ARE PUBLIC SECTOR EXPATRIATES DIFFERENT IN THEIR CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT?
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Abstract

Although public sector expatriates are becoming increasingly common, research on them is very limited. There is reason to believe that public sector expatriates cross-culturally adjust differently than private sector expatriates. This study investigated U.S. Department of Defense administrators assigned to U.S. embassies worldwide. Results showed that self efficacy, role clarity and role discretion had a positive association with the psychological adjustment of the respondents while role conflict and role overload only had a marginal negative relationship with the criterion variable. Surprisingly, these findings suggest a similar picture for the expatriates from the public and private sector. Implications are discussed in detail.

Keywords:

Adjustment, expatriate, public sector
INTRODUCTION

Due to the growth and accelerated numbers of multinational companies and their needs to manage their expatriate staff effectively, research on expatriates from the private sector totally dominates the literature on expatriate management (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). Nevertheless, organizations in the public sector have a long tradition of sending personnel overseas for widely differing purposes, including diplomatic and military service as well as inter-governmental exchange programs (cf. Stening, 1994). Given the current geopolitical situation and frequent international intervention in regional/local conflicts, there is reason to believe that public sector (PS) expatriates are becoming increasingly common. However, little is known about PS expatriates and their conditions since research on them is very limited (Anderson, 2001; Harris & Holden, 2001). As it is not unlikely that the situation for PS expatriates may be different than for private sector expatriates, more research is required to discover and examine potential discrepancies.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the specific situation of PS expatriates and how they adjust to their foreign assignments. More specifically, this investigation will study both personal characteristics and job factors and the relationship between these circumstances and how the expatriates adjust psychologically. This type of adjustment focuses on expatriates subjective well being (happiness, depression, anxiousness, nervousness, etc.) while sociocultural adjustment, on the other hand, deals with expatriates’ culturally specific skills (cf. Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992; Ward & Searle, 1991). This is an important study for several reasons. Firstly, although some studies have investigated the association between personal
characteristics and the psychological adjustment of private sector expatriates (cf. Selmer, 2004; Shaffer, et al., 2006; Swagler & Jome, 2005), few studies have included job factors. This is peculiar since the main reason for a company to assign private sector expatriates abroad is to perform certain work tasks. Needless to say, no study is known to have investigated PS expatriates in this way. Secondly, the influence of the public sector ethos on expatriates is an obvious and important issue to investigate. Public sector organizations have traditionally been characterized by bureaucracy, hierarchy, and rule enforcement (Parker & Bradley, 2000), and the public sector has generally seen more centralization, tighter financial controls and more politically determined access to resources (Bach & Della Rocca, 2000). That may entail a specific influence on the psychological adjustment of PS expatriates, not encountered by expatriates assigned abroad by private sector organizations (Harris & Holden, 2001). Thirdly, it may be speculated that considering the globalization trend, PS expatriates are probably becoming more frequent, although there seems to be no known study trying to estimate their numbers or such a trend. Therefore, it is both relevant and important to investigate PS expatriates and try to understand their psychological adjustment and its association with personal characteristics and job factors.

The rest of this article deals with a literature review of the conceptual elements of the study; psychological adjustment, personal characteristics and job factors and generation of the hypotheses to be tested. The target group, sample and measures applied are described in the method section. Findings are presented and discussed in terms of main findings, limitations, and implications. Finally, the conclusions of this study are offered.
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Psychological Adjustment

Expatriation is stressful and adjustment can be regarded as a means to reduce stress levels. Hence, a reduction in experienced stress due to better adjustment may be accompanied by higher levels of subjective well-being (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Consistent with this theoretical argument, empirical research evidence supports such a relationship between subjective well-being and work adjustment of private sector expatriates (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). Psychological adjustment refers to individuals’ subjective well-being in their new cultural environments. It has been associated with a person’s emotional states, cognitive perceptions, and personal trait variables (Ward & Kennedy, 1996). The theoretical concept of subjective well-being has been well developed, especially in relation to work and work environment characteristics (cf. Caplan et al., 1975; Karasek, 1979; Kornhauser, 1965). The concept of psychological adjustment encompasses a problem-oriented view, focusing on attitudinal factors of the adjustment process (cf. Grove & Torbiörn, 1985; Juffer, 1986; Oberg, 1960). As opposed to sociocultural adjustment, which may be manifest in behavior and readily observable, psychological adjustment, as a mental frame of mind, could be less detectable and more voluntary since it may not be as easily deduced from the observable social skills of expatriates (Jun, Lee & Gentry, 1997). For example, American expatriates could make behavioral changes in China to fit in, but may not want to adopt Chinese values (Selmer, 2001). In connection with the adjustment of expatriate business managers, the concept of subjective well-being has been applied in several instances (cf. Anderzen & Arnetz, 1997, 1999; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993).
Personal Characteristics

