

Enhancing Expatriate Adjustment and Performance Through Pre-Departure Training: An Empirical Investigation On Indonesian Migrant Workers In South Korea

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ENHANCING EXPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract

Pre-Departure Training (PDT) was considered as a crucial event to conduct before sending expatriates for international assignment to ease their adjustment process, improve their performance, and prevent problems that could lead to expatriate failures. However, studies regarding the impact of Pre-Departure Training (PDT) on expatriate adjustment and their performance revealed inconsistent findings. Therefore, this study aims to clarify the inconsistency of findings by investigating how pre-departure training affects expatriate adjustment and their performance during expatriation by adding additional data support from Indonesian migrant workers in South Korea.

An online questionnaire was administered to 155 Indonesian migrant workers who have been joining G2G (Government to Government) program to South Korea. The data was analyzed using path analysis. The result shows that pre-departure training has positive and significant effect on both expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance. Moreover, the mediating role of expatriate adjustment in the relationship between pre-departure training and expatriate performance is confirmed.

Keywords: pre-departure training, expatriate, migrant workers, expatriate adjustment, expatriate performance.

1. Introduction

International assignment does not always end up successfully. It may end up in failed expatriation and can also cause the company loss, remembering the cost to send or either requesting expatriate is relatively high. It even costs three times more than hiring local workers in management level (Shaffer, et al., 1999).

Shay and Tracey (1997) did a study which explains the reasons for expatriate failure and how company or government may overcome it through training program. According to the study, the main problem of expatriate failure was in the expatriate adjustment process (Shay & Tracey, 1997). Furthermore, Shay and Tracey (1997) also analyzed the desirable attributes of an expatriate. It showed that people skills and adaptability process were the most significant

attributes. It is clear that the adjustment process is very important issue that a company should consider when hiring expatriates (Shay & Tracey, 1997).

Due to the importance of the successful adjustment process and the risk of expatriate failures, Indonesian government develops a training program as an obligation before expatriates' departure. It gives the participant courses that introduce them to host country cultures, enhance their language skills, and give them new knowledge that could ease their adjustment process during their overseas assignment.

However, previous research regarding the impact of pre-departure training seems to be inconsistent in the result although most of them demonstrated positive result on the adjustment process. Black and Mendenhall (1990) reviewed 9 studies regarding pre-departure cross-cultural training towards adjustment. They found it has positive relationships with both adjustment process and expatriate performance. Meanwhile, Puck, Kittler, and Wright (2008) found that the positive impact of cross-cultural training participation and its comprehensiveness towards expatriate adjustment is not confirmed, making pre-departure training slightly important and not crucial (Puck, et al., 2008).

Therefore, this study aims to examine how pre-departure training affects expatriate adjustment and their performance during expatriation, with Indonesian migrant workers in South Korea on labor levels as the unit of analysis. In addition, this study aims to clarify the inconsistency of findings regarding the effect of pre-departure training on variables mentioned earlier by adding additional data support. Thus, we could conclude whether PDT is beneficial or not, remembering the cost to conduct a training is not cheap. Since the majority of previous studies were done with lower until top management level, this study is conducted on different levels of unit analysis to get different perspectives that might open further research in the future.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1. Pre-Departure Training

Training could be defined as every effort planned well with an objective to facilitate the learning process of job-related knowledge, skills, and behavior of organization's member (Noe & Gerhart, 2003). Afterwards, Bernardin and Russell (1998) explained additional criteria for the training, that it must improve employee performance on their currently held job or any job related to the training in the future. To be effective, training should be designed to meet employee's needs of knowledge, skill, behaviour for the assigned job whether it comes in the present or in the future (Bernardin & Russell, 1998).

On the other hand, pre-departure training appears as a preparation method for expatriates to face expatriation. It can be defined as series of events and activities conducted in order to improve several knowledge, skills, and behavior, specifically to help them perform well in expatriation. Those knowledge, skills, and behavior lessons could be presented as cultural awareness, culturally appropriate behaviour, inter-cultural skill, and a positive perspective towards other culture (Levy, 1995).

