



## CHAPTER 6

### INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher has to be careful not to make snap judgments about the data he/she has collected, as the most thorough research effort can go astray when conclusions are drawn from the data. The interpretation of the data is the essence of the research. Chapter 6 presents an interpretation and discussion of the findings recorded in chapter 5. The focus of the discussion will be on:

- Relating the findings to the original research problem and the specific research questions and hypotheses.
- Relating the findings to pre-existing literature and research studies.
- Determining whether the findings have practical significance, i.e. whether the findings are usable.

#### 6.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

##### 6.2.1 The “intention to separate” in the sample

*Is the group of respondents who have the intention to separate from the foreign assignment in the sample, either through quitting (turnover intention) or by returning before completing the foreign assignment (propensity to return prematurely) significant?*

The findings indicate that 46,48% of the participants report an intention to quit and that 26,76% of the participants report an intention to return prematurely. From the 26,76% participants who indicated an intention to return prematurely, 68,42% indicated an intention to quit. If the participants' intentions translate into actual labour turnover and premature return, and research confirms that most probably it will (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Steel & Ovalle, 1984), it will create problems and expenses for the multinational organisations. Separation from

the organisation through labour turnover while on, or shortly after, being on a foreign assignment and separation from the foreign assignment through the premature return of an expatriate from the host country to the home country is operationally termed, for the purpose of the study, expatriate failure. The high cost and high rates of expatriate failure were set out in chapter 1. The high percentages for intention to separate in the study confirm the rationale for and importance of the research study as set out in chapter 1.

The percentages for intention to quit and propensity to return early in the study are aligned with the expatriate failure rates published in international and South African literature. Hawley (2005:1) states that between 25 and 40 percent of South African expatriate managers end their assignments early and Hill (2003:612) suggests that between 16 and 40 percent of American employees sent abroad to developed countries return from their assignments early while almost 70 percent of American employees sent to developing countries return home early. Naumann *et al.* (2000:227) indicate that 25 percent of returned expatriates leave the parent company within one year of repatriation. Harzing (1995:458), after intensive debate on the empirical foundation of the high levels of expatriate failure rates, concludes that the problem is not so serious, but it is worthy of further attention.

The findings of this study do indicate unacceptably high levels of separation intention in South Africa, therefore, a red light is flashing for South African multinationals to investigate the phenomenon properly and take proactive action. It is important to note that the intention to quit does differ between the expatriates stationed in Africa (51%) and the expatriates stationed in Europe, United States and Australia (36%). There seems to be truth in the claim that the failure rates are higher for expatriates stationed in developing countries in comparison with those in developed countries. Taking into account that most South African multinational organisations spread their wings into Africa, South African multinationals are faced with an even greater challenge of managing the processes of expatriation and repatriation successfully.

## 6.2.2 Differences between groups of participants

*Are there statistically significant differences between the group of participants who have an intention to quit and the group of participants who do not have an intention to quit; and among the following demographic groups based on: age, gender, marital status and educational level?*

The question seeks to establish the difference between the mean scores of the different work-related attitudes (independent variables) of the various selected groups. The mean scores of the work-related attitudes and the different groups do not differ significantly except for the following:

- **Intention to quit:** The means of the participants who have no intention to quit are significantly higher for the predictor variables; feedback, absence of role conflict, the job itself and co-workers. In comparing the means and standard deviations of the demographic variables from the group who indicated an intention to quit, with the group who did not indicate an intention to quit, the only significant statistic is the mean difference on experience in international assignments. The participants who do not indicate an intention to quit have a higher mean score than the participants who have an intention to quit. In other words, on average the non-quitters have more international experience than the quitters. Interesting to note is that there is no difference in the means for work pressure for the two groups.
- **Gender:** The means of the male group are significantly higher for the predictor variables; skill variety and job involvement. The mean of the female group is significantly higher for the predictor variable expectations.
- **Marital status:** The means of the never married group are significantly higher for the predictor variables; feedback, co-workers, expectations and promotional opportunity.
- **Age:** The means of the younger age groups are significantly higher for the predictor variable; promotional opportunity.
- **Educational level:** The means of the lower qualified groups are significantly higher for the predictor variables; supervision, compensation package and organisational commitment.

It can thus be concluded that the intention to quit is influenced by the quantity and quality of feedback an expatriate receives on how well he or she is doing, how clear the expatriate is on his/her role in the foreign assignment and the absence of role conflict. The extent to which the job provides the expatriate with stimulating tasks, opportunity for learning and personal growth and the chance to be held responsible and accountable for results (the job itself) and the extent to which co-workers are supportive are also significant. It also seems as if international experience contributes to expatriates' intention to stay. The implication is that, if all other needs are met and experienced expatriates are on international assignments, the more likely the chances are of retaining these expatriates on a foreign assignment. When selecting expatriates, multinational corporations should consider hiring people with expatriate experience. Perhaps this experience can be related to realistic expectations.

