

I love my career, don't I? The influence of organisation-based support on expatriates' adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention

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Abstract

Employees are encouraged to undergo expatriation to develop cross-cultural competencies that meet global workforce standards. However, most expatriates struggle to adjust and eventually withdraw from their assignments. The purpose of this paper is to empirically investigate the role of perceived organisational support (POS), host country national (HCN) support, and adjustment as antecedents of expatriates' occupational withdrawal intention. Drawing from the sampling frame of various foreign chambers of commerce, survey data were collected from 112 expatriates based in organisations in Malaysia. Partial least squares-structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses. Both POS and HCN support positively influence expatriate adjustment, while only POS negatively influences occupational withdrawal intention. Further, expatriate adjustment mediates the effects of POS and HCN support on occupational withdrawal intention. When expatriates adjust better upon receiving POS and HCN support, their occupational withdrawal intention is lower. This study enriches the current literature by applying the conservation of resources theory and contributes to the limited research on the roles of organisation-based support on expatriate success. The findings indicate that expatriate-hiring firms should provide suitable support mechanisms for expatriates on overseas assignments. These firms should amplify the role of HCNs to help expatriates adjust to local cultures and complete their assignments.

Keywords: perceived organisational support, host country national support, expatriate adjustment, occupational withdrawal intention, conservation of resources theory, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalisation, expatriates have to undergo international assignments to hone a wide range of cross-cultural competencies. These assignments are typically contingent on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991), which is an integral index of expatriate success. Overcoming adjustment challenges indicates that expatriates have fulfilled an important professional criterion while living and working in a foreign country (Pinto et al., 2012). However, when culture shock strikes, expatriates' adjustment process may consume more time than expected. This stems from the difficulties they face in changing their attitudes and behaviours to suit local contexts. In particular, expatriates in Southeast Asia are challenged by the local cultural norms of consensus building, hierarchy, and 'face' saving during their assignments (Dosanj, 2015). Consequently, occupational or career change is pronounced among expatriates in this region, affecting several key stakeholders (Dosanj, 2015). Despite vast investigation into job performance as an outcome of expatriate adjustment, only one study, to our knowledge, has looked into occupational withdrawal intention in this regard (Pinto et al., 2012). Thus, we aim to identify the factors influencing expatriates' adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention. It is crucial to distinguish between withdrawal intention and occupational withdrawal intention in the international arena. Withdrawal intention refers to expatriates' plans to return home prematurely (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), while occupational withdrawal intention is understood as expatriates' plan to look for a new career in the future (Pinto et al., 2012).

In response to the issues highlighted by Dosanj (2015), Malaysia offers an interesting research avenue for expatriation. Malaysia is a multicultural country in Southeast Asia, with various cultural and racial backgrounds comprising Bumiputera Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other minorities (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2003). According to InterNations (2019), Malaysia is the world's ninth-best destination for expatriates to work and settle down. About 73 percent of expatriates even agreed that they were able to easily adjust to the local culture and blend into the local society. In reality, however, the cultural diversity in this country has broadened the psychological cultural distance between locals and expatriates. Expatriates find it taxing to adjust to the working conditions and business culture in Malaysia, which vary in terms of communication, hierarchies, space, and relationships (HSBC Bank, 2019). Arokiasamy and Kim (2020) further argued that the close distance between Asian countries does not promise expatriates' effective adjustment to local cultures. For expatriates, the worst experience would be to fail their international assignment due to maladjustment stemming from their inability to deal with cultural differences in a multicultural setting like Malaysia.

Drawing upon the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), four unique resources are believed to help individuals be productive in any situation, i.e. objects (e.g. money), conditions (e.g. social support), personal characteristics (e.g. personality), and energy (e.g. knowledge). The theory suggests that individuals do not just acquire, develop, maintain, and protect their internal resources when they feel stressed but also strive to minimise the loss of such resources (Hobfoll, 1989). As most expatriates are typically career-oriented, they require resources in the form of information and support to attain their assignment goals (Linder, 2019). However, since international assignments can be extremely onerous, expatriates are vulnerable to acculturative stress and could be deterred from receiving local support (McNulty et al., 2019). Specifically, expatriates become stressed when both their cognitive and somatic systems deteriorate as a result of resource depletion in relation to personal networks and relationships (Davies et al., 2019). To compensate for this loss, expatriates may invest their time, emotions, and energy into gaining access to various support mechanisms. The COR theory is therefore superior in terms of explaining expatriates' behaviours.

Salient stakeholders, including organisations and host country nationals (HCNs), function as expatriates' key resources that provide information on social norms and acceptable behaviours in both work and non-work domains (Takeuchi, 2010; van der Laken et al., 2019). Social support from organisation-based stakeholders is thus a major contributor to expatriates' cultural adjustment, which in turn eliminates their withdrawal (van der Laken et al., 2016). On the international platform, expatriates are often overwhelmed by challenging work demands and stress from inadequate support, which consume their existing resources (Davies et al., 2019; McNulty et al., 2019). As such, it is relevant to understand their coping strategies (Andresen et al., 2018), such as occupational withdrawal intention. Since social support serves as a condition resource as per the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), our study sheds light on expatriate adjustment by incorporating salient stakeholders' support as a deterrent of occupational withdrawal intention.

Although we argue that both POS and HCN support are effective in tackling expatriates' occupational withdrawal intention, the underlying process of how support affects occupational withdrawal intention is not fully understood in the literature. Given that a mediating mechanism would enhance our understanding of the direct relationships between POS, HCN support, and occupational withdrawal, our research set forth to examine the mediating effect of expatriate adjustment. From a career management perspective, expatriates need support from their social networks to improve their perceived career prospects (Linder, 2019). Consistent with the COR theory, when expatriates receive limited support from stakeholders (i.e. organisations and HCNs) due to cultural issues like consensus building and hierarchies, the consequent depletion of support-related resources leads to

feelings of unadaptability and unpleasant attitudes towards their career. In other words, a dearth of POS and HCN support increases expatriates' maladjustment, which pushes them to change occupations in the hope of protecting their existing resources. On the other hand, if expatriates form relationships with organisations and HCNs, they establish a support system with shared knowledge and personal interest, thereby decreasing their likelihood of withdrawing from the occupation. Based on these arguments, a research framework including POS, HCN support, adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention was developed and analysed using a sample of 112 business expatriates in Malaysia. Business expatriates are professional working individuals, either assigned or self-initiated, who live and work abroad on a temporary basis without citizenship in the country of employment (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). The terms 'expatriates' and 'business expatriates' are used interchangeably in this paper.

