

## JOB-RELATED ATTITUDES AND EXPATRIATE MANAGERS' INTENTION TO QUIT A FOREIGN ASSIGNMENT

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A prominent issue in international staffing literature is the premature return of an expatriate to his/her home country or resignation during or shortly after the international assignment. This paper is based on an empirical study that draws upon quantitative and qualitative data generated through self-administered questionnaires from among a sample of South African expatriate managers. The main purpose of the study was to determine to what degree job-related attitude predicts the intention to quit prematurely, or intention to quit their job during or post completion of an international assignment, and which job-related attitude variables are accountable for this intention to quit or not to quit. The findings provide empirical evidence that expatriate failure rates could reach unacceptable levels and job-related attitudes are identified as critical to the adjustment process. The results and recommendations may assist multinational corporations in South Africa to facilitate the expatriation and repatriation processes of managers, saving substantial sums of money and keeping valuable human capital within the multinational corporation as part of talent management.

*Key phrases: Expatriation, adjustment, job attitudes, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement, turnover intention, expatriate failure, globalisation*

### INTRODUCTION

According to Hill (2003:5, 31), rapid changes are occurring in the global economy. National economies are becoming integrated into a single, global economic system. In today's economic environment, corporations are realizing that, to grow, they are obliged to expand their operations to foreign countries. For South African organisations this, in many ways, is the best of times. Globalization has increased the opportunities for organisations to increase their profits by selling around the world (globalization of markets) and reduce costs by producing in nations where key inputs are cheap (globalization of production). South Africa and other African countries are part of these international trends, as they are extensively involved in the process of globalization. Africa is viewed as the last big investment opportunity, and it is big. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) asserts that the average return on inward investment for Africa as a whole is four times that of the group of developed countries known as G-8 (Shelley 2004:11). There is increasing investment in Africa by South Africa. The trend of South African businesses expanding beyond their home territory is set to grow, especially considering successful small national operations led by entrepreneurial owner-managers who find the home market too small (Shelley 2004:24).

Most multinational corporations rely on extensive use of parent country nationals (called expatriates for the purpose of this paper) to staff their foreign operations in a host country. While organisations may perceive expatriation as an attractive staffing strategy, they face the challenges of successfully managing an expatriate in a foreign country (host country). Breiden (2003:1) states that anecdotes and reports of professional sojourners struggling during their international assignments demonstrate that a transfer abroad can create substantial risks for the expatriate employee as well as for the multinational corporation. Multinational corporations are plagued by the persistent problem of significant rates of premature returns of expatriates (Özbilgin 2005:132). Although early return rates of expatriates vary significantly in different companies, in different industries, in different surveys and in different countries (Briscoe & Schuler 2004:243-244) and the empirical foundation intensively debated by Harzing (1995:458), most literature on expatriate management suggests unacceptable levels of expatriate failure. Literature suggests that between 16 and 40 percent of American employees sent abroad to developed countries return from their assignments early and almost 70 percent of American employees sent to developing countries return home early (Black 1999:11; Hill 2003:612). In addition to the failure rates, 30 to 50 percent of the expatriates who stay at their foreign assignments are considered to be ineffective or marginally effective by their organisations (Hill 2003:612; Usunier 1998:93). Naumann, Widmier and Jackson (2000:227) add another dimension to the high early return rates, by indicating that 25 percent of returned expatriates leave the parent company within one year of repatriation.

Virtually every publication on the topic defines and measures *expatriate failure* as the percentage of expatriates returning home before their assignment contracts expire. Harzing (1995:458) argues that expatriate failure is more complicated than merely returning home before an international assignment contract has expired. He states that high labour turnover during or shortly after international assignments, and expatriates who fail to perform adequately, are (potentially) more damaging to the multinational organisation than those who return prematurely. Briscoe (1995:57) supports this view by stating that although expatriate failure is usually defined in terms of returning home earlier than a contract requires, or termination of employment during or shortly after a foreign assignment, it could also be defined in terms of:

- Poor quality performance in a foreign assignment.
- Personal dissatisfaction of the expatriate or the family with the international experience.

- Inability to adjust to local conditions.
- Not being accepted by the local nationals.
- Inability to identify and/or train a local successor.

