/collectivism dimensions (Hofstede, 1985). This is supported by ample empirical evidence that demonstrates how power distance is deeply rooted in collectivistic cultures. Ghosh (2011) outlined individualism-collectivism and power distance indices and revealed that the dimensions are significantly correlated; a graphical plot of these data showed that collectivism is associated with high power distance, while individualism is associated with lower power distance.

Several studies also concurred with this assumption, including Rivera-Vazquez et al. (2009) and Demigha and Kharabsheh (2019). They suggested that national culture dimensions influenced the level of trust among personnel, and feeling of mistrust could affect knowledge sharing and transferring. Also, studies by Ismail et al. (2016) and Jannesari et al. (2016) shared the same views and are aligned with the findings. The authors persistently emphasised that high power distance cultural orientation may have prevented HCNs from trusting and sharing visions with their different cultural background expatriate co-workers. This barrier will then obstruct the expatriate's ability to effectively perform their contextual performance (i.e. networking ability, communications) and assignment-specific performance (i.e. knowledge transfer) among the HCNs and the host organisation/subsidiary. On the same basis, this is also in tandem with the conclusions drawn by Yang (2016) and Sambasivan et al. (2017). However, all these findings are contradictory to the work of Downer et al. (2002), who opined that power distance is negatively related to expatriates' job performance.

Supporting the positive correlation between power distance and expatriate's job performance is also inconsistent with the findings of Downes et al. (2002), who discovered that low power distance is related to high job performance among expatriates working in a high power distance host country. The contradictory result may be attributed to the expatriates' individual factors like cultural intelligence, personality and self-efficacy. In the context of personality, several studies found that there is a positive and significant relationship between personality traits of expatriates and their cross-cultural adjustment (Kumar et al., 2008; Ramalu et al., 2010; Bhatti et al., 2014). Personality traits like the Big Five (extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience and neuroticism) and personal traits of expatriates like a desire to work overseas, positive mindset and comfortable to work outside serve as partial mediation of the expatriates' ability to adjust to new working places and expatriates job performance (task, relationship building, and overall performance (Rose et al., 2010; Bhatti et al., 2014). Cultural intelligence and self-efficacy were also cited as important determinants and mediators to expatriates' ability to adjust to the host nationals and to be able to perform in their international assignments despite the cultural value differences. Studies by Ang et al. (2007) and Ramalu et al. (2012) found that expatriates' cultural intelligence (CQ) goes beyond recognising cultural differences and deals with the motivation behind cognitive knowledge and processes; it reflects the desire to adapt to other cultures and in engaging with others.

Findings from this study have filled up the gap in the previous literature that high and low context communications significantly influence expatriates performance. The results from the analysis conducted indicated that there was also a significant, positive relationship between HC-LC communications and job performance, r = 0.639, p < 0.01, with higher context communicators associated with high job performance among expatriates. The inferences made by influential researchers from Foese and Peltokorpi (2011), Milliman et al. (2002) and Kurata

(1990) were also in tandem with this study. Prior scholarly studies have provided evidence that cultural similarity significantly influences intercultural communications between expatriates and host nationals. It was said that the similarity of expatriates home cultures and host cultures facilitated better and positive group cohesion as well as adjustment to their international assignments (Martin, 2014). Van Vianen et al. (2004) correspondingly contended that individuals tend to behave and perceive events in similar ways when they share the same values. This behavioural and perceptual similarity expedites effective coordination and communication while minimising conflict. It was then further emphasised that this is the rationale why expatriates who hold relatively similar values and communication patterns as host country nationals would encourage effective interactions with HCNs and receive social support from HCNs and, therefore, better adjustment and performance. On the contrary, expatriates with diverse cultural values and communication styles are more likely to experience communication barriers, triggering misunderstandings, irritation and conflict that herald low performance among expatriates (Stahl et al., 2009; Zhou & Qin, 2009; Meyer et al., 2016). The studies conducted by Varner and Palmer (2006) and Tahir and Ismail (2007) are also indicated by this finding and may explain the reason why high context communicators have higher job performance compared to their low context communicators counterparts. These authors insisted that high and low context communication styles are not the only reason to underperformance expatriates as other cultural dimensions such as individualism-collectivism can also be a factor in determining the level of expatriate's job performance. Similar to high-context communicators, members of collectivistic culture rely on context (e.g., tone of voice, gestures, eye context, the position of bodies) more than the content of the conversations (Triandis, 2001). Gao (2019) also added that high-context members tend to place more value on developing close interpersonal relationships and attach significant importance to maintaining group harmony as they care about others' 'faces' and feelings. As such, they prefer to use an implicit and indirect way of communicating and decidedly avoid unhappiness and disputes, which is also a typical feature of collectivistic culture. In this case, expatriates from high context cultural backgrounds would easily attune to the high-context communication styles of the HCNs in Malaysia as this intercultural communication is moderated by the expatriates' perceptions of the spirit of camaraderie in the host organisation. This, therefore, encourages better performance levels among these expatriates as compared to expatriates with low-context orientation.