The present study makes three main contributions. First, we extend the COR theory by applying it to the relationships between POS, HCN support, expatriate adjustment, and occupational withdrawal intention. van der Laken et al. (2016) claimed that the effect of organisation-based support on expatriate retention is always indirect by way of adjustment. Hence, our study contributes to the literature by incorporating expatriate adjustment as a mediator (Harari et al., 2018; Kraimer et al., 2001) based on the COR theory. Second, we contribute to the concept of occupational withdrawal intention in a domestic setting (Carmeli, 2005) by establishing its body of knowledge in an international context. A similar study by Pinto et al. (2017) found that both home and host organisational cultures have an impact on expatriates' withdrawal intention from their organisations and assignments, respectively. Scholars (e.g. van der Laken et al., 2019; Varma et al., 2016) have further reported that expatriate withdrawal can be predicted by organisation-based support, highlighting the need to examine withdrawal intention in international human resource (HR) management. Given that occupational withdrawal intention has been largely neglected in the expatriate literature (Pinto et al., 2012), this particular concept was assessed to understand its antecedents in terms of support and adjustment. Third, we undertook this study within Malaysia due to the scarce literature on expatriate adjustment and withdrawal intention in the Malaysian context. Malaysia is a multicultural country which is home to various ethnic groups with strong cultural sensitivity (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2003). The country is particularly high in power distance and collectivism (Abdullah & Pedersen, 2003; Hofstede, 1994). Despite these cultural variances, Malaysia is a developing country that has continuously attracted expatriates (InterNations, 2019), which calls for further study in this context.

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Perceived organisational support (POS)

POS is defined as an employee's global belief that an organisation cherishes its employees' contributions and cares about their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The COR theory assumes that POS is a condition resource that influences the attitudes and behaviours of employees. The concept of 'resource caravan passageways' highlights how an organisation plays a critical role in creating passageways via suitable working conditions (e.g. assistance and resources) for employees to function in hostile environments. This implies that POS embodies both socio-emotional support and tangible support. Hence, POS can protect employees from the loss of resources and subsequent detachment and withdrawal (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Since expatriates sacrifice their social contacts with friends and families in their home country, POS is a prominent source of support to facilitate expatriates' adjustment and retention (Leiva et al., 2017; van der Laken et al., 2016). Abdul Malek et al. (2015) suggested that POS can minimise assignment failure rates and the escalating costs of retaining expatriates. When expatriates are supported with specific policies and practices, they feel obligated to reciprocate with effort and loyalty (van der Laken et al., 2016). Accordingly, prior studies have reported that POS has a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment (Chan et al., 2019; Kraimer et al., 2001). This indicates that organisations can grant expatriates support in various forms, such as cross-cultural training and language classes, to boost their adjustment level. When organisations implement such support strategies, expatriates can enhance their cultural adjustment in the host country.

While previous studies have made some efforts to understand the relationship between POS and withdrawal intention (Cao et al., 2014; van der Heijden et al., 2009), little has been done to investigate whether an expatriate's intention to leave an occupation is associated with lower POS. In line with the COR theory, POS includes objective and formal resources that enable expatriates to succeed in their career (Andresen et al., 2018; Leiva et al., 2017). As such, POS fits well as a resource caravan passageway since it prevents expatriates' withdrawal from an occupation after they have invested a reasonable amount of their talent and energy in it. For instance, Millennial expatriates are reliant on their organisations to support their career development and provide a transparent career path (Crowley-Henry & Collins, 2017). If organisations fail to invest in expatriates' occupational growth, the latter may leave their job as an opportunity cost. Based on this reasoning, POS may promote the adjustment of expatriates and satisfy their need for resources that elicit their desire to remain in the career. We thus theorise that expatriates' global belief that their organisations care about their well-being and

contributions would help them reconsider their decision to leave the occupation. Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: POS has a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment.

H2: POS has a negative relationship with occupational withdrawal intention.

2.2. Host country national (HCN) support

The COR theory acknowledges that expatriates are likely to experience higher levels of stress apart from resource loss as their personal conditions change in the host country (Bader, 2017). As expatriates are disengaged from their personal networks and relationships, it is typical for them to feel dejected and isolated in the host country. Nevertheless, expatriates have to form new networks with HCNs and comprehend new procedures in the local subsidiary (Bader, 2017). HCNs refer to local employees within the host unit who help newcomers adjust to the new working conditions (Toh & Denisi, 2007). From the lens of the COR theory, HCNs can substitute the change or loss of resources related to expatriates' private relationships.

According to Bader (2017), HCNs are a significant resource for expatriates to master assignment challenges. Fundamentally, the support provided by HCNs can minimise expatriates' level of uncertainty in both work and non-work environments. HCN support entails beneficial information that enables expatriates to observe norms, values, and behaviours in a new culture (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Pustovit, 2020; Varma et al., 2016). HCNs can also assist them with job tasks and integrate them into the local context to facilitate their adjustment. In fact, HCNs serve as socialising agents that strengthen expatriates' adjustment via interaction and socialisation, given that expatriates cannot undergo a successful social adjustment process on their own (Arman & Aycan, 2013). Therefore, when expatriates socialise with HCNs, they feel psychologically safe and emotionally stable within the local society. However, while interactions with HCNs offer expatriates social learning opportunities, language barriers are likely to lead to misunderstandings (van der Laken et al., 2019). Moreover, as expatriates and HCNs are from different cultural backgrounds, it is inevitable that they face continuous challenges in forging positive relationships (Ismail, 2015). To overcome this issue, HCNs must perform dual roles as colleagues and mentors for expatriates at the workplace.

