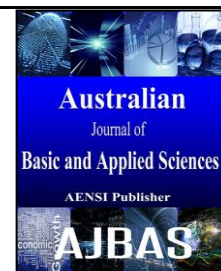




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International Assignment: Reasons and Work Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Background: Globalization has become the strategic key necessity for organization. To stay competitive, international assignments has become an integral part for any organization. **Objective:** This study attempts to examine the reasons for accepting international assignment and its relationship with work outcomes. **Results:** Four reasons have been identified - mercenary, explorer and architect and refugees. Despite of four identified reasons, only one reason found to have a significant relationship with work outcomes - architect reasons. **Conclusion:** This study could assist an organization to plan sound career prospects of its employees who undertakes the international assignment.

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INTRODUCTION

The fast pace of globalization over the years has made organization to be more flexible in their businesses. This is at least a genuine reason to the multinational companies (MNCs) not only to ensure its competitive position in the industry but to sustain the businesses in the long run as well. Globalization has becomes the strategic key necessity for organization. To stay competitive, international assignments has become an integral part for any organization (Brown, 2008). The organization needs to send it staff to all over the world to manage global operation in effective way (Selmer and Lauring, 2012).

International assignment is often assigned to fulfill the empty position abroad. It is also to give exposure to the staff about global business and trends. Other reason for international assignment is professional development, knowledge transfer, fulfillment of scarce skills, control and co-ordination (Cuizo, 2009). International assignments strategic values always been describe as transferring business and technology know-how, developing personal skills, facilitating and improving communication between subsidiary and headquarters. It is also to introduce new organizational policy and also to

shape the perspectives and capabilities of a global leader (Altman and Baruch, 2012).

International assignments can be defined as employer sends out their employee overseas for a temporary assignment (Brewster & Scullion, 1997). There are several forms of international assignment. First, is short term international assignment - a popular form of non-standard assignments. It is also defined as temporary internal transfer to a foreign subsidiary of between one to twelve months. The short term always been used in the following situation. First is problem solving or skilled transfer. Secondly, control purposes. While the later is a managerial development purpose. Expatriate who are going for short term international assignments will leave their family in the home country. The advantages of short term international assignment are flexibility, simplicity and cost effectiveness. While the disadvantages of short term international assignment are taxation issue, potential for side effects such as culture shock, failure to build effectiveness among subsidiary colleagues, and work visa and permit issue (David, Scullion and Morley, 2007).

Next is frequent flyer assignment. It is also known as international business traveler (IBT). IBT has been defined as "one for whom business travel is an essential competent of their work". The IBT has

the advantage of avoiding the relocation of expatriate and their entire family to the foreign country. IBT gives advantage of face to face interaction when dealing business transaction without relocating the physical presence. IBT is appropriate to handle irregular task such as annual budgeting meeting. It is also useful in maintaining personal touch in managing subsidiary operation without relocation. The advantages of IBT are it allows for face to face interaction without physical relocation, minimize the impact of international work on dual careers couple (David, Scullion and Morley, 2007). Last is commuter and rotational assignments. It is defined as assignee commutes from their home base to another country in a post to another country weekly or bi-weekly basis. Another definition of commuter assignment is assignee commute from their home country to a workplace in a short period of time followed by a period of time off in the home country (David, Scullion and Morley, 2007).

In today stiff business environments, MNCs strives to compete with its rivals in widening world market thus the relocation of employees worldwide has become critical business agenda (Hainess, Tania and Choquette, 2008). Statistics from 1980s has shown that the number of international assignments has increased. Despite of increasing demand for international assignment, many expatriates return with failure without finishing their international assignment (Haring, 1995; 2002). This is because the expatriate face many challenges in host country of their international assignment. Those challenges may varies from culture shock, transitional difficulty in other word adaptation, isolation, homesickness, healthcare, housing, schooling, cuisine, language, customs and cost of living which in turn affect expatriate work outcomes. Due to these contradict scenario, this study is attempt to examine the expatriate reasons to accept international assignment and its effects on their work outcomes (work performance, work effectiveness and job satisfaction).

