Job factors and work outcomes of public sector expatriates

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While the literature on private sector expatriates is burgeoning, research on public sector expatriates is scant, despite their increasing numbers. This is unfortunate, as these two groups of expatriates may face different work conditions at their foreign assignment. The target group for this study was the US Department of Defense administrators located at US embassies around the world. Results showed that the time expatriates had spent in their current location had a positive association with both work adjustment and work effectiveness. So did role clarity, which also had a positive association with job satisfaction, making it a more important job factor than role conflict, role overload or role discretion. Although role clarity may have a similar impact on work outcomes of expatriates, both in the private and public sector, the findings regarding role conflict and role overload may constitute a discrepant outcome for the two groups. There may also be a difference between the two categories of expatriates with regard to role discretion. Implications of these findings are discussed in detail.

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INTRODUCTION

The overwhelming majority of research on expatriate managers emanates from studies of private sector business expatriates. Contributing to this emphasis has been the fast growth and increased numbers of multinational companies (MNCs) and their enhanced needs to manage their worldwide expatriate staff effectively. However, organisations in the public sector (PS) have a long tradition of sending personnel overseas for widely differing purposes, including diplomatic and military service as well as intergovernmental exchange programmes. Countries with a colonial past have long historic traditions of dispatching personnel to foreign lands for administrative and military purposes (cf. Stening, 1994). In recent years, there is reason to believe that given the current geopolitical situation and frequent regional/local conflicts, PS expatriates are becoming more and more common. Although the literature on private sector expatriates has recently increased rapidly (cf. Hechanova

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et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), little is known about PS expatriates and their situation as research on them is scarce (Anderson, 2001; Harris and Holden, 2001). It is not unlikely that the situation may be different for PS expatriates than for private sector expatriates and more research is needed to uncover such potential differences.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the specific situation of PS expatriates and their adjustment to their foreign assignments. More specifically, this investigation will study the relationship between job factors and how the expatriates adjust to their work. This is an important study for several reasons. Firstly, the influence of the PS ethos on job factors and hence work outcomes of PS expatriates is an obvious and important issue to investigate. Generally, the PS may be characterised by centralisation, tight financial control and politically determined access to resources (Bach and Della Rocca, 2000), and many PS organisations could be described as bureaucratic, hierarchical and dominated by rule enforcement (Parker and Bradley, 2000). Such conditions may constitute a major influence on PS expatriates (Harris and Holden, 2001). Secondly, even for private sector expatriates, investigations of work adjustment and its correlates are less than abundant. This is so much more remarkable as the main reason for companies to assign their business expatriates abroad is to perform certain work tasks. In the case of PS expatriates, studies on work adjustment are virtually non-existent. Thirdly, against the increasing trend of globalisation, the occurrence of PS expatriates most probably is also rising, although no studies are known to have assessed such a development. It is therefore relevant and important to investigate this group of international assignees to try to understand their situation, especially at work.

The remainder of this article will first deal with a literature review of the conceptual parts of this investigation: expatriate work outcomes and job factors. This theoretical underpinning is succeeded by a generation of the hypotheses to be tested. The methods section delineates the target group, sample and measures applied. Results are displayed and subsequently discussed in terms of main findings, limitations and implications. Finally, the conclusions of this study are drawn.

### CONCEPTUALISATIONS

**Expatriate work outcomes**

There are many potential consequences of the work of expatriates. This study will primarily deal with three basic expatriate work outcomes: work adjustment, work effectiveness and job satisfaction.

**Work adjustment** This refers to an individual’s psychological comfort with various aspects of work such as supervisory and job responsibilities (Black, 1988; Black and Stephens, 1989). The expatriates have to adjust to a new work role, which may be more or less similar to their previous assignment. The theoretical framework of work adjustment emanate from Davis and Lofquist (1984) and Nicholson (1984), suggesting that adjustment to a new role is fundamental to subsequent outcomes in the role. Furthermore, it may not be inappropriate to explore the construct of work adjustment in isolation from other domains of adjustment. Work adjustment can be seen as part of a theoretical framework of international adjustment proposed by Black et al. (1991),
making a distinction between three dimensions of in-country adjustment: (1) adjustment to work, (2) adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and (3) adjustment to the general non-work environment. Despite criticism sometimes raised against this three-dimensional construct of international adjustment not grounded on a solid theoretical basis (cf. Huang et al., 2005), it has been supported by a series of empirical studies of US expatriates and their spouses (Black and Gregersen, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c). McEvoy and Parker (1995) also found support for the three dimensions of expatriate adjustment. More recently, meta-analytic large-scale investigations of studies of business expatriates confirmed this three-dimensional theoretical framework (Hechanova et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