5. Conclusion

The remarkable difference in job performance among expatriates is attributed to some cultural factors in the context of communications, namely, power distance and high/low context communications. The different orientation towards power distance and spectrum of communication styles has led to distorted job performance among expatriates owing to the communication barriers between the expatriates and HCNs. Known for its global footprint, MNCs rely heavily on the job performance of their international assignees to successfully transfer knowledge and perform specific assignments that have a significant bearing on the firms' competitive advantage. In this respect, communication barriers caused by different power distance and context communications orientations have significantly hampered the excellent level of performance wished by the expatriates. In addition, these differences have enticed them to deal with associated conflicts with their host country nationals at the workplace, lowering their level of performance at work. The study found that from MNCs in Malaysia perspectives, expatriates with high power distance orientation and high context communication styles have better job performance as compared to their low PD and LC counterparts. According to these findings, the Human Resource (HR) management team of MNCs in Malaysia need to strategise their intercultural training for their potential expatriates by integrating the power distance and HC-LC communication styles components.

References

Abugre, J. B. & Debrah, Y. A., 2019. Assessing the impact of cross-cultural communication competence on expatriate business operations in multinational corporations of a Sub-Saharan African context. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management,* 19(1), 85-104.

Adair, W. L. & Brett, J. M., 2005. The negotiation dance: Time, culture, and behavioral sequences in negotiations. *Organization Science,* 16(1), 33-51.

Ahmad, M. H., Ab-Hamid, M. R. & Azizan, N. A., 2018. Impact Of Culture On The Acceptance And Outcomes Of Assessment Centre Method. *Journal of Quality Measurement and Analysis,* 14(1), 24-43.

Al Ariss , A. & Syed, J., 2011. Capital mobilisation of skilled migrants: A relational perspective. *British Journal of Management,* 2, 286-304.

Bhatti, M. A., Battour, M. M. & Ismail, A. R., 2013. Expatriates adjustment and job performance: An examination of individual and organisational factors. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management,* 62(7), 694-717.

Bhatti, M. A., Battour, M. M., Ismail, A. R. & Sundram, V. P., 2014. Effects of personality traits(big five) on expatriate adjustment and job performance. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:An International Journal,* 33(1), 73-96.

Bhatti, M. A., Sundram, V. P. K. & Hee, H. C., 2012. Expatriate Job Performance and Adjustment: Role of Individual and Organisational Factors. *Journal of Business & Management,* 1(1), 29-39.

Bickers, R. A., 2010. *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the seas.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bonache, J. C., Brewster, C. & De Saa, P., 2010. Expatriation: Traditional criticisms and international careers. *Thunderbird International Business Review,* 52(4), 236-274.

Borman, W. & Motowildo, S., 1997. Task performance and contextual performance: The meaning for personnel selection research.. *Human Performance,* 10(2), 99-109.

Caligiuri, P. M., 1997. Assessing expatriate success: Beyond just being there.. *New Approaches to Employee Management,* 4, 117-140.

Caliguiri, P. M. & Day, D. V., 2000. Effects of self-monitoring on technical, contextual, and assignment-specific performance: A study of cross-national work performance ratings.. *Group and Organization Management,* 25, 154-174.

Campbell, J. P., 1990. Modeling the performance prediction problem in industrial and organisational psychology . In: L. M. H. M. D. Dunnette, ed. *Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology* . California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 687-732.