Although in agreement with Harzing and Briscoe, for *the purpose of this paper*, expatriate failure is operationally defined as the premature return of an expatriate from a host country to the home country or labour turnover while on, or shortly after returning from, a foreign assignment.

In South Africa the full extent of the problem is difficult to determine as research houses, on behalf of individual organisations or specific industries, predominantly do most of the research on expatriate failure. The resulting information is confidential or is very expensive to acquire. However, Hawley (2005:1) states that between 25 and 40 percent of South African expatriate managers leave their international assignments early. The statistics are so high that companies considering foreign expansion are very cautious. It is estimated that the total cost per failure to the parent company can be as high as three times the expatriate's annual domestic salary, plus the cost of relocation, which in turn is affected by currency exchange rates and the location of the foreign assignment (Hill 2003:612). This means that if the process of expatriating an employee and his or her family goes wrong, it can be a woefully expensive mistake for the multinational corporation.

In the light of the above, expatriate failure in the South African context is worth studying as it appears to influence the operations and cost effectiveness of multinational corporations. Factors contributing to the successful adjustment of an expatriate and his or her family in a foreign country are thus of great significance to multinational corporations.

## LITERATURE STUDY

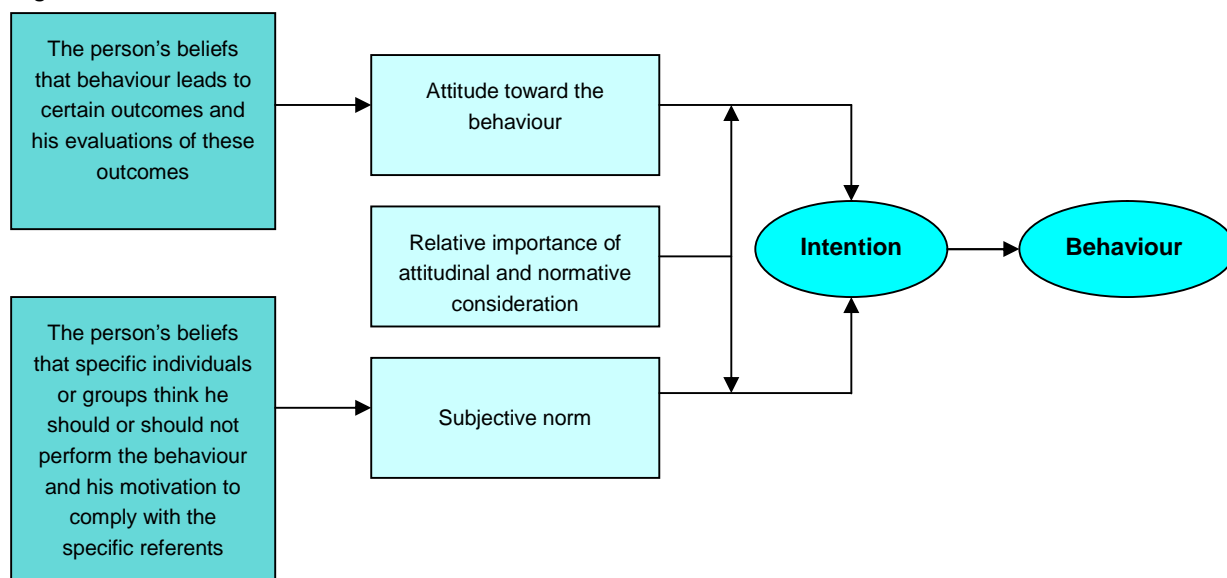
Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991:291) point out that the past decade has seen an increase in research on international adjustment. According to Black (1988:277), expatriate adjustment refers to the level of comfort a professional sojourner experiences during the stay abroad. Black *et al.* (1991:291) argue that integrating job and organisational variables with individual and non-work variables as predictors of international adjustment should provide a comprehensive framework for international adjustment. The findings made in a number of subsequent studies have confirmed

the multifaceted conceptualisation of expatriate adjustment (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley 1999:557).

