

## **Determinants of Chinese Expatriates' Work Adjustment in the Context of International Mobility**

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**Abstract.** To gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly economy, both private and public sector organizations essential part of their international human resources management strategy. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues, and support from the home organization), partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience, and clarity in roles on Chinese expatriates adaptation in Morocco. The quantitative approach used structural equation modeling on SMART PLS software version 3.0. The sample is composed of 548 managers, technicians and workers, obtained using convenience sampling technique and collected using a questionnaire composing of a set of ready-made scales used in previous studies. The results show that the success of Chinese expatriates integration into their new position requires a contingent approach taking into account all these factors identified in order to provide managers in charge of managing international staff with additional elements to better assess the adjustment difficulties that Chinese expatriates will encounter and improve expatriate support policies according to their particular needs.

**Keywords:** Expatriation, Work Adaptation, Creativity, Chinese International Mobility

## **1. Introduction**

One of the consequences of internationalization is the international mobility of employees (Mo & Jian-Ming, 2010). For international companies, employee mobility is a necessity in order to remain competitive in the international market (Hechanova and al., 2003). But the success of expatriation and the adaptation of an expatriate abroad is not always obvious. An expatriate is expensive for his company: on average, two to three times more expensive than it would cost if he performed an equivalent function in his country of origin. Between 10% and 20% of expatriates return to headquarters before the end of their contracts because they have not been able to adapt to their new position or environment (Bonduelle, 1993).

In addition, one-third of those who remain in office do not achieve the expected performance by their superior (Black and Gregersen, 1999). However, multinational companies still often underestimate the complexities of mobility and international employee exchange (Collings, Scullion & Morley, 2007). For companies that send employees abroad, expatriate failure caused by poor adaptation is costly (Lin, Lu & Lin, 2012). It is essential for the multinational company that the expatriate succeeds in his work abroad. To gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly economy, both private and public sector organizations essential part of their international human resources management strategy. Missions abroad are often difficult because there are a large number of different factors that require a careful approach and planning, indeed, it is interesting to study the experiences and histories of expatriates and thus gain a better idea of the factors that influence their success.

These experiences can in turn be important for Chinese multinational companies, gaining a better understanding of the factors involved in the professional success of expatriates. This study may lead Chinese multinational companies to develop a new strategy for the expatriation of their employees in the Moroccan context.

The purpose of this work is to study the factors that influence the adaptation to work of Chinese expatriates who are called upon to work in the Moroccan context. So the question of our research can be formulated as follows:

**What are the factors that influence the adaptation to work of Chinese expatriates working in Morocco?**

Such a question engages us in a quantitative research that should allow us to identify these factors through the interrogation of Chinese expatriates who work in Morocco.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

### **2.1. Adaptation in International Mobility Context**

According to Mériqnac and Roger (2005), adaptation to work refers to work-

specific responsibilities, performance level and expectations, and managerial responsibilities. Black and Stephens (1989), on the other hand, define adaptation to work as commitment to the company, intention to remain in the company, and satisfaction with one's work. These authors noted which conflicts in the different roles played by the employee during expatriation have a negative effect on the expatriate's adaptation to work. Shaffer et al. (1999) show that the lack of clarity in the role has no influence on the adaptation of expatriates while the novelty of the role assumed by the latter has a negative impact. In the context of the internationalization of firms, the adaptation of expatriates to the positions offered is an essential element to support the development of Human Resources Management (HRM) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices. The transfer of skills from the expatriate to the organization after his return from mobility is also a fundamental issue for the company (Berthier, 2007).

Festing and Mueller (2007) talk about return on investment. The success of an expatriate depends on his adaptation to his new situation abroad. Failures of expatriation missions are usually due to a non-adaptation of the spouse or family and a non-adaptation of the expatriate in person to his new environment. It is commonly accepted that adaptation is defined as the state of harmonious relationship with the environment in which the individual can satisfy most of his needs and meet the demands of that environment. For some authors, adaptation time is the time elapsed between the moment an individual takes up a new position and the moment when it reaches a level of performance that equalizes his contribution and his remuneration.

