The Moderating Effect of Social Support on the Relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Chinese Expatriates in Ghana

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Abstract – Literature shows that not all individuals are equally suited to embark on a new life in another country, and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) could be particularly susceptible to failure since they have no support from a home organization. The study sought to examine the moderation role of Social Support in relation to Cultural intelligence (CQ) Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Chinese Self-initiated Expatriates (SIEs) in Ghana. A sample of 400 respondents was selected for the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data via an online survey. Data was analyzed using PLS-SEM for the analysis, PLS algorithms and Bootstrapping tests were performed. Findings suggested that social support acquired by Chinese SIEs from host country citizens had no moderating influence on the relationship between their CQ and their capacity to adapt cross culturally to Ghanaian cultural situations. The study's findings will help SIEs, human resource practitioners, and cross-cultural managers who work with SIEs to understand the requirements for effective cross-cultural management towards reducing expats failure.

Keywords – Cross-Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Intelligence, Ghana, Self-Initiated Expatriates, Social Support

1   Introduction

Historically, both Cultural Intelligence and Cross-Cultural Adjustment have been related with and significant for expatriates (Daher, 2019; Hong, Ng, & San Lai, 2021). While interest in expatriate research is increasing, several complex aspects continue to be misunderstood (Fee, 2020; Sambasivan, Sadoughi, & Esmaeilzadeh, 2017; Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Wang, Fan, Freeman, & Zhu, 2017)   such as the cross-cultural adjustment of self-initiated expatriates who travel on their own choice to look for investment opportunities in the African continent and the role, the support they get from the society they find themselves (social support) play in their cross-cultural adjustment. African countries attract foreign investors looking to expand and invest in their international businesses in Africa, particularly Ghana. Self-initiated expatriates travel on their own volition to pursue cultural, personal, and business opportunities (Andresen, Pattie, & Hippler, 2020; Cannavale & Claes, 2019; Cho and Chew, 2019; Fu, Hsu, Shaffer, & Ren, 2017; Goštau-taitė, Bučiūnienė, Mayrhofer, Bareikis, & Bertašiūtė, 2019; Selmer, Andresen, & Cerdin, 2017) often with no definite timeframe in mind (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012; Tharenou, 2010) in foreign locations. These SIEs must function well across both national and cultural boundaries for a successful adjustment, cross-culturally. The purpose of this study was to examine how SIEs' cultural intelligence and social support influence the relationship between Chinese SIEs' CQ and CCA in Ghana. The topic is critical and timely because a large number of Chinese SIEs are flocking to Ghana in search of investment opportunities in various sectors of the Ghanaian economy (Boakye-Gyasi & LI, 2016; Evans & Antwi, 2019; Lu, 2016), and successful adjustment of these Chinese SIEs is critical for the investment of the Chinese SIEs, employment opportunities for Ghana's labour force, the economy of Ghana and cross cultural managers (Pustovit, 2020). The study sought to examine the moderation role of Social Support in relation to CQ and CCA of Chinese SIEs in Ghana.

2   Literature review

This section will present the theoretical literature as well as the empirical literature review.

2.1   Empirical literature review

Social Support

Leavy (1983) defined social support as "The availability of helping relationships, as well as the quality of those relationships".   Emotional, Instrumental, and Informational were the three categories of social support definition by other researchers (Kahn, Quinn, Wolfe and Snoek, 1964). In the expatriate setting, according to Kraimer, Wayne, and Jaworski (2001, p. 5), informational entails providing relevant information and support to the expat-

riate in order to alleviate stress and assist him or her in making sense of the work environment. The relationship between the source of social support and the support seeker is the second category of social support. Emotional is akin to reciprocal liking in that it fosters positive, supportive interactions. Instrumental is the third sort of social support, and it refers to reaffirming the support seeker's talents and faith in oneself to deal with a difficult situation. Reaffirming connections will be more helpful than non-reaffirming partnerships, according to Kraimer, Wayne, and Jaworski (2001). Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) define social support in an expatriation context as help from family, host country coworkers, compatriots, and foreign expatriates. Social support for SIEs was chosen as the moderating factor for the relationship between CQ and CCA for the study, and Caliguiri and Lazarova's concept of social support in the SIE setting was chosen by the researcher for this study. Previous studies have examined the impact of organizational support on CAEs and found that organized organizational practices help with social integration and are especially important for cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri et al., 1999; Chen, 2010; Farh et al., 2010; Shen & Kram, 2011; Stroppa & Spieß, 2011).