Essentially, pre-departure training or shortly called PDT can also be considered as pre-departure cross-cultural training since, the material taught in it mostly contains cross-cultural knowledge, skill, and behaviour. Another reason is because expatriates will certainly face a situation in the host country where they must work in a new environment with different culture than them and will often meet new people who have different culture than them as well. Therefore, cross-cultural training prepares them to face such situation effectively.

19

Puck, Kittler, and Wright (2008) assessed the impact of the training. In their study, PDT does not have a significant impact on expatriate adjustment, even though the impact is not negative. They also explained PDT dimensions as a whole evaluation criterion of the PDT itself (Puck, et al., 2008), including: expatriate participation upon training, training duration, training intensity, and training comprehensiveness.

The same research result came from Martins & Tome (2015), where companies and expatriates do not feel the urgency of pre-departure training. Moreover, a company claims that those kind of trainings could increase the refusal of employee to go to expatriation. In fact, some expatriates still encounter adjustment difficulties in linguistic and cultural aspects, especially for those who receive overseas assignment in a country that has significant cultural distance from their homeland (Martins & Tome, 2015).

Furthermore, Waxin & Pannacio (2005) posited that the more cultural distance from origin to host country is, the more the impact of cross-cultural training can be seen clearly. They found the pre-departure cross-cultural training has a positive impact on expatriates adaptation process. This phenomenon has made pre-departure training impact even more questionable.

2.2. *Expatriate Adjustment*

Expatriate can be defined as a person who stays or resides in a country that is not his/her native country (Oxford University, 2018). However, the term often refers to skilled workers, professionals, or even artists who reside/stay in another country, either because of personal business or even sent abroad by their employers, which can be universities, companies, governments, or other typical organizations (Castree, et al., 2013).

Moreover, according to Oxford University (2018), there is a slight difference between expatriate and migrant. While expatriate refers to a person who moves or stays for a while in a foreign country, migrant is described more specifically into what we are looking for. Since migrant means a person who moves from one place to another (could be a city, region or even country) in order to find work or better living conditions, thus they are also called migrant workers. However, this definition must not be a big problem for this research because expatriate can have the same meaning as migrant workers depends on the situation and the expert who explain them. The point is, expatriates are the main set of object for this research which would be people who move from their country to other country in order to find job opportunities.

15

Afterwards, expatriate adjustment can be defined as psychological comfort ness degree of a person towards various aspects of a new environment or new setting during their expatriation

(Black, 1988). Adjustment is an important aspect of every living being, either it is human or animal, or even plant in biological terms. In psychological terms, adjustment is very crucial if a person wanted to have a high-quality life. Those who are unable to adjust well enough tend to have clinical anxiety or even suffer depression. (Ward & Kennedy, 1994).

Successful adjustment from psychological perspective can be seen as a person who has the synthesized criteria from the Riddler, Geenen, Kuijer, and van Middendorp's study (de Ridder, et al., 2008), those are: the ability to adequately function, the ability to perform adaptive tasks, high positive affect and low negative affect, general satisfaction in various life domains, and the absence of debilitating psychological orders.

From the explanation earlier it can be synthesized that expatriate adjustment refers to the degree of psychological comfortness and familiarity of an expatriate towards various aspects in new environment or new setting that one will encounter in expatriation. Afterwards, experts tried to explain how adjustment can take part in expatriate life during expatriation. Black (1988) divided adjustment process into three dimensions to relate more in expatriate context including general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment.

Several research related to PDT and its correlation towards adjustment process showed that PDT has positive and significant impact on the adjustment process that expatriates will encounter in the destination country (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Wang & Tran, 2012; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009). This can be done through briefing expatriates with information regarding the foreign aspects that they will encounter, for instance, transportation system, housing ethics, food and beverages, and such. Thus, expatriates can prepare themselves to encounter it later in expatriation. In addition, the more cultural distance it has from origin to host country, the more impact of cross-cultural training or pre-departure training can be seen clearly (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Therefore, we expect pre-departure training to have positive impact towards expatriate adjustment.