## **2.2. Factors Influencing the Expatriates Adaptation**

### **2.2.1. Organizational Social Support**

Support is a physical, emotional or symbolic contribution made to individuals, increasing their clear abilities to cope with change (Walter and Marks 1981). The social-emotional support that the leader and reference group provide and its intensity are considered crucial determinants of organizational behaviour (House, 1981).

They have been studied in particular in the areas of leadership (Yulk, 1981) and group dynamics. The role of interpersonal support in helping an individual overcome uncertainty, anxieties, and more generally in facilitating the integration of a newcomer into a position has often been demonstrated (Pinder and Schroeder, 1987). Superiors and colleagues are the most cited variables in the transfer literature (Aryee and Stone, 1996). However, in the case of international transfers, Cerdin(1999) notes that the support of the home organization must also be taken into account.

**H1:** Support of the superior is positively associated with adaptation to work.

**H2:** Support from colleagues is positively associated with adaptation to work.

**H3:** Support from the home organization is positively associated with adaptation to work.

### **2.2.2. Partner Support**

Social support outside of work is provided by family and friends. According to Fenlason and Beehr (1994), it can reduce the stress generated during work, and thereby facilitate adaptation to work as well as other facets of adaptation. In expat studies, the most examined source of external social support is the partner. According to Cerdin, (1999) partner support has no effect on the expatriate's adaptation to work. However, we maintain the hypothesis of Fenlason and Beehr (1994).

**H4:** Partner support is positively associated with adaptation to work.

### **2.2.3. Intercultural Preparation**

In most multinationals, the intercultural preparation of expatriates is superficial, incomplete or non-existent (Waxin and all, 2003). Gertsen (1990) distinguishes four types of training by crossing the axes of traditional versus experimental training and training towards the notion of culture in general versus training in a particular culture. In our study, we will try to determine whether a type of training promotes a faster adaptation of expatriates.

**H5:** Expatriates who have followed an experimental intercultural preparation and specifically focused on Moroccan culture will adapt better to their work than others.

### **2.2.4. Previous International Experience**

The strategies that individuals adopt to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and how they interpret a situation depend on how they have learned in the past to deal with new situations (Jones, 1983). However, the results of Pinder and Schroeder (1987) do not validate their hypothesis that the most frequently transferred employees would adapt most quickly to their new position.

In the literature on international transfers, Black (1988) showed that the experience of a previous expatriation reduced the difficulties of adjustment to the new post, but not those of adjustment in general. On the contrary, Parker and McEvoy (1993) found that international experience is significantly correlated only with general adaptation. Although empirical results related to international experience do not agree, it seems logical to assume that previous international experience facilitates an individual's adaptation.

**H6:** International experience is positively associated with adaptation to work.

### 2.2.5. Clarity in the Role

The clarity of the role may favor the adaptation of a transferred employee to the extent that he will become aware of the requirements of his new position more quickly. Research on domestic transfer shows that clarity of role reduces the uncertainty associated with the new work situation (Pinder and Schroeder, 1987). Research on international transfers leads to the same conclusions. When the role is unclear, ambiguity can be a source of stress limiting the expatriate's ability to adapt (Kahn et al., 1964). Aryee and Stone (1996), Black (1988), Black and Gregersen (1991), Cerdin (1999), find a negative relationship between role ambiguity and adaptation to work.

**H7:** Clarity in the role is positively associated with adaptation to work.

The research model was presented as shown below in Fig. 1 based on the previous research presented in the theoretical background.