Unfortunately, most of the research focused on selective aspects of adjustment, while neglecting other important predictors of adjustment. Job attitudes are thought to play a key role in the labour turnover process. Domestic studies have generally found that job attitudes are negatively related to turnover, although this relationship is mitigated by intermediate links. Surprisingly, job attitudes which are important antecedents of turnover domestically, have received little attention in international research (Naumann 1993:62). Research has consistently indicated that a variety of job/task characteristics and organisational characteristics are directly related to employee attitudes and labour turnover (Bluedorn 1982:135; Cotton & Tuttle 1986:55). Studies by Lee (2005), Lee and Liu (2006; 2007) and Naumann *et al.* (2000) have identified a positive relationship between favourable job attitudes and the tendency to complete a foreign assignment and remain with the multinational corporation. Three job attitudes seemed appropriate for investigation, as they have received much attention in labour turnover research: job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement. The mediating role of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement borrows from the labour turnover model developed by Bluedorn (1982:135). The model posits that organisational, job-related and person related variables are predictors of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement, and these variables in turn are related to the propensity to leave. The intention to leave/quit is a chief determinant of labour turnover. Since job satisfaction, organisational commitment and job involvement appear to interact in determining intention to leave (Newstrom & Davis 1997:262), it seems that insight into these three job attitudes can contribute significantly to a more comprehensive understanding of the adjustment process of expatriates.

Behavioural scientists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen have developed a comprehensive model of behavioural intentions used widely to explain attitude – behaviour relationships (Ajzen & Fishbein 1977:888-918). Kreitner and Kinicki (1998:136) depict in Figure 1 an individual's intention to engage in a given behaviour as the best predictor of that behaviour.

Figure 1: A model of behavioural intention



Source: Kreitner and Kinicki (1998:137)

Steel and Ovalle (1984:673) validate this direct approach, by conducting a meta-analysis of 34 studies of employee turnover involving more than 83 000 employees. The researchers found stated behavioural intentions to be a better predictor of employee turnover than job satisfaction, satisfaction with the work itself or organisational commitment. Although asking about intentions enables one to predict who will quit, it does not help to explain why an individual would want to quit. Thus, to gain a better understanding of why employees exhibit certain behaviours, such as quitting their jobs, one needs to consider their relevant attitudes. Lee and Goa (2005:381) confirm that the intention to leave is considered an important work outcome variable. As a behavioural intention variable, the intention to leave, acts intermediary between worker attitudes and actual turnover (Naumann *et al.* 2000:229).

Against this background the main aim of this research study was undertaken to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of job attitudes in the adjustment of expatriates and their intention to quit during or shortly after an international assignment.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

**The purpose of the paper** is to provide a better understanding of the role of job and organisational variables in the expatriate adjustment process as it pertains to

expatriate managers from South Africa. To achieve this purpose, the following **research questions** formed the basis of data gathering, data analysis and data interpretation:

- 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?
- Are there specific aspects of job attitudes that will predict the intention to quit?
- Are there specific organisational and job-related aspects that are perceived by the participants as critical to their adjustment while on a foreign assignment?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