To our knowledge, no studies have examined the relationship between HCN support and occupational withdrawal intention. It is thus important to first document why and under what condition this direct relationship exists. As expatriation is emotionally demanding, HCN support is useful in engendering expatriates' successful assignments (Varma et al., 2016). When expatriates face resource loss caused by a lack of support, they strive to protect their resources in their international career. In congruence with the COR theory, HCNs function as new resources that offer expatriates objective feedback and affirmation (Bader, 2017), which may include appreciation and career progression plans. Ismail (2015) posited that an established relationship between expatriates and HCNs would foster career-related knowledge transfer from HCNs to expatriates. When expatriates build social ties with HCNs in their given occupation, the former receive useful information and support from the latter with specialist knowledge, which would reduce their occupational withdrawal. Thus, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H3: HCN support has a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment.

H4: HCN support has a negative relationship with occupational withdrawal intention.

2.3. Expatriate adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention

Expatriate success with the absence of withdrawal intention is a direct indicator of a well-accomplished assignment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Generally, withdrawal intention is a conventional outcome of poor expatriate adjustment (Pinto et al., 2012). Different cultural environments impinge on unadjusted expatriates who are then unable to meet their career goals as a result of having fewer resources to perform their tasks; in this scenario, termination is their most straightforward option (Black & Stephens, 1989; Shaffer et al., 1999). However, research on the relationship between expatriate adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention is relatively sparse. One of the few studies to have considered this is Pinto et al. (2012), who investigated the relationship between expatriate adjustment (general, work, and interaction) and withdrawal intentions from the assignment, organisation, and occupation using a sample of 166 expatriates working in the United States, Europe, Asia, and South America. Carmeli (2005) argued that the multidimensional concept of withdrawal intention is particularly relevant in the international context. To illustrate, expatriates may leave their present assignment, but may wish to work in the same organisation. In contrast, they may leave their organisation while staying with the same assignment and occupation. The scholars' regression analysis confirmed that only work adjustment influences expatriates' withdrawal intention from the assignment (Pinto et al., 2012).

Due to limited research on the direct relationships among these variables, expatriate adjustment may mediate the relationship between the antecedents (POS and HCN support) and the outcome (occupational withdrawal intention); however, this mechanism remains unexplored in the literature. Since the COR theory

classifies social support as a condition that motivates employees to achieve career goals (Hobfoll et al., 2018), both POS and HCN support are valuable resources that are expected to help expatriates cope with the challenging problems of cultural adjustment. In turn, adjusted expatriates are unlikely to withdraw from their occupation. Indeed, expatriate adjustment has been found to explain how POS minimises assignment withdrawal intention (van der Laken et al., 2016). Based on the discussion above, the following hypotheses were postulated:

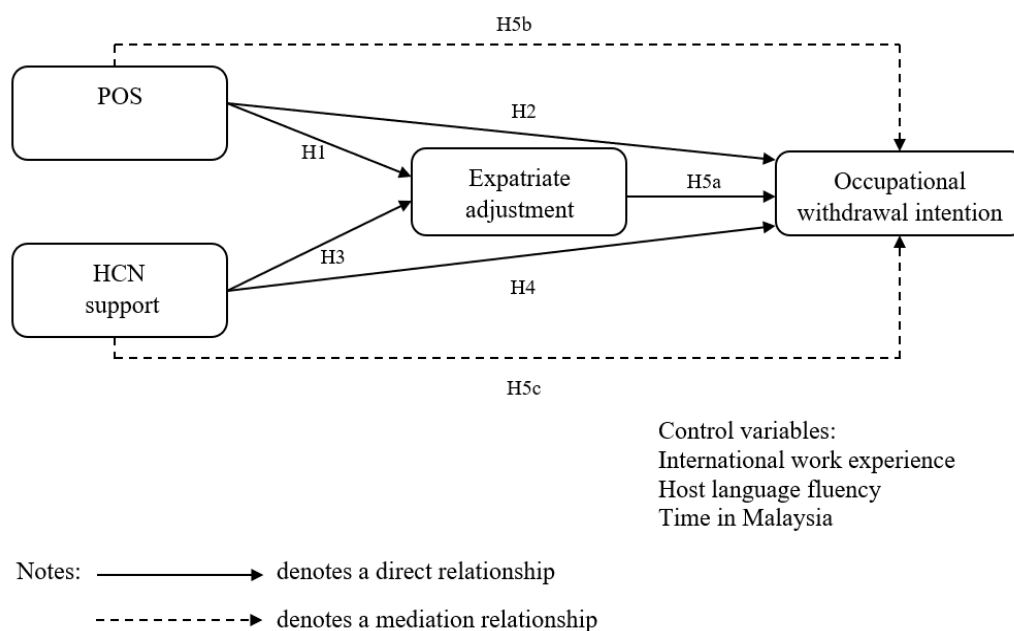
H5a: Expatriate adjustment has a negative relationship with occupational withdrawal intention.

H5b: Expatriate adjustment mediates the negative relationship between POS and occupational withdrawal intention.

H5c: Expatriate adjustment mediates the negative relationship between HCN support and occupational withdrawal intention.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework with the proposed hypotheses.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



3. METHODS

3.1. Sample and data collection

Data was collected from business expatriates at all levels (non-managerial to top management) working across various industries in Malaysia. As noted earlier, business expatriates is a term that refers to assigned or self-initiated expatriates who reside temporarily in a country without citizenship to attain a career goal (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). This study specifically targeted expatriates who had stayed in the country for a minimum of six months. Referring to the U-Curve of adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991), when the initial ‘honeymoon’ period of expatriation fades, expatriates feel homesick. Following this, expatriates are likely to experience ‘culture shock’ as they face reality in the host country, leading them through the challenging process of ‘adjustment’. Once that is over, they learn how to behave appropriately in the new culture, known as ‘mastery’ (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). As per the U-Curve of adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991), passing through these stages typically takes about six months. Hence, the decision to select expatriates who had resided in Malaysia for at least six months was necessary to grasp the actual adjustment process.