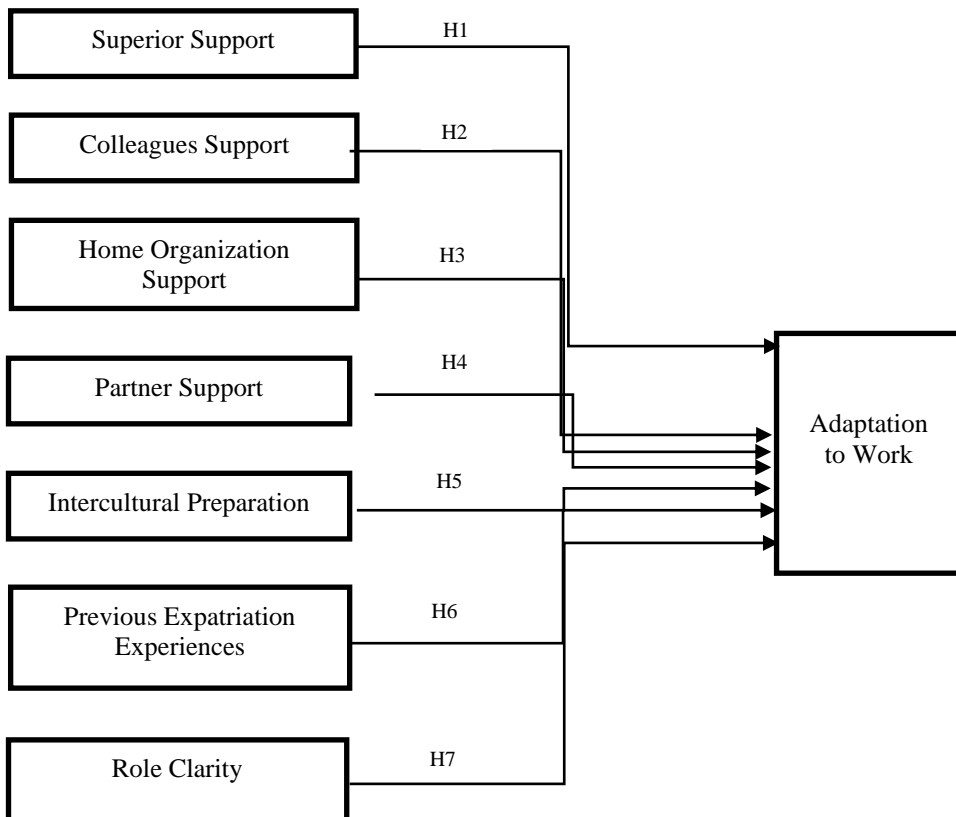


Fig. 1: Research Model

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Operationalization of Variables**

**Organizational social support:** To measure organizational social support, we adapt the scale of House and Wells (1978) and Cerdin (1996) which breaks down into logistical support and social support provided by the superior (8 items, example: my supervisor is interested in my professional problems), by colleagues (8 items, example: my colleagues are ready to help me and support me in my work) as well as by the organization of origin (11 items, example: the organization is interested in my values and personal goals).

**Partner support:** Regarding the measure of partner support, we decide to use again the scale proposed by House and Wells (1978). We measure emotional social support using three statements, one focused on the private sphere and two on the professional sphere, tangible social support by two statements and informational social support by one statement. We thus come up with a measure of spouse's support in six statements.

**Intercultural preparation:** we propose to measure intercultural preparation by an item from our interviews with expatriates: my organization has informed us about all the elements we need to know about the culture of host countries.

**Previous international experience:** we propose to measure the previous international experience by an item from our interviews with expatriates I can say that my international experience is sufficient to be able to adapt.

**Clarity in roles:** we take up the scales of Breaught and Colihan (1994).

**Adaptation to work:** to measure adaptation to work, we take up the scale created by Black and Stephens (1989) in three statements.

In terms of response modalities, we used the Likert interval scale of 1 to 5, which is commonly used to measure attitudes (Perret et al., 2008, p.136).