Further implications for multinational corporations are that male expatriates need skill variety and job involvement, while female expatriates want their expectations to be met. Unmarried expatriates place greater emphasis on receiving feedback, co-workers, expectations and promotional opportunities, than their married counterparts. Younger expatriates value promotional opportunities, while less qualified expatriates, who rely more on fair supervision and compensation packages, tend to value organisational commitment more than more qualified expatriates.

Although job involvement, as one of the independent variables in the study, does not find much statistical support as a predictor of the intention to quit, the male participants rate it as an important variable. Blau (1985b:19) describes job involvement as the extent to which a person identifies psychologically with his or her job and considers his or her performance level as a reflection of self-worth. A person with a high level of job involvement will have a strong sense of "belonging" in the specific job, and will want to perform well. It seems that male expatriates rate their jobs as important to their self-image, as they identify with them and view them as a central life interest.

### 6.2.3 The correlation between work-related attitudes and the intention to quit.

*Is there a relationship between the various job attitudes measured in the study and the intention to quit, and what is the direction and the strength of the relationship?*

The pattern of correlations, although not totally significant, is what can be expected when referring to the literature. The intention to quit is negatively correlated with most of the aspects related to job satisfaction (job characteristics, absence of role conflict and role ambiguity, the job itself, supervision, co-workers and compensation package) and organisational commitment. This implies that if the above work-related aspects are present in the work environment the likelihood of quitting will decrease. Job involvement though, in contradiction to other similar research studies, does not show a negative correlation with the intention to quit. The strongest negative correlations with the intention to quit are a challenging job (-.391), the absence of role conflict (-.369) and supportive co-workers (-.349). All three correlations are significant at  $p < .01$ . The effect of these correlations will be considered to be medium according to the cut-off points of Cohen (1988). According to Cohen (1988), the following cut-off points in terms of the correlation coefficient are recognized as practically significant (independent of the direction of the relationship):  $r = .10$  small effect,  $r = .30$  medium effect and  $r = .50$  large effect.

Additionally, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are significantly related to several predictor variables. The highest correlations for the various aspects of job satisfaction are with met expectations (ranging from .273 to .638), and the highest correlations for organisational commitment are with met expectations (.638), a challenging job (.506), supervision (.387), and promotional opportunities (.446).

In a study conducted by Naumann *et al.* (2000), he and his colleagues find that the propensity to leave a foreign assignment is negatively correlated with job satisfaction (-.41), organisational commitment (-.43), and job involvement (-.31). Additionally, each of the three attitudes is significantly related to several predictor variables. The highest correlations for job satisfaction are with role ambiguity (-.45), task significance (.39), met expectations (.36), task identity (.35), autonomy (.33), role conflict (-.31) and participation (.30). The highest correlations for organisational

commitment are with role ambiguity (-.51), participation (.41), role conflict (-.38), met expectations (.33) and the value of expatriate training (.31). The highest correlations for job involvement are with participation (.28), met expectations (.22) and skill variety (.21).

It can be concluded that multinational corporations can foster positive work-related attitudes in expatriates through providing challenging jobs, managing role conflict, ensuring supportive co-workers, clarifying and meeting expectations, following sound supervisory practices and providing promotional opportunities.

#### 6.2.4 Predicting the intention to quit

*Are there specific aspects of work-related attitudes that will predict the intention to quit?*

Although the independent variables are correlated, judgments about the relative importance of these predictors are difficult. However, the results of the logistic regression show that a challenging job, the absence of role conflict and promotional opportunities have the strongest influence on the intention to quit. This alone accounts for 37,5 percent of the variance of the intention to leave with statistical significance ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). As the overall accuracy of the model is 74,6%, it can be concluded that a challenging job, the absence of role conflict and promotional opportunities are strong predictors of an expatriate's intention to quit.

These findings correspond well with the researched literature. Literature indicates that **the job itself** - the extent to which the job provides the individual with stimulating tasks, opportunities for learning and personal growth, and the opportunity to be responsible and accountable for results and **promotional opportunities** - the opportunities for promotion and advancement in the organisation, not necessarily associated with hierarchical progress in the organisation, but including opportunities for lateral movement and growth; have been associated with job attitudes (Schleicher, Watt & Greguras, 2004:165).