Work effectiveness Although the theoretical link between expatriate adjustment and performance is conceptually unclear, it has been observed that expatriates who are unable to adjust to work and life at a host location are also likely to perform poorly (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). Emerging rigorous empirical research supports a positive association between the adjustment of expatriates and their work performance (cf. Parker and McEvoy, 1993; Caligiuri, 1997; Kraimer et al., 2001).

Job satisfaction This concept has been defined as the emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one’s job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). As an overall assessment, job satisfaction is obviously and primarily work-related. It may arise from successful adaptation to overseas job requirements (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998).

Job factors

Job factors refer to a specific set of tasks and duties performed by an individual. Obviously, job factors may have their greatest impact on work outcomes, and various job factors could have either a facilitating or an inhibiting effect (Andreason, 2003). Expatriates typically have to deal with new operations, novel means of completing tasks and increased responsibilities. Foreign assignments are often characterised by policy and procedural conflicts with headquarter organisations (Gregersen and Black, 1992). Work-role transition research has focused on several job factors that may affect expatriate work outcomes including role clarity, role conflict, role overload and role discretion.

Role clarity This construct entails an understanding of the requirements of the position providing the expatriate with a clearly defined set of expected behaviours (Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). It has been argued that firms should place more emphasis on designing foreign assignment positions such that they provide clearly defined jobs for their expatriates (Shaffer et al., 1999).

Role conflict The concept depicts incompatible cues regarding job expectations due to conflicting information about what is expected of individuals in a new work setting. In a new cultural environment, conflicting signals could give rise to considerable uncertainty as the expatriates are first required to comprehend conflicting signals, then retain the relevant ones and finally execute appropriate behaviours (Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).
Role overload This construct can be separated into qualitative and quantitative role overload. If individuals feel that they lack the necessary skills to complete an assigned work task, they are considered to experience qualitative role overload. Quantitative role overload occurs when an individual finds it difficult to complete an assigned task within an allotted period of time (Kahn, 1978; Pines and Maslach, 1978; Maslach and Jackson, 1984).

Role discretion This concept can be explained as the amount of leeway individuals have in performing their job responsibilities, or the authority and the decision-making latitude in their jobs (Karasek, 1979; Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

HYPOTHESES

As the empirical findings about the work situation of PS expatriates are scarce, the more ample empirical database available regarding private sector expatriates will be referred to in justifying the hypotheses. Implicitly, that could also provide an indirect way to test for differences between private and PS expatriates.

The less clarity of the work role, the less the expatriates are able to predict the outcome of various behaviours and thus the less capable they are to use previous experiences to help them make successful choices (Black, 1988). Similarly, it has been argued that expatriates who believe that their position has high role clarity should experience a greater degree of work adjustment (Parker and McEvoy, 1993). Morley et al. (1997) also contended that the clearer the role, the better the individual can predict the necessary actions. They also found empirical evidence for this claim, investigating the adjustment of Irish private sector expatriates in Moscow. Subsequent, large-scale meta-analytic studies have empirically confirmed that there is a positive association between role clarity and work adjustment for private sector expatriates. Meta-analytic evidence also exists for a positive association between work adjustment and performance, as well as between work adjustment and job satisfaction (Hechanova et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). In a similar way, high role clarity leading to a high extent of work adjustment may enable PS expatriates to be effective and draw satisfaction from a job well done. Consequently, there may be a positive relationship between role clarity and work outcomes of PS expatriates.

Hypothesis 1a: There is a positive association between role clarity and work adjustment.

Hypothesis 1b: There is a positive association between role clarity and work effectiveness.

Hypothesis 1c: There is a positive association between role clarity and job satisfaction.