Cañado, M. L. P. & García, M. D. C. M., 2007. Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace: The Case of Multicultural Teams in Spain. *Culture, Language And Representation,* 6, 185-202.

Cardin, J. L. & Brewster, C., 2014. Talent management and expatriation: bridging two streams of research and practice. *Journal of World Business,* 49(2), 245-252.

Chang, Y. Y., Gong , Y. & Peng, M. W., 2012. Expatriate Knowledge Transfer, Subsidiary Absorptive Capacity, and Subsidiary Performance.. *Academy of Management Journal,* 55(4), 927-948.

Chen, N., Chao, M. C.-h., Xie, H. & Tjosvold, D., 2018. Transforming cross-cultural conflict into collaboration: The integration of western and eastern values. *Cross-Cultural & Strategic Management,* 25(1), 70-95.

Cheng, S. S. & Seeger, M. W., 2012. Cultural Differences and Communication Issues in International Mergers and Acquisitions: A Case Study of BenQ Debacle. *International Journal of Business and Social Science,* 3(3), 116-127.

Clarke, L., Akhentoolove, C. & Punnett, B. J., 2016. *Expatriates to and from developed and developing countries.* London: Edward Elgar.

Congden, S. W., Matveev, A. V. & Desplaces, D. E., 2009. Cross-cultural Communication and Multicultural Team Performance: A German and American Comparison. *Journal of Comparative International Management,* 12(2), 73-89.

Daniels, M. A. & Greguras, G. J., 2014. Exploring the Nature of Power Distance: Implications for Micro- and Macro-Level Theories, Processes, and Outcomes. *Journal of Management,* 40(5), 1202-1229.

Dato Mansor, Z. & Adnan, N., 2014. Factors Contributing for Malaysian Employees' Willingness to Accept International Assignment. *Int. Journal of Economics and Management ,*8 , 67-80.

Dedahanov, A. T., Lee, D., Rhee, J. & Yusupov, S., 2016. An examination of the associations among cultural dimensions, relational silence and stress. *Personnel Review,* 45(3), 593-604.

Douchet, L. et al., 2009. Conflict management: An inductive study of Chinese and American managers. *International Journal of Conflict Management,* 20, 355-376.

Downer, M., Thomas, A. S. & Singley, R. B., 2002. Predicting expatriate job satisfaction: The role of firm internalisation. *Career Development International ,* 7(1), 24-36.

Durán-Brizuela, R., Brenes-Leiva, G., Solís-Salazar, M. & Torres-Carballo, F., 2016. Effects of Power Distance Diversity within Workgroups on Work Role Performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. *Tecnología en Marcha,* 29(2), 64-76.

Farah, J., Hackett, R. D. & Liang, J., 2007. Individual-level cultural values as moderators of perceived organisational support-employee outcome relationships in China: Comparing the effects of power distance and traditionality. *Academy of Management Journal,* 50, 715-729.

Fitzpatrick, F., 2017. Taking the "culture" out of "culture shock" – a critical review of literature on cross-cultural adjustment in international relocation. *Critical perspectives on international business,* 13(4), 278-296.

Fletcher, C. & Perry, E. L., 2002. Performance appraisal and feedback: A consideration of national culture and a review of contemporary research and future trends. In: O. Anderson, ed. *Handbook of industrial, work and organisational psychology, 1: Personnel psychology.* London, England: SAGE Publications, 127-144.

Foese, F. J. & Peltokorpi, V., 2011. Cultural distance and expatriate job satisfaction. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* 35, 49-60.

Ganapavarapu, L. K. & Sireesha, P., 2015. Cross-Culture Issues in Global WorkPlace Expatriates at Global Work Place. *Journal of Business and Management,* 17(8), 22-26.

Georgakopoulos, T. & Jaeckle, T., 2007. Teaching in the age of diversity: Culture and language sources of conflict and strength in the classroom. *Peace and Conflict Studies,* 14, 93-113.

Ghosh, A., 2011. Power Distance in Organisational Contexts- A Review of Collectivist Cultures. *The Indian Journal of Industrial Relations,* 47(1), 89-101.

Gilad, C., Kirkman, B. L., Kim, K. & Farh, C. I. C., 2010. When Does Cross-Cultural Motivation Enhance Expatriate Effectiveness? A Multilevel Investigation Of The Moderating Roles Of Subsidiary Support And Cultural Distance. *Academy of Management Journal,* 53(5), 1110-1130.