### 6.2.5 Aspects perceived by South African expatriates as critical to their adjustment.

*Are there specific work-related aspects that are perceived by the participants as critical to their adjustment while on a foreign assignment?*

The responses to the open-ended questions on what makes adjustment easier, and what makes adjustment difficult, reveal the following:

- **Adjustment is easier** when there are commitment to the vision of the organisation (shared vision), supportive co-workers, good supervision, teamwork, a challenging job, reasonable compensation package, a favourable work environment, pre-departure training, fluency in language of host country, family and organisational support, supportive social environment and well-disposed host country parameters.
- **Adjustment is difficult** when there are local language barriers, the absence of familiar social relationships, xenophobia (dislike of foreigners), unsettled family life, cultural differences both in the work environment and the social environment, unmet expectations, a lack of support received from the organisation, inclement weather conditions and absence of everyday commodities such as types of food and medical services.

The findings of the qualitative data analysis correspond with the findings of the quantitative data analysis. This confirms the aspects that are perceived by the participants as critical to their adjustment while on a foreign assignment and allows the researcher to confidently make conclusions regarding the critical aspects influencing job attitudes.

As the purpose of the study is to identify the work-related aspects that facilitate expatriate adjustment, the above aspects are classified into work-related, person-related and other-related variables. See Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1: Aspects related to expatriate adjustment**

<b>Work-related adjustment variables</b>	<b>Person-related adjustment variables</b>	<b>Other-related adjustment variables</b>
Shared vision	Fluency in host country	Host country parameters
Congenial co-workers	language	Friendly supportive host
Supervision	Family support and presence	country nationals
Teamwork	Social relationships	Opportunity to see new places
Challenging job	Settled family life	Weather
Compensation package	Cross-cultural adaptation	Medical services
Work environment	Acceptance in host country	Living conditions
Sufficient pre-departure training	Types of food	Technology and infrastructure
Organisational support practices	Home-sickness	
Diversity management	Met Expectations	
Absence of xenophobia		
Met Expectations		

It is interesting to note that when the question is posed about what makes adjustment easier, the majority of responses are job-related, but when the question is posed about what makes adjustment difficult, the majority of responses are person-related. It seems that the variables that facilitate adjustment are not the same variables that hamper adjustment. What makes a person adjust is not the same as what makes a person fail to adjust. This principle relates to the controversial two-factor theory of Frederick Herzberg. Herzberg's theory is based on two basic needs: (1) the need for psychological growth or motivating factors; and (2) the need to avoid pain or hygiene factors (Samad, 2006:113). According to Herzberg job satisfaction depends upon a certain set of conditions, whereas job dissatisfaction is the result of an entirely different set of conditions. Thus, although it is possible to think of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as two extremes on a single continuum, they are determined by different factors. Hence, it may be more helpful to consider these as two separate factors. Although Herzberg's theory has been severely criticized, the principle makes sense in terms of expatriate adjustment because two sets of variables are apparent. In other words, the set of variables that facilitates adjustment seems to be work-related whereas the set of variables that prevents adjustment seems to be person-related. The implication of the principle implies that, to prevent expatriate separation, managers should make drastic changes by adding person-related factors and work-related factors to the expatriation and repatriation process.

Another significant point that stands out is the high emphasis the participants place on commitment to the organisation's vision, or sharing the same vision. This brings the point of affective commitment to mind. Meyer and Allen (1991:67) argue that an individual will develop an emotional attachment to an organisation when he/she identifies with the goals of the organisation and is therefore willing to assist the organisation in achieving these goals. Furthermore identification with an organisation occurs when the employee's personal values are congruent with the organisation's values enabling the employee to internalize the values and goals of the organisation. With this, there are a psychological identification with- and a pride of association with the organisation. Employees build affective and normative commitment by connecting their own values to the perceived values of their current organisation.

Another finding worth mentioning is the role of organisational support practices for the expatriate and his/her family. Perceived organisational support (POS) is the degree to which employees believe the organisation provides them with needed support, values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Provision of support is clearly an important aspect for expatriates as this aspect is consistently mentioned. This finding supports the research of Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001:389), who found that supportive organisational practices offered by multinational corporations improve expatriates and repatriates general perceptions about their organisations, which ultimately influence their desire to remain with the organisation. An example can be support in terms of medical services. A practically significant group of participants (all stationed in Africa), mention the lack of reliable medical services as a major factor impacting on their adjustment

Florkowski and Fogel (1999:783) found that perceptions of local ethnocentrism had a negative effect on work adjustment and commitment to the host unit. This study also found that expatriate managers were likely to react negatively to perception of host ethnocentrism.

