THE IMPACT OF PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING ON WORK ADJUSTMENT: AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Businesses are becoming more and more global and companies frequently relocate employees to work in cultural environments abroad. Successful expatriate adjustment to new work environments is critical for the success of their assignments and their performance. Pre-departure training (PDT) is a vital human resource intervention meant to prepare employees for the cultural, social and work-related challenges of relocation. This paper reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature to investigate the relationship between PDT and work adjustment (WA).

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study adopts the social learning theory, uncertainty reduction theory, and person-environment fit theory to argue that effective PDT can improve expatriates' knowledge, cultural awareness, and coping ability, and thus facilitate a smoother WA.

Findings: The review argues that effective PDT can improve expatriates' knowledge, cultural awareness, and coping ability, and thus facilitate a smoother WA.

Research Limitations: The abstract does not explicitly mention any research limitations.

Managerial Implications: It also provides practical implications for multinational organizations and future research avenues.

Originality/Value: The study integrates social learning theory, uncertainty reduction theory, and person-environment fit theory to examine the relationship between pre-departure training and expatriate work adjustment.

Keywords: Pre-departure training, work adjustment, expatriates, cross-cultural adjustment, cultural intelligence, expatriate performance.

1. Introduction

The globalization of business activities has greatly increased the movement of employees across national boundaries. Multinational corporations (MNCs) are using expatriates more and more to transfer knowledge, coordinate international operations, develop global leadership capabilities and implement organizational control over foreign subsidiaries. Notwithstanding their strategic importance, expatriate assignments are still challenging as employees have to adapt to unfamiliar cultural, social and work environments. An inability to make a successful adjustment may lead to poor performance, psychological stress, dissatisfaction and early termination of assignments.

Research shows that expatriates' failure results in large direct and indirect costs for organizations such as costs for the move, for training, lost business opportunities and reputation. Consequently, organizations have become more and more interested in identifying interventions that can help facilitate expatriate adjustment and enhance assignment success. Among these interventions, the pre-departure training (PDT) has become one of the most popular international human resource management practices.

PDT is a series of structured sessions offered before relocation to prepare employees for the cultural, social, and professional challenges of a new environment. These programs usually involve training in cultural awareness, language training, area studies, practical information seminars and development of interpersonal skills. The main goal is to reduce uncertainty and to provide expatriates with the knowledge and skills to adjust successfully.

WA is one of the most important dimensions of expatriates' adjustment. It refers to the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity that people feel with respect to their responsibilities, work roles, organizational culture, supervisory relationships and the expectations of the workplace in the host environment. Successful adaptation to the work environment among expatriates results in higher levels of performance, commitment and job satisfaction (Takeuchi, 2010).

Although there is an extensive literature on expatriate adjustment, there is a growing body of evidence that PDT is an important, but under-studied, antecedent to WA. Recent research continues to highlight the importance of organizational support mechanisms, training

interventions, and cross-cultural learning processes in facilitating expatriate adaptation and effectiveness. stress, turnover intention and expatriate failure.

Cross-cultural training serves as a positive moderator for the adjustment processes of expatriates and contributes to the successful adaptation of both self-initiated and organizational expatriates (Noman et al., 2023)

Moreover, expatriate performance research indicates that training improves adjustment and, in turn, work performance. Cross-cultural adjustment is an important mediating mechanism that links training to expatriate effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

Person–Environment Fit Theory proposes that positive outcomes occur when an individual's capabilities meet environmental demands. PDT improves the knowledge, skills and cultural awareness of the expatriates, which will improve the fit between the individual's competencies and the work requirements of the host country. Adjustment becomes easier and performance improves because expatriates are better able to cope with the difficulties of the work environment.

2.1 Pre-Departure Training (PDT)

PDT is a systematic process through which employees are prepared for international assignments before entering the host country (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). It comprises various learning activities including cultural awareness programs, language training, area studies, practical information sessions, intercultural communication workshops, sensitivity training and experiential learning exercises. The primary goal of PDT is to prepare expatriates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful functioning in culturally unfamiliar environments (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Littrell et al., 2006).