Guttormsen, D. S. A. & Francesco, A. M., 2019. Status and success: Do lower status expatriates in multinational corporations experience different types of success?. *Journal of Global Mobility,* 7(4), 364-380.

Hair, J. F. Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. & Anderson, R. E., 2006. *Multivariate Data Analysis.* 6th Edition ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. & Anderson, R. E., 2010. *Multivariate Data Analysis.* 7th edition ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Hall, E. T. & Hall, M. R., 1990. *Hidden differences: Doing business with the Japanese.* New York: Anchor Books.

Hall, E. T., 1962. *The Hidden Dimensions.* New York: Anchor Books.

Hall, E. T., 1976. *Beyond culture.* New Jersey: Anchor Books.

Harada, Y., 2017. A cultural comparison of business practices in Thailand and Japan with implications for Malaysia. *Cogent Social Sciences,* 3(1), 1-9.

Harris, H., 2002. Strategic management of international workers. *Innovations in International HR,* 28(1), 1-5.

Harrison, D. A. & Shaffer, M. A., 2005. Mapping the criterion space for expatriate success: task and relationship-based performance, effort and adaptation. *The international journal of human resource management,,* 18(8), 1454-1474.

Hill, C. W. L., 2005. *International Business: Competing in the global marketplace.* 5th edition ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G., 1991. *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind.* London: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G., 1999. Problems remain, but theories will change. *Organizational Dynamics,* 28, 34-44.

Hofstede, G., 2001. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions and Organisations Across Nations.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J. & Minkov, M., 2010. *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the mind.* 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

InterNations, 2019. *Expat Insider 2019 Survey Reveals: The Best and Worst Destinations to Live and Work in 2019.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.internations.org/press/press-release/expat-insider-2019-survey-reveals-the-best-and-worst-destinations-to-live-and-work-in-2019-39881
[Accessed 3 January 2020].

InterNations, 2019. *The Best & Worst Cities for Expats in 2019.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.internations.org/expat-insider/2019/the-best-and-worst-cities-for-expats-39894
[Accessed 3 January 2020].

Kartar-Singh, J. S. & Nik-Mahmood, N. H., 2017. Managing Successful Overseas Assignments in Malaysia: Social Competencies, Emotional Competencies, Job Performance and Cultural Adjustment. *International Journal of Business and Management,* 12(11), 174-186.

Kawar, T. I., 2012. Cross-cultural Differences in Management. *International Journal of Business and Social Science,* 3(6), 105-111.

Keltner, D., Gruenfield, J. & Anderson, C., 2003. Power, approach, and inhibition. *Psychological Review,* 110(2), 265-284.

Khatri, N., 2009. Consequences Of Power Distanceorientation In Organisations. *The Journal of Business Perspective,* 13(1), 1-9.

Kirkman, B. L. et al., 2009. Individual power distance orientation and follower reactions to transformational leaders: A cross-level, cross-cultural examination.. *Academy of Management Journal,* 52, 744-764.

Kumar, S., 2018. Understanding Different Issues of Unit of Analysis in a Business Research. *Journal of General Management Research,* 5(2), 70-82.

Kurata, Y., 1990. Human resource management of foreign staff employees in Japanese companies. *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies,* 22, 27-36.

Kuznetsov, A. & Kuznetsova, O., 2014. Building professional discourse in emerging markets: language, context and the challenge of sensemaking. *Journal of International Business Studies,* 45(5), 583-599.

Lee, T. J., 2015. Implications Of Cultural Differences For Expatriate Managers In The Global Hotel Industry. *Tourism Analysis,* 20, 425-431.

Lennie, C. & Griggs, L., 1985. *Going international: How to make friends and deal effectively in the global marketplace.* New York: Plume/Random House.

Leonard, K. M. et al., 2011. Examining media effectiveness across cultures and national borders:A review and multilevel framework. *International Journal ofCross Cultural Management,* 22(2), 83-103.

Liu, L. A., Adair, W. L. & Bello, D. C., 2015. Fit, misfit, and beyond fit: Relational metaphors and semantic fit in international joint ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies,* 46(7), 830-849.

