

Host country nationals as socializing agents: A social identity approach

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Summary

A major challenge facing Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) is finding ways to increase the success rates of managers assigned overseas. Our paper draws upon social identity theory to develop a model that focuses on the role of host country nationals (HCNs) in determining the adjustment of expatriate managers. Specifically, our model proposes attributes of the expatriate and the HCN that can increase the salience of national identity and outgroup categorization of expatriates by the HCNs. We also suggest how outgroup categorization interacts with a number of situational factors to influence the role of HCNs as socializing agents for expatriate newcomers. Finally, we propose that the socializing behaviors HCNs may display or withhold from the expatriate will affect the adjustment of the expatriate. Our model highlights the often-overlooked partners in the expatriate adjustment process and emphasizes the need for MNEs to be cognizant of the social dynamics between HCNs and expatriates in the host location. Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

The very nature of the work carried out by MNEs requires employees (especially managers) to move around the world. But, these international assignments are very demanding for the expatriate involved, and when expatriates fail to perform, the results can be costly (Forster, 1997; Swaak, 1995). Therefore, it is important for MNEs to develop a better understanding of why expatriate assignments may fail, and to examine ways to increase the likelihood of success.

One potential direction to turn to for ideas on how to increase the likelihood of success is to look within the host unit—to its organizational insiders, specifically the local employees in the host unit, or host country nationals (HCNs). Scholars have long recognized the importance of organizational insiders as socializing agents for organizational newcomers to help them make sense of their new environments (Fisher, 1985; Louis, 1980; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Morrison, 2002). Organizational insiders, such as the newcomers' supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates, are reservoirs of valuable organizational information that newcomers need to learn in order to become effective members of the organization. Furthermore, they can help the newcomers by serving as sources

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of instrumental and emotional support when newcomers encounter stressful situations either at work or at home.

Based on the vast research on organizational socialization, we believe that understanding what motivates organizational insiders (i.e., HCNs) to exhibit socializing behaviors toward the expatriates will help MNEs to manage the expatriate assignment process better so that more of these assignments will be successful. However, socializing behaviors are often not formally required by the job and are instead extra-role, that is, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs: Organ, 1988, 1997). In the context of MNEs, most socializing behaviors that HCN co-workers, for example, might display would be beyond their call of duty and would need to stem from their own initiative. Hence, it is important to understand the circumstances that would motivate or discourage HCNs from acting as socializing agents for expatriate newcomers.

Furthermore, social identities and intergroup relations have been overlooked by research as playing a significant part in predicting behavior, attitudes, and perceptions among HCNs and expatriates (Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Increasingly, researchers recognize the significance of social identities in the workplace (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2001) and have applied the social identity approach fruitfully in the context of MNEs (Li, Xin, & Pillutla, 2002; Toh & DeNisi, 2003; Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006). In the multinational context, social identities, such as national identities, may be especially significant because they have the potential to be salient, and thus, may act as a potent influence on members' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Social identity processes could determine whether HCNs will exhibit socializing behaviors on their own accord that could be useful in helping expatriates adjust. Therefore, the potential role of salient identities and outgroup categorization in predicting HCN reactions toward expatriate newcomers in the host unit should be considered.

The objectives of our paper are two-fold: (1) to present a theoretical model that highlights the specific role of HCNs in the expatriate adjustment process; and (2) to propose a set of factors that influences how HCNs will be to act as socializing agents for expatriate newcomers. Drawing upon social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Turner & Reynolds, 2004), we predict that, to the extent to which expatriates are *categorized as outgroup* members, HCNs could be less willing to display *socializing behaviors* (as shown in Figure 1) because the apparent social distance between HCNs and expatriates increases the perceived and real costs of doing so (Javidan, Stahl, Brodbeck, & Wilderom, 2005). However, we do not suggest that HCNs will necessarily withhold socializing behaviors if expatriates are categorized as outsiders. We propose that a number of situational factors which affect the HCNs' *motivation to help* expatriate newcomers may moderate the relationship between outgroup categorization and the display of socializing behaviors. Drawing upon the substantial research on

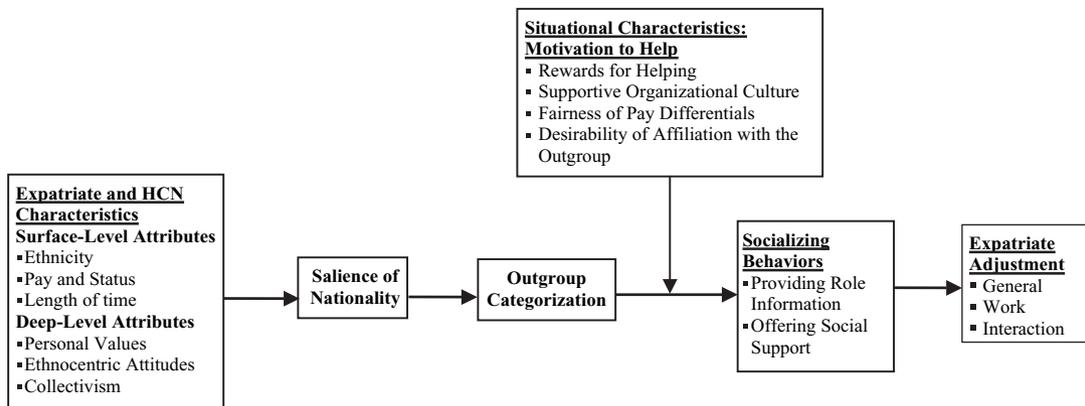


Figure 1. A Model of HCNs as socializing agents for expatriates

antecedents of OCBs, we propose that *rewards for helping*, a *supportive organizational culture*, *fairness of the pay differentials* between HCNs and expatriates, and the *desirability of affiliation with the expatriate outgroup* influence motivation to help and may weaken the relationship between outgroup categorization and the display of socializing behaviors.