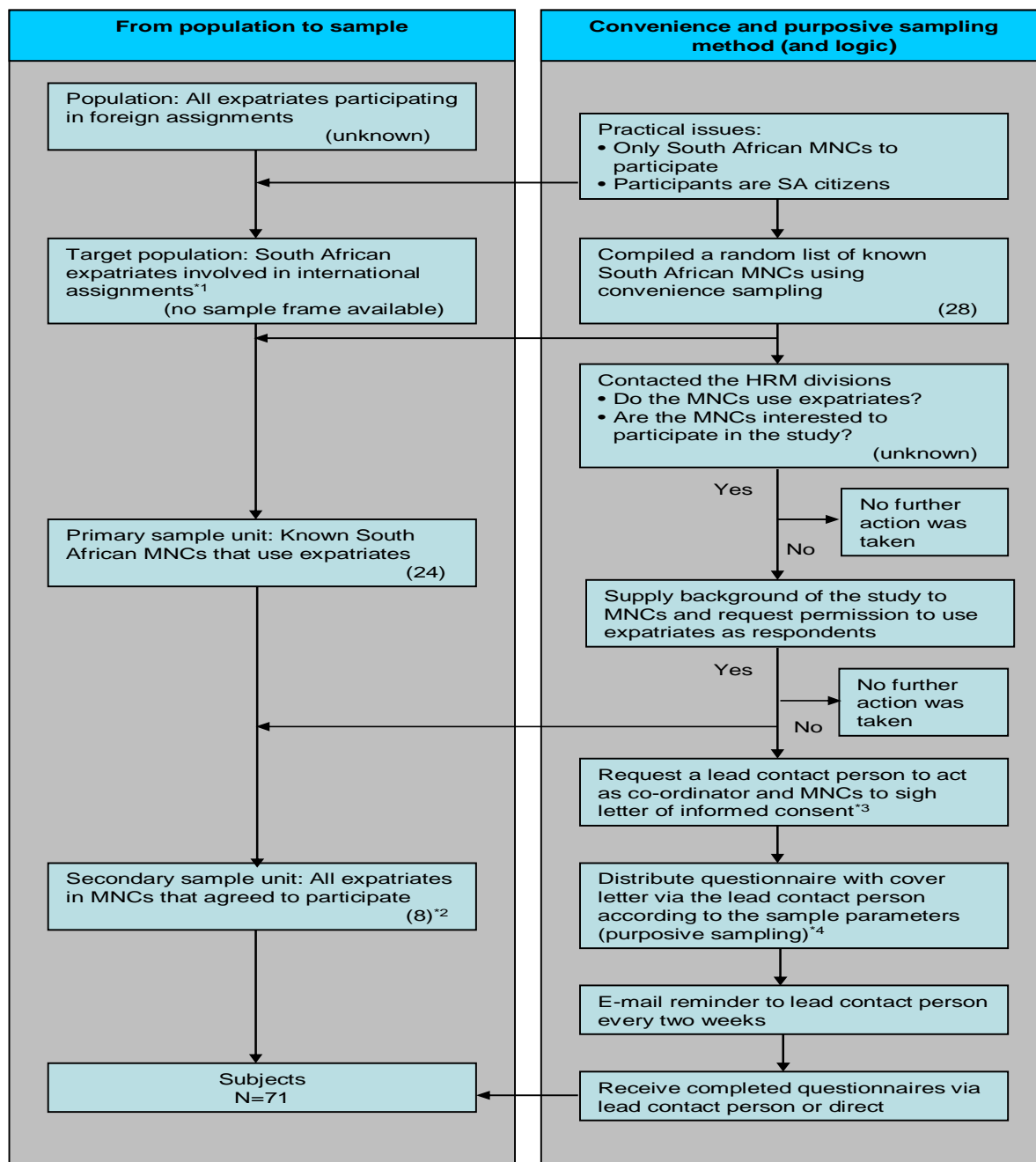
The population was all employees on a managerial level who worked, or who are currently working for a South African Multinational Corporation outside South Africa's border. The employees were not citizens of the country in which the firm is located (host-country), but citizens of South Africa, the country in which the organisation is headquartered (parent country). Non-probability sampling was applied during the study through a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. The procedure entailed taking all cases on hand that suited the purpose of the researcher, until the sample reached its desired size. Subjects were chosen on the basis of what the researcher considered to be typical units. It can thus be seen that although the researcher relied on available subjects (convenience sampling); a very specific type of person was recruited for the study. This implied that the sampling approach was also purposive in nature (Babbie 2004:183; Goodwin 1995:109; Rossouw 2003:113). The sample, based on availability (convenience sampling), was drawn from South African-based multinational corporations. The following categories of employees (population parameters) were included in the sample (purposive sampling):

- Expatriate managers who repatriated from foreign assignments prematurely.
- Expatriate managers who repatriated from foreign assignments on schedule.
- Expatriate managers who were on foreign assignments and who had resigned during the assignment or shortly thereafter.
- Expatriate managers who are currently on foreign assignments.