Madlock, P. E. ., 2012. The Influence of Power Distance and Communication on Mexican Workers. *Journal of Business Communication,* 49(2), 169-184.

Mead, R., 1998. *International Management: Cross-cultural Dimensions.* 2nd ed. Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.

Miller, E. C., Griffin, T., Paolo, P. D. & Sherbert, E., 2009. The Impact Of Cultural Differences On The Effectiveness Of Advertisements On The Internet: A Comparison Among The United States, China, And Germany. *International Business & Economics Research Journal ,* 8(4), 1-12.

Milliman, J., Taylor, S. & Czaplewski, A. J., 2002. Cross-cultural performance feedback in multinational enterprises: Opportunity for organisational learning. *HR. Human Resource Planning,* 25(3), 29-44.

Millman, J., Taylor, S. & Czaplewski, A., 2002. Cross-cultural performance feedback in multinational enterprises. *Human Resource Planning,* 25, 29-43.

Minbaeva, D. & Michailova, S., 2004. Knowledge transfer and expatriation in multinational corporations: the role of disseminative capacity. *Employee Relations,* 26(6), 663-679.

Mittal, R. & Elias, S. M., 2016. Social power and leadership in cross-cultural context. *Journal of Management Development,* 35(1), 58-74.

Mittal, R. & Saran, A., 2010. Impact of power distance on multi-source feedback evaluations: a cross-cultural perspective. *Journal of International Business and Economics,* 10(2), 117-122.

Mohd Salleh, L., 2005. *Proceedings of the 2005 Association for Business Communication Annual Convention 1 Copyright @ 2005 Association for Business Communication High/Low Context Communication: The Malaysian Malay Style.* s.l., Association for Business Communication.

Morrison, E. W., Chen, Y. R. & Salgado, S. R., 2004. Cultural differences in newcomer feedback seeking: A comparison of the United States and Hong Kong. *Applied Psychology: An International Review,* 53(1), 1-22.

Naeem, A., Nadeem, A. & Khan, I. U., 2015. Culture Shock and Its effects on Expatriates. *Global Advanced Research Journal of Management and Business Studies,* 4(6), 248-258.

Nam, K. A., 2015. *High-context and low-context communication.* California: Sage Publication.

Nnia, I., 2015. Conflicts Encountered by Multinational Corporations in Cross-Cultural Communication and its Solutions. *Journal of International Business and Economics,* 3(1), 86-92.

Okech, J. E. A., Pimpleton , A. M., Vannatta, R. & Champe, J., 2015. Intercultural communication: An application to group work. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work,* 40, 268-293.

Okech, J. E. A., Pimpleton-Gray, A., Vannatta, R. & Champe, J., 2016. Intercultural Conflict in Groups. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work,* 41(4), 350-369.

Okoro, E., 2012. Cross-cultural etiquette and communication in global business: towards a strategic framework for managing corporate expansion. *International Journal of Business and Management,* 7(16), 130-138.

Osland, J. & Osland, A., 2005. Expatriate paradoxes and cultural involvement. *International Studies of Management and Organization,* 35(4), 91-114.

Pinto, L. H., Cardoso, C. C. & Werther, W. B., 2017. Expatriates' withdrawal intentions: The influence of organisational culture and satisfaction with the assignment. *Personnel Review,* 46(8), 1852-1869.

Purwanto, E., 2018. Moderation Effects Of Power Distance On The Relationship Between Job Characteristics, Leadership Empowerment, Employee Participation And Job Satisfaction: A Conceptual Framework. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal,* 17(1), 1-9.

Qureshi, M. A., Muhammad-Shah, S. M., Mirani, M. A. & Tagar, H. K., 2017. Towards an Understanding of Expatriate Job Performance: A Conceptual Paper. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences,* 7(9), 320-332.

Rahman, M. S., 2017. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language "Testing and Assessment" Research: A Literature Review. *Journal of Education and Learning,* 6(1), 102-112.

Ramalu, S. S., Rose, R. C., Kumar, N. & Uli, J., 2010. Doing business in global arena: An examination of the relationship between cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adjustment. *Asian Academy of Management Journal,* 15(1), 79-97.

Rani, K. U., 2016. Communication Barriers. *Journal of English Language and Literature,* 3(2), 74-76.