In brief, we predict that a number of *surface-level attributes* and *deep-level attributes* (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998) possessed by HCNs and perceived by them to be held by expatriates will affect the *salience of national identity* in the host context, that is, nationality will be used as a dimension by which HCNs define themselves relative to the expatriates. The greater the salience of national identities, the greater the extent to which expatriates are viewed as outgroup by HCNs. Outgroup categorization of expatriates may then reduce the willingness of HCNs to help socialize expatriates. When HCNs fail to initiate socializing behaviors, they contribute to the maladjustment of the expatriate newcomer.

We highlight two key socializing behaviors by HCNs in our model: *providing role information* and *offering social support*. These are important socializing behaviors for the following reasons. First, expatriate newcomers need to learn what to expect, how to interpret various stimuli, and how to behave appropriately in their new role in the host country (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Furnham & Bochner, 1983). The environment is unfamiliar and informational resources the expatriates used to rely upon in the home country are no longer present. HCNs are most likely to possess the requisite knowledge and have the necessary links to important informational resources. Host country supervisors, co-workers, and subordinates are possible sources of valuable role information (Peterson, Rodriguez, & Smith, 2000), knowledge, and feedback (Javidan et al., 2005). Some even suggest that the knowledge gained from HCNs cannot be substituted by formal training the organization may provide beforehand (Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001; Oddou, 2002). As organizational insiders, HCNs have more experience than the newcomer in the organization, and thus, encounter fewer surprises in the course of work compared to the newcomer (Louis, 1980). Even if surprises do arise, insiders usually have sufficient knowledge and history to make sense of the situation and resolve it. Furthermore, insiders have other insiders to rely on when difficulties arise. The expatriate newcomer lacks these resources. As such, the resource network that HCNs can bring to expatriates is valuable to the expatriates' sense-making process (Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Toh & DeNisi, 2005).

Second, because expatriates are no longer in a familiar social environment where their network of friendships is readily available, they need to develop alternative sources of social support. Supportive relationships, including friendships that provide emotional reassurance, information, encouragement, or aid in dealing with stressful situations (Fisher, 1985; Javidan et al., 2005) can help the newcomer deal with unexpected or unpleasant experiences (Nelson & Quick, 1999). Even if help is not needed, the mere knowledge that support is available to them is often sufficient to help alleviate the newcomers' stress (Wills, 1991). Accordingly, recent research found that the presence of social support is beneficial to expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). The friendship and mentorship provided by HCNs alleviated the stresses faced by expatriates (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Bjorkman & Schaap, 1994; Suutari & Brewster, 1998) and also differentiated between successful and unsuccessful expatriates (Osland, 1995).

We focus on situations where providing role information and social support are extra-role, that is, situations where HCNs are not formally required to engage in socializing behaviors. Our model is not about how one might motivate employees to engage in in-role work behaviors—an established literature on motivating work performance already exists. But, we acknowledge that, in some situations, the socializing role of HCNs may be expected by the organization (Gallaga, 1997; Osland, 1995). HCNs who are formally required to assist expatriates (i.e., in-role work behavior) are more likely to do so than those who are not. Nonetheless, even in cases where such behaviors may be required, individuals possess a good deal of discretion in terms of how conscientiously they would perform them. Leaders have been found to vary their support toward their subordinates (as seen in the research on Leader-Member

Exchange: Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995) and subordinates of expatriate managers react differently depending on how they perceive their managers (Thomas & Ravlin, 1995). Hence, even though our primary focus is on extra-role socializing behaviors, the processes identified in our model may apply to situations where the behaviors are required.

The International Assignment and the Expatriate Adjustment Process

International assignments create significant demands that often exceed the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the expatriate (Black, 1988). Assumptions the expatriate has about everyday social encounters, be it in the workplace or outside, no longer hold in the host culture. This creates significant challenges in the expatriate's ability to fulfill his/her role in the host unit, particularly, with respect to leading, communicating, and transferring knowledge to host employees (Tsang, 2001; Wang, Tong, & Koh, 2004).

As such, a foremost undertaking for the expatriate is to learn the salient characteristics of the host culture and acquire the necessary knowledge and social skills to carry out his/her new role effectively (Furnham & Bochner, 1983; Osland, 1995). This learning process is referred to as expatriate adjustment and may occur via behavioral modeling, feedback, and reinforcement (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) from possible sources such as the expatriate's supervisor, co-workers, and subordinates (Peterson et al., 2000). Also viewed as a competence-gaining process (Aycan, 1997; Furnham & Bochner, 1983; Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl, & Osland, 2002), or a process of 'personal transformation' (Osland, 1995), expatriate adjustment entails developing necessary social skills, gaining local cultural and work-related knowledge, building social networks, and mastering the appropriate behaviors necessary for the performance of the expatriate's new role. The acquisition of key global competences (Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001) help expatriates negotiate everyday social interactions with members of the host country (Furnham, 1988), facilitate the knowledge exchange, gain competence in their new role, and develop a sense of comfort in the new environment (Gregersen & Black, 1990).