Conflicting signals about what is expected of an expatriate may increase uncertainty and thus inhibit work adjustment. Individuals must first understand the conflicting messages about what to do, and then decide which messages to ignore and which to follow (Black et al., 1991). This proposition emanates from Black’s (1988) study of American private sector expatriates in Japan and previous studies by
Kahn et al. (1964). However, no empirical evidence was initially found for this theoretical statement (Black, 1988) and subsequent studies have showed mixed results. While Aryee and Stone (1996) found a negative relationship between role conflict and work adjustment for private sector expatriates in Hong Kong, Shaffer et al. (1999), investigating business expatriates employed by US large multinational corporations, could not empirically establish such an association. In Morley et al.’s (1997) study, Irish expatriates in Moscow associated role conflict with less work effectiveness. However, the recent large-scale meta-analytic studies have empirically established a negative direct link between role conflict and work adjustment of private sector expatriates. As mentioned above, work adjustment has also been positively associated with performance and job satisfaction (Hechanova et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Similarly, high role conflict generating a low degree of work adjustment could prevent expatriates from being effective and could draw much satisfaction from their jobs. Hence, supported by these recent unequivocal empirical findings, subsuming a large number of studies of private sector expatriates, one may presume a negative association between role conflict and work outcomes for PS expatriates.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a negative association between role conflict and work adjustment.

Hypothesis 2b: There is a negative association between role conflict and work effectiveness.

Hypothesis 2c: There is a negative association between role conflict and job satisfaction.

Sheer overload may be the most obvious source of stress at work, irrespective of occupation or position (Statt, 1994). Hence, expatriates that encounter too many demands at work may be less able to respond in an adequate way to these demands. Role overload could therefore have a detrimental effect on work adjustment (Karasek, 1979; Tung, 1982; Black, 1988). However, studies of private sector expatriates have not found much empirical support for this theoretical assumption (cf. Black, 1988; Morley and Flynn, 2003). On the other hand, Bhanugopan and Fish (2006) found a positive relationship between role overload and job burnout in the workplace of private sector expatriates. Job burnout outcomes such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishments may likely mitigate work adjustment as well as work efficiency and job satisfaction. Despite the lack of direct empirical support regarding private sector expatriates, the strength of the theoretical argument may warrant a presumption that there may be a negative relationship between role overload and expatriate work outcomes for PS expatriates.

Hypothesis 3a: There is a negative association between role overload and work adjustment.

Hypothesis 3b: There is a negative association between role overload and work effectiveness.

Hypothesis 3c: There is a negative association between role overload and job satisfaction.
It has been argued that role discretion permits workers to adjust their work role and setting to themselves rather than adapting themselves to the work setting and thus enhance their work adjustment (cf. Brett, 1980; Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; Nicholson, 1984). Assigned to a less well-known foreign work environment, a certain amount of role discretion may enable expatriates to use previously employed behavioural mechanisms to minimise the uncertainties associated with their foreign job assignment (cf. Nicholson, 1984; Black and Gregersen, 1991a). There are ample empirical research findings from private sector expatriates to support such a theoretical proposition (cf. Black and Gregersen, 1991c; Shaffer et al., 1999; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The work situation for PS expatriates may typically be characterised by centralisation and bureaucracy (Harris and Holden, 2001). Hence, the positive association between role discretion and work adjustment for this category of expatriates may be even stronger than for private sector expatriates. Also, if there is more discretion in the work-role, PS expatriates may be able to be more effective than vice versa and draw more satisfaction from their jobs. For private sector expatriates, Aryee and Stone (1996) found a positive relationship between role discretion and job satisfaction. Accordingly, there is presumably a positive association between role discretion and expatriate work outcomes.

Hypothesis 4a: There is a positive association between role discretion and work adjustment.

Hypothesis 4b: There is a positive association between role discretion and work effectiveness.

Hypothesis 4c: There is a positive association between role discretion and job satisfaction.

**METHOD**

**Target population**

Data for the current study were taken from a more extensive investigation. The target population of PS expatriates for this larger study consisted of United States Department of Defense (DoD) administrators assigned to US embassies worldwide. DoD administrators are commissioned officers or very senior non-commissioned officers from the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps and the Navy (Army Regulation 611–60). Job factors of DoD administrators can be characterised as follows. The duties of DoD administrators are clearly defined by Department of Defense regulations, the senior officer on station may occasionally tell them to do something in contradiction to established procedures, many of the DoD administrators work under conditions of inadequate manning and their actions have to conform with Department of Defense, Department of State and federal regulations.