There are a large number of personal attributes that may be associated with the adjustment of expatriates (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). In this paper we will focus on international experience, preparatory training, and self-efficacy. Since there is a distinct lack of research on PS expatriates, especially regarding survey-based hypotheses-testing studies, the more abundant empirical and theoretical literature on private sector expatriates will be referred to in justifying the hypotheses. That may also serve as an implicit platform to test for potential discrepancies between PS and private sector expatriates.

International Experience. International work experience is increasingly recognized among business firms as a crucial asset for private sector expatriates (Carpenter, Sanders & Gregersen, 2001) and such experience has become one of the main requirements for promotion to top management positions. CEOs with extensive international experience are highly appreciated by the job market (Daily, Certo & Dalton, 2000). Organizations that fail to develop needed international experience among its managers may not be able to carry out global strategic initiatives, could suffer the consequences of suboptimal productivity of their foreign subsidiaries, may lose market opportunities, and may experience problems in creating and maintaining relationships with foreign market stakeholders (Dowling, Welch & Schuler, 1999). In short, international experience may be considered as a crucial personal characteristic for private sector. Given that most people have little, if any, experience of living and working in another country, international experience may be helpful in doing so. It has been convincingly argued that seasoned veterans may have an easier task to adjust to a foreign context since they are able to anticipate problems more clearly using their
accumulated knowledge from prior experiences of working and living abroad (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Despite the intuitive appeal of such a theoretical argument, empirical findings have been surprisingly inconsistent. Research results ranging from positive, null and negative effects have been found (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Selmer, 2002). Nevertheless, on the strength of the theoretical argument, a benevolent influence of previous experience is predicted.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a positive association between international experience and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

*Preparatory Training.* The purpose of (pre-departure) preparatory training of expatriates is to predispose them to a quick adjustment to their new foreign assignments (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Similarly, Torbiörn (1982) stated that effective preparatory training permits expatriates to learn what is expected of them in the new job and in the foreign country. Based on an early research review of the effect of preparatory training, Black and Mendenhall (1990) suggested a positive correlation between training and adjustment. Hence, many early studies recommended expatriates to undergo preparatory training (cf. Berry, et al. 1993; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Hammer & Martin, 1990; Naumann, 1993; Oddou, 1991). However, there is actually little conclusive evidence of the claimed effectiveness of preparatory training of private sector expatriates. Although establishing a weak positive overall association between preparatory training and expatriate adjustment, the meta-analytic study by Morris and Robie (2001) found correlations between training and adjustment that ranged between $r=-.42$ (Black, 1988) and $r=.57$ (Early, 1987). Furthermore, thorough subsequent examinations have found that many of the studies which support
the effectiveness of preparatory training applied flawed methodologies or were based on anecdotal or limited information restricting their generalizability (cf. Caligiuri et al., 2001; Despande & Visweswaran, 1992; Kealy & Protheroe, 1996). However, more recently, a few studies applying a more rigorous methodological approach have established a positive association between preparatory training and expatriate adjustment (Selmer, 2005; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Given the previously mentioned stress-reducing effect of better adjustment, supported by the recent research findings, a positive effect of preparatory training is hypothesized.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive association between the effectiveness of preparatory training and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