Although "cultural differences" is cited as a predictor variable impacting on adjustment in the study and various cases in the literature have been made on the impact of cultural differences, it is interesting to see that studies conducted by Lee and Liu (2006; 2007) in the Asian context reveal similar results to this study done in

an African context. The question can be debated whether such major cultural differences exist when it comes to an expatriate's job and organisational needs on a foreign assignment.

The last factor that features consistently as a predictor variable is the role of expectations. Accurate expectations dealt with in realistic job previews seem to be critical to the adjustment of expatriates on foreign assignments.

### **6.2.6 Framework of organisational best practices**

*Do the findings provide sufficient information to identify factors, under the control of the multinational corporation, that will facilitate positive work-related attitudes amongst expatriates and can these be summarized in a framework of organisational best practice – enhancing expatriate job and organisational adjustment?*

As a negative relationship between work-related attitudes and the intention to quit has been established; and as specific aspects of work-related attitudes have been identified as critical to adjustment, it is possible to summarize the results in a framework of organisational best practice.

The aim of the framework depicted in Figure 6.1 is to encourage expatriate job and organisational adjustment. This is what the researcher wants to achieve, her contribution to the field of organisational behaviour. With this proposed framework the objective set for the research study is achieved: to propose a framework of organisational best practice that will encourage positive job attitudes of expatriate managers on international assignments.

Organisational practices that focus on fostering positive work attitudes should improve the probability of adjustment during foreign assignments, thereby reducing the risk of expatriate failure. The framework should be a guideline and be employed as a control mechanism for South African companies during the adjustment phase of expatriate managers on foreign assignments.