A recent meta-analysis (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) found that in addition to personal characteristics (Caligiuri, 2000a, 2000b; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999), work (Morley & Flynn, 2003), family/friends (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001), and environmental factors (Manev & Stevenson, 2001; Melles, 2003), social support from HCNs is positively related to expatriate adjustment. Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of HCN relationships, research is still relatively silent on what drives HCNs to act as socializing agents (Caligiuri, 2000b; Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Instead, the onus tends to be placed on the expatriate to learn, and to initiate and manage host country interactions (Caligiuri, 2000b; Tsang, 2001). MNEs have been urged to select, train, and reward expatriates, as well as design tasks carefully to ensure success. Failing to capitalize on HCNs for socialization poses a limitation to current practice and may impede on the adjustment of expatriate newcomers. In the model we elucidate next, we wish to highlight the role of HCNs and how social identity processes as well as other situational factors could influence the HCNs' socializing role.

A Social Identity Model of HCNs as Socializing Agents for Expatriates

The social identity approach, based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and self-categorization theory (SCT: Turner, 1981; Turner, 1985), refers to a general social psychological theory of how

self-definitions in terms of social categories affect attitudes and behaviors (Terry, 2003). The theory posits that although there are multiple social categories by which one might define oneself (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004), only the category(s) that are salient at a given point of time will determine one's attitudes and behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000). Salience refers to a readiness to use a given dimension to categorize oneself as well as others and is contingent upon 'the interaction between context-specific judgments of similarity and difference (comparative and normative fit) and the perceivers' expectations, motives, and goals (perceiver readiness)' (Turner & Reynolds, 2004: 268).

Salient identities are ones that are psychologically and cognitively accessible to the individual's field of perception (Atkinson, 1986; Kahneman, 2003; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Accordingly, categorizations are driven by the perception of clearly identifiable or distinct social dimensions (Cota & Dion, 1986; Lansberg, 1988; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). These may be based on real or perceived differences, the presence of similar others in close proximity, or the sharing of a common fate with others (Campbell, 1958). Even the mere knowledge of others being in the same social group (Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980) can be sufficient to elicit a common identity and result in category-consistent perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Here, we propose that national identity will become salient as a function of attributes (both surface-level attributes and deep-level) of the HCN and the expatriate and as a result, expatriates will more likely be categorized as outgroup by HCNs.

Surface-level attributes of HCNs and expatriates

Surface-level attributes refer to overt, or easily observable characteristics that are generally immutable (cf. Harrison et al., 1998). The cognitively accessible attributes tend to form the initial bases of social categorization (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; Wharton, 1992). In the multinational context, we propose that ethnicity, and pay and status possessed by both HCNs and expatriates, as well as the length of interaction are surface-level attributes that may contribute to the salience of the national identities and in turn increase the extent to which HCNs will categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Ethnicity

In the MNE, physical and language differences between HCNs and expatriates are likely to be salient attributes, especially if the expatriates originate from a vastly different part of the world. Expatriates could have different skin color, eye color, hair, dress norms, physical build (e.g., height, bone structure, facial features), and spoken language, thus highlighting ethnic differences (Fisher, 1998; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Liladhar, 1999). Language, for example, is 'a very culture-specific medium. If two people do not share a common language, their interactions are much restricted and they realize this' (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992: 341). The kinds of accents detected in speech have been found to influence evaluations individuals have of the speaker and how he or she would be socially categorized (Abrams & Hogg, 1987). Hence, it is conceivable that if the HCNs and expatriates are distinctive in appearances and language, it triggers differentiation. Of course, there may be cases where appearances are similar and languages are dissimilar and *vice-versa* and this may affect salience. Even so, it is likely that when ethnic differences between the HCN and the expatriate are apparent, nationality will gain salience and increase the extent of outgroup categorization.

Proposition 1a: Differences between HCNs and expatriates on ethnicity will increase the salience of nationality among HCNs and thus the extent to which HCNs categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Pay and status

In an organizational setting, categories may be created based on organizational roles, organizational practices (e.g., HR practices), and organizational workgroups (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Accordingly, things like pay and position can provide the bases for group distinctions. In the MNE, expatriates and HCNs may be distinguishable by their pay as well as status in the organization.

Expatriates are rewarded based on one or a mix of several basic compensation approaches. Among U.S. MNEs, for example, the most favored is the balance-sheet approach (Gould, 1999). This approach ensures that expatriates will not be disadvantaged financially from taking on the assignment and aims to maintain a similar standard of living for expatriates in the host country to that enjoyed at home (Harvey, 1993). Various incentives, allowances, and perquisites are often provided (Leung, Smith, Wang, & Sun, 1996), as well as benefits for the accompanying spouse and children. Yet, these are not available to HCNs. As a result, there are often substantial total compensation differences between expatriates and HCNs (Beamish, 1998; Perkins, 1999). Even though actual compensation information about the expatriate may not be available, HCNs can still form subjective evaluations about the expatriate's pay package, albeit inaccurate (Toh & DeNisi, 2003). As HCNs perceive a clear expatriate's financial advantage, the relationship between national origin and pay is highlighted (Delisle & Chin, 1997).

Next, pay differences also connote and/or are reinforced by status differentials between HCNs and the expatriates (Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Some organizations tend to place their expatriates in high-level, high-paying posts that are almost exclusively reserved for expatriates (Perlmutter, 1969). If expatriates enjoy higher status, they will also be more motivated to engage in behaviors to maintain the status differential. Consequently, national identity attains greater salience and expatriates are likely to be viewed as outgroup.