**Self-Efficacy.** This personal characteristic can be conceptualized as the beliefs in one’s own ability to execute plans of action (Bandura, 1977). Generally, increased self-efficacy may have a number of effects relevant to the expatriate situation. It may affect individuals’ level of interest (Lenox & Subich, 1994), contribution to their teams’ effectiveness (Kozlowski, et al., 1999), setting of higher goals, and ultimately through higher performance (cf. Locke et al., 1984; Phillips & Gully, 1997; Wood & Bandura, 1989a; 1989b). Similarly, high levels of self-efficacy has been theorized to lead to positive choices (e.g. welcoming the challenge of a new task), motivational effort (e.g. people will try harder), and perseverance (e.g. be resilient when meeting problems and even failure) (Luthans, 2002). Hence, self-efficacy may aid all forms of expatriate adjustment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Building on Bandura’s (1977) conceptualization of self-efficacy above, Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) argued that expatriates with high overall self-efficacy persist in displaying newly learned behaviours, despite negative feedback, and they use the resulting
learning to improve their adjustment. Subsequent large-scale meta-analyses of empirical research have supported this theoretical argument (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). More specifically, research evidence suggests that self-efficacy may also directly affect positive thought patterns (e.g. efficacy judgements may influence self-talks: “I know I can figure out how to do this”) and resistance to stress (e.g. those with high self-efficacy meet potentially stressful situations with confidence and assurance which make them able to resist stressful reactions) (Luthans, 2002). Accordingly, self-efficacy is likely to have a positive impact on psychological adjustment.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a positive association between self-efficacy and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

**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. Additionally, foreign assignments are often characterized by policy and procedural conflicts with headquarter organizations (Gregersen & Black, 1992). Work role transition research (cf. Davis & Lofquist, 1984; Nicholson, 1984) 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 a position providing the
expatriate with a clearly defined set of expected behaviours (Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005). It has been argued that expatriates who believe that their position has high role clarity should experience a greater degree of work adjustment (McEvoy & Parker, 1995). Morley, et al. (1997), also contended that the clearer the role, the better the individual can predict necessary actions. They also found empirical evidence for this claim investigating the adjustment of Irish private sector expatriates in Moscow. Subsequent, meta-analytic studies have empirically confirmed that there is a positive association between role clarity and work adjustment for private sector expatriates (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). Based on the relationship mentioned above between subjective well-being and work adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993), supporting the suggested stress-reducing functions of better adjustment, a positive impact of role conflict is likely.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is a positive association between role clarity and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

**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 novel cultural context, 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; Black, 1988). However, no empirical evidence was initially found for this theoretical statement (Black, 1988) and subsequent studies have showed mixed results. While Aryee & Stone (1996) found a negative relationship between role conflict and work adjustment for private sector expatriates in Hong Kong, Shaffer, Harrison &
Gilley (1999), investigating business expatriates employed by U.S. large MNCs, could not empirically establish such an association. In Morley, et al.’s study (1997), Irish expatriates in Moscow associated role conflict with less work effectiveness. However, the two recent meta-analytic studies have empirically established a negative direct link between role conflict and work adjustment of private sector expatriates (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et al., 2005; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). Given the above mentioned positive association between subjective well-being and work adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993), a negative impact of role conflict can be postulated.

**Hypothesis 5:** There is a negative association between role conflict and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

*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 occur when an individual finds it difficult to complete an assigned task within an allotted period of time (Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Kahn, 1978; Pines & Maslach, 1978). Generally, 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 (Black, 1988; Karasek; 1979; Tung, 1982). However, studies of private sector expatriates have not found much empirical support for this theoretical assumption (cf. Black, 1988; Morley & Flynn, 2003). On the other hand, based on a sample of private sector expatriates, Bhanugopan & Fish
(2004) found a positive relationship between role overload and all dimensions of job burnout; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishments. Such outcomes may not promote the subjective well-being of expatriates. Accordingly, it is likely that role overload may have a negative effect.

**Hypothesis 6:** There is a negative association between role overload and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

*Role Discretion.* This 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 (Andreason, 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, *et al.*, 2005; Karasek, 1979). It has been argued that role discretion permits employees 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 & 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 minimize the uncertainties associated with their foreign job assignment (*cf.* Black & Gregersen, 1991; Nicholson, 1984). There are ample empirical research findings from private sector expatriates to support such a theoretical proposition (*cf.* Bhaskar-Shrinivas, *et al.*, 2005; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999). Since the work situation for PS expatriates may typically be characterized by bureaucracy, hierarchy, and rule enforcement (Parker & Bradley, 2000), the positive association between role discretion and work adjustment for this category of expatriates may be even stronger than for private sector expatriates. Again, referring to the positive association between subjective well-being and work adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996; Nicholson & Imaizumi,
1993), a negative impact of role conflict is suggested.

**Hypothesis 7**: There is a positive association between role discretion and psychological adjustment of PS expatriates.

**METHOD**

**Target Population**

The data were extracted from a larger study. United States Department of Defense (DoD) administrators assigned to U.S. embassies worldwide was the population of PS expatriates targeted in this bigger investigation. DoD administrators are U.S. military personnel as they all are commissioned officers or very senior non-commissioned officers from the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and the Navy (Army Regulation 611-60).