Literature Review:

Expatriate and work outcomes have been widely discussed in past research from various perspectives including the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985). International assignment is an important agenda for the employee and also employer. Thus, it's often relies on the employee's own willingness and initiatives to take up for the assignment.

The theory of planned behavior is significant in this study as it served as a basis for expatriate in considering for international assignment (Albarracín et. al., 2001; Armitage and Conner, 2001). Employee's own willingness and initiatives to take up for the assignment are thus relevant with the theory as it specifies that actions are predicted based on intentions. This intention later will influence employee's commitment in international assignment.

The willingness to take up for the assignment in turn, predicted the perceived behavioral control (the extend employee easily carry out the assignment); the attitudes (towards the international assignment); and subjective norms (perceived social pressure to carry out the assignment). In summary, these three mechanisms may produce an outcome of behavioral intention, which in turn results in behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The model from (Selmén and Luring, 2012) had been adapted in order to accomplish the objective. The model has discussed four independent variables - refugee reasons, mercenary reasons, explorer reasons and architect reasons. While the dependent variable measures three work outcomes - work performance, work effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Work outcomes - measures there components; work performance, work effectiveness and job satisfaction. Work Performance is an important ingredient of the working lives of expatriates who accept international assignments. Work performance often defined as the core technical duties of the job, also known as task performance or in-role performance (Fisher, 2003). However, there is little agreement as to what constitutes work performance in general terms. It measures the expatriate ability to perform their job effectively in your job requirement, up to date job description for your position. Besides that, it is the ability of an expatriate to meet their standards and expectations. Work performance of an employee also refers to whether a person performs their job well. It is important criterion that related to organization outcomes and success. Job performance is as an individual variable. It is what a single person does on their job or assignment. Work Effectiveness is a person's job behavior that is matching with a role sender's expectation is referring to work effectiveness (Tsui, 1984). Previous research has shown that work effectiveness is positively correlated to job performance (Tsui and Ohlott, 1988). According to Michigan State University Human Resource Department, there are several indicators could be used to measures employee job effectiveness. Those are achieves result, ability to communicates effectively, dependability or attendance, ability to makes effective decision and last but not least is problem solving and judgment. Job satisfaction has varies of definition used by professional. It is primarily work-related overall performance. It can be defined as the emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). It can also be defined as how content of individual is with his or her job. Luc and Pargneux (2009) defined job satisfaction as an effective attitudinal response to the work environment. It is an important indicator of adjustment to a new work environment. Therefore, work performance, work effectiveness and job satisfaction could well be interrelated but are not

necessarily so. Different motives for expatriates may result in different work outcomes (Selmen and Lauring, 2012).

Explorer Reasons has been cited in most of journals that travel or adventure as one of the common reason employee's expat from their home country. They are desire to see other parts of the world that they haven't seen yet. The three main ingredients that could represent adventure or travel are the employee desire to see more of the world, in search for a new experience and the desire for an adventure or challenge. This reason has been identified to influence expatriate to accept for international assignment (Selmen and Lauring, 2012). They also found that explorer reason differs based on marital status, seniority, nationality, and previous expatriate experience (Selmen and Lauring, 2011). While it is also relevant that young expatriate loves to travel or adventure rather than old expatriate (Selmen and Lauring, 2010). International assignment is a phase where the expatriate can explore the world and gain more experience. International experience has a high intrinsic value which is valuable for the expatriate to further their personal development (Banai and Harry, 2004).

The self-expatriate have rated adventure or international experience as the highest among other reasons. The foreign experience related adventure and exploration, self-confidence and broad skills acquisition supporting the significant of working abroad as an opportunity for expatriates to discover challenge, opportunity and exploration (Doherty, Dickman and Mills, 2011). Explorer reason gives the expatriate great exposure of other cultures including the opportunity to learn the host country languages. They also able to expand their friends network by building a relationship with local colleagues as well with other expatriators. Seedy adaptation of host country great environments helps expatriate to gain self-confidence and able perform better as expected by their employer (Contreras and Fabio, 2003).