Proposition 1b: Differences between HCNs and expatriates on perceived pay and status will increase the salience of nationality among HCNs and thus the extent to which HCNs categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Length of interaction

We propose that some of the relationships proposed in our model will change as the length of time the expatriate and HCN interact with each other increases. It is not possible to generate a specific hypothesis about the role of the length of the interaction, because it can affect different parts of the model in different ways. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to discuss this attribute and its role in the processes described.

For example, in general, immediately observable attributes are more often used as bases for categorization during initial contact because these are relatively accessible in the cognitive sense, and tend to provide more information to the perceiver than would deep-level attributes (Harrison et al., 1998; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). Through prolonged contact, surface-level differences may become less important as a factor affecting how the interactions occur as parties get to know more about each other. Thus, as the length of the interaction between the parties increases, surface-level attributes may be less important and deep-level attributes more important as determinants of the similarity (or differences) between the HCN and the expatriate.

Similarly, social identity theorists suggest that interpersonal interaction with a member of the outgroup can lead to personalization or individuation of the outgroup member (Brickson & Brewer, 2001). Through increased interactions with the expatriate, HCNs may come to realize that the stereotypes that they held about the expatriate do not hold—that the expatriates are in fact unique relative to one another (Ravlin, Thomas, & Ilsev, 2000) and that the HCNs and expatriates may be similar to each other in more ways than they first thought. As a result, HCNs may make corrections to previously held negative attitudes and stereotypes held about the outgroup (Pettigrew, 1998). More

generally, increased interaction may simply weaken the relationship between perceived differences and the salience of nationality.

However, it is also possible that HCNs' initial assessments of expatriates will be further reinforced through prolonged interactions. Differences could become more glaring and play a greater role in guiding HCNs' future interactions with expatriates (Ravlin et al., 2000). This helps illustrate exactly how complex the role of time together plays. Longer interaction can shift the relative importance of surface-level versus deep-level attributes and it can lead to stereotypes being either reinforced or weakened, which, in turn, will affect the strength of the relationship between perceived differences in attributes and the salience of nationality.

Deep-level attribute of HCNs and expatriates

Deep-level differences refer to subjective assessments of attribute dissimilarity on things that are less readily detectable as surface-level differences. The discovery of these differences generally occurs through personal contact (Harrison et al., 1998). In the MNE context, personal values, ethnocentric attitudes, and collectivism can contribute to the salience of nationality and in turn, the categorization of expatriates as outgroup members.

Personal values

Values form an important part of one's self schema and they help differentiate oneself from others (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1992). Values, such as those regarding work (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998; Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987), guide perceptions and behaviors and often determine the nature of multicultural interactions (Ravlin et al., 2000; Thomas, Ravlin, & Wallace, 1996). Value differences between parties create opportunities for misunderstandings, and lessen interaction and communication (Harrison et al., 1998; Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Turban & Jones, 1988). Parties pursue goals and priorities, possess interpretations of surrounding stimuli, adhere to sets of norms and practices, and prescribe to sets of beliefs and attitudes (Peterson et al., 2000; Ravlin et al., 2000) that may be different from each other. These differences may be perceived either through direct interaction or through more indirect means such as a third party or the media (Dixon, 2001) and are often attributed to the different social upbringing of the foreign counterpart. As such, when HCNs perceive expatriates to have different personal values from themselves, national identities may become more salient (Ravlin et al., 2000).

Proposition 2a: HCN and expatriate differences in perceived personal values will increase the salience of nationality among HCNs and thus the extent to which HCNs categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Ethnocentric attitudes

According to Sumner (1906), ethnocentrism is described as the 'view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn' (p. 13). He further describes that, 'ethnocentrism leads people to exaggerate and intensify everything in their own folkways which are peculiar and which differentiates them from others' (p.13).

If HCNs are highly ethnocentric, national identity is likely to be salient in the minds of HCNs and expatriates will more likely be considered and treated as outgroup. Host ethnocentrism (Florkowski &

Fogel, 1999) has been linked to a culture's level of uncertainty avoidance and agreeableness (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Hofstede, 2001). Pre-existing stereotypes about the trustworthiness of foreigners (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998) and their desire to maintain that level of distinctiveness from other groups may cause HCNs to resist expatriate presence in the organization (Hailey, 1996), and/or disassociate from them (Aycan, 1997). Any differences between them are exaggerated and amplified. HCNs' feelings of superiority may be reinforced as uninitiated expatriates exhibit poor social skills and appear inept in the host culture. As such, highly ethnocentric HCNs tend also to have national identities salient in their minds and consequently, tend to draw clearer boundaries between themselves and expatriates.

Similarly, ethnocentric expatriates will tend to cause social lines to become accentuated. Ethnocentric expatriates may be more reluctant to learn from HCNs. Expatriates who are unwilling to communicate or possess ethnocentric attitudes, have greater difficulty in becoming comfortable with their social interactions at work (Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006; Takeuchi, Yun, & Russell, 2002). SCT argues that members of higher status social groups are more motivated to maintain a positive distinctiveness from lower status groups (Turner, 1985). To maintain their higher status, expatriates may isolate themselves in an exclusive lifestyle and rely on expatriate contacts rather than working to establish local networks (cf. Hailey, 1996). This creates the impression of two separate groups in the organization, and thus, increases the salience of nationality in the eyes of HCNs. In contrast, expatriates who are proactive learners (Wong, 2001) and possess an openness to new experience (Caligiuri, 2000b) are more likely to facilitate interactions with HCNs and to model their behaviors after HCNs. As such, ingroup-outgroup boundaries may become blurred.