Although they can be characterised as middle managers, the target group of DoD administrators make up a relevant group representing members working for PS organisations. The DoD administrators all work at US embassies and the cultural climate is dominated by a US cultural work context. The working language is English and local nationals working at the embassy are expected to adjust to this cultural context rather than the other way around. However, the job tasks of DoD
administrators also include work and contacts outside the embassy, arranging meetings between local country representatives and US representatives, local procurement, hotel reservation for visitors, planning of external functions, etc. On the one hand, the place of work of DoD administrators may have more similarities with large offices populated by many private sector expatriates than small operations consisting of one or two of them. On the other hand, also the work of private sector expatriates will take them outside of the more protective environment of the subsidiary office.

**Sample**

The survey instrument was sent out to the entire target population via the intranet inviting all DoD administrators to participate. Of the 314 surveys sent out, 174 respondents returned usable surveys for a return rate of 55 per cent. The completed questionnaires were returned either by fax or electronically.

The average DoD administrator’s age was 40 years (standard deviation \( \text{SD} = 0.71 \)) and the average educational level was just below a Bachelor’s degree. The average respondent had served a total of 56.25 months as a DoD administrator (SD = 52.25) of which 19.47 months (SD = 12.36) had been served at the current assignment. Hence, the experience of the respondents varied widely.

**Instrument**

Single direct questions were applied to gauge background variables of the respondents. At the end of the questionnaire, there was an open-ended question asking for additional comments.

*Work adjustment* was assessed by three items from the scale developed by Black (1988); response categories ranged from (1) ‘not adjusted at all’ to (7) ‘completely adjusted’, sample item: ‘how adjusted are you to your job and responsibilities?’ (alpha = 0.69).

*Role discretion* and *job satisfaction* were measured by the Career Development Survey (West et al., 1987). Role discretion was measured with a four-item, four-point Likert-type scale from (1) ‘much less than my previous job’ to (4) ‘much more than my previous job’, sample item: ‘I am free to act independently’ (alpha = 0.88). Job satisfaction was assessed by a four-item, five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, sample item: ‘I am satisfied with my job’ (alpha = 0.69).

*Role clarity* and *role conflict* were assessed by the scales of Rizzo et al. (1970) and *role overload*, measured by the three items used by Black (1988) based on Kahn et al. (1964). All three scales used a Likert-type scale from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. Role clarity was measured by a four-item scale. A sample item is: ‘I have clear instruction on how to do my job’ (alpha = 0.85). Role conflict was gauged by a two-item scale and a sample item for this scale is, ‘I receive contradictory orders from headquarters leadership and local leadership’ (alpha = 0.75). One item was omitted from the three-item role overload scale to adapt to the work situation of DoD administrators but the remaining two items reflect both qualitative and quantitative overload (Kahn, 1978; Pines and Maslach, 1978; Maslach and Jackson, 1984). A sample item for the role overload scale is, ‘There is insufficient time to do my work’ (alpha = 0.76).
Work effectiveness was assessed by a self-developed, Likert-type scaled single item, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree with a sample item, ‘I am effective at my job’.

Time on current location was applied as a control variable, as work adjustment, as well as any other form of adjustment, can be regarded as a process over time following a learning curve (Church, 1982; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Black and Mendenhall, 1991). This variable was assessed by a direct question to the respondents: ‘How long have you served at your current location?’.

RESULTS

Sample means, standard deviations and zero-order Pearson correlations of all variables are provided in Table 1. One-sample t-tests showed that the mean scores for work adjustment ($t = 37.28$, $p < 0.001$), work effectiveness ($t = 27.29$, $p < 0.001$) and job satisfaction ($t = 19.40$, $p < 0.001$), were all significantly higher than the mid-point of their respective scales, indicating that the DoD administrators generally felt well adjusted to their jobs, perceived themselves as effective in their work and were satisfied with their jobs. The significant association between time in current location and work adjustment ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and work effectiveness ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) confirms the need to use time in current location as a control variable.