With this scale, respondents can express their opinions from a "degree of agreement" with a proposal. Regarding the scale of measurement of adaptation to work was measured on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

#### **3.2. Data Collection**

We chose to collect the data necessary for our study by questionnaire translated English in collaboration with language teachers. Indeed, we collected all the data by face-to-face interview. We got 548 valid responses. The questionnaires were administered over two and a half months. We interviewed employees who work in the Chinese companies operating in Morocco for construction of the Noor I, Noor II and Noor III Thermo-solar plants, without any selection.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

We planned to conduct a descriptive analysis of the data that should allow us to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed population.

Using the SPSS version 24 software, we carried out a series of measurements to study the dimensionality and internal coherence of the scales used, namely: The Bartlett sphericity test, the KMO, the eigenvalue criterion, the minimum restitution criterion, the Cattell elbow criterion and the Cronbach alpha calculation.

Based on SMART PLS software version 3.0, we implemented the structural equations method (SEM), in fact, we chose the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to test the research hypotheses. Initially, we estimated the measurement model. Three evaluation criteria were carried out: reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

In a second step we estimated the structural model, to do this, we evaluated on the one hand, the percentage of variance explained  $R^2$  and, on the other hand, the value of the coefficients of the paths. These estimates were analyzed based on statistics generated by the Bootstrap re-sampling procedure under Smart PLS version 3.0 software to test research hypotheses.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Sample Analysis**

The sample consists of 548 Chinese expatriates. It is composed of 121 executives, 263 technicians, and 164 workers, working in 14 Chinese companies operating in the Noor solar complex, for at least 9 months. The participation rate was 90%. The average age of the 80 women and 468 expatriate men who responded was 37 years; 42% of them went to university for more than 4 years. 43% of respondents have lived abroad for more than one year. Their expatriation contract began 19 months ago, and the expected duration of their expatriation contract is on average 3 years.

### **4.2. Hypotheses Evaluation**

After carrying out the set of tests necessary to judge the dimensionality and consistency of the measurement scales used, as well as the evaluation of the measurement model and that of the structural model, we can proceed to the evaluation of the hypotheses.

The structural model highlights the  $R^2$  of 0.83, which means that these variables explain 83% of the variance relative to the dependent variable (adaptation to work). It is above the threshold of 33% that Chin (1998) proposes to consider as a substantial variance.

The correlation coefficients of the structural equation model and the p-value values confirm that the seven causal links between the latent variables are indeed significant. Hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 are supported.

Organizational support has a positive and significant effect on work adjustment. The link between the support of the superior is confirmed (B1=0.241; p=0.000). As a result, hypothesis H1 is supported. The effect of co-worker support on work adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is in sum significant and positive sign (B2=0.211; p=0.000). Therefore, hypothesis H2 is supported.

The impact of the Original Organization Support on Work Adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is significant and positive (B3=0.274; p=0.061). For this, the H3 hypothesis is validated. Similarly, Partner Support has a positive and significant effect on work adjustment. (B4= 0.496 p=0.065). The H4 hypothesis is therefore supported. Similarly, intercultural preparation is positively and meaningfully associated with Work Adjustment. (B5= 0.643; p=0.003). The H5 hypothesis is supported.

As a result, the H6 hypothesis is supported. In the same vein, the effect of previous international experience on Work Adjustment is confirmed. The causal relationship between these two variables is in sum significant and negative sign (B6 = 0.521 p = 0.012). Therefore, hypothesis H7 is supported. Finally, clarity in roles positively and significantly influences (B7 = 0.191 p = 0.043) Work Adjustment of the interviewed expatriates as part of this research.

Table 1 presents the test results of the research hypotheses

Table 1: Test Results of Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	P- Value	Hypotheses Validation
H1	0,241	0,000	Supported
H2	0,211	0,000	Supported
H3	0,274	0,061	Supported
H4	0,496	0,065	Supported
H5	0,643	0,003	Supported
H6	0,521	0,012	Supported
H7	0,191	0,043	Supported

*Source: Personal development, via SmartPLS version (3.0)*

## 5. Discussion

This study presents a model of work adjustment integrating organizational, individual and contextual factors and aims to analyze the impact of organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues, and support from the home organization), partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience, and clarity in roles on the adaptation of the Chinese



expatriates. The results show that these factors has a direct effect on Chinese expatriates adaptation to work by explaining 83% of its variance.