Proposition 2b: Ethnocentric attitudes will be associated with an increase in the salience of nationality among HCNs and thus the extent to which HCNs categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Collectivism

Collectivists view ingroup obligation and duty as central (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). They also tend to make clearer ingroup-outgroup distinctions than individualists and identities (both self and other) are more likely to be defined in collective rather than individual terms (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Consequently, in encounters with strangers, group membership may be more important to collectivists than to individualists in determining their reactions (Barrett et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2002).

Applying these findings to the MNE context, we would then expect that HCNs with interdependent self-concepts (collectivists) to be more likely to define expatriates in terms of social group identities, such as the expatriate's nationality (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Expatriates are unlikely to be members of HCNs' ingroups in collectivist societies because of the relatively stable interdependent self-concepts of HCNs, thus, including outsiders into HCNs' self-concept is not something that happens easily. Given that ingroup-outgroup distinctions are important to collectivistic HCNs, the expatriate's national identity, and differences in national identity, is more likely to be salient to them. The same pattern should hold for more collectivist expatriates as well. As nationality gains salience as a means to define the social situation, we expect that expatriates will more likely be categorized as outgroup members.

Proposition 2c: For individuals with interdependent self-concepts such as collectivists, the salience of nationality is likely to be greater and will increase the likelihood that HCNs categorize expatriates as outgroup members.

Consequences of outgroup categorization

Next, we propose that when outgroup categorization has taken place, HCNs may be less likely to engage in socializing behaviors and in turn, negatively affect the expatriate's adjustment. As noted, we consider providing role information and social support as important socializing behaviors as well as their influence on the three main aspects of expatriate adjustment: work, interaction, and general.

Socializing behaviors

We propose that the extent to which HCNs perceive expatriates as outgroup members will affect the role information and social support that might be provided to expatriates. If HCNs view expatriates as part of the same social group, they may be more concerned about their welfare and at the same time, are more motivated to protect or enhance their shared social identity by helping the expatriates adjust and become effective members of the organization. SCT posits that those who share category membership are seen as qualified and that interactions among members will be expected to be positive (Haslam, 2004). Accordingly, members will be more motivated to communicate and interact with ingroup members than outgroup members. As such, there may be a greater occurrence of knowledge transfer (Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005) and social support if HCNs feel that they shared a superordinate identity with the expatriates. However, when HCNs categorize the expatriate as outgroup, the extent to which socializing behaviors are displayed tends to reduce.

Proposition 3: HCNs who categorize expatriates as outgroup members may be less likely to engage in socializing behaviors than are HCNs who categorize expatriates as ingroup.

Expatriate adjustment

Many expatriate adjustment studies have adopted the view that adjustment is multifaceted (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989; Gregersen & Black, 1990; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Shaffer et al., 1999). Expatriate adjustment may comprise of three facets—(1) work, (2) interaction, and (3) general (Black, 1988). Work adjustment is the degree of adjustment an expatriate feels about the job and responsibilities; interaction adjustment refers to the comfort the expatriate feels about interacting with local supervisors, peers, and subordinates; and general adjustment refers to the “comfort an individual feels with various aspects of the host country culture” (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000). General adjustment is synonymous to cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate that “involves the gradual development of familiarity, comfort, and proficiency regarding expected behavior and the values and assumptions inherent in the new culture” (Black & Mendenhall, 1990: 118). Each dimension of adjustment differentially predicts different outcomes, and should be treated as distinct rather than one overarching, unitary construct (Parker & McEvoy, 1993).

We expect the information and social support shared by HCNs will help enable expatriate newcomers to adjust on all three dimensions. The information that HCNs provide may encompass information about the cultural mores of the host country and the subtleties of the organization, hence, aid in the work and general adjustment of the expatriate. The local friendships can help the expatriate overcome culture shock and any feelings of loneliness or isolation experienced being away from home and their previous support networks (Osland, 1995; Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Torbiorn (1982) notes that expatriates who build a network of HCN relationships tend to be more satisfied. Hence, the social support received from HCNs could help expatriates feel comfortable with local interactions and ameliorate many of the stresses they face.

Proposition 4: Higher levels of socializing behaviors engaged in by the HCN will be positively related to the general, work, and interaction adjustment of the expatriate.

Thus far, our model suggests that comparisons between the attributes of HCNs and expatriates will be associated with the degree of salience of nationality, outgroup categorization, and in turn, the extent to which socializing behaviors are exhibited by HCNs. Greater socialization then leads to greater expatriate adjustment. However, if our model stopped there, it would mean that the likelihood of socializing behaviors occurring on the part of HCNs would be largely pre-determined by the differences or similarities that existed between the attributes of the HCNs and those of expatriates. We do not think this to be true and thus, we discuss next the situational factors that can influence the display of socializing behaviors and moderate the relationship between categorization and the exhibition of socializing behaviors.

Situational moderators

We believe that various situational factors can increase HCNs' motivation to help the expatriate, even in the face of outgroup categorization. We propose four situational factors (some of which are more controllable by the organization than others) that can influence the HCNs' willingness to display socializing behaviors and so moderate the relationship between outgroup categorization and the exhibition of socializing behaviors. Drawing on the OCB (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Organ, 1994; Organ & Ryan, 1995) as well as the social identity literatures, we propose that when the motivation to help is high, socializing behaviors are more likely to occur, even when expatriate are categorized as outgroup members. Therefore, the higher the motivation to help, the weaker will be the link between outgroup categorization and the exhibition of socializing behaviors by the HCNs. The proposed situational characteristics affecting motivation to help are: (1) rewards for helping; (2) supportive organizational culture; (3) perceived fairness of pay differentials; and (4) desirability of affiliation with the outgroup.