The hypotheses were formally tested by way of hierarchical multiple regression (Table 2). The control variable, time in current location, was entered in Step 1. As seen in Table 2, there was a significant association with two of the three criterion variables. The control variable had a positive relationship with work adjustment (beta = 0.41, $p < 0.001$) and work effectiveness (beta = 0.25, $p < 0.001$). Time in current location explained 17 per cent of the variance in the former criterion variable and 6 per cent of the variance in the latter. In Step 2, the four predictor variables were entered. This also produced significant effects on the criterion variables, explaining

<table>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Work adjustment</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>2. Work effectiveness</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>4. Role clarity</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>0.56***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>5. Role conflict</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.33**</td>
<td>−0.43***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>6. Role overload</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.21**</td>
<td>−0.20**</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>7. Role discretion</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>−0.24**</td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Time in current location (months) (control)</td>
<td>19.47</td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (2-tailed).
† 170 < $n$ < 175 due to missing answers.
6 per cent of work adjustment, 7 per cent of work effectiveness and 42 per cent of satisfaction. As displayed in Table 2, the findings provide support for Hypothesis 1a, Hypothesis 1b, Hypothesis 1c and Hypothesis 4c. Hypothesis 2b was rejected, while the rest of the hypotheses, 2a, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 4a and 4b were not supported. All $F$ values for the work outcome variables were statistically significant, indicating a proper fit between the regression model and the data.

**DISCUSSION**

**Main findings**

The variable time in current location had a relatively strong positive association with two of the three work outcomes, work adjustment and work effectiveness. The positive relationship with work adjustment is consistent with previous research findings on private sector expatriates (cf. Selmer, 2002; Takeuchi et al., 2005). It is also worth noting that despite a better adjustment to work and increased effectiveness in their work over time on the same job, the DoD administrators did not experience any higher job satisfaction.

Role clarity is clearly the job factor that affects DoD administrators the most as it is positively associated with all of the investigated outcome variables: work adjustment, work effectiveness and job satisfaction. The positive association between role clarity and the DoD administrators’ adjustment to work is consistent with research results from private sector expatriates integrated in a recent meta-analytic investigation covering 66 studies and almost 8,500 expatriates (Bhaskar-Shrinivas

| Table 2 Results of hierarchical regression for effects of job factors on work outcomes† |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                   | Work adjustment$^a$ | Work effectiveness$^a$ | Job satisfaction$^a$ |
| Step 1 (control)                  |                 |                 |                 |
| Time in current location (months) | 0.41***         | 0.25***         | 0.01            |
| $R$                               | 0.41            | 0.25            | 0.02            |
| $R^2$ (adjusted)                  | 0.17            | 0.06            | 0.01            |
| $F$                               | 34.90***        | 11.14***        | 0.04            |
| Step 2                            |                 |                 |                 |
| Role clarity                      | 0.25***         | 0.26**          | 0.44***         |
| Role conflict                     | -0.02           | 0.19*           | -0.05           |
| Role overload                     | -0.01           | 0.03            | -0.07           |
| Role discretion                   | -0.04           | 0.03            | 0.32***         |
| $R$                               | 0.49            | 0.36            | 0.65            |
| Change in $R^2$                   | 0.06            | 0.07            | 0.42            |
| $R^2$ (adjusted)                  | 0.21            | 0.10            | 0.40            |
| $F$                               | 10.14***        | 4.83***         | 24.04***        |

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; two-tailed.
† Regression coefficients are standardised.
et al., 2005). In order for DoD administrators to perform successfully, they must clearly understand what the Defense Attaché and headquarters expect from them. Without this initial understanding, the administrator may have adjustment problems. The following comment from one administrator in Ghana illustrates this point:

There are two things which stand out to make this assignment unpleasant: over-supervision from the ambassador’s office and under-support from the embassy’s administrative section. If these problems were solved, this would be a pleasant place to work.

