Self-initiated expatriate adjustment over time

SIE adjustment over time

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Abstract

Purpose and Scope – This chapter aims to discuss the role of time on expatriate adjustment, focusing specifically on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), and contrasting them with assigned expatriates (AEs). We also aim to develop a theoretical model depicting the different stages and timings of adjustment among both groups of expatriates.

Method – We conduct a literature review of studies on both AE and SIE adjustment, paying particular attention to the sparse longitudinal studies in the field.

Results – We provide an empirically based adjustment process model for SIEs vs AEs where we address the factors that may facilitate the adjustment of both groups. We also describe factors that may be more relevant for the adjustment of one group specifically. Our main empirically-based proposition has to do with the fact that the experience of AEs tends to have more defined time boundaries, contrasting with that of SIEs.

Recommendations and Conclusions – We conclude that the adjustment process of SIEs may be more based on individual action and dependent wider factors and we recommend that organisations employing SIEs are aware of this in order to understand this part of their workforce.

Introduction

Expatriates' ability to adjust to their new organisational context and to a host country is closely linked to their personal well-being and to the success of their international work. Expatriate adjustment has been positively related to favourable attitudes at work, less job

strain, more job satisfaction, stronger organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003) as well as to higher performance levels - though this last is more contentious (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010; Takeuchi, Li, & Wang, 2018). Adjustment is not always easy, but to suggest ways to improve it, we need to have a clearer and better understanding of the construct and the processes.

The process takes place over time, however, most of our research lacks a time-based approach, or a longitudinal design, which would allow more certainty in advancing causal relationships (Hippler, Brewster, & Haslberger, 2015). This means that overall few psychological process theories of expatriate adjustment have emerged, and the development of adjustment over time has largely been ignored. How quickly they can adjust is relevant to all expatriates, though there have been fewer studies of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). We explore the notion of adjustment and the processes of adjustment over time for all expatriates; then, given that almost all that research is drawn from assigned expatriates (AEs), we ask whether the different situation of SIEs might mean that their adjustment is different; and finally we offer a new model to encompass research into those differences.

Defining adjustment

Given the importance of expatriate adjustment for both individuals and organisations, much research has focused on understanding the meaning of adjustment, as well as its antecedents. A large proportion of this draws on Black and colleagues' conceptualisation (Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989): This addresses adjustment as the degree

of perceived psychological comfort with the new environment in terms of work, interaction with host-country nationals and the general environment. Many of these studies use Black and Stephens' (1989) 14-item questionnaire, or some variant of it, to operationalise adjustment. However, this conceptualisation of adjustment has been much criticised, amongst other reasons partly because it is an empirical construct not underpinned by theory, partly because the categories are not discrete, and partly because it focuses on an individual subjective well-being state, neglecting external environmental factors (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013).

Haslberger et al. (2013) suggest addressing the multidimensionality of adjustment (its cognitive, affective and behavioural elements). The *cognitive* dimension refers to the expatriates' knowledge and understanding of the new environment in which they have to operate – for example how to greet people or how business is conducted in the host country. The *affective* dimension of adjustment is associated with expatriates' feelings – e.g. how happy they are in the new environment, their expectations for the future and how excited/ reluctant they are about coping with a new language. *Behavioural* adjustment refers to the individuals' observable physical actions – e.g. behaving in ways that seem to be effective and are perceived by locals as appropriate. Indeed, for each of these three dimensions there is both an internal and an external aspect: Both the individual and the environment (other people) judge whether the expatriate is adjusted.

Haslberger et al. (2013) emphasise the fact that adjustment is based on a person-environment fit. Person-environment fit theory postulates that congruence between individual

characteristics and contextual characteristics (e.g., at work: Job demands, job resources, or when shopping: The expected ways of dealing with shop workers) is an important predictor of attitudes. Factors such as satisfaction with the stay in the country and general happiness can also be linked directly to work issues such as commitment and turnover (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

The environment in which an expatriate lives and works, and their own individual characteristics, create a set of variables that facilitate or hinder adjustment (Haslberger et al., 2013). These variables include language ability, previous overseas experience, self-efficacy, relational skills, education level, job-related factors such as role clarity, role discretion and role conflict, job level, organisational tenure, assignment duration, outcome expectancy, cross-cultural training, co-worker support, culture novelty and spouse adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003; Takeuchi, 2010). Fewer studies have focused specifically on the adjustment of SIEs, but this group has recently been receiving additional attention (e.g., Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008; Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2013; Froese, 2012; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Nolan & Morley, 2014; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009), even if many of these studies are limited by a reliance on the Black and Stephens's (1989) scale.