Expatriates were recruited through our sampling frame generated from different foreign chambers of commerce in Malaysia. The membership lists in these directories displayed a total of 694 companies, of which 316 local companies were excluded for being local businesses like sole proprietorships and partnerships that do not hire expatriates. After discarding redundancy and validating the details of each remaining company, 145 suitable companies were identified. The remaining companies were removed from the list due to inaccessible contact numbers, improper addresses, and permanent closures that had yet to be updated in the directories. Upon contacting each company’s HR manager, 36 companies agreed to participate in the survey. Cooperation was

sought from the HR managers to ascertain that the expatriates fulfilled the employment criteria enforced by the Immigration Department of Malaysia, such as basic monthly salary of at least RM5,000 and a valid employment contract for at least one year. Upon confirming the number of expatriates in the selected companies with their HR managers, 432 questionnaires were disseminated with a range of five to 20 questionnaires per company through both drop-off and electronic questionnaire methods. The online and offline methods were compared using an independent t-test, the results of which showed no significant difference between these methods (refer to Table I in Appendix). Of the 123 returned questionnaires, 112 were usable, yielding a response rate of 25.9 percent. Table 1 depicts data collection details by the expatriates' industry. Although the response rate was low, it was acceptable as the main researcher was informed by the companies' HR managers that many expatriates had left Malaysia due to the uncertainty about the goods and services tax, the plunging value of the Ringgit, and the rising cost of living.

Out of the 112 expatriates, 70.5 percent were males. The sample consisted of equal proportions of assigned expatriates (50%) and self-initiated expatriates (50%). Most of them (72.3%) were below 40 years of age: 47.3 percent were 31 to 40 years old and 25 percent were 21 to 30 years old. Most of the expatriates were from Asian countries (73.3%), including the Philippines, India, Indonesia, China, Thailand, and Japan. Only 18 percent of the expatriates came from Western regions, while the remaining 8.7 percent were from other regions. The sample comprised a few top managers (14.3%), some middle-level managers (37.5%), and a majority of low-level managers or non-managers (48.2%). As for employment duration, 81.2 percent of the respondents had been working in Malaysia for over a year. More than half of the expatriates (54.5%) had no prior international work experience, while 50.9 percent could not speak the local language. In terms of occupational background, 60.8 percent of the expatriates worked in service departments, such as information technology, customer services, financial services, and HR services.

Table 1. Summary of data collection

Industry	No. of companies	No. of questionnaires distributed	No. of usable questionnaires
Service	10	120	37
Manufacturing	3	26	5
Education	4	48	12
Oil and gas	2	20	2
Transportation	2	40	7
Mining	1	5	4
Healthcare	1	8	1
Finance	4	48	15
Hospitality	1	6	1
Information technology	9	114	28
Total	36	432	112

An additional analysis was carried out to assess the variances in POS, HCN support, expatriate adjustment, and occupational withdrawal intention across respondent profile characteristics, such as expatriate type and position. An independent t-test and one-way ANOVA were performed for this purpose. The mean results revealed no significant differences in the attitudes of assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates towards the main variables (refer to Table II in Appendix). Meanwhile, there was a significant variance in POS between expatriates in different positions, indicating that those holding a higher position were more likely to perceive consistent organisational support (refer to Table III in Appendix).

3.2. Power analysis

A power analysis was performed using the G*Power 3.1.9.7 software to calculate the sample size (Faul et al., 2007). For our model, the results recommended at least 77 respondents to achieve 80 percent statistical power for a medium effect (0.15) at a significance level of 5 percent. The sample collected for this study (n=112) was above the minimum sample size.

3.3. Measurement scales

To measure the study variables, we employed well-developed scales that had been effectively applied in prior studies.

Expatriate adjustment was measured with a 15-item scale which was developed by Black and Stephens (1989) and subsequently updated by Shaffer et al. (1999). In this section, expatriates indicated their level of adjustability on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly unadjusted) to 5 (strongly adjusted). Sample items comprised 'housing', 'working conditions', and 'socialising with HCNs outside of work'.

Next, *POS* was measured using a 16-item global scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). It captured expatriates' evaluative judgments of their organisations. The items were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item was 'My organisation considers my goals and values.' The scale included seven reverse-scored items, such as 'My organisation shows very little concern for me.'

HCN support was measured on a 16-item scale introduced by Abdul Malek et al. (2015). The responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item was 'My co-workers/friends in the host country provided me information about activities'.

Occupational withdrawal intention was determined through a three-item measure built by Carmeli (2005) on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were 'I often think about leaving the present occupation', 'I intend to search for an alternative to the present occupation', and 'I plan to leave the present occupation.'

Control variables. In accordance with prior studies (Abdul Malek et al., 2015; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 1999), the effects of three demographic variables, i.e. international work experience (1= Yes; 2= No), host language fluency (1= Yes, fluent; 2= Yes, partly; 3= No), and time in Malaysia (in years), on expatriates' adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention were controlled. The items to measure these variables were presented as open-ended questions.

4. RESULTS

For data analysis, we employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), a widely applied technique in business management research. Unlike covariance-based (CB) SEM, PLS-SEM does not impose strict requirements on measurement scales and sample size (Henseler et al., 2015). It has the ability to handle a small sample size (Hair et al., 2018), so long as the size is 10-fold the number of indicators for the most predicted construct (Barclay et al., 1995). In this study, the sample size (n=112) met this requirement. PLS-SEM is also a powerful analytical tool to analyse a complex framework with a mediator (Hair et al., 2018). For these reasons, PLS-SEM was preferred to CB-SEM, since the available sample of 112 was not sufficient to analyse the proposed framework with a mediator using CB-SEM. Using SmartPLS 3.0 software, the maximum number of iterations was limited to 300. For the bootstrapping analysis, individual sign changes and 5,000 bootstrap samples were used. All control variables were included in the analysis.