Surprisingly, neither role conflict nor role overload had any negative significant relationship with any of the work outcome variables of the DoD administrators. These results deviate from previous findings of research conducted on private sector expatriates (cf. Morley et al., 1997; Shaffer et al., 1999; Hechanova et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). On the contrary, there was a positive significant association (although weak) between role conflict and work effectiveness. This may not be easy to explain but it could have something to do with the specific work situation of DoD administrators. The source of role conflict may be similar to that for private sector expatriates. As mentioned before, conflicting signals could give rise to considerable uncertainty as the expatriates are first required to comprehend various signals and identify them as conflicting, then retain the relevant ones and finally execute appropriate behaviours (Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Conflicts of guidance between headquarters and the local Defence Attaché may cause conflicts in the administrator’s mind. However, there may be a considerable extent of latitude to solve such conflicts creatively as the local situation may be less well organised, offering little detailed direction and the support and guidance from headquarters could be insufficient. Such a situation may benefit work effectiveness in a positive way as assistance may be sought elsewhere. Consider the following comment from a senior DoD administrator from Tajikistan:

I came here as the first permanent senior administrator, many things were not done, nor did I have the experience to know the difference. The guidance from my headquarters has been not much more than ‘read the manuals’ which are outdated. Everything I have learned has been from the help of other senior administrators in the region.

As predicted, role discretion has a positive relationship with DoD administrators’ job satisfaction, indicating that they regard autonomy, allowing them to adapt their work role and setting to themselves, positively. Surprisingly, there is no association between role discretion and the other two work outcomes. For private sector expatriates, a positive relationship has repeatedly been found between role discretion and work adjustment (cf. Shaffer et al., 1999; Hechanova et al., 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

While role clarity and role discretion may have had the greatest positive effect on the administrator’s job satisfaction, the job of a DoD administrator in an embassy setting itself seemed to bring intrinsic job satisfaction, not the least from the perceived importance of the job regarding US national security. Consider the following comments by the DoD administrators:
Attaché duty has been a very rewarding experience. It’s not for everybody, but if you and your family want to experience different cultures and take the good with the bad, this is the place to be. (Botswana)

I feel that the job I am doing here is very important for the United States and Tajikistan. (Tajikistan)

Working in the Defense Attaché System has given me the highest job satisfaction of any other position I have held in any unit in the Army and quite possibly is the reason that I chose to remain in the Army. (Poland)

Each day I wake up and say to myself, I love my job. They will have to drag me out of here. (Ethiopia)

Conversely, when the administrator felt the job was beneath his or her abilities, satisfaction plummeted.

I feel that the jobs of the senior administrator and the administrator are thankless ones. We’re expected to and do more work than the attaches and most other people in the embassy. Defence Attaché Office support staff, in my opinion, are regarded as nothing more than secretaries by some attaches and embassy personnel. I sometimes feel that some of the work/tasks I must do are beneath me – some admin related duties are better suited for junior enlisted personnel. Attaches in general, seem helpless to take care of simple tasks on their own (making copies, etc.). Also, many attaches in my experience are not very effective (this may be due to my background) and cannot seem to keep up with their own paperwork and reports. (Mali)

Limitations

Single-method variance could have affected the results of the study as all data were self-reported. Although the general condemnations of self-report methods have been found exaggerated (Crampton and Wagner, 1994), the potential for this type of bias was investigated. Single-method variance could lead to a compressed response range (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), but a manual inspection of the dataset did not reveal any such tendency.

Although the target group of DoD administrators may be relevant representatives of PS expatriates, they are all middle managers. That covers but one contingent of PS expatriates but does not exhaust this category of foreign assignees of organisations from the PS. Hence, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other categories of PS expatriates.

The self-reported measurement of work effectiveness by a single-item scale may raise reliability concerns. Although such concerns may be justified to a certain extent, an alternative applied by some expatriate studies of asking respondents to recall their most recent performance evaluation and to indicate where that rating would place them relative to their peers (cf. Black and Porter, 1991; Shay and Baack, 2004) was not deemed feasible. Little communication within the geographically dispersed specific referent group appears to take place in this respect, and a number of the DoD
administrators were new on the job and only had pre-assignment ratings to refer to. In our sample, a number of the respondents had had totally different military jobs before their assignment as DoD administrators. For example, some of the DoD administrators from the US Air Force had previously been aircraft mechanics.