Rewards for helping

In general, where organizational incentives are available for helping, HCNs are more motivated to engage in socializing behaviors. For example, a portion of a HCN supervisor's rewards may be tied to the performance of the expatriate, a team member may be rewarded on the achievement of group goals, and the HCN subordinate recognized for alerting expatriate bosses to cultural faux pas. The extent to which HCNs perceive these behaviors as an expected part of their job affects the likelihood that they are performed (Morrison, 1994). Responsible executive secretaries, for instance, are often excellent cultural mentors (Osland, 1995), whereas other HCNs may not feel that helping expatriate managers is part of their jobs since expatriates are supposed to be more qualified than they are and should be the ones HCNs depend on instead (Hailey, 1996; Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Accordingly, the enlarging of HCNs' job scopes to include socializing expatriates and rewarding them for doing so will more likely lead to the display of socializing behaviors.

There may also be personal rewards for helping expatriates. HCNs may help simply because they want to. HCNs who are interested in developing their international experience could gain from knowledge exchange with incoming expatriates and consequently, will be more willing to develop good relationships with the expatriate (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). HCNs can learn about the expatriate's home country as well as gain insight into the expatriate experience. Hence, when personal rewards are perceived, HCNs will be more likely to interact with and help socialize expatriate newcomers.

Proposition 5: When rewards for helping are perceived, HCNs will be more likely to be motivated to help and thus engage in socializing behaviors than when few rewards for helping are perceived.

Supportive organizational culture

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' global belief that the firm cares about their personal well-being and values their contribution to the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Based on principles of social exchange, POS has been found to relate to the display of helping behaviors (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). When employees believe that the organization is committed to them, they may feel obliged to reciprocate by exerting greater effort toward achieving the organization's goals (Eisenberger et al., 1986). These beliefs are developed over time and constantly reinforced based on the employee's experience with the organization and the organization's history of reward decisions, hence creating a culture of mutual support (Wayne, Shore, & Linden, 1997).

If the host organization that the expatriate enters is one that is supportive and caring of its members, the expatriate is likely to find that the HCNs in the organization will be more willing to help, regardless of whether the individual is expatriate or local. The success of an expatriate's assignment is likely to be an important organizational goal given that the expense the organization puts up for the expatriate is usually great. If HCNs believe that the organization truly cares about them, they are more likely to reciprocate by going out of their way to help expatriates. On the other hand, if the organization's culture is one of apathy, disaffected HCNs will be less likely to take the initiative to help anyone, including, and perhaps especially, expatriates.

Proposition 6: HCNs who perceive higher levels of organizational support will be more likely to be motivated to help and thus engage in socializing behaviors than those who perceive low levels of organizational support.

Perceived fairness of pay differential

In general, research on social exchange finds that fair pay leads to the display of helping behaviors (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Masterson et al., 2000; Moorman, 1991). However, there is evidence that the presence or even the perception of objective pay differences do not always lead to feelings of injustice and subsequent action (Martin, 1986). Pay, per se, may not be a valued outcome or the procedures used to determine pay might be viewed as legitimate. As such, even if objective differences exist, injustice may not be experienced. If employees perceive the wage dispersion among organizational members is fair, they will be more likely to cooperate with others (Pfeffer & Langton, 1993).

As discussed earlier, HCNs are likely relatively deprived in absolute terms compared to the expatriate. If HCNs feel that they are deserving of better pay (Crosby, 1984; Lansberg, 1988), desire higher pay (Tyler, Boekmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997), and perceive the deprivation as illegitimate (e.g., HCNs have greater abilities, performance, skills, or knowledge), then HCNs are more likely to experience injustice and feel less justified in helping expatriates. Conversely, if expatriates' pay are perceived to match their responsibilities and abilities, or perhaps higher pay is not a desired outcome (commodities or recognition may be preferred), then HCNs may not experience injustice. Similarly, if HCNs perceive the procedures used to arrive at the discrepant pay packages as legitimate, they may be less likely to withhold helping. It is also important to note, however, that definitions of justice are culture- and context-specific, hence an equity justice rule may not be prescribed by HCNs (Toh & DeNisi, 2003).

Proposition 7: HCNs who perceive that the pay differential between themselves and expatriates is fair will be more likely to be motivated to help and thus engage in socializing behaviors than those who perceive the pay differentials to be unfair.

Desirability of affiliation with the outgroup

Social identity theorists show that outgroup categorization does not necessarily lead to outgroup discriminatory behaviors (Guimond, Dif, & Aupy, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Under certain circumstances, ingroup members may be more willing to help outgroup members than they would fellow ingroup members. Lower status ingroup members, for example, who desire to be affiliated with the higher status outgroup, may engage in outgroup favoring behaviors, especially when it appears possible for them to transcend social group boundaries (Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). Often, expatriates are accorded higher status in the organization and are deemed to play an important role for the organization. HCNs may wish to be affiliated with a higher status group or wish to themselves be expatriates in the future, hence they may treat expatriates more favorably (Vivian & Berkowitz, 1993). On the other hand, if the expatriate's perceived status in the organization is low, such as when expatriates tend to have a poor performance record in the organization or are treated as second class in an organization there may be less desire to affiliate with the expatriates to avoid being associated with a lower-status social group. Therefore, these HCNs will tend to have a greater desire to positively distinguish themselves from the outgroup and be less willing to help.