4.1. Measurement model

The measurement model is used to evaluate the consistency and validity of the constructs. In this study, consistency was assessed using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha. According to Byrne (2016), the value of an outer loading should be greater than 0.50 to be considered adequate. The acceptable values of CR and Cronbach's alpha are above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). The validity of the constructs was determined based on convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), where the value for each construct should exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). Table 2 shows that the outer loading of each indicator was above the threshold value of 0.50 (Byrne, 2016), except for five items (EXP14, POS02, POS03, POS012, and HCN11), which were deleted due to low outer loadings. Both the CR and Cronbach's alpha values of all the constructs were above 0.70, while the AVE values of all latent indicators exceeded 0.50.

Table 2. Measurement model results

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Outer loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
<i>Expatriate adjustment</i>						
EXP1	3.78	2.39	0.757	0.937	0.517	0.927
EXP2			0.771			
EXP3			0.603			
EXP4			0.676			
EXP5			0.706			
EXP6			0.703			
EXP7			0.587			
EXP8			0.742			
EXP9			0.792			
EXP10			0.830			
EXP11			0.851			
EXP12			0.690			
EXP13			0.740			
EXP15			0.545			

POS						
POS1	3.59	2.41	0.755	0.947	0.578	0.939
POS4			0.825			
POS5			0.747			
POS6			0.662			
POS7			0.773			
POS8			0.752			
POS9			0.655			
POS10			0.691			
POS11			0.816			
POS13			0.799			
POS14			0.825			
POS15			0.744			
POS16			0.812			
<i>HCN support</i>						
HCN1	3.67	2.53	0.743	0.949	0.558	0.943
HCN2			0.766			
HCN3			0.802			
HCN4			0.782			
HCN5			0.806			
HCN6			0.678			
HCN7			0.784			
HCN8			0.831			
HCN9			0.616			
HCN10			0.851			
HCN12			0.682			
HCN13			0.745			
HCN14			0.759			
HCN15			0.622			
HCN16			0.691			
<i>Occupational withdrawal intention</i>						
OW1	2.39	1.90	0.963	0.947	0.908	0.949
OW2			0.942			
OW3			0.953			

Note: EXP14, POS02, POS03, POS012, and HCN11 were deleted due to low outer loadings.

Discriminant validity can be measured using the Fornell and Larcker criterion or the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). The square root of AVE for a construct should be greater than its correlations with other latent constructs, as per Fornell and Larcker (Hair et al., 2017). Table 3 shows that the study constructs fulfilled this criterion.

Table 3. Fornell and Larcker criterion results

	1	2	3	4
1. Expatriate adjustment	0.719			
2. HCN support	0.493	0.747		
3. POS	0.471	0.634	0.760	
4. Occupational withdrawal intention	-0.491	-0.339	-0.465	0.953

Notes: Diagonal and bold elements are the square roots of AVE; below the diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

Henseler et al. (2015) recommended the HTMT ratio of correlations as a new method to assess discriminant validity in variance-based SEM. Scholars have suggested that the threshold value should be HTMT_{.85} (Kline, 2011) or HTMT_{.90} (Gold et al., 2001). HTMT scores exceeding either of these two values implies a lack of discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, all the values were lower than the benchmarks of HTMT_{.85} or HTMT_{.90}. The results thus established discriminant validity for our study.

Table 4. HTMT results

	1	2	3
1. Expatriate adjustment			
2. HCN support	0.492		
3. POS	0.471	0.664	
4. Occupational withdrawal intention	0.510	0.336	0.471

4.2. Structural model

The structural model assessment began with the assessment of collinearity. Table 5 presents the values of the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all exogenous constructs, which ranged from 1.463 to 1.876 (<3.33), indicating no major lateral collinearity issue (Diamantopoulos & Sigauw, 2006).

To investigate the hypothesised relationships, the bootstrapping resampling approach (5,000 re-samples) was applied. As displayed in Table 5, the structural model showed that most of the hypotheses were supported. The results revealed that POS had a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment ($\beta= 0.249$, $p= 0.011$) and a negative relationship with occupational withdrawal intention ($\beta= -0.331$, $p= 0.004$), confirming both H1 and H2. Next, HCN support exerted a positive influence on expatriate adjustment ($\beta= 0.347$, $p= 0.001$), which supported H3. However, HCN support did not display a significant relationship with occupational withdrawal intention ($\beta= 0.038$, $p= 0.389$), thus rejecting H4. In support of H5a, a negative relationship was noted between expatriate adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention ($\beta= -0.356$, $p= 0.000$). Turning to the mediating role of expatriate adjustment, it was found to mediate the effects of POS ($\beta= -0.089$, $p= 0.023$) and HCN support ($\beta= -0.124$, $p= 0.015$) on occupational withdrawal intention, accepting both H5b and H5c.

The effect size (f^2) analysis results were in line with the guideline provided by Cohen (1988). The values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively, of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable. Table 5 shows that POS ($f^2= 0.052$) and HCN support ($f^2= 0.107$) had a small effect size on expatriate adjustment. Similarly, POS ($f^2= 0.090$) and expatriate adjustment (0.127) demonstrated a small effect size on occupational withdrawal intention. In contrast, the effect size of HCN support on occupational withdrawal intention was trivial. Overall, both POS and HCN support explained 31.7 percent of the variance in expatriate adjustment ($R^2= 0.317$). Meanwhile, POS, HCN support, and expatriate adjustment explained 32 percent of the variance in occupational withdrawal intention ($R^2= 0.320$). None of the control variables (i.e. international work experience, host language fluency, and time in Malaysia) exhibited a significant relationship with expatriate adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention.