Time as a key element for adjustment

If we conceptualise adjustment based on person-environment fit (Haslberger et al., 2013), then fit experiences are inherently dynamic, because various types of fit (e.g., person-organisation fit; person-job fit; person-supervisor fit; or person-host-country fit) evolve over

time as individuals and aspects of their environments change (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006). The role of time in expatriate adjustment has been called ”the elephant in the room” by Hippler, Brewster, and Haslberger (2015, p. 1920). This is since most research on expatriate adjustment has, somewhat bizarrely, ignored the duration of the stay in the host country and the interval between cause and effect. Hippler at al. (2015) argue that questions such as ‘what happens when’ and ‘how long does it take for an intervention to show an effect’ are critical to adjustment.

It is obvious that someone who has spent a total of six months in a country is likely to be better adjusted than they were when they had only been in the country for six weeks, and they are likely to be considerably better adjusted than they were in their first six days. However, this is ignored in most of our research on adjustment, which summarises the average of groups of people who have been in a country for different periods of time. Part of the problem is methodological: Getting large samples of respondents is difficult; dividing small numbers of respondents into different groups according to the amount of time they have had to adjust means that any time-based sub-categories will have insufficient numbers for conclusions to be statistically valid. Given that many studies have around a hundred respondents or less, researchers have little choice but to batch them together and ignore time. An alternative approach, some kind of longitudinal research takes considerable commitment, resources and continued contact with the original sample.

Early attempts to conceptualise the time dimension of adjustment showed some inconsistency in terms of the average timings/ phases. One well-known model is the U-curve theory of

adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955), where there is an initial 'honeymoon' phase, created by the excitement of the new environment; followed by a sharp fall in adjustment, named 'culture shock', created as a result of the frustration of expectations and the failure of familiar approaches to work in the new culture; followed, hopefully, by a recovery phase as the expatriate finds ways to cope; before reaching a final stage of 'mastery'. Black and Mendenhall (1991) described the 'honeymoon' phase as ending about two months after initiating the international assignment, with the lowest point in the culture shock phase taking place at about four to six months into the assignment. Other studies provide different results, suggesting that the 'honeymoon' stage may last as long as 12 months and the 'culture shock' stage would not reach its lowest point before about three years into the assignment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

The U-curve and culture shock hypotheses have been subject to considerable criticism (see Halsberger et al., 2015, for a summary). There is a lack of construct clarity and little empirical support has been found for either. It seems likely that a person may be at different stages of development of adjustment depending upon which dimension and which domain one considers. Others have suggested a W-curve (successive U-curves) or a J-curve (early depression followed by steady improvement). However, in spite of their intuitive appeal, empirical support for these curves remains elusive (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). Critical voices rose early on: Questioning how culture shock was defined and whether it was as widespread as claimed, and critiquing the methodology of the studies (e.g., Church, 1982; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Hippler et al. (2015) suggest that the phases of adjustment will vary with different domains. Drawing from research on migrants they argue that expatriates can relatively easily and quickly adjust to *public order and political systems*: Few expatriates end up driving on the wrong side of the road or fail to register with the authorities. The *economic* domain may pose some challenges: Opening bank accounts, acceptance of credit cards, and shopping practices or utility repairs can be challenging but can usually be relatively easily solved. Clearly, if the expatriate becomes an entrepreneur and sets up their own business in the country then the economic domain increases in salience and adjustment may take longer, blurring into work. Generally, the *work* domain may be more challenging: There is often some familiarity with the work environment (especially for AEs), but how things operate and what processes work may be somewhat unfamiliar, especially for certain SIEs who take the opportunity of the move to go into different kinds of work (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This means that adjustment to the work domain may take longer than adjustment to the public order or economic domain but is usually relatively straightforward compared to other domains (Hippler et al., 2015). Adjustment may take more time in the domain of *social relations*. While new technology means that it is increasingly easy to maintain contact with family and friends back home, distance can still be painful. It may be difficult to make friends in a considerably different society; in some high-context societies (Hall, 1976) culture and language may be major problems. Children at school or social interests (sports or religious attendance) may ease things. However, in some societies making friends with locals takes a long time. *Family relations* are less likely to change as a result of the expatriation: Most families will try to keep the family in its familiar form; at least in private. In public they may have to adjust – for example, small children running around in a restaurant may be indulged in Portugal; but would be frowned upon in Japan. The family may be put under some strain in a new environment, especially if one partner ends up working for many more hours in the day

that was usual at home. Finally, the least likely area to change is ideology – people are unlikely to fundamentally change their views of what is right and wrong to fit in with an environment that they do not expect to stay in long-term, even if they may have to make small adjustments in their public behaviour (Hippler et al., 2015). Time plays a different role in different domains of adjustment.