Although the response rate of 55 per cent is higher than that of many surveys targetting private sector expatriates (cf. Naumann, 1993; Harzing, 1997), the extent to which this outcome has biased our results cannot be assessed with certainty. The timing of the survey was somewhat unfortunate. As the survey was sent out in mid-May, it coincided with the military rotational cycle (May–September). Although the latest copy of the administrative roster was used, updates to the roster are self-reported and many of the positions could have been vacant due to failure of the predecessors to report their departure. However, a manual inspection of the non-responses could not detect any geographical or embassy size pattern.

Expatriate adjustment is considered to be a process over time (cf. Church, 1982; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Black and Mendenhall, 1991), but the method employed here only used a measure of the average level of work adjustment for the investigated group of DoD administrators at a certain point in time. A longitudinal approach may have produced a richer data source. On the other hand, longitudinal studies pose other serious methodological challenges (cf. Menard, 1991).

**Implications**

This study was designed to determine how job factors may affect work outcomes of a group of expatriate middle managers, DoD administrators, representing a larger target population of PS expatriates. An initial obvious practical implication of the findings of this study is that, as both work adjustment and work effectiveness may increase over time, it could be worth considering for organisations assigning PS expatriates abroad to allow them a running-in period before they have to face regular job demands. Like some private business corporations, PS organisations may want to communicate realistic expected levels of work performance in the early stages of the foreign assignment so that too much is not expected too soon (cf. Mendenhall et al., 1987).

Secondly, it was found that the relationship of the expatriate manager to his/her immediate supervisor is essential. In this study, Defence Attaches who clearly defined the role of the DoD administrators in their office may have contributed positively to their work adjustment, work effectiveness and to their job satisfaction. Therefore, it may be important for PS expatriate middle managers to try to understand what their bosses expect of them. In a job environment, typically obscured by bureaucracy and regulations, role clarity may play a major role for the job outcomes of PS expatriates.

Thirdly, as role discretion of DoD administrators had a clear positive association with their job satisfaction, PS organisations may wish to enhance contentment with their jobs among PS expatriates by allowing them to employ more of their discretionary powers. This may generally facilitate and support the foreign work assignment of PS expatriates.

All three suggested implications above and the results that they are based on are compatible with the theory of met expectations proposing that the more congruent an individual’s expectations are with the individual’s reality once on the job, the
greater the individual’s satisfaction and adjustment (Porter and Steers, 1973; Wanous, 1980, 1992). It has been suggested that cross-cultural training can create accurate expectations for expatriates with respect to living and working in the host country (cf. Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Black et al., 1991). Research on private sector expatriates has shown that relevant pre-departure cross-cultural training can enhance the accuracy of an expatriate’s expectations prior to the assignment (Caligiuri et al., 2001). Hence, based on the tenets of the theory of met expectations, organisations assigning PS expatriates abroad may want to provide relevant cross-cultural training to try to ensure that their expatriates have accurate expectations about the initial levels of expected work performance, their immediate supervisor and the extent of discretionary powers that they can use on the job. As the results of this study indicate, this may not only enhance their satisfaction and adjustment, as predicted by the theory of met expectations, but also their work effectiveness.

Future research on PS expatriates could both improve on potential limitations of this study and expand it to adjacent domains. More than one data source may be tapped and a longitudinal design may be considered. The target population may also be extended to other categories of PS expatriates than middle managers, preferably outside any Defence Attaché system with another nationality than the American. A direct comparison with the work situation of private sector expatriates could also be a relevant extension of this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This is one of the first known rigorous surveys studying the work situation of PS expatriates. As such, it contributes to the literature representing a fundamental attempt to highlight the work situation of this under-researched group of expatriates. As many PS organisations are bureaucratic, hierarchical and dominated by rule enforcement (Parker and Bradley, 2000), this may also influence the overseas situation at work for PS expatriates (Harris and Holden, 2001). In comparison, based on the findings of this study of job factors and work outcomes of DoD administrators, one may tentatively conclude that the foreign work situation for PS expatriates could have both similarities and discrepancies as compared with that of private sector expatriates. While role clarity may have a similar impact on work outcomes of expatriates both in the private and public sectors, the findings regarding role conflict and role overload may constitute a discrepant outcome for the two groups. There may also be a difference between the two categories of expatriates with regard to role discretion. These potential discrepancies may warrant further investigations and perhaps a more direct future comparison of the work situation of public and private sector expatriates.

REFERENCES