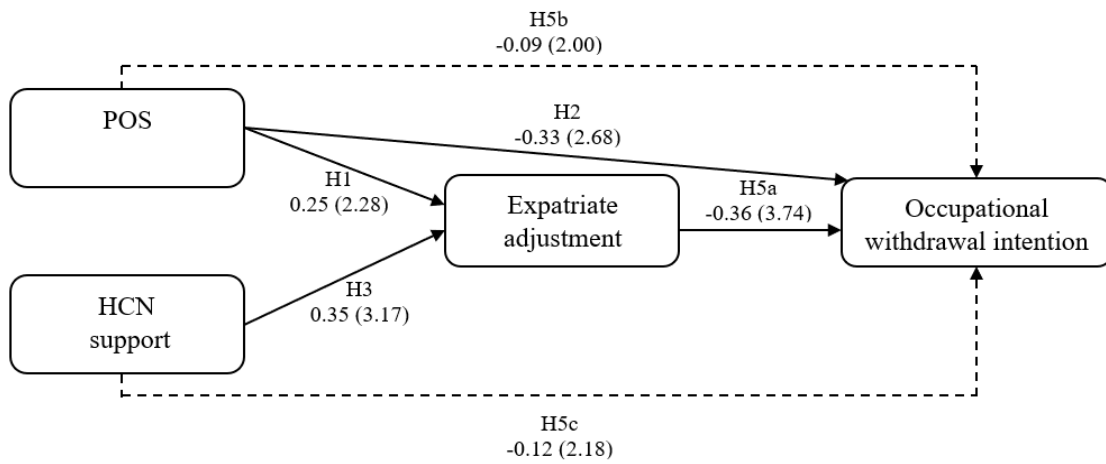
Finally, the predictive relevance of the model was assessed based on the Stone-Geisser Q^2 method (Geisser, 1975). Hair et al. (2017) stated that a Q^2 value greater than zero implies that exogenous variables have predictive relevance for endogenous variables in a model. Referring to the blindfolding procedure, the Q^2 values for both endogenous variables exceeded the threshold value of zero (expatriate adjustment= 0.149; occupational withdrawal intention= 0.268), indicating the predictive accuracy of the model.

4.3. Model fit

The standardised root mean residual (SRMR) was applied to calculate the model’s overall goodness of fit. The SRMR refers to a measure of the estimated fitness of a model (Henseler et al., 2015). When the SRMR is below 0.10, the model is deemed to have a good fit in a conservative manner (Hu & Bentler, 1998). In our study, the SRMR of 0.099 indicated that the model had a good fit.

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework with supported hypotheses.

Figure 2. Results of PLS analysis (t-values in parentheses)



Control variables:
 International work experience
 Host language fluency
 Time in Malaysia

Notes: —————> denotes a direct relationship
 - - - - -> denotes a mediation relationship

Table 5. Summary of path relationships

Hypothesis	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Standard error	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Confidence interval	VIF	Effect size	Decision
H1: POS → Expatriate adjustment	0.249		0.109	2.281*	0.011	(0.085, 0.444)	1.695	0.052	Supported
H2: POS → Occupational withdrawal intention	-0.331		0.124	2.675*	0.004	(-0.536, -0.131)	1.784	0.090	Supported
H3: HCN support → Expatriate adjustment	0.347		0.110	3.165**	0.001	(0.167, 0.527)	1.695	0.107	Supported
H4: HCN support → Occupational withdrawal intention	0.038		0.135	0.282	0.389	(-0.179, 0.266)	1.876	0.000	Not supported
H5a: Expatriate adjustment → Occupational withdrawal intention	-0.356		0.095	3.743**	0.000	(-0.512, -0.202)	1.463	0.127	Supported
H5b: POS → Expatriate adjustment → Occupational withdrawal intention		-0.089	0.044	2.002*	0.023	(-0.191, -0.019)			Supported
H5c: HCN support → Expatriate adjustment → Occupational withdrawal intention		-0.124	0.057	2.179*	0.015	(-0.253, -0.033)			Supported

Notes: ** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$

5. DISCUSSION

The present study contributes to the expatriate literature by examining POS and HCN support as the antecedents of occupational withdrawal intention and expatriate adjustment as the mediator of these relationships. Apart from extending the COR theory, we uphold the notion that resource loss in the form of social support loss, especially in a culturally demanding setting, activates expatriates' negative adjustment experiences and subsequently affects their occupational decisions. The extension of the COR theory here encompasses a wide range of contexts, including career change, withdrawal, and mobility decisions (Singh et al., 2018).

In line with the tenets of the COR theory, POS appears to be a credible resource that expatriates can accumulate to facilitate assignment success (Chan et al., 2019; Leiva et al., 2017). By alleviating expatriates' stress during their assignments, POS symbolises a resource caravan passageway that bolsters expatriate outcomes, which include cultural adjustment and occupational commitment. POS emerged as a significant predictor of adjustment in this study, and has been consistently reinforced in the literature (Abdul Malek et al., 2015; Kraimer et al., 2001). Indisputably, expatriates make substantial sacrifices for their assignments and expect benefits from their organisations in return. When organisations take care of expatriates' well-being and support their overseas experiences, these individuals are driven to improve their cultural adjustment. As predicted, POS appears to be influential in minimising occupational withdrawal intention as well. Specifically, a lack of POS induces a greater consideration for leaving one's career. We further found that 85 percent of the respondents in this study, who were middle-level managers and below, required regular POS for their occupational advancement. Conversely, expatriates who are unhappy with unfair treatment by their organisations would withdraw as they are not given opportunities to learn new tasks or to be promoted.