## **Procedure**

Once permission had been obtained from the multinational corporation and the letter of consent signed, the questionnaire was sent via e-mail to a lead contact person at each multinational corporation. The lead contact person was, in all 8 multinational corporations, a part of the human resource management division and to some extent involved with expatriates. The lead contact person's responsibility was to distribute and collect via e-mail the questionnaires. The lead contact person was requested to send the questionnaires according to the sampling parameters and contact all available expatriates that adhered to the parameters set. Completed questionnaires were returned either directly or via the lead contact person, depending on the arrangements the lead contact person had made with the expatriates in his/her organisation. Every two weeks, an e-mail reminder was sent to the lead contact person who then had to remind the respondents to complete and return the questionnaires. The researcher also had telephonic conversations with the lead contact persons to urge them to send out the questionnaires and remind the expatriates to return them. Administration of the returned questionnaires included data coding and editing, data entry, data cleaning and data-processing. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis of all the numerical data in the study. The procedure followed to draw the sample is depicted in Figure 2. The numbers in brackets represent the number of multinational corporations (MNCs).

Figure 2: From population to sample through convenience / purposive sampling methods



- \*1 – The definition did not exclude expatriates who had finished their foreign assignments or who had already returned to South Africa.
- \*2 – This became the sample frame for the participating organisations, but as the organisations did not want to reveal the mailing list of their expatriates, no sample frame for the possible participants existed.



- \*<sup>3</sup> – A letter of informed consent was given to every participating organisation. The letter included: a description of the research, ethical considerations, process of participation and the potential benefit of the study for the multinational corporation.
- \*<sup>4</sup> - An undisclosed number of questionnaires were sent out making follow-up and determining response rate impossible for the researcher.

### Measurement instrument

*Self-administered e-mailed questionnaires were used as the data-gathering method.* The first part of the measurement instrument was developed by integrating questions used in already existing job-attitude surveys. It consisted of questions with predetermined responses using interval scales. This enabled the researcher to extract numerical data. Table 1 provides a summary of the job-attitude surveys used.

The measurement instruments mentioned in Table 1, with the exception of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), are derived from a study that was done by Naumann *et al.* (2000). The reliability and validity of the instruments have been established by Naumann *et al.* (2000). The reliability and validity of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) has also been confirmed. Jung, Dalessio and Johnson (1986:613) indicate that the JDI dimensions (supervision, co-workers, pay, promotion, and work) are very stable across a wide variety of situations and groups of respondents.

Table 1: Summary of the measurement instrument

Variable	Subscales	Original document	No. of items
<b>Job characteristics*</b>	Skill variety	Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) by Hackman and Oldman (1975; 1980)	3
	Task identity		3
	Task significance		5
	Autonomy	Selected items from scales by Rizo, House and Lirtzman (1970)	3
	Feedback		7
	Role conflict		12
	Role ambiguity		8
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	Job itself	Job Descriptive Index (JDI) by Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) and revised in 1985 (Smith <i>et al.</i> , 1987)	18
	Supervision		18
	Co-workers		18
	Promotion opportunities		9
	Compensation package		9
<b>Organisational commitment</b>	-	Organisational Commitment Scale (OCS) by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982)	15
<b>Job involvement</b>	-	Scales from Kanungo (1982)	6
<b>Met expectations*</b>	-	Modified from Lee and Mowday's (1987) scales	8
<b>Intention to leave</b>	Intention to quit	From Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro (1984)	2
	Intention to return prematurely	Developed by researcher	1

\* "Job characteristics" and "met expectations" were included in the measurement instrument as these variables are recognized antecedents of job attitudes in labour turnover models.

The researcher relied on Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficient to ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of the study reported in Table 2 show that all nine sub-dimensions of the measurement instrument meet the criteria with alphas ranging from the lowest .776 (the job itself) to the highest .895 (organisational commitment). These coefficient alphas indicate that the reliability of the measurement instrument is good.