A second factor influencing the desirability of affiliation with the outgroup is the cultural values of the HCNs, particularly those that govern people's relationships with one another. Self-transcendence (Schwartz, 1996) reflects a concern for others' welfare over one's own interests. This concern includes understanding, appreciating, tolerating, preserving, and enhancing the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact with. This value mainly emphasizes a caring for others regardless of identity or status. In the organizational context, behaviors such as helping and cooperating with others, and caring for and promoting the welfare of other members of the organization are likely manifestations of self-transcendence values. Self-transcendent HCNs would thus, be more likely to affiliate themselves with expatriates. On the contrary, collectivist HCNs will find this affiliation less desirable because they value their ingroup identity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis et al., 1988). The permeability of group boundaries are especially low among collectivists causing HCNs to have less desire to cross group boundaries to include outgroup expatriates through affiliation. As such, these HCNs will be less likely to act as socializing agents to expatriates.

Proposition 8: HCNs who desire to affiliate with the outgroup will be more likely to be willing to help and thus engage in socializing behaviors than those who perceive such affiliation as undesirable.

Based on the above discussion, it is reasonable to posit that outgroup categorization and situational characteristics would have an interactive effect on the likelihood that socializing behaviors are displayed. When the situation encourages high levels of motivation to help, i.e., when rewards for helping, a supportive organizational culture, fairness in the pay differentials, and a strong desire to affiliate with the outgroup are present, the relationship between outgroup categorization and socializing behaviors will be weakened such that the effects of outgroup categorization on the display of socializing behaviors will be smaller when motivation to help is high. When motivation to help is low, HCNs will be less likely to help expatriates even if outgroup categorization is low.

Proposition 9: The relationship between the categorization of expatriates as outgroup and the display of socializing behaviors will weaken as the HCN's motivation to help strengthens.

We recognize that the motivation to help is probably more complex than we have suggested. For example, we believe that the interaction of national cultural values (and even combinations of cultural values), with social categorization could be as important as determinants of this motivation. However, we cannot do justice to the various interactions and possible combinations within the scope of our

paper, and within the scope of our proposed model. We would simply like to suggest here that cultural values are an important contingency to consider. Elucidating more complex relationships and propositions would take away from the focus of our model. Future research is needed.¹

Discussion

An overlooked way to help MNEs reduce the number of failed expatriate assignments lies in the growing body of research recognizing the potential importance of HCNs as socializing agents for expatriates (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Gregersen & Black, 1992). Yet, even though it is clear that HCN organizational members could have a significant socializing role to play (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Kraimer et al., 2001), their characteristics, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors have not been clearly addressed and we know little about what affects HCNs to play this role. Our paper aims to turn the spotlight on this important group of organizational stakeholders.

We feel that the role of HCNs as socializing agents will be increasingly important as MNEs turn to shorter-term assignments. While expatriation is expected to continually grow, industry surveys polling HR executives (e.g., 'New Approaches to Global Mobility: 2002 Worldwide Benchmark Study' by Cendent Mobility, and '2004 Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Practices and Policies' released by ORC Worldwide) suggest that the use of short-term assignments are on the rise, replacing long-term assignments. Short-term assignments are increasingly favored because they are less costly and at the same time allow MNEs to continue to advance their global imperative. In these short-term assignments, expatriates only have 3 months to a year to learn the ropes, so it is imperative that they adapt quickly to the new situation and perform their job before moving on to their next assignment. In our model, we suggest that time can mitigate the effects of differences as HCNs get to understand expatriates better. However, it has been found that some expatriates in short-term assignments are reluctant to adapt their behaviors and attitudes (Wong, 2005). At the same time, HCNs may be less willing to exert effort to teach expatriates or develop friendships with them when they expect them to leave again very shortly. Yet relationships with insiders for newcomers are far more influential in their job-related outcomes than they are for longer-tenured employees (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996), suggesting that it is in the short-term assignments where HCNs can have an even greater impact on expatriate adjustment. With the increasing trend of short-term assignments, creating opportunities for positive interaction should warrant greater attention from MNEs. We foresee a much greater role for HCNs in the future and a far greater need for understanding and managing this group of employees better.

Even though we have outlined what we see as the key antecedents of national identity salience, we do not assume that nationality will always be the basis on which HCNs define the social situation. There are multiple ways in which people can define themselves as well as other people (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). Nationality as a social category only becomes salient when certain cues are observed (Abrams & Hogg, 1987; Toh & DeNisi, 2003) and the importance of these cues may vary with time and situation (Harrison et al., 1998). It is possible HCNs may perceive each expatriate as a unique individual, as 'one of us', or possibly as sharing a larger organizational identity (Reade, 2001; Thomas & Ravlin, 1995). It is also possible that even when expatriates seen as the outgroup, not all of them will be treated as so, especially if HCNs become better acquainted with one or a few individual expatriates, then these special expatriates may become individuated and viewed separately from the rest of the outgroup. However, in our model, we wish to highlight the various circumstances that would cause nationality to be salient as well as its consequences.

¹We would like to thank the Editors for highlighting this issue.