Social Support from Host Country Nationals (HCN)

Skilled expatriates are invaluable assets in developing global competitive advantages (Akhimien & Adekunle,2023). Many experts have found that multinational corporations (MNCs) continue to rely heavily on expatriates to manage their activities abroad and compete cheaply in the global market (Malek & Budhwar, 2013; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014). Expatriates are responsible for highly managing their overseas subsidiaries to coordinate and integrate multiple units while providing technical knowledge to local employees (Harzing, Pudelko, & Reiche, 2016). Due to the nature of overseas assignments, employees are isolated from the daily work and social support systems of family, friends, relatives and colleagues. This situation can lead to more anxiety. Employers, and particularly host countries, have a critical role in guaranteeing expatriates' comfort in terms of housing, food, and shopping, as well as providing enough help to their families, particularly spouses and children (Canhilal Canboy, and Bakici, 2022; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi et al., 2009). As a result, support from local employees can aid expats' early adjustment to the host nation, resulting in increased commitment and a positive work attitude. Given that expats must acquire knowledge of both their new employment and the host culture to assimilate (Toh, DeNis, & Leonardelli, 2012), the role of host country nationals (HCNs) cannot be overstated. Social support from HCNs has been regarded as a critical resource for expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country (Mahajan & Toh, 2014). HCNs assist expatriates in adjusting to new work and social situations by providing companionship and relevant knowledge. Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, and Shin (2010) observe that HCNs play a crucial role in giving information and alleviating social ambiguity during expatriates' cultural transition. Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, and Song (2013) expand on the importance of subsidiary support for expatriates' performance, arguing that early support from supervisors and coworkers is

related with increased work proactivity, social integration, and organizational commitment. Moreover, social support is one of the core antecedents that influences expatriate adjustment and performance (Chanveasna, Chanthuch, Veasna., Sovannara, & Ngounhort,2024). Relationships with HCNs may assist expats in acquiring knowledge that will enable them to overcome the obstacles inherent in their new assignments and integrate socially into the host culture (Toh et al., 2012). Earlier research on expatriates' cultural adjustment argues that positive interpersonal relationships with HCNs have a major effect on expatriation results (Caligiuri, 2000; Gregersen & Black, 1992). Additionally, social support has also emerged as a widely applicable and potent predictor of positive psychosocial outcomes (Chaudhry, Tandon, Shinde & Bhattacharya, 2024). As a result, poor connections with HCNs would have a detrimental influence on the adjustment (Kour &Jyoti, 2022) and overall performance of expatriates (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). Given the HCN's critical role in the acclimatization process, it's perplexing that research examining HCNs as a source of support for expatriates have received scant attention in the expatriate management literature. Thus, this study seeks to close this information gap by analyzing expatriates' perceptions of how supportive HCNs are and the value of that support in terms of adjustment.

2.2   Theoretical literature

Confronting Uncertainty

The ambiguity and confusion inherent in interpreting people's behavior in new cultures can leave individuals with a cognitive framework for recognizing recognizable reaction patterns, or lead to culturally insensitive attribution (Brislin, 1981; Ehrenhaus, 1982). Excessive pressure to absorb unexpected input can overwhelm newly arrived expats and affect their ability to make sense. Individuals feel forced to talk to others who can clarify the problem or dispel self-doubt, depending on the situation. As a result, building accurate and functional attribution and self-confidence in one's judgment are deeply rooted in the structure of connections and interactions that provide feedback to alleviate the anxiety of the focused person. In other words, if you're not sure about a particular event (for example, your actions, moods, thoughts, action plans), one common sense way is to seek feedback and support from others. Albrecht and Adelman (1984, 1987) argued that the underlying function of this process was to eliminate uncertainty between HCNs and expats. Based on the uncertainties associated with stress and the quest for meaning, these authors define social support as linguistic and nonverbal communication between HCNs and expats. In some cases, newly arrived expats may be able to seek advice from their HCNs colleagues, but they risk being considered incompetent because their reaction is unpredictable. In these situations, expats look for low-risk whistleblowers (such as colleagues or low-ranking employees), use passive methods of observing or listening to others, or simply abandon their request for information. Therefore, the Uncertainty Principle helps to understand the motivational forces, functions, and sources involved in the process of seeking help.

Possessing a Perceived Mastery and Control

In addition to lessening uncertainty, social support can help people become more conscious of their abilities or influence over their surroundings. In the coping literature, control and empowerment are key notions. Having enough information to understand the situation and make informed decisions raises a person from being dependent on others to being autonomous, ingenious and self-respecting (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987a, p. 26). Physical and psychological disorientation can undermine the self-control and self-esteem of expats in the event of culture shock. Social feedback that reassures people adapting to a new culture that it is a temporary and ubiquitous reaction to a new situation helps to regain cognitive and behavioral control. Such information helps restore a sense of control over the situation by paraphrasing the stressful experience as a learning transition ("difficult at first, but getting used to"), thereby causing temporal uncertainty. Providing prescriptive information that helps reduce stress (for example, it does not last forever) and help rebuild self-esteem and take steps to adapt to the new environment ("yes, others will react in the same way"). At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the reduction of uncertainty and the universality of control as an individual coping method. Personal and cultural heterogeneity exists in terms of thresholds for accepting ambiguity and selected techniques for regaining perceived control. In previous studies of cross-cultural attribution styles, the members may have come from a "contextual culture" (Hamaguchi, 1982, 1985) that emphasizes group support, or an "individualist culture" that supports independence (Triandis, 1986). Uncertainty and management are important elements of the culture shock/coordination process. Cross-cultural adjustment places great value on the ability to handle new stimuli and test expats problem-solving skills. Asking for help can be mental fatigue associated with culture shock, a lack of available providers, a high level of uncertainty in deciding which people are good supporters, or possible responses from providers.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling

According to the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) the total population number of Chinese SIEs in the Ashanti region is at 2976. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size from a given population, a sample of 400 would be appropriate for the population of Chinese SIEs in the Ashanti region.

3.2   Data collection

In this study, the Likert Scale of CQ scale, CCA Scale and the OSSS-3 of the social support scale were used. The purpose of the Likert scale is to quantify the intensity of one's feelings about a subject. This is why the researcher chose CQ scale, CCA Scale and the OSSS-3 of the social support scale Likert scales for item analysis (Norman, 2010). Oslo social support scale (osss-3) (Kocalevent et al., 2018) was used to examine the moderating effect on the dependent and independent variables of the study. The 3-items OSSS-3 measured were: 1: The number of people who are so close to you that you can count on them if you have great personal problems, 2: The extent to which people show interest and concern in what you do, and 3: The ease with which one gets practical help from neighbors if one should need it. The researcher and two assistants administered the questionnaires to the respondents through online survey. Chinese SIEs in all sectors of the Ghanaian economy were reached through online platforms. The objective was to ensure that the final outcomes reflected all sectors of the economy. The Chinese version of CQ scale questionnaires which is written in Mandarin was used for the online survey. The researcher chose to conduct this study using a questionnaire due to its numerous advantages as a data collection instrument.

3.3   Data analysis

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between CQ and CCA of Chinese SIEs in Ashanti region of Ghana and the moderating role of social support. Data was analysed using PLS-SEM for the analysis, PLS algorithms and Bootstrapping tests were performed.

3.4   Reliability and Validity

To determine the questionnaire's reliability, this study used reliability analysis. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the items or variables. A high alpha value indicates that the internal consistency of the system is satisfactory. Cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.750 is found in our overall results. The internal consistency achieved was satisfactory.

4   Results and Discussion

4.1   Moderation Analysis

To determine whether Social support moderates the existing relationship between CQ and CCA, the following was done. First, a PLS algorithms and Bootstrapping were run without the moderating variable (Social support) added to the model. This was done to determine the direct effects and significance of the various CQ dimensions on CCA dimensions. After verifying the

significance of path coefficients (without the moderator variable), the results revealed the effects of CQ dimensions on the various CCA dimensions were significant. However, the path between cognitive CQ and GA and meta-cognitive CQ and GA were insignificant. Also is the path between cognitive CQ and WA. Next, a bootstrapping and PLS algorithm was run by adding a moderating variable to the model. Moderation explains a situation in where the relationship between two constructs is not constant but depends on the values of a third variable known as a moderator variable. The strength or even the direction of a relationship can be affected by a moderator variable in the model. The outcome of the moderation analysis is presented in Table 1 below and further supported with Figure 1 below

Table 1: Result of moderation analysis

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
CQ -> CCA	0.446	0.443	0.047	9.489	**0.000**
Social Support -> CCA	0.184	0.164	0.061	3.032	**0.003**
Moderating Effect 1 -> CCA	0.112	0.161	0.102	1.098	**0.273**

Results in Table 1. above, shows that whiles the moderator, Social support has direct significant effect on CQ and CCA, both interaction terms are insignificant at 0.05 significance level. Hence, there is no moderation on the effect of CQ on CCA.
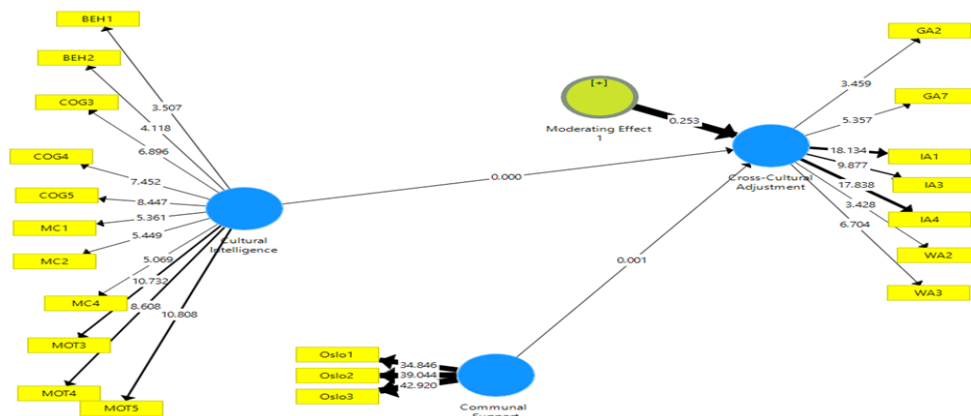