**Table 2: Cronbach's alpha for the sub-scales of the measurement instrument**

Instrument sub-dimension	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	No of items
Job characteristics	.840	41
The job itself	.776	18
Supervisor	.843	18
Co-workers	.862	18
Promotion opportunities	.864	9
Compensation package	.820	9
Organisational commitment	.895	15
Job involvement	.826	6
Expectations	.810	8

The above alphas seem aligned with the results from other researchers. In a study by Whisenant, Pedersen and Smucker (2004:368-382) the Job Description Index (JDI) was used in conjunction with a referent-comparison scale in order to measure job satisfaction. Initial validation of the JDI instrument included factor and cluster analysis, which supported the five factors (the job itself, supervisor, co-workers, pay and promotional opportunities) and allowed the developers of the survey to conclude that the scale had a high level of discriminate and convergent validity. Whisenant *et al.* (2004:372) state that reliability assessments using Cronbach alpha coefficients have typically exceeded .80 on all the JDI scales in other studies. In the study of Whisenant and colleagues the Cronbach's reliability coefficients were .88 for the facet of pay satisfaction, .78 for promotion satisfaction, .90 for supervision satisfaction, .77 for co-worker satisfaction, and .91 for the job-itself satisfaction. These correlations indicate how well the items within each part (facet) of the instrument yield similar results from each respondent (Whisenant *et al.* 2004:372).

The second part of the measurement instrument was semi-structured, with open-ended questions to allow the respondent his/her own response to the questions. This enabled the researcher to extract textual data. The following two questions were included:

- Which aspects made or are making your adjustment to the foreign assignment easier?
- Which aspects made or are making your adjustment to the foreign assignment difficult?

A third section on biographical characteristics was added at the end of the measurement instrument to gather relevant background, personal and organisational information.

### **Data analysis**

As mentioned, the pre-structured questionnaire consisted of closed questions (numerical data) and open-ended questions (textual data). The two sets of data required different methods of analysis.

#### **Numerical data analysis**

As the main purpose of the study was to test empirically whether South African expatriates' have a significant intention to return prematurely from an international assignment or to leave the organisation during or shortly after the international assignment; and to identify the specific aspects of job attitudes that are perceived by expatriates as critical to their adjustment in a foreign assignment. In order to achieve the above purpose the researcher relied on the following statistical procedures:

- Descriptive statistics (Frequencies, Percentages, Tables and Graphs) – to describe the characteristics of a data set and to compare results.
- Logistic regressions – to identify the predictor variables that are responsible for the most significant variances in the intention to quit.

#### **Textual data analysis**

From a qualitative perspective, the answers to the two open-ended questions were analysed by identifying general themes through content analysis. The purpose was to focus on the central themes that were extracted. Final analysis was done by comparing material on the extracted themes to look for variations and nuances in meanings and to discover connections between the themes. During this process the approach of Marshall and Rossman in De Vos (1998:342-343) was used.

## RESULTS

The results of the study are provided hereunder as per stated research question.

### The intention of South African expatriates to return prematurely or resign during or shortly after an international assignment.

In the study the participants who indicated an intention to quit measured 46,48% (33 out of 71 participants) and the propensity to return prematurely measured 26,76% (19 of 71 participants). These percentages become more awkward for the multinational corporations if they are cross-tabulated with the frequencies of how often the participants' think of quitting the foreign assignment. See Table 3.

Table 3: Intention to separate in the sample

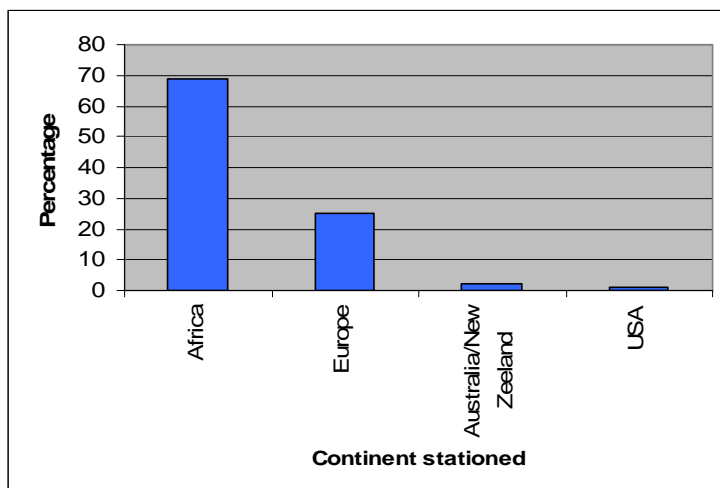
Sample N = 71			Intention to return					
			No (N=52)			Yes(N=19)		
			Intention to quit		Total	Intention to quit		Total
			No (N=32)	Yes (N=20)		No (N=6)	Yes (N=13)	
Frequency: Never	Count	30	5	35	6	3	9	
	Row%	68.2%	11.4%	79.5%	13.6%	6.8%	20.5%	
	Col%	93.8%	25.0%	67.3%	100.0%	23.1%	47.4%	
Occasionally	Count	1	11	12		8	8	
	Row%	5.0%	55.0%	60.0%		40.0%	40.0%	
	Col%	3.1%	55.0%	23.1%		61.5%	42.1%	
Always	Count	1	4	5		2	2	
	Row%	14.3%	57.1%	71.4%		28.6%	28.6%	
	Col%	3.1%	20.0%	9.6%		15.4%	10.5%	