Accordingly, the targeted group of DoD administrators make up a relevant group of respondents representing PS expatriates. Although the DoD administrators all perform the same work tasks, the necessary variation in the studied issues is provided for by the different geographical locations of work as well as by the various career stages of the respondents.

**Sample**

All DoD administrators were invited to take part in the study via the intranet and the questionnaires were distributed the same way. Respondents returned 174 usable surveys of the
314 distributed achieving a return rate of 55 percent. The completed questionnaires were also returned electronically.

The average respondent had served totally 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. Accordingly, the total experience of the DoD administrators varied greatly. The average DoD administrator’s age was 40 years (SD=0.71) and the average educational level was almost a Bachelor’s degree.

Instrument

Background variables of the respondents were assessed by single direct questions. The questionnaire ended with an open question encouraging respondents to provide additional comments.

Psychological adjustment of the expatriates was measured using the twelve-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ–12) developed by Goldberg (1972). This instrument is usually applied to measure minor psychiatric symptoms. However, the scale has also been used to monitor levels of well-being (Forster, 2000) and it has previously been used to measure expatriates' psychological adjustment (cf. Anderzen and Arnetz, 1999, 1997). The scale contains a number of items concerning how people have been feeling recently and whether these feelings have interrupted their daily life. Response categories varied from (1) “not at all” to (4) “much more than usual”, sample item: “Have you been able to concentrate on whatever you’re doing?” The reliability of this scale was moderately high (alpha=.83).
Personal Characteristics

*International Experience* was assessed by a direct single question: “How long have you served as an Operations NCO/OPSCO in the Defense Attaché System?”.  

The *effectiveness of preparatory training* was measured by a self-developed, three-item Likert-type scale which ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. These item were: “The Joint Military Attaché School prepared me well to perform the administrative parts of my job”, “The Joint Military Attaché School prepared me well to perform the financial parts of my job”, and “The Joint Military Attaché School prepared me well to perform the logistical parts of my job”. This scale had adequate reliability (alpha = .70).

*Self-efficacy* was assessed by the Chen, Gully & Eden (2001) eight-item scale. It consists of a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, sample item: “Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well”. The reliability of this scale was high (alpha = .88).

*Job Factors*

*Role clarity* and *role conflict* were measured by the scales of Rizzo, House and Litzman (1970) using a Likert-type scale from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. The reliability of the four-item *role clarity* scale was moderately high (alpha=.85), sample item: “I have clear instruction on how to do my job”. The three-item *role conflict* scale had an adequate reliability (alpha = .75), sample item: “I receive contradictory orders from headquarters leadership and local leadership”.

*Role overload* was assessed by the three items used by Black (1988). This three-item, Likert-type
scale ranges from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. One item was omitted from this scale to adapt to the work situation of DoD administrators but the remaining two items reflect both qualitative and quantitative overload (Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Kahn, 1978; Pines & Maslach, 1978). A sample item for the role overload scale is: “There is insufficient time to do my work”. This scale had adequate reliability \( \alpha = .76 \).

*Role discretion* was measured by a scale taken from the Career Development Survey (West, Nicholson & Rees, 1987). The four-item, Likert-type scale had a response range from (1) much less than my previous job to (4) much more than my previous job, sample item: “I am free to act independently”. The reliability was high for this scale \( \alpha = .88 \).

*Time on current location* was applied as a control variable since adjustment may be regarded as a process over time following a learning curve (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This variable was assessed by a direct single question to the respondents: “How long have you served at your current location?”.

**RESULTS**

Sample means, standard deviations and zero-order Pearson correlations of the variables are provided in Table 1. A one-sample \( t \)-test showed that the mean score for *psychological adjustment* was significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale \( t=15.23, p<.001 \). The result indicates that the DoD administrators were well adjusted psychologically.
The hypotheses were formally tested through hierarchical multiple regression (Table 2). The control variable, *time in current location*, was entered in Step 1. Unexpectedly, as seen in Table 2, there was no significant association with the criterion variable. In Step 2, the seven predictor variables were entered. This produced significant effects on the criterion variables, explaining 30 per cent of the variance in *psychological adjustment*. As displayed in Table 2, among the personal characteristics, there was neither any significant relationship between *international experience* and *psychological adjustment* nor between the *effectiveness of preparatory training* and *psychological adjustment*, providing no support for H1 or H2. However, there was a significant and positive association between *self-efficacy* and *psychological adjustment* ($\beta=.15; p<.05$) providing support for H3.