Hypothesis 1: Pre-departure training positively affects expatriate adjustment

2.3. Expatriate Performance

Performance or job performance can be defined as a person's action that is observable and inline or relevant with organization objective (Campbell, et al., 1990). Shortly, performance is a person's ability to accomplish certain given task.

In the workplace, performance or job performance means good ranking with hypothesized conception of requirements of a role. Job performance, later on, is divided into two types, contextual performance and task performance (Robertson & Cooper, 2015). Task performance can be recognized and related to cognitive ability, while the contextual performance is dependent upon personality. Furthermore, task performance is recognized in job descriptions and related directly to organizational performance. Meanwhile, contextual performance is not recognized in job descriptions, but indirectly related to organizational performance.

Furthermore, the picture of task performance can be simplified into any achievement/capability of an employee regarding his task accomplishment. That is why benefits of the task performance can directly affect the organization or company of the employee.

Meanwhile, contextual performance can be simplified into employee interpersonal and motivational capability, that drives them into creating a good work-relationship in the company by raising the relationship through helping each other's tasks (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996). Thus, employees can do their work more effectively due to the relationship building through contextual performance. This performance can give indirect impact or benefits towards the company/organization.

The task and contextual performance are identified by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) in their study as dimensions of general job performance among workers (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Yet, since the study was related to expatriate performance, the dimensions thereafter, must be adapted to expatriate conditions. A study conducted by Ones and Viswesvaran (1997), found that they seem to have similar things regarding dimensions of job performance itself. In addition, they adapted it into expatriation concept and came with two dimensions regarding expatriate success, those are specific task requirement fulfillment and developing relations with host country nationals (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997).

PDT also helps expatriates prepare the skills needed to perform well at their workplace. This can be done through skills briefing and training before departure or by doing on the job training. Thus, they are already adjusted to jobs that they must do during expatriation later. Certain research had proved it right that pre-departure training has positive and significant impact towards expatriate performance, either directly (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) or indirectly through adjustment process (Wang & Tran, 2012). Therefore, we expect that pre-departure training has positive impact towards expatriate performance.

Hypothesis 2: Pre-departure training positively affects expatriate performance

Furthermore, expatriates adjustment process could be a mediator for pre-departure training towards expatriate performance. Several research also proved that expatriate adjustment can directly or partially influence expatriate performance (Wang & Tran, 2012; Hassan & Diallo, 2013). This relationship can possibly exist by successful transition to new cultural environment which helps individuals to perform in their job, as more energy and focus can be given in accomplishing the task (Ramalu, et al., 2010). Thus, we expect that expatriate adjustment has positive impact towards expatriate performance, either directly, or as a mediator for pre-departure training.

Hypothesis 3: Expatriate adjustment positively affects expatriate performance

Hypothesis 4: Pre-departure training positively affect expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

The population of this study is Indonesian migrant workers who have been joining G2G (Government to Government) program to South Korea. G2G program is an expatriation program facilitated by Indonesian and South Korean government through bilateral cooperation in two sectors of work, including fisheries and manufacture. An online survey was administered to 155 Indonesian migrant workers in South Korea.

3.2 Measures

A customized four point Likert scale was used as a measurement tool in the questionnaire with 34 measurement statements. Those 34 measurement statements came from 3 variables. All statements were developed using four-point Likert scale that ranged from one for “Very Disagree” until four for “Very Agree”.

Pre-departure training consists of 8 indicators from Tung (1982) including geography information, climate information, housing, cultural orientation, value systems, intercultural encounters, language, and attitude flexibility. The Cronbach’s alpha for PDT variable was 0.943. Moreover, expatriate adjustment was assessed using 7 indicators from Black (1988) including local weather condition, local food and beverages, local transportation systems, current job and responsibilities, local host senior in workplace, working with local host working partners, and interacting with local host generally. The Cronbach’s alpha score was 0.832.