Refugee reasons for international assignment are mainly motivated to escape past experience or past life in the expatriate home country (Selmen and Lauring, 2010). They simply are looking for what are being offered in the new assignment to offset with their action in escaping previous life (Richardson and McKenna, 2000). Taking overseas position in order to escape the home context was a common theme. This is also due to negative working environment in expatriate home country. Some may see this as an opportunity to change. A study by Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008) found there are discrimination in managerial practices in the UK which was restricted women's their promotion options. In return, the affected women has self-initiated expatriate themselves to the Cayman Island as a reason to escape from what they have been through. Expatriates who have unhappy working environment in home country would escape from such boredom

situation in their home country. However, escaping away from home country situation does not always promise for future success. Running from home country situation as reason to accept international assignment does not solve the individual problems. The problem of the expatriate might get worst in the host country. Thus, it is difficult to expect and control the actions of expatriate in a newly assigned international assignment especially in new pleasurable situation. Nevertheless some study found a negative correlation in refugee reasons to accept international assignment as well as towards the work outcomes (Selmen and Lauring, 2010; Luc and Pragneux, 2009).

Architect reasons for international assignment are mainly about career development issue (Selmen and Lauring, 2010). The expatriates are desire to enhance their career prospects and interested in career building (Selmen and Lauring, 2011). Even though architect reason is not the main reason for expatriate to accept for international assignment, they usually do well in the assignment and get promoted after get back to their home country (Selmen and Lauring, 2012). International assignment could advance expatriate career faster (Bruce, Burnaby and Nailin, 2004). Results show that young expatriate was driven more to career rather than old expatriate (Selmen and Lauring, 2010). Individuals who are desire to enhance their career prospects may self-initiate international assignment when he/she cannot get it from the current organization in order to gain international experience (Tharenou, 2010). The opportunity to acquire career capital appears to be a significant motivator for expatriate to work abroad. It is also believe expatriate can do goods to someone career. Job and career development appear as fundamental to decision to move abroad and embark their professional career development (Doherty, Dickman and Mills, 2011). International assignments may benefits individual rather than the organization beneficial (Collings, Scullion and Morley, 2007). The expatriate normally would look at the advantages from career perspective. An international assignment will expose the expatriate to the new ways of doing business, allow them to gain new perspective, and give better understanding on organization as a whole. The international assignment also help expatriate improve their interpersonal skills effectiveness. It will result boost up expatriate self confidence in professional capabilities (Contreras and Fabio, 2003).

There are two career variables were taken into account. Firstly, the employee career goal distances. It is defined as job ladder taken by the employee. The ladder connects the employee with their goals. This was extended to a theory where the larger the employee career goal distances the greater the acceptance on international assignments. The next variable is firm's career policy for expatriate. It was found that career goal distances has greatly influence

the expatriate willingness to accept international assignment (Abraham, 1997). Employee who has strong commitments and involvements in their career development is likely believed that career accomplishments are related to self-worth feeling. Thus, career objective has positively related to willingness to accept international relocation regardless of any destination. The higher employee career insight the more possible the acceptance of employee towards international relocation. However, the research findings showed that most of the respondent's career involvement and career commitments rated high rather than career goal and career insight (Noe and Barber, 1993). Even though various past study found a relation between international assignment and career development there is still a number of studies show that the relation between expatriate international experiences and positive career outcomes are dubious (Bolino, 2007; Bossard and Peterson, 2005; Stahl et. al., 2002). As a result the desired work outcomes of the expatriation may be difficult to control.

Mercenary reasons are motivated by financial incentives including to make money for family and saves (Selmen and Luring, 2012). Expatriate are more interested to accept international assignment if offered better compensation and package by the company. The increased of job opportunities and job responsibilities also attract employee to accept international assignment. The findings show that there is a positive correlation between the employees place on higher salary and fringe benefits and their willingness to accept international assignment (Irene and Zhu, 2002; Selmen and Luring, 2012). Mercenary also includes the opportunity for expatriate to make some money and save a large amount of it. It is also being an issue after marriage or after having children. Mercenary reasons differ based on demographic factors. Non-European Union (EU) expatriate to EU nation driven by mercenary reason. It is also found that experience is positively related with mercenary reason (Selmen and Luring, 2011) while young expatriate motivated more to financial incentive rather than old expatriate (Selmen and Luring, 2010). International assignment has also been perceived as providing better financial rewards rather than domestic career. Receptivity over international assignment has been found significant with the expectation of interesting job rewarding and better monetary reward. 90% of Canadian students are ready for international assignment for financial incentives (Bruce, Burnaby and Nailin, 2004). Willingness to accept international assignment depends on most strongly and not exclusively on financial components. Thus, in order to persuade employees to accept foreign assignment particularly to difficult country, an impressive salary has to be offered. A survey was conducted to find the best compensation package for expatriate. The most frequently mentioned among respondents was salary.