Regarding job factors, significant associations are displayed between all predictor variables and the criterion variable. There was a significant and positive relationship between *role clarity* and *psychological adjustment* ($\beta=.22; p<.01$) offering support for H4. There were also a significant, but weak, negative relationship between *role conflict* and *psychological adjustment* ($\beta=-.14; p<.10$) as well as between *role overload* and *psychological adjustment* ($\beta=-.13; p<.10$) providing some marginal support for H5 and H6. Finally, the significant and positive association between *role discretion* and *psychological adjustment* ($\beta=.24; p<.001$) supports H7.

In summary, H3, H4, H5, H6, and H7 are supported while H1 and H2 are not supported.
DISCUSSION

Clearly, job factors seem to dominate over personal characteristics in influencing the psychological adjustment of the respondents. Especially role clarity and role discretion appeared more important in this respect than the self-efficacy of the DoD administrators. Although self-efficacy seems to have had some impact on the psychological adjustment of the respondents, it is surprising that neither international experience nor the effectiveness of preparatory training had any effect on psychological aspects of the adjustment of the expatriates. Not even experience gained by the managers during their current location proved useful for their psychological adjustment. If preparatory training can be regarded as a form of anticipatory adjustment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), international experience gained at other assignments, and especially that at the current location, may be perceived as on-the-job training enabling the expatriates to successfully complete the present assignment which in turn may invoke good feelings and subjective well-being among the respondents.

Role clarity and role discretion had a significant positive association with the psychological adjustment of the DoD administrators. These findings are consistent with those reported from private sector expatriates (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999). Therefore, if the Defense Attache clearly defines the role of the DoD administrator upon arrival and gives the administrator the freedom to accomplish his/her duties, the administrator should adjust better psychologically. A comment that emphasizes the importance of role clarity and role discretion for the administrator’s
psychological adjustment comes from an administrator in Burma:

“I am not depressed but unhappy because I’m not in charge. I feel completely capable of making any decision; I’m just not allowed nor given an opportunity to. I started out a senior administrator 6+ years ago, then, due to a lack of vacancies, I was put in my current slot a major step down in responsibilities and authority.”

There was also a weak negative relationship between role overload and the criterion variable. Role overload may induce a feeling of helplessness. The findings of this study are consistent with Black’s (1988) research results on role overload’s negative impact on the psychological adjustment of private sector expatriates. The feeling of defencelessness came out in the following comments from one administrator in Russia:

“Everything is a crisis. Attaches take little or no initiative to resolve even the most basic issues before elevating them to the support staff as a “crisis action” (everything from invitations to dinners through the last minute operational travel is given the same sense of urgency).”

Similarly, DoD administrators expressed frustration over underperforming senior officers who “dumped” work on them. One administrator from Hungary commented:

“For me the job is not so overwhelming as to cause some of the problems listed (too much stress, loss of sleep – from the one of the longest serving senior administrators), however I
am frustrated sometimes.”

Role conflict also had a weak negative association with the DoD administrators’ psychological adjustment. If the Defense Attaché tells the administrator “don’t listen to headquarters, do what I say,” the administrator may not adjust well psychologically. Conflicts of guidance between headquarters and the Defense Attaché may cause conflicts in the mind of the DoD administrator, since the administrator knows that the Defense Attaché’s opinion carries the most weight on his/her performance evaluation.

Regarding preparatory training, all potential DoD administrators attend a ten week attaché staff support course at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington DC. The course serves as an introduction to supporting military attaches on station and prepares the candidates for the administrative, fiscal and logistical tasks that lie ahead. After the initial training, the administrator receives language or country specific training required to perform successfully. Country specific training normally consists of consultations and briefings with military analysts to help the administrator understand the current military to military engagement in the country to which the administrator will be assigned. The amount of language training given to the administrator is determined by the military service based upon input from the country to which the administrator will be assigned (Joint Military Attaché School, 2004).