Rao, A. N. & Pearce, J. L., 2016. Should management practice adapt to cultural values? The evidence against power distance adaptation. *Cross-Cultural & Strategic Management,* 23(2), 257-286.

Rau, P.-L. P., Liu, J., Juzek, C. & Nowacki, C. R., 2013. Fostering Job Satisfaction and Motivation through Power Distance: A study of German Expatriates' Leadership in China. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal,* 5(4), 161-170.

Ray, D., 2014. Overcoming cross-cultural barriers to knowledge management using social media. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management,* 27(1), 45-55.

Rehman, K. M., 2018. *Study The Role of Expatriate In Managing MNC Subsidiary Organizations.* s.l., Journal of Business and Management.

Sambasivan, M., Sadoughi, M. & Esmaeilzadeh, P., 2017. Investigating the factors influencing cultural adjustment and expatriate performance: The case of Malaysia. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management,* 66(8), 1002-1019.

Scheible, D. H., 2017. The Role of Expatriation in the Context of Managing Diversity in International Organizations. *Interculture Journal,* 16(27), 87-96.

Sekaran, U., 2013. *Research Methods for Business.* 4th edition ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Shaffer, M. A. et al., 2006. You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 91(1), 109-125.

Shore, B. & Cross, B., 2005. Exploring the role of national culture in the management of large-scale international science projects. *International Journal of Project Management,* 23(1).

Sims, R. & Schraeder, M., 2004. An examination of salient factors affecting expatriate culture shock. *Journal of Business and Management,* 10(1), 73-88.

Singh, A. A., Merchant, N., Skudrzyk, B. & Ingene, D., 2012. Association for Specialists in Group Work: Multicultural and social justice competence principles for groupworkers.. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work,* 37, 312-325.

Society for Human Resource Management, 2008. *Research Quarterly,* Alexandria: Society for Human Resource Management.

Sonnentag, S. & Frese, M., 2002. *Performance Concepts and Performance Theory.* Germany: John Wiley & Sons, LTD..

Tharenou, P., 2013. Self-initiated expatriates: an alternative to company-assigned expatriates?. *Journal of Global Mobility,* 1(3), 336-356.

Treven, S., Mulej, M. & Lynn, M., 2008. The impact of culture on organisational behavior. *Management,* 13(2), 27-39.

Tsegaye, W. K. & Su, Q., 2017. Expatriates Cultural Adjustment: Empirical Analysis On Individual Cultural Orientation. *The Journal of Applied Business Research,* 33(5), 963-978.

Tyler, T. R., Lind, E. A. & Huo, Y. J., 2000. Cultural values and authority relations: The psychology of conflict resolution across cultures. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law,* 6(4), 1138-1163.

Varner, I. & Palmer, T. M., 2006. Role of Cultural Self-Knowledge in Successful Expatriation. *Singapore management review,* 27(1).

Wang, J., 2008. A Cross-cultural Study of Daily Communication between Chinese and American -- From the Perspective of High Context and Low Context. *Asian Social Science,* 4(10), 151-154.

Yang, I., 2016. Lost overseas? The challenges facing Korean transformational leadership in a cross-cultural context. *Critical perspectives on international business,* 12(2), 121-139.

Yang, R. & Hen, X., 2014. A Framework for Research and Practice: Relationship between Expatriate Knowledge Transfer, Subsidiary Absorptive Capacity, and Subsidiary Performance. *Open Journal of Business and Management,* 2, 73-77.

Ybema, S. & Hyunghae, B., 2009. Cultivating Cultural Differences in Asymmetric Power Relations. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management,* 9(3), 339-358.

Yeaton, K. & Hall, N., 2008. Expatriates: reducing failure rates. *Journal of Corporate Accounting & Finance,* 19(3), 75-78.

Zheng, X., Lan, L., Zhang, F. & Zhu, M., 2019. The Roles of Power Distance Orientation and Perceived Insider Status in the Subordinates' Moqi with Supervisors and Sustainable Knowledge-Sharing. *Sustainability,* Volume 11, 1-17.

Zhou, Y., 2008. The Impact of Cultural Transfer on Cross-Cultural Communication. *Asian Social Science,* 4(7), 142-146.