Thus, salary is the reason for expatriate to accept international assignment (Warkene and Schneider, 2011).

Research Methodology:

Based on the sample of 96 employees in International Business Department, Petroleum Nasional Berhad (PETRONAS), the data is analysed. The next section describes target population, data collection method, data analysis, followed by a discussion of measures. The population for this study was the employees who have experiences in international assignments who worked in International Business Department, Petroleum Nasional Berhad (PETRONAS). Total population of the department is 96 employees. Judgmental sampling technique was used. We used this technique due to units to be sampled to have a knowledge and professional judgment as well as have the experiences in international assignment or international relocation. Thus, they can provide the information as needed. The data has been collected electronically through email as well as through personal questionnaire distribution. Questionnaire has been distributed to all employees in International Business department. This method is convenient as it consume less time. There are three sections in the questionnaire. The first section contains questions related to the respondents' demographic background. Second and third sections ask questions related to the independent and dependent variables respectively. Demographic background variables were estimated through direct questions (Section A). Work outcomes constructs and reasons to expatriate were measured using seven-point scale adopted from Richardson and Mallon (2005) in Selmen and Luring (2012). Response categories ranged from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1:

There is a significant relationship between refugee reasons (RR) and work outcomes (WO).

Hypothesis 2:

There is a significant relationship between mercenary reasons (MR) and work outcomes (WO).

Hypothesis 3:

There is a significant relationship between explorer reasons (ER) and work outcomes (WO).

Hypothesis 4:

There is a significant relationship between architect reasons (AR) and work outcomes (WO).

Analysis:

The analysis conducted in this research includes frequency, descriptive, reliability and Pearson correlation.

Findings And Discussion:

The respondent rate for this study is 100%. However, only 54.17% of the questionnaires have been answered completely thus useable for this study. The other 45.83% was rejected due to incomplete answer. Frequency analysis was conducted to analyses the respondents demographic background. 15 (28.8%) out of 52 respondents were single while the majority 37 (71.2%) were married during expatriation. 26 respondents (50%) were the majority for international assignment duration from one to three years. Another 16 respondents (30.8%) went for international assignment for less than 1 year. 7 respondents (13.5%) for four to five years duration. The remaining 3 respondents (5.8%) have experienced more than 5 years. There were 4 identified designations in the host country during the international assignment. Those were senior or top management, manager, management trainee and executive. 26 designations were executives (50%), 14 were managers (26.9%), 10 were management trainees (19.2%) and the other 2 were the senior or top management (3.8%).

Reliability Test:

George and Mallory (2003) rule of thumb has been used to explain the strength of Cronbach alpha for each of the analyses done for the independent and dependent variables. Result show that the overall Cronbach alpha for work outcome (WO) - consists of 11 items is 0.722. This indicates the strength of the reliability is acceptable.

While the Cronbach alpha for the independent variables - refugee reasons (RR) is 0.587 which indicate the strength of reliability is poor, mercenary reasons (MR) is 0.593 which indicate the strength of reliability is poor, explorer reasons (ER) is 0.799 which indicate the strength of reliability is acceptable and architect reasons (AR) is 0.735 which indicate the strength of reliability is acceptable. However, the overall Cronbach alpha for independent variables - consists of 12 items is 0.756 which indicate the strength of the reliability is acceptable.

Pearson Correlation:

Guilford's rule of thumb (Guilford, 1956) has been used to measure the strength of the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables as well as its significant level.

Table I: Pearson Correlation Analysis.