Overall, comments from the DoD administrators showed that they believed preparatory training from the Joint Military Attaché School was a good start, but the school did not fully prepare them for all the tasks they would perform on station. Since they did not feel fully prepared for the job, the
lack of association between the effectiveness of preparatory training and psychological adjustment is not surprising. Many DoD administrator functions had to be learned ‘by doing’ or by seeking guidance from other, more experienced, administrators. However, even though they didn’t feel that the school fully prepared them for life at the embassy, the administrators were generally satisfied with the preparatory training. This satisfaction may have come from the knowledge that the school could not prepare the administrator for every situation faced at all embassies around the world.

Consider the following comments from the administrator in Oman:

“The Joint Military Attaché School was a great help in getting me oriented about the Defense Attaché System; however, it did not prepare me for current military operations in the Middle East, nor do I think the school was designed for this purpose. I tried to use the administrative tools the school taught me, but these operations forced me to become more creative than I have ever been in my life.”

A number of comments from the DoD administrators dealt with the lack of organizational support. While previous research has demonstrated the importance of such support (cf. Andreason, 2003; Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley, 1999), a continuing theme among those respondents who provided comments was the need for greater language capability, better human resources management and better headquarters logistics support. Without this support, the administrator’s role clarity may decline and thereby the administrator’s psychological adjustment. The comments below illustrate this point:

(Canada) “In my four years of working for this organization, I have been very disappointed
with the poor customer service and unprofessional services received from Bolling Air Force Base (Air Force human resource support services). When an individual is stationed in a third world country with no access to internet or fax, that same individual expects strong support from his/her (headquarters) in the US. This has been a recurring problem for a while.”

(Lithuania) “Proper manning would alleviate many of my negative replies.”

(Macedonia) “The pay disparity between military members and members of other agencies, of similar background and career experience is astounding. I personal believe that sending anyone to live and work on a permanent basis in a foreign country without the native language is a mistake.”

(Malaysia) “The transition to the Defense Attaché system was a bit hectic at first but I feel comfortable now. Service specific personnel support back at headquarters is really lacking. Navy detailers and technical advertisements need to see what actually our job is in the Defense Attaché System. Promotion opportunities throughout each service are lacking.”

(Oman) “I wish I could have learned Arabic before arriving. It would have made the job much easier.”

(China) “I highly recommend all staff members receive a basic language course prior to coming to Beijing. Administrators will not have enough time to pick up the necessary
language skills on station. Even administrative tasks, local procurement, hotel reservations for visitors, planning functions, and supervising local nationals can be better accomplished by someone with language skills.”

(China) “I have had a previous senior administrator tour in a small Defense Attaché Office but now I am an administrator in a large office. I sometimes feel that I am not being used to my fullest potential. My biggest challenge is not comprehending the language well. I was only able to have one month of language training prior to arrival.”

Limitations

Since all data were self-reported, single method variance could have affected the results of the investigation. Although the general condemnations of self-report methods have been found exaggerated (Crampton & Wagner, 1994), the potential for single-method bias was checked. This type of bias could lead to a compressed response range (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), but no such tendency was detected by a manual inspection of the data set.

Despite the conventional wisdom that expatriate adjustment is considered to be a process over time (cf. Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), the method employed here only used a measure of the average level of psychological adjustment for the investigated group of DoD administrators at a certain point in time. However, the findings did not reveal any significant association between the two time-related variables, time in current location and (length of) international experience on the criterion variable psychological adjustment. It is therefore doubtful whether a longitudinal approach may have produced a more adequate data source. Besides, longitudinal studies pose other serious methodological challenges (cf. Menard, 1991).
DoD administrators may be appropriate representatives of PS expatriates, but they are all middle managers. While being a relevant group of PS expatriates, it does not exhaust this category of foreign assignees. Hence, the validity of the findings of this investigation may be in doubt regarding other groups of PS expatriates.

**Implications**

This study was designed to determine how personal characteristics and job factors may affect the psychological adjustment of a group of expatriate managers across the world, DoD administrators, representing the larger group of PS expatriates.

Regarding personal characteristics, it is obvious that the extent of self efficacy of the DoD administrators may be important for their psychological adjustment. This may have implications for the Defense Attaché System in particular as well as for PS expatriates and their organizations in general. When seeking applicants for DoD administrator positions, the four services should look beyond the technical abilities of the applicant and more toward sergeants and officers with a high self confidence (self efficacy) in their abilities. While a fine line may exist between self confidence and arrogance, candidates with a strong internal locus of control may adjust quicker and perform better. This finding contradicts current military policy in which the services gauge successful previous performance as the primary predictor of future success. For public organizations sending expatriates on foreign assignments, self-efficacy could make a better selection criterion of PS expatriate candidates, than only relying on past performance to predict future success.
It can also be argued that preparatory training need not be all encompassing to be perceived as a positive experience. In this study, the effectiveness of preparatory training of DoD administrators did not predict their psychological adjustment and they did not feel that their training enabled them to accomplish all tasks. Nevertheless, some of them felt that it gave them a good start, maybe as a type of anticipatory adjustment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), getting somewhat more used to their work task ahead of arrival at the foreign location.