Lastly, expatriate performance is derived from 9 indicators from Kraimer and Wayne (2004), for instance meeting job objectives, overall job performance, meeting performance standards and expectations, technical competence, meeting specific job responsibilities, interacting with host country coworkers, establishing relationships with key host country business contacts, adapting to foreign facility’s business customs and norms, and interacting with coworkers with different cultures. The Cronbach’s alpha for expatriate performance variable was 0.901.

Furthermore, the data analysis technique used in this study is inferential statistics. It is used to find out the impact of researched variables on a sample, pull some analysis from it, and generalize the result to the populations. Correlational and verificative analysis are used in this study to see the relationship between variables, as well as to clarify the previous research findings.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using path analysis (mediated regression analysis) (Rossee, 2012). Path analysis used in this study could also be called mediated regression analysis. It is advanced regression analysis that conducted with an intervening variable that mediates the direct impact of the independent variable to the dependent variable, thus they called it indirect effect.

The analysis is conducted using STATCAL software, a statistic data processing application. STATCAL is developed using R programming language in R studio which commonly used to run statistical and graphics computation process.

4. Results

Hypothesis testing could be done by looking at path analysis main result, specifically by looking at the value of path coefficient or beta (β) and p-value of each path analysis. The path coefficient value in path analysis indicates whether the path shows a positive relationship between two variables or a negative one. It also shows how much one variable affects/influences other variables in the model. The p-value, or we can call it T statistic test is done to see whether a relationship between two variable is significant or not by comparing the probability value of T statistic/p-value (Sig.) towards the proposed hypothesis confidence level. The significance level or alpha (α) used in this study is 5% (0,05). Thus, the proposed hypothesis as listed below:

- a. Hypothesis 1: PDT positively affects ADJ
 $H_{0.1}: p(\beta_1) = 0$; Pre-departure training does not affect expatriate adjustment
 $H_{1.1}: p(\beta_1) \neq 0$; Pre-departure training affects expatriate adjustment
- b. Hypothesis 2: PDT positively affects PER
 $H_{0.2}: p(\beta_2) = 0$; Pre-departure training does not affect expatriate performance
 $H_{1.2}: p(\beta_2) \neq 0$; Pre-departure training affects expatriate performance
- c. Hypothesis 3: ADJ positively affects PER
 $H_{0.3}: p(\beta_3) = 0$; Expatriate adjustment does not affect expatriate performance
 $H_{1.3}: p(\beta_3) \neq 0$; Expatriate adjustment affects expatriate performance
- d. Hypothesis 4: PDT positively affects PER through ADJ
 $H_{0.4}: p(\beta_4) = 0$; Pre-departure training does not affect expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment
 $H_{1.4}: p(\beta_4) \neq 0$; Pre-departure training affects expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment

Hypothesis testing criteria:

- 1. If the probability value or p-value (Sig.) < significance level (α), thus H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted
- 2. If the probability value or p-value (Sig.) > significance level (α), thus H_0 is accepted and H_a is rejected

The output of analysis is displayed on Table 1:

Table 1 Output of Analysis

Standardized Parameter Estimates								
No	lhs op	rhs	Est.std	se	Z	p-value	ci.lower	ci.upper
1	ADJ ~	PDT	0.365	0.067	5.430	0.000	0.233	0.497
2	PER ~	PDT	0.176	0.062	2.846	0.004	0.055	0.297
3	PER~	ADJ	0.603	0.052	11.496	0.000	0.500	0.706
7	a1i1 :=	a1*i1	0.220	0.045	4.894	0.000	0.132	0.308

a. Hypothesis 1: PDT positively affects ADJ

According to Table 1, pre-departure training has path coefficient towards expatriate adjustment, equals to positive 0.365. It means that pre-departure training has a positive influence on

expatriate adjustment. Furthermore, the direct influence of pre-departure training towards expatriate adjustment has a p-value of 0.000 < significance level 0.05, thus H_0 could be rejected. It also means that pre-departure training has positive and significant effect on expatriate adjustment. This confirms the acceptance of H1.