Figure 1: Results of Bootstrapping PLS Algorithm for moderation analysis

4.2   Discussion of Results

A total of 397 respondents answered the 400 questionnaires sent out by the researcher. Analysis of the demographic variables of the study revealed 94% (373) of the total respondents were above the age of 31 years. That indicated majority of the respondents were active workforce, within working age group and are ready to work for the good of their investment (Anand & Roy, 2016; Emerson et al., 2020). Males dominated the respondents, with 73.8% of the total respondents been male and the remaining 26.2% of the total respondents were females. 57.9% of the respondents were married while 42.1% were single. This indicated majority of the respondents had spousal support in their cross-cultural adjustment drive as discussed in other literatures, although not part of the variables of the current study (Okpara, 2016; Sambasivan et al., 2017). Respondents were in the educated class as majority had had diploma education and above. 276 out of 397 of the respondents, representing 69.5% had some form of certification in education, ranging from diploma and above diploma. From the dataset, 76.3% of the total respondents had been in the host country for more than seven years. Seven years is enough duration for SIEs to familiarize themselves with the cultural setting of the host country to aid their cross-cultural adjustment. The Chinese SIEs in Ghana had invested in the various sectors of the economy, ranging from Mining, Hospitality, Construction, Manufacturing, and to General Commerce. Out of 397 respondents for the study, 166 respondents representing 41.8% had their investment in the manufacturing sector and it was the highest percentage of the dataset. This confirmed previous literature about manufacturing sector being the lead in Chinese investments in the different sectors of the Ghanaian economy (Evans & Lucy, 2020; Osei et al., 2016). The moderator variable modifies the strength or even the direction of an association between two model constructs (Hair et al., 2021). The study sought to find out whether the relationship between CQ and CCA differs as a function of social support Chinese SIEs in Ghana receive from the host country nationals.   Results from Table 1. indicated that, while the moderator, social support, has a direct significant effect on CQ and CCA, both interaction factors are insignificant at the 0.05 level of significance. As a result, there is no moderation effect of social support on CQ and CCA. The findings indicated that SIEs who are more motivated to experience diverse cultures and who can present a diverse range of behaviors will benefit from increased cultural flexibility, which enables individuals to be less offending to others and more likely to blend in and be well adjusted across cultures. The study's findings suggested that social support acquired by Chinese SIEs from host country citizens had no moderating influence on the relationship between their CQ and their capacity to adapt cross culturally to Ghanaian cultural situations. The finding casts doubt on earlier assumptions indicating that social support has a moderating influence on the CQ and cross-cultural adjustment links (Takeuchi et al., 2002). A surprising finding was that social support has no effect on the relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment for Chinese SIEs living in Ghana.

5   Recommendations

Firstly, it is proposed that CQ be prioritized over emotional and social intelligence as a critical driver of cross-cultural adjustment. Secondly, it should be noted that SIEs with a high level of motivational and behavioral CQ may catch up more easily and fast on other areas of cross-cultural skills. Thirdly, cross cultural managers should prioritize developing CQ (particularly motivational and behavioral competences) to enable SIEs to adapt their existing cognition, motivation, and actions to multiple cultural contexts. Fourth, SIEs who are more likely to undergo maladjustment as a result of the host cultural environment require more comprehensive motivational and behavioral CQ coaching, which should be offered by cross cultural managers. Fifth, differences between the home and host countries, cultural contexts, and CQ all play a role in this regard and must be identified and handled completely in the management of SIEs' CCA. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, cross cultural managers should consider the distinctions between various expatriate groups and cultural surroundings while managing SIEs cross cultural adjustment.

6   Implications for Future Research

Along with tangible work behaviors, future research may examine psychological constructs such as affective trust, cognitive trust, interpersonal trust, interpersonal liking, or the quality of exchange amongst SIEs (peer-member exchange). All these concepts have received scant attention in the literature on SIEs and cultural intelligence. By progressing beyond modification, future research will add interest and appeal to the subject matter. Investigating how cultural intelligence and social support influence these pre-existing systems of relationships connected with the cross-cultural outcomes will also add to the body of knowledge and management practice. Meanwhile, future research can consider a variety of different domains by concentrating on relevant areas such as the various personal aspects of SIEs adjustment, (ii) the role of spouse and family support and input in SIEs cross cultural adjustment, and (iii) the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs' children.

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