Of the participants who wanted to return early from the foreign assignment, 68,42% (13 out of 19 participants) also wanted to quit the job. In other words, labour turnover can be predicted when the expatriate returns to South Africa. From the participants who did not necessarily want to return early, 38,46% (20 out of 52 participants) also wanted to quit their job. This can be an indication that labour turnover will take place while the expatriate is still on the foreign assignment. 75,76% of the participants who wanted to quit, often thought about quitting (25 out of 33 participants). In Table 3 thinking about quitting often; is represented by the frequencies occasionally and always.

An important observation from the study relate to the location (host continent) of the expatriates in the sample. From Figure 3 it can be seen that the majority of participants were stationed in Africa (69,01%) followed by Europe (25,35%). This is similar to the results from the study conducted by Vogel (2006:143). In his study

61,53% of the participants were stationed in Africa and 20% in Europe. It can thus be concluded that the majority of South African expatriates are first stationed in Africa and then in Europe. As cross-cultural adjustment is a major indicator for expatriate success, this demographic information is worth taking note of.

Figure 3: Host continent of the participants



### Job attitudes variables as predictor of the intention to leave prematurely or resign during or shortly after the international assignment.

Logistic regression was used to predict the intent to leave from the independent variables (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement) and to explain the impact of these predictor variables on intention to leave.

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 and the overall accuracy of the model is 74,6%.

Table 4: Omnibus test of model coefficients

	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
<b>Step 1</b> Step Block Model	10.451	1	.001
	10.451	1	.001
	10.451	1	.001
<b>Step 2</b> Step Block Model	4.861	1	.027
	15.312	2	.000
	15.312	2	.000
<b>Step 3</b> Step Block Model	8.056	1	.005
	23.368	3	.000
	23.368	3	<b>.000</b>

The overall fit of the model is significant at step 1 with the predictor variable “the job itself”,  $X^2 = 10.451$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the overall fit of the model is significant after both the first new variable (role conflict),  $X^2 = 15.312$ ,  $p < .001$  and second new variable (promotional opportunity),  $X^2 = 23.368$ ,  $p < .001$  have been entered. The significance of .000 (highlighted) indicates that the  $H_0$  can be rejected. The  $H_0$  states that all correlation coefficients in the model are zero, in other words that no correlation exists between the dependent variable and the predictor variables.

Table 5: Model summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	87.624 <sup>a</sup>	.137	.183
2	82.762 <sup>b</sup>	.194	.259
3	74.706 <sup>b</sup>	.280	.375

Overall the model accounts for 28% - 37,5% of the variances in the intention to quit (depending on which measure  $R^2$  you use).

Table 6: Variables in the equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>								
Jobscore	-.259	.092	8.013	1	.005	.772	.645	.923
Constant	3.019	1.166	6.704	1	.010	20.480		
Step 2 <sup>b</sup>								
RoleCon	-.075	.035	4.515	1	.034	.928	.866	.994
Jobscore	-.217	.096	5.106	1	.024	.805	.667	.972
Constant	6.708	2.208	9.227	1	.002	818.812		
Step 3 <sup>c</sup>								
RoleCon	-.107	.040	7.117	1	.008	.898	.830	.972
Jobscore	-.312	.110	8.084	1	.004	.73	.591	.908
Promscore	.282	.106	7.057	1	.008	1.326	1.077	1.632
Constant	8.459	2.535	11.137	1	.001	4716.772		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: The job itself (Jobscore).

b. Variable(s) entered on step 2: Role conflict (RoleCon).