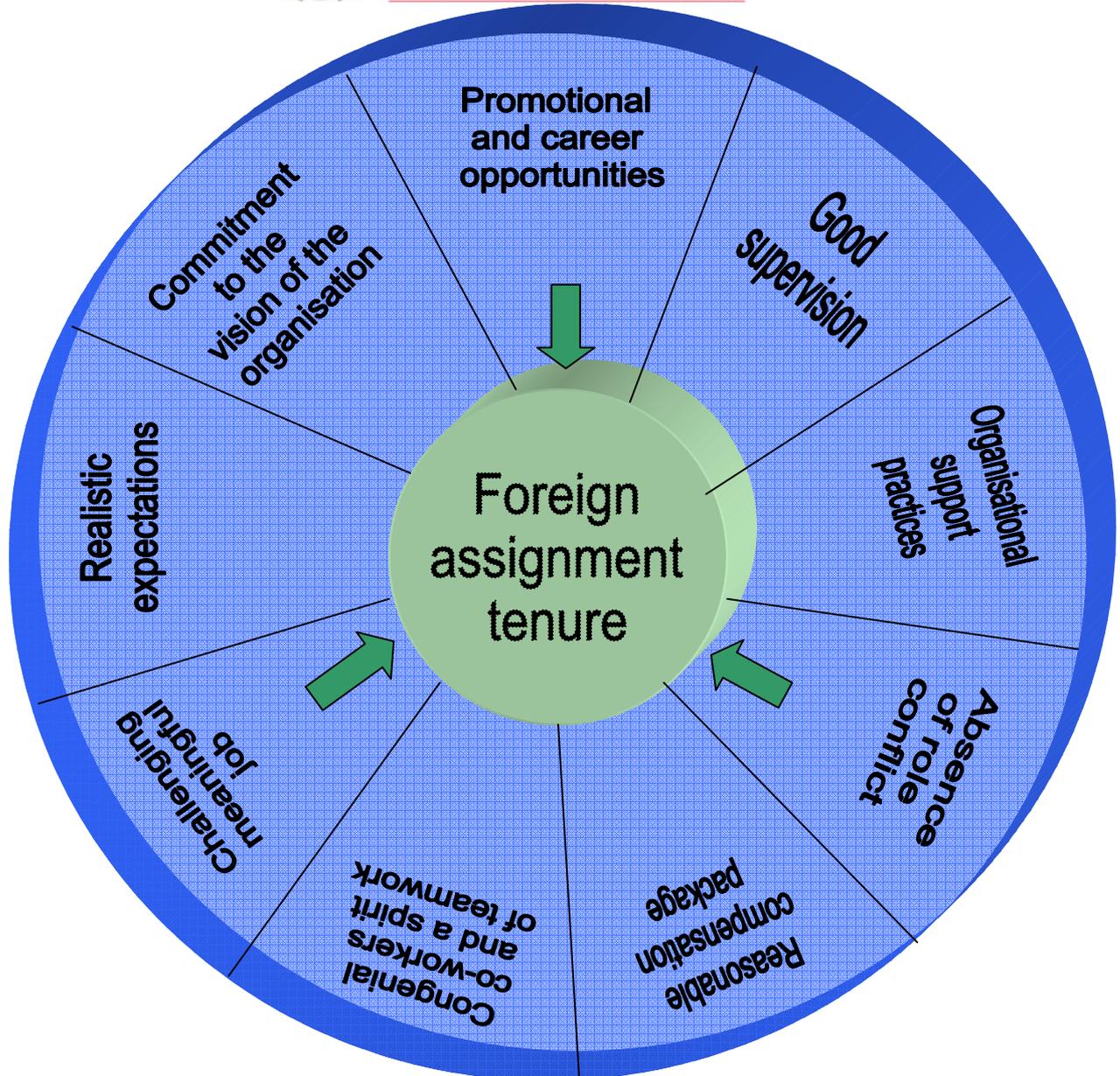


Figure 6.1: Framework of organisational best practice – enhancing expatriate job and organisational adjustment

The nine major components of the framework can be explained as follows:

- 1) **Commitment to the vision of the organisation.** Identification with the vision of the multinational corporation. This will happen when the expatriate's own values are congruent with the multinational corporation's values and the expatriate is able to internalize the values and goals of the multinational corporation.



- 2) **Promotional and career opportunities.** The opportunities for promotion and advancement in the multinational corporation, not necessarily associated with hierarchical progress in the multinational corporation, but including opportunities for lateral movement and growth.
- 3) **Good supervision.** Management's ability to demonstrate interest in and concern for employees. It implies that expatriates' relationships with supervisors need to be open and supportive, and absent from xenophobia.
- 4) **Organisational support practices.** The degree to which expatriates believe the multinational corporation provides them with needed support (practically and emotionally) and cares about their well-being.
- 5) **Absence of role conflict.** Expatriates' need to receive relevant messages regarding appropriate behaviour in the foreign assignment context. In other words the role requirements on the foreign assignment should not violate the expatriate's basic values and the expatriate must not be faced with conflicting expectations or demands.
- 6) **Reasonable compensation package.** Expatriates' need to receive compensation packages that they perceive to be in line with their expectations and to enable them to maintain the same or better standard of living than in the home country. When compensation is seen by expatriates as fair, based on job demand, individual skill level and community pay standard, satisfaction is likely result.
- 7) **Congenial co-workers and a spirit of teamwork.** Expatriates expect to get more from work than merely money or other tangible assets. For most expatriates, work fulfils the need for social interaction. Not surprisingly, therefore, technically, emotionally and socially supportive co-workers are consistently indicated as a critical aspect of expatriate adjustment. The need to be part of a group seems to be associated with expatriates' strong emphasis on teamwork.
- 8) **A challenging and meaningful job.** The extent to which the job provides the individual with stimulating tasks, opportunities for learning and personal growth, the opportunity to be responsible and accountable for results and regular feedback on performance. The individual must experience work as worthwhile and important.

- 9) **Realistic expectations.** Accurate expectations through realistic job previews seem critical to the adjustment of expatriates on foreign assignments.

These work-related aspects that contribute to job satisfaction and organisational commitment will in turn foster foreign assignment tenure. Due to the interdependent nature of work-related aspects, if one of the organisational practices is ignored, the likelihood of expatriate separation increases.

The presence of the nine organisational practices contribute to **foreign assignment tenure** – completion of a foreign assignment on schedule and no labour turnover during or shortly after being on a foreign assignment. This implies that the expatriate will serve the full intended purpose of the foreign assignment. As seen in Figure 6.1, the object of this approach is to promote foreign assignment tenure by enhancing expatriate job and organisational adjustment through the provision of organisational best practice.

### 6.3 SUMMARY

The high percentages for intention to separate in the study confirm the importance of the research study. A negative relationship between work-related attitudes and the intention to quit has been established and specific aspects of work-related attitudes have been identified as critical to adjustment. The results are summarized in a framework of organisational best practice. The aim of the framework is to enhance expatriate job and organisational adjustment. The **framework of organisational best practice** is what the researcher wanted to achieve. This is the contribution of the research to the field of organisational behaviour. Chapter 6 has provided an interpretation of the data and chapter 7 will conclude the research study.