b. Hypothesis 2: PDT positively affects PER

According to Table 1, pre-departure training has path coefficient towards expatriate performance, equals to positive 0.176. It means that pre-departure training has a positive influence on expatriate performance. Furthermore, the direct influence of pre-departure training towards expatriate performance has a p-value of 0.004 < significance level 0.05. Thus, H_0 can be rejected. It also means that pre-departure training has positive and significant effect on expatriate performance. Thus, we can accept H2.

c. Hypothesis 3: ADJ positively affects PER

Based on the output table, expatriate adjustment has path coefficient towards expatriate performance, equals to positive 0.603. It means that expatriate adjustment has a positive influence on expatriate performance. Furthermore, the direct influence of expatriate adjustment towards expatriate performance has a p-value of 0.000 < significance level 0.05, thus H_0 can be rejected. It also means that expatriate adjustment has positive and significant effect on expatriate performance. This indicates the acceptance of H3.

d. Hypothesis 4: PDT positively affects PER through ADJ (indirect impact)

Table 1 shows pre-departure training has indirect path coefficient towards expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment, equals to positive 0.220. It means that pre-departure training has an indirect positive influence on expatriate performance. Moreover, the indirect influence of pre-departure training towards expatriate performance through expatriate adjustment has a p-value of 0.000 < significance level 0.05, thus H_0 can be rejected. It also means that pre-departure training is significantly related to expatriate performance indirectly through expatriate adjustment as a mediator. Thus, we can conclude that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between pre-departure training and expatriate performance which confirms H4.

5. Discussion

Indonesia-South Korea G2G program has a government facilitated pre-departure training that becomes mandatory for the assignees. It delivers certain materials including South Korean language, introduction to Korean history and cultures, financial education, work safety, standard labour contract, and such, in order to anticipate cross-cultural adjustment problems and enhance their performance.

The Government as a facilitator seems to be successful in briefing Indonesian Expatriates with information and skills needed that ease expatriates adjustment process through the PDT. Even though the program was majorly focused on language training while participants have already taught it for many hours. Yet, it seems the language training that has 25 training hours portion on training schedule helps them a lot, by covering one aspect of adjustment for instance interactions with local host, that had been explained by Wang and Tran in 2012. Furthermore, the interactions

adjustment could cover the rest aspect, for instance, when expatriate could interact fluently with the locals, they could ask things that they should know, namely Halal Foods for Muslims, thus the expatriates could adjust with local food more easily. This interaction adjustment also could lead a benefit to work roles adjustment, due to the easiness of interaction with host local working partners, asking help and feedback would not be a big problem anymore, and in no matter of time expatriates will be adjusted to their work roles (Wang & Tran, 2012).

However, previous studies showed different results regarding the impact of pre-departure training. Some of them successfully enhanced expatriate adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Wang & Tran, 2012). Other literatures also found the effect of PDT on expatriate performance (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Wang & Tran, 2012). Moreover, an indirect impact of PDT towards performance through adjustment process had been explained by Wang and Tran (2012). Yet, some of them were resulting in insignificant results (Puck, Kittler, & Wright, 2008; Martins & Tome, 2015; Qin & Baruch, 2010). These results made the benefits of PDT even more questionable, while expatriates confess that they felt difficulties in adjusting during their expatriation (Martins & Tome, 2015).

Nevertheless, the results show that pre-departure training has positive influence towards expatriate adjustment and performance directly. In other words, we can say that the training may successfully enhance expatriate adjustment and performance in all of its aspects, not only in the interaction adjustment facets as we thought before. Furthermore, expatriate adjustment in their expatriation has been proven to be impactful on their performance, both directly or as mediator for PDT impact. This means that the training conducted for South Korean G2G expatriates has covered information, skill, knowledge, and behavior needed for expatriates to adjust themselves and perform well in expatriation.