c. Variable(s) entered on step 3: Promotional opportunities (Promscore)

The correlation coefficients for the predictor variables (role conflict -.107, the job itself -.312 and promotional opportunity .282) are all significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 7: Step summary<sup>a,b</sup>

Step	Improvement			Model			Correct Class %	Variable
	Chi-square	Df	Sig.	Chi-square	df	Sig.		
1	10.451	1	.001	10.451	1	.001	64.8%	IN: Jobscore
2	4.861	1	.027	15.312	2	.000	71.8%	IN: RoleCon
3	8.065	1	.005	23.368	3	.000	<b>74.6%</b>	IN: Promscore

a. No more variables can be deleted from or added to the current model

b. End block: 1

The conclusion can be drawn that the overall accuracy of the model is 74,6% (highlighted). The accuracy can be deduced from a classification table on which the model predicts an expatriate's intention to quit and then compares this with the observed intention to quit. 74,6% of the model's predictions are correct. This implies that the model will predict an expatriate's intention to quit with a 74,6% accuracy. The Hosmer and Lemeshow's *Goodness-of-fit* test has been applied to assess how well the chosen model fits the data.

Table 8: Hosmer and Lemeshow test

Step	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
3	6.778	8	.561

The test statistic is 6.778 and the significance value .561. The statistic tests the hypothesis that the observed data is significantly different from the predicted values in the model. In effect, the researcher wants a non-significant value for the test as it will indicate that the model does not differ significantly from the observed data. As the value .561 is not significant, it is an indication that the model predicts the real-life data very well and therefore the model appears fit.

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

The participants' responses to the open-ended questions were allocated to the relevant code category and frequency counts were calculated. Frequencies supply a valuable picture of how the data is distributed across the aspects the expatriates perceive as critical. As 9 participants did not complete the open-ended questions, they were excluded from this part of the data analysis (N = 62). Table 9 and Table 10 present the findings.

**Table 9: Frequency count for the aspects that make adjustment easier as perceived by expatriates**

Categories/ Themes	Frequency count (N = 62)
Commitment towards the vision of the organization	34
Friendly supportive co-workers	39
Good relationship with management	14
Teamwork	18
Job satisfaction and challenges within the job	15
Remuneration/ benefits	18
Work environment	10
Pre-departure training	12
Expatriate support from home country	18
Friendly supportive locals (social environment)	42
Fluency in the host-country language	22
Family accompanied expatriate on the assignment	16
The opportunity to see new places and travel	8
Country parameters (Safe environment, stable economic climate, stable political environment, quality education)	26

**Table 10: Frequency count for the aspects that make adjustment more difficult as perceived by expatriates**

Categories/ Themes	Frequency count (N = 62)
Local language barriers	28
Missing family and friends	38
Racism and discrimination (social and work)	16
Unsettled family life (employment opportunities for spouses and schooling for children)	24
Foreign culture (social environment)	16
Weather	8
Missing everyday commodities like Food, Technology and Infrastructure, Medical services, Living conditions	31
Financial strains	10
Cultural differences in the working environment	32
No expatriate support received from the organization	16
Unmet expectations	32

## DISCUSSION

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 indented 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 organisational practices that will facilitate expatriate job and organisational adjustment.

The percentages for intention to quit and propensity to return early in this 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 unacceptable 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.

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% of the variance of the intention to leave. 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.

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.

As a purpose of the study was to identify the aspects that facilitate expatriate adjustment, the aspects are classified into work-related, person-related and other-related variables as indicated in Table 11.

**Table 11: Aspects related to expatriate adjustment**

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

Interesting to note that when the question was posed about what makes adjustment easier, the majority of responses were job-related, but when the question was posed about what makes adjustment difficult, the majority of responses were 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.

## **CONCLUSION**

While there is still much to be learned about expatriate and repatriate adjustment and its antecedents and outcomes, this study has made valuable contributions. 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 job-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 job-related attitudes are identified as critical to the adjustment process. The results and recommendations of the study may help multinational corporations in South Africa to facilitate the expatriation and repatriation processes of their managers, saving substantial sums of money and keeping valuable human capital within the multinational corporation as part of talent management.

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