## CHAPTER 7

### FINAL SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of chapter 7 is to bring closure to the interpretation of the findings and to look back at what has been accomplished. In chapter 7 the researcher summarizes the findings and states whether the research hypotheses have been supported or not, identifies possible practical implications of the results to multinational corporations, discusses the contribution of the study to the field of international management, lists the limitations of the current study, makes recommendations for future studies worthy of investigation and brings the research report to a final conclusion.

#### 7.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Cotton and Tuttle (1986); Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982); and Steel and Ovalle (1984) have found that labour turnover intention and propensity to return prematurely, are the strongest predictors of actual labour turnover and actual premature return. In this study the participants who indicate an intention to quit is a high 46,48%. Participants indicating the propensity to return early is also high at 26,76%. Assuming, based on the mentioned research, that these intended behaviour will most probably become actual behaviour, the rationale for and importance of the research study is confirmed: expatriate failure is worthy of study because it is imperative for multinational corporations to have a framework of organisational practices that will facilitate expatriate job and organisational adjustment.

The means of the participants in the sample who have no intention to quit are significantly higher for the predictor variables: receiving feedback, absence of role conflict, a challenging meaningful job and congenial co-workers. These factors thus play a determining role in an expatriate's decision to quit or not. In comparing the means and standard deviations of the demographic variables from the group who indicate an intention to quit with the group who do not indicate an intention to quit,



the only significant statistic is the mean difference on experience in international assignments. This implies that more experienced expatriates are more likely to stay on a foreign assignment. The lack of statistical support for the other demographic variables implies that demographic factors are not strong predictors of the intention to separate from an organisation or a foreign assignment. Literature provides contradictory views on this point as some studies support the role of the demographic variables while others report no significant influence. The conclusion reached by the researcher is that different demographic groups have different needs, and although these difference do not significantly impact on the intention to separate, multinational corporations should be aware that a one-fits-all approach will not foster positive work-related attitudes amongst expatriates. The implications for multinational corporations are that male expatriates need skill variety and job involvement. Female expatriates want their expectations to be met. Unmarried expatriates place higher emphasis on feedback, supportive co-workers, met expectations and promotional opportunities than their married counterparts. Younger expatriates value promotional opportunities. Less qualified expatriates rely more on fair supervision and compensation packages and tend to value organisational commitment more highly than more qualified expatriates.

A moderately negative relationship exists between the intention to quit and most of the aspects related to job satisfaction (job characteristics, absence of role conflict and role ambiguity, the job itself, supervision, co-workers and compensation package) and organisational commitment. Job involvement does not show a negative correlation with the intention to quit. The intention to quit correlates negatively with a challenging and meaningful job, the absence of role conflict and congenial co-workers. Job satisfaction and organisational commitment are significantly related to the following predictor variables: job satisfaction with met expectations and organisational commitment with met expectations, a challenging and meaningful job, supervision and promotional opportunities. The researcher concludes that multinational corporations can encourage positive work-related attitudes in expatriates by providing a challenging and meaningful job, managing role conflict, ensuring supportive co-workers, clarifying and meeting expectations, following sound supervisory practices and providing promotional and career opportunities.



The results of the logistic regression have shown that a challenging job, the absence of role conflict and promotional opportunities have the strongest influence on the intention to quit. This alone accounts for 37,5 % of the variance of the intention to quit.

The open-ended questions bring the following to light. Adjustment is facilitated through: commitment to the vision of the organisation (shared vision), supportive co-workers, good supervision, teamwork, a challenging job, reasonable compensation package, a favourable work environment, pre-departure training, fluency in the language of host country, family and organisational support, a supportive social environment and well-disposed host country parameters. Adjustment is hampered by: local language barriers, the absence of familiar social relationships, xenophobia, unsettled family life, cultural differences both in the work environment and the social environment, unmet expectations, a lack of support received from the organisation, inclement weather conditions and missing everyday commodities such as types of food and medical services.

The findings of the study generally support the hypotheses put forward concerning the negative relationship between job satisfaction (H1) and organisational commitment (H2) and propensity to return early from an international assignment or labour turnover during or shortly after the international assignment. This implies that the higher the level of job satisfaction and organisational commitment among expatriates, the lower the intention to separate, as expatriates will be better adjusted to the job and work environment of the foreign assignment.

The findings do not support the hypothesis regarding a negative relationship between job involvement and propensity to return early from an international assignment or labour turnover during or shortly after the international assignment (H3). The researcher is, however, of the opinion that the role of job involvement must not be ignored as the male participants rate it as an important variable. It seems that for a male expatriate manager his job is important to his self-image as he identifies with it and regards it as a pivotal interest.