		RR	MR	ER	AR	WO
RR	Pearson Correlation	1	.329*	.301*	.173	-.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.030	.221	.352
	N	52	52	52	52	52
MR	Pearson Correlation	.329*	1	.320*	.229	-.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017		.021	.103	.961
	N	52	52	52	52	52
ER	Pearson Correlation	.301*	.320*	1	.461**	-.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.021		.001	.874
	N	52	52	52	52	52
AR	Pearson Correlation	.173	.229	.461**	1	-.284*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.221	.103	.001		.041
	N	52	52	52	52	52
WO	Pearson Correlation	-.132	-.007	-.022	-.284*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.352	.961	.874	.041	
	N	52	52	52	52	52
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Referring to Table I, Pearson correlation for all independent variables are negatively correlated with the dependent variable. Refugee reasons (RR) Pearson correlation with work outcome (WO) is -.132, a mercenary reasons (MR) is -.007, explorer reasons (ER) is -.022 and lastly architect reasons (AR) is -.284. This indicates that three of the independent variables which are RR, MR and ER have a slight, almost negligible relationship with work outcomes (Guilford, 1956). The three independent variables RR, MR and ER are thus not significant at p-value 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3 are rejected. As for AR, the Pearson correlation is -.284. It indicate that AR has low, correlation; definite but small relationship with work outcomes (WO). However, it is significant at p-value 0.05. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is accepted.

For refugee reasons (RR), the decisions to escape from home country working environments as reason to accept international assignment doesn't always lead to the positive outcomes. This is due to running away from home country doesn't solve the expatriate problem. The problem of the expatriate might get worst in the host country. Escaping away from home country situation does not always promise for future success. Thus, this is somehow affecting the expatriate's work outcomes (Selmen and Luring, 2010; Luc and Pragneux, 2009). As for architect reasons (AR), the result is consistent with Bonache (2005) where the expatriate's career expectation will lead to less job satisfaction. It is found that, the higher the expectation of the career, the lower the job satisfaction of the expatriate. In this case, the PETRONAS expatriates would probably

place a high expectation on their international assignment career but somehow high responsibilities and tasks in foreign country lead to low work performance and effectiveness. This is also consistent with Bonache (2005) study where the career reasons gave better outcomes for repatriate and not to the expatriate. Mercenary reasons (MR) has negative and weak coefficient with work outcomes (WO). The monetary doesn't always lead to work performance. Job that requires cognitive skills apparently lead to less job performance of an expatriate. A monetary benefit isn't sufficient for the expatriate or worker to motivate them to perform better in their tasks. An employee who worked for their own sake by fulfilling their personal or social norm is often indispensable. All this can be destroyed by offering huge monetary benefit to the worker (Neely, 2002). This could also be related to financial motives being less important for international assignment to those expatriates who were actually reluctant to leave their home country yet cannot pull or cope with the international environments. This negative relationship might also due to what expatriate felt and think that some other organizations in their host country or home country offered better pay and benefits than what they received. This would then affect the expatriate work outcomes (Expatriate Engagement Survey, 2014). Explorer reasons (ER) has negative and weak coefficient with work outcomes (WO). This may be due to the international assignment accepted by the expatriate doesn't really challenge their capability and skills compared to the one's they have had back then in the home country. It could be said that the experiences gained in the foreign country doesn't not add to the value of what they expected prior accepting the international assignment.

Conclusion:

Globalization has becomes the strategic key necessity for organization (Kutscher and Schmid, 2002). To stay competitive, international assignments has become an integral part for any organization (Brown, 2008; Kuehlmann, 2004). The objective of this study is to examine the reasons for accepting international assignment and its relationship towards the work outcomes. Four reasons that have been identified were mercenary, explorer and architect and refugees reasons. Despite of four identified reasons as mentioned earlier, only one reason found to have a significant relationship with work outcomes. It was architect reasons. This study could assist an organization to plan sounds career prospects of its employees who undertakes the international assignment.

Limitations and future research:

This research was done in international business department in PETRONAS. Thus the sample gathered was quite small to be analyzed and to make

generalizations. Thus, research should be conducted in many other departments and include other organization as well. Therefore, the sample size would be large. Secondly, the independent variables were adapted and been tested previously in the European countries. The culture between European and Asian countries are differences. Thus the results would be varies as well.

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