In addition, we find that this type of PDT which is very concerned about expatriates language ability is the primary key either for expatriate's adjustment or performance. This might be the same thing that Wang and Tran (2012) had explained in their study, that language training has significant impact on interaction adjustment, and the interaction adjustment afterwards becomes a mediator for PDT towards expatriate performance.

The logical explanation that can be generated from this phenomenon is PDT that concerns more about language training than other materials can enhance their interaction capability with local host. For example, if they wanted to adjust with local transportation system, they could ask for help or direction. Thus, they could adjust faster than those who are not capable to communicate with the locals. This could also affect work adjustments facet in the similar case of asking guidance and socializing with coworkers.

Moreover, work adjustment that can be enhanced by interaction adjustment is a good mediator for expatriate job performance. Due to expatriates enhanced capability of interaction, it can also affect their performance, specifically in contextual performance, where it is focused on how expatriates build a good relationship among their working partners. With good capability of

interacting with local host using their local language, they can easily ask for guidance, help, or even interact with each other fluently. As a result, it will be easy for them to blend in and create a good relationship with coworkers.

Furthermore, after expatriates adjust themselves in all facets (work, general life, and interaction) and make good relationship among their working partners during expatriation, their energy to adjust now can be focused more on completing their tasks and jobs. As a result, it can enhance them in task performance, completing all facets of expatriates job performance, as said by Ramalu et al. (2010). That is the logical explanation that might explain why PDT should focus more on language training. It is because interaction adjustment enhanced by the language training is the mediating key to enhance all their facets either in adjustment or even in their job performance during expatriation. However, PDT is not all about language training, proven by questionnaire response, but can also cover information, knowledge, skills, and behaviour guides needed for them to survive and achieve success in expatriation.

6. Conclusion

The verificative analysis ⁸ shows that pre-departure training has positive and significant influence on expatriate adjustment. Thus, we can conclude that the better pre-departure training, the easier it is for expatriates to adjust themselves in expatriation later. Furthermore, pre-departure training is also proven significantly to have a positive influence on expatriate adjustment. Thus, we can conclude that the better pre-departure training is developed, the more the expatriates are prepared to do their job assignment, which can lead to optimized expatriates in either accomplishing job assignments or establishing and maintaining a good relationship among working partners in their workplace.

Afterwards, the result shows ⁹ that expatriate adjustment has a positive influence on expatriate performance. Thus, we can conclude that the easier or the better the adjustment process of an expatriate, the better their performance would be, either in accomplishing job assignments or establishing and maintaining good relationships among working partners in their workplace. The last finding shows that expatriate adjustment significantly and positively mediates the relationship between pre-departure training and expatriate performance. Thus, we can conclude that better preparation training in the pre-departure training affects their adjustment process and leads them to optimize their expatriate performance during their overseas assignment.

In order to maximize the impact of Pre-departure Training, it would be better if the government could add a material to introduce South Korea's actual condition, namely cultures, weather, transportation, and others by providing a sharing session with G2G program Alumnus that already came home and finished the contract. The sharing session hopefully could fulfill the needs of information and skill to survive during expatriation from the actual perspective.

7. Limitation

This study has limitations to acknowledge. First, every respondent commenced his/her job at different times. The time gap between their commencing period and the time they answer the questionnaire insists them to remember their adjustment process in the earlier months when they arrived on expatriation. It would be better if future research involves expatriates who depart on

the same batch and measures the variables during their adjustment period.

In addition, this study only observes expatriates of G2G program to South Korea, while Indonesia has another G2G program with Japan. For future research, it is recommended to analyze another G2G program conducted between Indonesia and Japan. Moreover, it is also encouraged to compare the cultural distance between South Korea and Japan and its effect on expatriate adjustments to get more insights.

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