Although leaving an occupation is a difficult decision for expatriates, we stumbled upon an interesting fact. Given that 72.3 percent of the respondents were between 21 and 40 years old (born between 1980 and 1999), they fall into the category of Millennials. Crowley-Henry and Collins (2017) revealed that Millennial expatriates would change careers multiple times if not given effective POS. In other words, when organisations fail to effectively support this group of expatriates, they find a new path elsewhere to flourish. The authors added that this generational cohort prioritises high levels of organisational support that offers structured expatriation as well as compelling work experiences and opportunities. Torsello (2019) concurred that Millennials are easily bored with their tasks and display lower commitment to their careers, especially within the service sector. As 60.8 percent of our respondents worked in service departments, their intention to withdraw from their occupation was frequent, as expected. Thus, rotation programmes are a predominant aspect of organisational support that could potentially minimise such intention among Millennial expatriates (Crowley-Henry & Collins, 2017). Moreover, the results indicated that expatriate adjustment is a significant mediator through which POS affects occupational withdrawal intention. Considering that 81.2 percent of the respondents had worked in Malaysia for more than a year, POS generated a stronger reciprocation effect on these expatriates, and enhanced their cultural adjustment and, consequently, made them feel attached to their career over time. This implies that a higher level of POS enables well-adjusted expatriates to strengthen their loyalty towards their occupation as they stay longer in the host country. Overall, these findings contribute to the literature on Millennial expatriates and suggest that customising HR policies and practices will beget Millennial employees' positive reciprocal actions, such as forming an attachment to their jobs.

HCN support proved to be another significant predictor of expatriate adjustment, which is in agreement with several past studies (e.g. Bader, 2017; Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Varma et al., 2016). According to Toh and Denisi (2007), HCN offers expatriates two key socialising cues, i.e. role information and social support, to explore various stimuli and behave aptly in their new work role. Referring to the COR theory, HCN support may help expatriates replace their temporary loss of personal relationships and networks from their home country, which is crucial in ensuring a smooth adjustment process. If HCNs refuse to initiate socialising behaviour, they will fail to contribute to expatriate adjustment. Nevertheless, HCN support did not establish a significant impact on occupational withdrawal intention. It is plausible that HCNs provide only adjustment-related support to expatriates (Toh & Denisi, 2007; van der Laken et al., 2019), given that their support relates more to non-work matters such as social activities and local community interaction.

Anchored by the COR theory, our mediation analysis revealed that the effect of HCN support on occupational withdrawal intention is mediated by expatriate adjustment. That is, if expatriates can manage their adjustment, HCN support will indirectly attenuate their occupational withdrawal. This notable finding can be explained by the collectivism of the expatriate respondents in this study, who were mostly (73.3%) Asians and therefore collectivist in nature. A collectivist society encourages in-group members to maintain social harmony by behaving appropriately according to their norms and obligations (Hofstede, 1994), suggesting that Asian expatriates would enjoy socialising with others in the host country. Expatriates who developed suitable behavioural repertoires in collectivist cultures would therefore form strong support networks that positively affect their cultural adjustment (Harari et al., 2018). In an Asian country like Malaysia, it is interesting to note that HCNs who demonstrate varying types of collectivism may include expatriates with demographically

dissimilar backgrounds in their groups (Varma et al., 2016). When HCNs provide adjustment-related support, expatriates make their employment decisions based on the influence from colleagues and friends rather than their personal values and disposition. This implies that expatriates may choose to remain in their occupations because they place greater importance on their shared values with HCNs. As a result, these HCNs are likely to affect the occupational decisions of their expatriate peers by aiding expatriates' adjustment.

Finally, a negative relationship was noted between expatriate adjustment and occupational withdrawal intention. van der Laken et al. (2019) claimed that insufficient resources impede expatriates' effective adjustment, which then results in withdrawal intention. With POS and HCN support, expatriates would adapt to Malaysia's various cultural elements and increase their adjustment in the country. In particular, interesting cultural elements may fascinate expatriates, keeping them absorbed and invested in the successful accomplishment of their occupational goals in their assignments.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This paper makes the following contributions to theory. First, drawing upon the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), this study enriches the existing knowledge about organisation-based social support as a key resource for expatriates to function effectively in a stressful foreign environment. Specifically, we emphasise the role of POS and HCN support in improving expatriates' adjustment, illustrated by the case of Malaysia, a culturally challenging destination for expatriates (HSBC Bank, 2019). Furthermore, this study confirms that expatriate adjustment is an intermediary variable that transmits the effect of POS and HCN support to occupational withdrawal intention. Thus, we contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms that elucidate the influence of POS and HCN support. With respect to this, our research offers new insights to van der Laken et al.'s (2016) systematic review, which found that both organisations and HCNs foster expatriates' adjustment, which translates to retention.

Second, this study links the occupational withdrawal intention literature to the expatriate literature. Despite extensive research on withdrawal intention in cross-cultural and expatriate management (Cao et al., 2014; Pinto et al., 2017), little is known about occupational withdrawal intention as an important element of expatriate failure (e.g., Pinto et al., 2012). Against this background, it is imperative to differentiate between expatriates' withdrawal intention and occupational withdrawal intention to progressively develop their careers overseas. Hence, we enhance the understanding of the latter by incorporating POS and HCN support as its antecedents. Our findings further highlight the point that expatriates' occupational withdrawal intention becomes weaker when they have a strong perception of organisational support. In this manner, our study extends Pinto et al.'s (2017) work on the effect of organisational culture on expatriates' withdrawal intention by shifting the attention to POS as a contributing factor in lower occupational withdrawal intention.

5.2. Practical implications

Malaysia has active interactions with many foreign countries, making Malaysians more open to diversity (Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020). However, regional proximity between Asian countries does not promise expatriates a high level of cultural adjustment abroad. Maladjustment of expatriates and their consequent occupational turnover is indeed costly as more funding is invested in their career development. The findings from this study thus offer several practical implications for both expatriate-hiring firms and HR managers in collectivist countries (e.g. Singapore and Thailand) and Muslim-majority nations (e.g. Indonesia and Pakistan) that share similar cultural values with Malaysia. Specifically, we highlight the fact that both POS and HCN support can help expatriates adjust to the local culture and prevent their occupational turnover.