The findings of the study are similar to a study recently conducted by Lee and Liu (2007) in Taiwan. They performed a multiple regression analysis on the data they gathered, using simultaneous entry for the independent variables. The results, based on the full regression model, indicate that two predictors, adjustment and organisational commitment, are significantly related to intention to leave the multinational corporation. They report that approximately 58% of the variance of intention to leave can be explained by the combination of the three predictors, adjustment, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Lee & Lui, 2007:122).

### 7.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDING FOR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Empirical evidence supports the view that expatriate failure rates can be unacceptably high if the intention to quit and the intention to return prematurely turn into actual turnover and actual premature return. Keeping in mind that research has confirmed intention to separate as the strongest predictor of actual separation; it is worthwhile for multinational corporations to take a preventative approach. As the findings provide evidence that various aspects related to work-related attitudes influence the expatriate's intention to quit, the preventative strategies can be derived from these predictor variables. There are several actions multinational organisations can take to reduce the intention to separate among expatriates.

- **Realistic job previews.** As met expectations appear to be significantly related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job involvement, managers should provide realistic job previews to prospective expatriate managers. Management should be careful not to oversell or create unrealistic expectations concerning the foreign assignment. During the job preview the expected roles of the expatriate manager should also be clarified.
- **Job design.** Multinational corporations should ensure that the jobs of expatriate managers are designed in a manner that will influence work attitudes positively. Jobs should include skill variety, task identity, task significance, feedback and autonomy. Managers should also try to alleviate role conflict and role ambiguity by clearly defining the job they want the expatriate managers to perform.



- **Organisational support practices.** Perceived organisational support (POS) is the degree to which expatriates believe the multinational corporation provides them with support needed, values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Multinational corporations should be aware of, and supply on a practical level, what expatriate managers and their families require during expatriation and repatriation. An example would be medical services from the multinational corporation for expatriates stationed in certain African countries.
  
- **Teamwork.** It seems that, due to the context of international assignments, co-workers play a more critical role in the adjustment to the job than in a domestic assignment. Management therefore needs to pay special attention to the composition of the work group in the multinational corporation. Typical teamwork strategies used in the domestic arena should be investigated and tested for use in the international arena.
  
- **Sharing the vision through participative strategic planning.** Commitment to the vision of the multinational corporation is consistently cited during data gathering as a critical adjustment variable. It seems as if adjustment in a host country accelerates if the expatriate manager commits to the vision of the multinational corporation for the specific country. An expatriate manager must believe in the reason for the multinational corporation being in a certain country and the role he/she has to play in realising the vision of the multinational corporation.

The above aspects are classified in the **framework of organisational best practice** presented in chapter 6.

#### 7.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE CURRENT STUDY

While there is still much to be learned about expatriate and repatriate adjustment and its antecedents and outcomes, the study has made several contributions.

Significant contribution is made to the body of knowledge in the study fields of Organisational Behaviour and International Human Resources Management.

The study adds value by contributing to the issue of how little, in relative terms, is known about many of the mentioned concepts in the “international” as opposed to the “domestic” context. Although there is a substantial body of research available on domestic labour turnover in management literature, little attention has been devoted to international labour turnover. The study provides insight on the little debated phenomenon international labour turnover.

The study confirms and expands on previous international research on the role of work-related attitudes in the intention to quit the multinational corporation or to return prematurely from the foreign assignment. The findings of the study confirm the role of work-related attitudes in the holistic expatriate adjustment model. In terms of the South African research arena, the study is one of the first to identify work-related attitudes as an antecedent to South African expatriate managers’ labour turnover intention, as most of the current South African research has focused on the role of the spouse and family and pre-departure training in the adjustment process. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of the study can guide future South African research into expatriate managers’ separation intention and adjustment processes.

The findings also provide empirical evidence that expatriate failure rates could reach unacceptable levels, and that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are negatively related to intent to leave the organisation. Through statistical procedures specific aspects of work-related attitudes are identified as critical to the adjustment process. The findings are summarized in a framework of organisational best practice. The aim of the framework is to enhance expatriate job and organisational adjustment. The framework of organisational best practice is what the researcher set out to achieve.