The overall analyses show, first, that the organizational support of the supervisor, colleagues and the home organization are all significantly and positively correlated with adaptation to work on the overall sample. However, the results differ on the status samples.

Our results confirm those of Cerdin (1999) but contradict those of Aryee and Stones (1996), who find, in their sample of 184 expatriates of various nationalities, that only the support of colleagues was significantly and positively correlated with adaptation to work.

Second, the strategies that individuals adopt to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and how they interpret a situation depend on how they have learned in the past to deal with new situations (Jones, 1983).

However, the results of Pinder and Schroeder (1987) do not validate their hypothesis that the most frequently transferred employees would adapt most quickly to their new position. In the literature on international transfers, Black (1988) showed that the experience of a previous expatriation reduced the difficulties of adjustment to the new post, but not those of adjustment in general. On the contrary, Parker and McEvoy (1993) found that international experience is significantly correlated only with general adaptation. Although empirical results related to international experience do not agree, it seems logical to assume that previous international experience facilitates the adaptation of an employee.

Thirdly, the literature on the adaptation of expatriates does not fail to highlight the difficulties of adaptation of the spouse during expatriation and its repercussions on the adaptation of the framework, its performance at work. In one study, Bank and Rothmann (2006) showed that expats have significant family support, compared to those without family support, experience less stress and adapt better than other expats. With this demonstration, the authors once again highlight the essential role played by the family in the success of an expatriation. In a survey conducted by Halden and Perrin (2007), it emerges that family has an increasing impact in an employee's decision to accept an international assignment. Indeed, the family is not often excited about the international assignment of an expatriate. A survey shows that 61% of expats were married, but only 81% of married expats were accompanied by their spouse during the assignment.

Fourth, the intercultural preparation manifested by the prior training for expatriates has received a lot of attention in the literature. The research was conducted in a few directions. Studies by Brewster and Pickard (1994), Black (1988), Mendenhall & Oddou (1985). Landis & Brislin (1983) empirically prove that there is a positive relationship between the success of expatriation (in terms of performance, job satisfaction, easier adaptation to the cultural context) and the

training programs offered to employees. One of the most recent studies was conducted in Great Britain by Brewster and Pickard (1994). The population for this study consisted of 690 expatriates and their spouses who participated in training programs (previously analyzed and qualified as well-established programs) between 1988 and 1992.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research sought to identify the factors influencing the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in a context of international mobility. As a first step, thanks to a literature review, we were able to identify five factors most cited by the researchers. These are organizational support, partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience and clarity in roles. Second, having carried out the set of tests necessary to judge the dimensionality and consistency of the scales of measurements used, as well as the evaluation of the measurement model and that of the structural model, through a quantitative study, we evaluated the influences of the factors identified on the expatriate work adjustment in the Moroccan context.

We found through the testing of hypotheses that organizational support (support from superiors, support from colleagues and support from the home organization), partner support, intercultural preparation, previous international experience and clarity in roles have a positive and significant effect on the adaptation of the expatriates interviewed to the level of the Moroccan context.

These results suggest that companies cannot just manage all expats the same way. The success of their integration into their new position requires a contingent approach taking into account the country of origin and the country of assignment of the expatriate. First, such studies highlighting the most important adaptation factors according to the country of origin provide managers in charge of managing international staff with additional elements to better assess the adjustment difficulties that expatriates will encounter and improve expatriate support policies according to their particular needs relating to their culture of origin. The limit of this research work is the size of the sample. Indeed, only one nationality was examined. In addition, the number of respondents does not allow the results to be generalized throughout the national territory. Subsequent research will need to include more countries of origin and more respondents.

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