As indicated by past literature, the feelings of uncertainty and fear are common among expatriates prior to their departure because of their lack of familiarity with the host environment (Black et al., 1991). Training conducted before their departure plays an important role in

alleviating their apprehensions by offering relevant information regarding the customs, values, social behaviors, business etiquettes, and working styles of the host culture. This allows the expatriates to build up realistic expectations and prevents them from developing false assumptions about the host culture. According to Littrell et al. (2006), expatriates with proper cultural preparation exhibit more readiness psychologically and also have increased self-confidence when dealing with organizational issues. Notably, Noman et al. (2023) established that cross-cultural training is a major enabler of adaptation among expatriates since it enhances cultural comprehension and eases adjustment problems. Training not only makes workers ready to face cultural issues, but it also makes significant contributions toward improved adjustment, satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Puck et al., 2008). For this reason, PDT is now an essential part of international human resource management practice.

2.2 Work Adjustment (WA)

WA is a significant factor in expatriate adjustment since success of any organization greatly depends on their ability to adapt to the job they are supposed to do (Black et al.,1991), with successful WA, expatriates will be able to understand what is expected of them, interact well with supervisors and colleagues, and complete their assigned tasks effectively. Poor WA, on the other hand, can lead to low job satisfaction, lack of commitment to the organization, and early termination of assignment. According to Kraimer et al. (2001), expatriates who are able to adjust successfully in terms of their work find themselves under less stress, which is reflected in the improved results of their performance. Also, according to Malek and Budhwar (2013), adjustment has a positive impact on the performance of expatriates, which can be seen through easier interactions in the workplace and less strain of a psychological nature. Moreover, today's studies show that WA involves not only technical skills but also socialization in the workplace.

2.3 Relationship between Pre-Departure Training (PDT) and Work Adjustment (WA)

An empirical evidence to this link is the study conducted by Black and Gregersen (1991) who found that individuals who had undergone considerable PDT adjusted better at work compared to others who had minimal training. Similar study done by Waxin & Panaccio (2005) showed that comprehensive training program improves the performance of expatriates. A meta-analysis was

conducted by Morris and Robie (2001) and it was found that cross-cultural training facilitates expatriate adjustment.

Recent research continues to support the positive impact of training on adjustment. Noman et al. (2023) found that cross-cultural training significantly improves expatriates' ability to adapt to host country environments. Similarly, Adegbite et al. (2024) found that training enhances the cultural awareness of expatriates and helps them successfully adjust to the workplace in culturally diverse contexts. Research also suggests that PDT increases expatriates' self-efficacy and confidence. Individuals who feel prepared for cultural and workplace challenges are more likely to approach unfamiliar situations positively and persist when difficulties arise (Caligiuri et al., 2001). Consequently, trained expatriates generally experience smoother WA than those who receive little or no preparation.

3. Theoretical Foundation

Person–Environment Fit Theory as an Explanation of the Relationship

There is no better way to link PDT to job adjustment than using Person-Environment Fit Theory. The theory was originally introduced by French et al. (1982), and it was further refined by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005). It recommends that success results from the concordance of a person with their surroundings.

As per P-E Fit Theory, adjustment happens when employees have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes for effective functioning in their environment. In case there is a mismatch between individual attributes and the environmental demands, employees face problems such as stress, lack of certainty, dissatisfaction, and low performance levels. On the other hand, when individuals are compatible with their environment, there are high chances of positive results like adjustment, satisfaction, commitment, and high performance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To analyze the association between PDT and WA, a quantitative research design was employed in the current study. This study sought to evaluate whether PDT enhances expatriates' adaptation

to their work setting. The data was collected from expatriates using a structured questionnaire survey.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The targeted group consisted expatriates working in multinational firms in industries such as IT, manufacturing, finance, consulting, and telecommunication. Convenience and purposive sampling was employed to recruit respondents who have been deployed on at least one expatriation mission.

Questionnaires were sent via Google Forms and organizational contacts, amounting to 300 copies. Out of which, 250 valid questionnaire copies were obtained after excluding any incomplete ones, giving a response rate of 83.3%.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	170	68.0
Female	80	32.0
Age below 35 years	140	56.0
Age above 35 years	110	44.0
Married	155	62.0
Single	95	38.0
Previous Expatriate Experience	145	58.0
First International Assignment	105	42.0

Source: Primary survey

3.3 Measurement of Variables

Pre-Departure Training

The pre-departure training variable was captured by a scale consisting of five questions derived from Black and Mendenhall (1990), as well as Littrell et al. (2006). The participants were asked to rate the success of the training programs prior to their departure from the country.