First, since poor cultural adjustment is the reason POS affects expatriates' intention to leave their occupation, organisations should consider offering appealing HR programmes and policies. For instance, the provision of organisational support should encompass cultural awareness programmes or cross-cultural training, which can be beneficial in intensifying expatriates' adjustment. Furthermore, it is crucial that HR policies be tailored to the career prospects of Millennial expatriates in different positions. These younger expatriates are predicted to make several career changes in their lifetime, and are attracted to organisations that offer personal training by international coaches or mentors (Crowley-Henry & Collins, 2017). With the expanding Millennial workforce, HR managers should improve this cohort's career path by providing supportive rotation programmes and career options that help them meet current global demands. Overall, viewing POS as a resource caravan passageway (Singh et al., 2018), expatriates who are appreciated and cherished by their organisations are likely to reciprocate with better adjustment. Therefore, the aforementioned efforts would be translated into expatriates' cultural adjustment and occupational retention during assignments.

Next, our findings clearly indicate that HCNs can motivate culturally similar expatriates to stay in their occupation by facilitating their cultural adjustment. Based on the COR theory, expatriates endure high stress from the loss of personal networks when they work abroad, preventing them from handling their assignments well (Bader, 2017). However, expatriates who establish quality personal networks with HCNs can experience better adjustment and retention (Pustovit, 2020). When interactions with HCNs are informal, expatriates are

more comfortable sharing their problems in work (e.g. occupational) and non-work (e.g. local customers) domains. Therefore, HR managers should focus on the HCN-expatriate relationship (Ismail, 2015), as this is likely to create positive impacts on expatriate success. For instance, a buddy programme may be introduced between HCNs and expatriates at the same levels in the department (Bader, 2017). This encourages regular interactions and social activities between both parties, gradually opening their minds to accept each other's differences. The buddy system can also aid expatriates' understanding of the local culture and the unwritten rules at the workplace.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Notwithstanding the above implications, the present study suffers from some drawbacks. The first limitation is that the data collection process was hampered by rejection from a number of companies due to the sensitive nature of the questions on POS and occupational withdrawal intention. This issue was raised by Brewster et al. (2014) as well, who stated that collecting expatriate data is an arduous task for researchers. To deepen the understanding of expatriate adjustment, future research may adopt a longitudinal study design to better examine its mechanisms associated with social support.

The second limitation is that our findings are restricted to self-reported data, which may be affected by common method variance. After performing Harman's single-factor test, the value of the first factor accounted for 31.83 percent of the total variance, which was below the threshold value of 50 percent (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, we concluded that the data was free of common method bias. Nevertheless, future research should collect data from multiple sources (e.g. HCN colleagues, spouses) to determine occupational withdrawal intention among expatriates (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A longitudinal method would also be advantageous to study different stages of expatriates' assignments to capture the development of adjustment and withdrawal intention over time.

The last limitation is that we focused on organisation-based support for expatriates while neglecting support sources outside the workplace, such as spouses and friends. van der Laken et al. (2016) argued that social support from a multi-stakeholder perspective is imperative in predicting expatriate success. Hence, future studies should assess the influences of salient stakeholders (e.g. organisations, HCNs, family members) from both work and non-work domains on expatriates' adjustment and withdrawal intention across a range of cultural and occupational settings (e.g. low-level or professional expatriates).

6. CONCLUSION

This study has extended the COR theory by demonstrating that expatriate adjustment explains the effects of POS and HCN support on occupational withdrawal intention. Given the mediating effect of expatriate adjustment, we draw the conclusion that without POS and HCN support, expatriates may face difficulties in dealing with adjustment-related stress, which may lead to the intention to withdraw from their occupation. The practical implications of this study serve as guidelines for HR managers of expatriate-hiring firms across developing countries like Malaysia.

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APPENDIX

Table I. Independent T-test on Paper-based and Electronic Questionnaire Methods

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
POS	Equal variance assumed	7.969	0.006	1.174	110	0.243
	Equal variance not assumed			0.979	37.402	0.334
HCN support	Equal variance assumed	0.290	0.591	-0.039	110	0.969
	Equal variance not assumed			-0.038	45.600	0.970
Expatriate adjustment	Equal variance assumed	0.131	0.718	-1.275	110	0.205
	Equal variance not assumed			-1.226	45.780	0.226
Occupational withdrawal intention	Equal variance assumed	0.082	0.775	1.939	110	0.055
	Equal variance not assumed			1.867	45.839	0.068

Table II. Independent T-test on Assigned Expatriates and Self-Initiated Expatriates

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
POS	Equal variance assumed	2.768	0.099	0.380	110	0.705
	Equal variance not assumed			0.380	108.272	0.705
HCN support	Equal variance assumed	1.386	0.242	0.323	110	0.747
	Equal variance not assumed			0.323	107.447	0.747
Expatriate adjustment	Equal variance assumed	3.974	0.049	-0.322	110	0.748
	Equal variance not assumed			-0.322	104.071	0.748
Occupational withdrawal intention	Equal variance assumed	1.828	0.179	0.565	110	0.573
	Equal variance not assumed			0.565	107.954	0.573

Table III. One-way ANOVA between Main Variables and Positions

	Position	n	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
POS	Top management	16	3.66	2.58	5.228	0.007
	Middle management	42	3.78	2.31		
	Non-managerial	54	3.41	2.26		
HCN support	Top management	16	3.50	3.22	1.221	0.299
	Middle management	42	3.78	2.18		
	Non-managerial	54	3.64	2.55		
Expatriate adjustment	Top management	16	3.73	2.46	2.535	0.084
	Middle management	42	3.95	2.18		
	Non-managerial	54	3.67	2.46		
Occupational withdrawal intention	Top management	16	1.96	2.18	2.078	0.130
	Middle management	42	2.33	1.73		
	Non-managerial	54	2.57	1.91		