Potential contributions

Our paper adds to the existing body of research on expatriate adjustment in several ways. First, it is an attempt to advance the research on expatriate adjustment that adopts the HCN perspective (Toh & DeNisi, 2003). The oversight of the HCN's perspective in existing models has foreclosed a comprehensive view of the expatriate adjustment process by focusing mainly on the characteristics of the expatriate and the organization. Incorporating the HCN perspective and the underlying psychological and social processes experienced by HCNs in the host unit adds a new dimension to studying the success of expatriate assignments and can lead to better theoretical models of expatriate adjustment.

Another major contribution of our model is that it applies several major bodies of literature in organizational behavior, particularly, socialization, social identity, organizational citizenship, and role theory to understand the expatriate adjustment process. We turn to the socialization literature to demonstrate the importance of the HCN's role in expatriate adjustment and suggest that there are specific behaviors that HCNs may carry out to facilitate adjustment. Our paper advances this literature by adopting the perspective of organizational insiders (Louis, 1980; Settoon & Adkins, 1997) and making formal propositions as to what might motivate them to act as socializing agents.

We draw upon social identity and OCB research to predict when HCNs are more likely to help in the adjustment process. Social identity processes have recently begun to be explicitly considered in expatriate adjustment research (Rao & Hashimoto, 1996). We suggest that doing so is useful as it allows us to examine the social dynamics in a context that often consists of at least two groups that are identifiable by their nationalities (Li et al., 2002; Salk & Shenkar, 2001). Our model also speaks to a relatively unexplored aspect of existing OCB research. Existing research is relatively mute on the outcomes of recipients of helping. The virtues of OCBs appear to be implied in its definition, with little explicit or systematic investigation on how the organization or the recipients of help actually affect them. In the multinational context, the impact of socializing behaviors displayed by HCNs toward expatriate newcomers have also yet to be elucidated with the onus often placed solely on the expatriate and/or the multinational organization. Our model examined how socializing behaviors directed at expatriates may help them adjust. Therefore, it is unique in its focus on the direct benefits of helping on its recipients.

Our model also speaks to role theory, particularly in the domains of role perceptions, role transition and role learning (Ashforth & Saks, 1995; Neale & Griffin, 2006; Nicholson, 1984). To the extent that HCNs perceive helping expatriate newcomers as included in their role as members of the organization, they will be more likely to display those behaviors. Our model highlights the importance of understanding how HCNs might come to perceive themselves as socializing agents for the expatriates. Next, the international assignment experience is an exemplification of role transition and role learning. Expatriates, although not new employees to the MNE, are newcomers to the host unit to which they have been assigned. Here, they must learn what their new role is in the organization as well as how to be effective in this role. Our model suggests that their host country counterparts are integral to the expatriate's role transition and highlights the importance of the social context in the development and learning of workers who are experiencing work-role transitions (Louis, 1980; Louis et al., 1983).

By examining how HCNs can play a role in expatriate adjustment, our paper can potentially help MNEs in developing practical ways to increase the likelihood of expatriate success. Our paper points to the importance of considering the perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of HCNs in MNEs because they can influence the success of the expatriate, as well as the organization. It makes it clear that MNEs must be concerned about the commitment and performance of *all* its employees—not just the expatriates (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Our model calls for the consideration of an additional aspect during the preparation for expatriate assignments. Much research has proposed the importance of preparing expatriates to ensure that the expatriate is well-equipped with the necessary skills for the assignment as well as preparing and accommodating the spouse (and family) of the expatriate (Black & Gregersen,

1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Shaffer et al., 2001). Our model suggests that HCN preparation is just as important. Training HCNs to be aware of the differences and similarities in cultural values, assumptions, communication styles, and attributions between the expatriate's culture and the local culture could yield great dividends to the expatriate, the HCN, and the MNE.

The reason for the use of expatriates could also be more clearly articulated to HCNs to minimize possible ethnocentrism or resentment toward the expatriate. A culture of mutual support and caring should be encouraged where top managers set an example for the HCNs who interact with expatriates. It is possible, however, that in certain countries, there will be greater resistance to developing such an organizational culture, than other perhaps more self-transcendent ones. Emphasizing all employees as one of us regardless of national origin by leaders in the organization can help minimize us-versus-them mentality among HCNs and expatriates (Tsang, 2001). As our model suggests, organizations that appear supportive and fair will do well in encouraging HCNs to act as good citizens toward expatriates and benefit also the organization. Finally, organizations could formalize socializing relationships between the expatriate and the HCN—encourage buddy or mentoring programs that reward HCNs informally or formally for helping expatriates (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). This way, both expatriates and HCNs can develop meaningful working and social relations more effectively.

Conclusion

MNEs must often send managers on overseas' assignments even though many of these assignments fail. We believe that focusing on HCNs can potentially reduce this failure rate. Despite the fact that expatriate management studies hint at the importance of the HCN perspective, calling for the inclusion of host country elements as endogenous factors in expatriate adjustment models (Aycan, 1997; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999), organizational scholars have only recently begun paying attention to HCNs. We have highlighted both the antecedents and consequences of socializing behaviors on the parts of HCNs. However, we acknowledge that the model presented here is a work-in-progress and will evolve as research in this area develops. We feel that with the high costs of expatriate assignments and failure (Poe, 2002; Rushing & Kleiner, 2003), and with the number of expatriates increasing (Voigt, 2001), the issue of expatriate management will continue to be important. We hope that future research will continue to adopt the HCN perspective in other productive ways and advance our understanding of various psychological and social processes in MNEs.

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