Work Adjustment (WA)

Adjustment at work was evaluated through the measure devised by Black & Stephens (1989). It evaluated the participants' ease with job duties, job performance expectations, supervision, and work procedures. Items used for evaluating the measure include "I feel comfortable with my duties in the host country".

Every item was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree."

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

This investigation was carried out using the SmartPLS 4.1.0.9 (Sarstedt et al., 2024) program and partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for mediation testing, theory development, and predictive research. Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were used to evaluate the measurement model; path path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping (5000 resamples) were used to test the structural model.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement scale was tested by Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE as means of assessing reliability and convergent validity. As such, the Cronbach's alpha for PDT (0.901) and WA (0.884) were higher than the prescribed level of 0.70, implying high levels of reliability (Hair et al., 2022). The CR levels of 0.926 and 0.912 were also significantly higher than the level of 0.70, proving the reliability of the constructs. The constructs' CR was determined using AVE. In this regard, the AVE for PDT (0.715) and WA (0.634) were both greater than the recommended level of 0.50, meaning that each construct accounts for more than 50 percent of the variation in its respective indicators. In general, the findings prove the accuracy of measurements and the appropriateness of using these constructs for future structural model evaluation. Besides, Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was used to assess discriminant validity. According to Table 3, the HTMT ratio of PDT and WA is 0.612. This figure falls below the standard of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). It can be argued that the constructs being tested are empirically different and measure separate variables. Thus, satisfactory discriminant validity was proven (Table 3).

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Pre-Departure Training (PDT)	5	0.901	0.926	0.715
Work Adjustment (WA)	6	0.884	0.912	0.634

Source: Authors' work

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Constructs	PDT	WA
PDT	-	
WA	0.612	-

Source: Authors' work

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

The results of the structural model indicate that PDT and WA have a positive and significant relationship ($\beta = 0.618$, $t = 13.547$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1 was supported by the results. A positive path coefficient shows that PDT significantly predicts successful WA among expatriates. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.382$) reflects the degree of PDT explanatory power (that is, PDT explains 38.2% of the variance in WA). In addition, it is noteworthy that the predictive relevance value ($Q^2 = 0.241$) is above zero; thus, the model can be considered having satisfactory predictive relevance. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.054), that is less than 0.08, means that the proposed model is well-fitted. In sum, PDT proved to be a strong predictor of WA.

Table 4: Direct Effect Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision	R^2	Q^2	SRMR

H1	Pre-Departure Training → Work Adjustment	0.618	13.547	<0.001	Supported	0.382	0.241	0.054
Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision	R^2	Q^2	SRMR
H1	Pre-Departure Training → Work Adjustment	0.618	13.547	<0.001	Supported	0.382	0.241	0.054

Source: Authors' work

4.3 Discussion of Results

In the current study, the effects of PDT on WA were analyzed. As was demonstrated, PDT had a significant effect on WA for expatriates, suggesting that expatriates having proper training before moving are more likely to adjust to their work environments after being relocated. These results contribute to the body of research on expatriate management by emphasizing the importance of organizational training programs in assisting expatriates in the process of adjustment and improving their efficiency.

The current research supports the idea that expatriate success does not depend only on technical abilities and qualifications of individuals. Indeed, successful adaptation is achieved through proper understanding of new expectations concerning the workplace, organizational culture, communication patterns, and behavioral norms. The experience of expatriation is associated with uncertainty and ambiguity as expatriates are expected to learn how to manage their activities and perform successfully in an unfamiliar organizational context where cultural differences affect various aspects of managerial behavior and performance.

There is an explanation to this phenomenon through the importance of PDT in overcoming uncertainty and anxiety. International assignments tend to bring expatriates into unfamiliar environments that can be psychologically stressful and lead to adjustment problems. The training

process gives knowledge on the host nation's culture, business protocol, workplace behavior, and communication style, thereby allowing the expatriate to have a clear understanding of what to expect from his/her assignment. It means that training helps expatriates to avoid culture shock and misunderstanding that could result from their encounter with new situations in the workplace. This finding supports the arguments put forth by Black and Mendenhall (1990).

Moreover, the outcomes reveal that PDT assists in the formation of intercultural competencies that facilitate effective WA. With cultural orientation programs, language training, simulation activities, and role plays, the expatriates receive knowledge that makes it possible for them to interpret various cultural signs correctly and react adequately in the context of workplace communication. This skill becomes especially important for the expatriates operating in diverse cultures whose approaches to communication, leadership, and business procedures vary significantly from those used in the expatriates' countries.