Finally, the results and recommendations of the study may help multinational corporations in South Africa to facilitate the expatriation and repatriation processes of their expatriate managers, saving substantial sums of money and keeping

valuable human capital within the multinational corporation. This is the practical value of the research to the multinational corporation society.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following limitations have become evident during the research study:

- As the size of the sample narrowed the researcher's field in terms of options for statistical procedures and the sample consisted of South African expatriates only, the generalizability of the findings are limited.
- The length of the questionnaire was considered by some participants to be too long. This could have contributed to a lower response rate and brought the question to mind if it would not have been more appropriate to view job satisfaction as a univariate construct instead of a multivariate construct. Viewing job satisfaction as a univariate construct would have reduced the number of questions in the self-administered questionnaire.
- Analysis was only conducted on an individual level. Organisational behaviour as a field of study involves three levels of analysis (individual, group and organisational level). The question comes to mind if work-related attitudes on the group and organisational level of organisational behaviour, could influence the labour turnover intentions and adjustment of expatriate managers.
- Work-related attitudes were viewed as linear for the purpose of the study. In reality the relationships between the various work attitudes are much more complex and inter-related.

## **7.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study does not provide the definitive answer to the adjustment problems of expatriate managers on foreign assignments. The field of study needs to be explored further if South African multinational corporations want to manage their human talent

optimally and staff their foreign subsidiaries with satisfied, committed and long-serving expatriates and repatriates. Suggestions for future research include:

- Future research, involving expatriate turnover should utilize a longitudinal research design rather than a cross-sectional design, so that the relationship between propensity to leave and actual labour turnover can be explored; and causal relationships in the turnover model can be examined.
- Future research should look holistically at expatriation and repatriation. The study, although acknowledging repatriates, focused mainly on expatriates. It has become evident that expatriation and repatriation are not two separate processes, but rather that expatriation is the initiation, while repatriation is the culmination of the same process. In reality, most activities that ensure high retention after repatriation occur during the expatriate assignment. Poor repatriation may result in a loss of valuable expatriate managers, a reluctance of future expatriate managers to accept overseas positions and an under-utilization of expatriate managers. Repatriation should not be the end of an international assignment for the expatriate manager, but rather the beginning of a new assignment.
- As the study confirms that most South African expatriate managers seem to be stationed in Africa, South African research focusing on the organisational support side of foreign assignments needs to move beyond the traditional topics to include variables specifically related to the African continent such as medical services, living conditions and technology. Additionally, variables such as acculturation and socialization to the host country should be explored.
- The under-researched role of teamwork and commitment to the vision of the multinational corporation in the adjustment process needs further investigation.



## 7.7 FINAL CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to investigate empirically variables influencing expatriates' work-related attitudes and to examine the relationships between work-related attitudes and expatriates' tendency to return early or resign during or shortly after the foreign assignment. The rationale for the study is that various previous research findings have suggested that job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement (together labelled job or work-related attitudes) are key variables in the turnover process. Virtually all turnover models include job attitudes as predictors of propensity to leave (Naumann *et al.*, 2000:228). The results of the study indicate that various aspects of organisational commitment and job satisfaction are inversely and significantly related to turnover intentions. Job involvement does not seem to be significantly related to turnover intention. This implies that the higher the level of organisational commitment and job satisfaction among expatriates, the lower the level of turnover intention.

The data analysis reveals that a challenging meaningful job, promotional and career opportunities, congenial co-workers, met expectations, commitment to the vision of the organisation, the absence of role conflict, good supervision, organisational support practices and reasonable compensation packages are significant predictors of turnover intentions. These aspects of the main variables (job satisfaction and organisational commitment) emerge as significant determinants of expatriate's job- and work adjustment on a foreign assignment. The results are in the hypothesized direction and in line with previous findings as various researchers confirm that job satisfaction and organisational commitment are consistent predictors of turnover intentions. Therefore, the present study validates the results obtained by these researchers and generalizes them to South African expatriate managers. Although some aspects of the independent variables in the study do not contribute or predict to turnover intentions, the identified predictors of turnover intentions in this study and the variables that have significant correlation with turnover intentions need to be recognized as a potential source of expatriates' intention to leave the multinational corporation.

The findings provide a better understanding of the role of job and organisational variables in the expatriate adjustment process. The study adds further value as the findings have been used to identify organisational best practice to solve the problem of expatriate failure. These practices have been placed in an organisational best-practice framework to facilitate expatriate job/organisational adjustment. The study suggests that the management of multinational corporations should consider these aspects of organisational commitment and job satisfaction to manage the adjustment of expatriate managers on foreign assignments effectively. The results of the study may also offer some insights into the multinational corporations of South Africa when they attempt to overcome turnover intentions among expatriate managers.

In conclusion, the study makes a useful contribution to theories about the relationship between organisational commitment and job satisfaction variables and labour turnover intentions as well as valuable suggestions on how multinational corporations can facilitate the adjustment of expatriate managers on a job and work level. Adjustment will reduce the probability of expatriate failure, saving multinational corporations substantial amounts of money and retain valuable knowledge by ensuring tenure in their staff compliment.