Concerning job factors, Defense Attachés who clearly defined the role of the DoD administrators may contribute in a positive way to their psychological adjustment. Therefore, in public sector organizations, which traditionally have been characterized by bureaucracy, hierarchy, and rule enforcement (Parker & Bradley, 2000), it may be especially important that PS expatriates initially must be made to understand exactly what their bosses expect of them. Undefined, broad objectives may overstress the PS expatriate.

Furthermore, since the role discretion of DoD administrators had a clear positive association with their psychological adjustment, public sector organizations may wish to enhance the subjective well-being among PS expatriates by allowing them to escape a bit from centralized tight routines and supervision and employ more of their discretionary powers.

Further studies of PS expatriates may want to improve on potential limitations of this investigation as well as to expand it to associated areas. A longitudinal design may be applied and more than one data source could be tapped. Other categories of PS expatriates than middle managers may be targeted and preferably non-military personnel of another nationality than the U.S. A direct
comparison with private sector expatriates may also be warranted. Since comments from the DoD administrators indicated that language efficiency affected their ability to adjust, further studies could opt to examine the effect of belief in PS expatriates’ language ability (across many languages while holding the job constant) on expatriate adjustment (cf. Selmer, 2006).

Conclusions

As a pioneering study of the psychological adjustment of PS expatriates, the findings of this investigation contributes to the emerging literature on this little known group of expatriates. An important point of departure for this investigation is that the situation at work for PS expatriates may be moulded by the traditions of the public sector (Harris & Holden, 2001) with its bureaucracy, hierarchy, and rule enforcement (Parker & Bradley, 2000) and hence could be different than the corresponding job context for private sector expatriates. However, despite the generally burgeoning research on private sector expatriates, their psychological adjustment has not been studied very frequently and especially not in connection with job factors. Nevertheless, the tentative findings of this pioneering study mainly suggest that there may be a similar picture of PS expatriates compared with what is known about private sector expatriates. Among the personal characteristics, generally consistent with empirical evidence from private sector expatriates, both international experience and the effectiveness of preparatory training may not create much psychological wellbeing among PS expatriates as opposed to self-efficacy, which may promote their psychological adjustment. For the investigated job factors, role discretion and role clarity seem to be able to generate psychological comfort in PS and private sector expatriates alike. Even the suggested slight negative impact of role conflict and role overload on the psychological contentment of PS expatriates is in line with previous research on private sector expatriates. However, it can be concluded that more research on
both private and PS expatriates is warranted before a more definite answer can be reached regarding
similarities and discrepancies regarding what factors may affect their psychological adjustment.
REFERENCES


Army Regulation 611-60. Attaché Duty.


**Disclaimer**

The Department of Defense Office of Freedom of Information and Security Review (OFOISR) has cleared the open publication of this article. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.
## TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<th>8</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.28***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
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<td>.40***</td>
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<td>.16*</td>
<td>.30***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12.37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
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</table>

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001 (2-tailed)

1 169<n<175 due to missing answers.
TABLE 2: Results of Hierarchical Regression for Effects of Personal Characteristics and Job Factors on Psychological Adjustment

<table>
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<th>Psychological Adjustment</th>
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</table>

### Step 1 (Control)

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<td>( R )</td>
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<tr>
<td>( R^2 ) (adjusted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>( F )</td>
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</table>

### Step 2

**Personal Characteristics**

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</thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.15*</td>
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</table>

**Job Factors**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Role Conflict</td>
<td>-.14†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Overload</td>
<td>-.13‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Discretion</td>
<td>.24***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| \( R \)                      | .55  |
| Change in \( R^2 \)          | .30  |
| \( R^2 \) (adjusted)         | .27  |
| \( F \)                      | 8.63*** |

\(^a\) Regression coefficients are standardized

\(^†\) \( p < .10; \) \(^*\) \( p < .05; \) \(^**\) \( p < .01; \) \(^***\) \( p < .001; \) two-tailed