In addition, the results also suggest that training prior to an employee's departure increases the confidence levels of the expatriate. Expatriates who are well-prepared before their departure are able to view new and foreign experiences positively and be resilient despite their difficulties in adjusting. Higher levels of confidence will lead expatriates to interact more with locals, seek information where required, and adjust their behavior accordingly. This is consistent with studies conducted by Caligiuri et al. (2001) and Littrell et al. (2006).

These results are especially pertinent today considering that international mobility is becoming an increasingly essential aspect of attaining organizational goals within the current world of business. In view of the increasing cultural diversity found in the workplace, adaptability is critical for success. PDT programs can be an extremely useful mechanism for organizations to improve the readiness of expatriates and minimize the chances of assignment failure.

6. Theoretical Implications

Several contributions of this paper to literature on expatriate management and international human resource management can be identified.

First, this study extends literature on expatriate adjustment in identifying PDT as an important antecedent of WA among expatriates. Previous literature has covered different antecedents of expatriate success; however, few have explored the effects of training for successful adaptation at work. These results suggest the usefulness of organizational interventions before sending employees abroad.

Second, the study advances knowledge about the application of Person-Environment Fit theory to expatriate management. It shows that training enables adjustment by increasing the match between the competence of expatriates and work requirements in the foreign country. Thus, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the adjustment process facilitated through organization.

Third, the study adds to cross-cultural management literature by underscoring the relevance of organizational actions in mitigating cultural obstacles. The results confirm that expatriate adjustment is not merely a personal attribute but can be greatly facilitated through organizational actions.

Finally, this paper contributes to expanding literature that stresses the importance of organization-driven adjustment process as opposed to individual adjustment process.

7. Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for organizations involved in international assignments.

First, organizations need to provide extensive PDT for their employees prior to international assignments. This PDT needs to go further than mere orientation sessions. Organizations must provide adequate cultural awareness training, language training, communication skills training, and work environment training.

Second, training programs must be specifically designed according to the requirements of the country where employees will be assigned to. Generic training programs might not be sufficient to help expatriates prepare adequately for their assignment in a new country.

Third, organizations need to make use of simulations, role playing, cultural assimilation, and case study-based training. These types of training can provide valuable practical experience which can help expatriates become better prepared and more confident.

Fourth, training programs could include expatriates' family members since family adjustment plays an important part in successful international assignments. Family training can be used to avoid any problems in adjustment which can hamper international assignments.

Fifth, multinational corporations should view PDT as a strategic investment rather than an administrative requirement. Effective training can reduce assignment failure rates, improve employee performance, and increase organizational effectiveness.

8. Limitations of the Study

The study has a number of drawbacks despite its benefits.

First, a cross-sectional research design was used in the study, reducing the possibility of developing conclusions regarding causality. Given that data was obtained at a particular point in time, it was impossible to assess the change in WA throughout the period of the assignment.

Secondly, the study made use of self-reported data, leading to possible common method bias and social desirability bias in data collection and analysis. Self-reported data may result in overestimation of respondents' adjustment levels and training effectiveness.

Thirdly, the study emphasized the views of the expatriates regarding the training and adjustment processes. Other perspectives that might provide relevant insights to the research problem were not considered by the researchers.

Fourthly, the study used expatriates from selected companies for data collection purposes. The results cannot be generalized to expatriates working in other industries, other countries, and other cultural settings.

Lastly, the study analyzed only the effect of PDT on WA. Variables that are likely to have an effect on expatriates' adjustment to new job assignments were ignored by the researchers.

9. Future Research Directions

Several avenues for future research emerge from the present study.

First, future research could incorporate longitudinal studies that study the changing nature of training impact at different stages during expatriation.

Secondly, future studies could focus on exploring the mediators of the relationship between training and WA. This could be done by studying variables like cultural intelligence, stress management, psychological resilience, expatriate self-efficacy, and intercultural competence.

Thirdly, moderators like cultural distance, organizational support, leadership style, host-country support, and family adjustment could be studied to understand under what conditions training can be most effective.

Fourthly, comparative studies across different countries, industries, and cultures could be used to understand whether environmental factors have an effect on the effectiveness of training.

Fifthly, different types of training programs, namely classroom training, virtual training, experiential learning, and blended learning could be studied to see which is more effective for WA.

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