Longitudinal studies of adjustment

One approach that would contribute significantly to our understanding of the impact of time on expatriate adjustment involves collecting data over different time points. This would provide empirical evidence to identify adjustment patterns over time, potentially in the different domains (Hippler et al., 2015). However, there are few longitudinal studies on expatriate adjustment or adjustment-related variables (for exceptions see Fee & Gray, 2012; Fu, Hsu, Shaffer, & Ren, 2017; Liu & Chen, 2014; Patel, Easmon, Seed, Dow, & Snashall, 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2018). There are methodological problems that help to explain this: Organisational constraints on following up samples, for example, and the limited duration of some expatriate assignments. It is also difficult to conduct longitudinal studies with short time lags since participants tend to stop responding.

The longitudinal studies on expatriate adjustment that we have offer important contributions to our understanding of the covariates of adjustment and its potential outcomes. Fee and Gray

(2012) find significant increases in overall creative-thinking abilities and cognitive flexibility, though not in originality, elaboration, or ideational fluency. Liu and Chen (2014) find that different forms of counterfactual thinking and cultural intelligence are important predictors of job-creativity. Takeuchi at al. (2018) focus on archival four-wave longitudinal data on expatriate job performance and, using a latent class growth analysis, find four main patterns that may apply to different expatriates: U-curve, learning-curve, stable high-performance, and stable low-performance. The longitudinal study by Patel et al. (2006) found that unaccompanied employees were at increased risk of health 'events' and of traumatic injury when compared to accompanied employees.

Though the longitudinal design of these studies is a relevant methodological contribution that helps address the role of time and potential causality patterns, explaining how such phenomena occur over time may require more complexity. Mitchell and James (2001, p. 532) identify five critical issues: Lag, durations, rate of change, dynamic relationships and reciprocal causation. Lag refers to the extent of time needed to see the effect of the independent variable (IV) on the dependent variable (DV). Duration concerns the fact that IV and DV each last a certain amount of time, meaning that they do not necessarily occur instantaneously. The rate of change refers to the fact that the speed of the IV and the DV may vary. Dynamism in relationships relates to the fact that, given these other changes, the relationship between IV and DV over time may change. Reciprocal causation refers to the fact that not only may the IV cause the DV, the DV may in turn cause the IV.

The inconsistency of results in terms of different timings of the phases of adjustment in the studies by Black and Mendenhall (1991) and Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) may result from the inadequacies of their construct of 'adjustment', but it may also be caused by heterogeneity among the populations of expatriates. One solution would be to try to move away from mean-based approaches and move towards variance-based approaches (Beugelsdijk, Maseland, Onrust, Van Hoorn, & Slanger, 2015). An example of that is the methodological latent class growth analysis used by Takeuchi et al. (2018). Job performance can be one relevant outcome of adjustment (to the work domain and maybe beyond that), but it would be extremely useful to use this kind of variance-based approach to understand possible patterns of adjustment over time and identify its main antecedents. Then expatriate adjustment over time could be addressed as a series of possible patterns – this would have important managerial implications.

Adjustment over time: Are processes different for assigned and self-initiated expatriates?

As noted in the introduction, most of this research draws on data from AEs. What about the adjustment over time of SIEs, a larger part of the total internationally mobile workforce (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013)? How might we expect the processes of adjustment over time of SIEs to differ from those of AEs?

The definition of SIEs is not consensual, though Cerdin and Selmer (2014) recently clarified this concept by specifying several criteria that differentiate SIEs from other forms of globally mobile employees. In particular, these authors claim that the first condition for being characterised as an SIE is to initiate one's own international relocation (Cerdin & Selmer,

2014). This implies that in many cases the organisational resources available to AEs, including specific expatriate management practices, are not available to SIEs (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008).

AEs and SIEs in Japan have been assessed in terms of their cross-cultural adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2013), but the research compared AEs in MNEs with language teachers, so it is not clear whether the differences that were found are related to expatriate type or to occupation. These authors found that the better Japanese language skills and longer stay in Japan of SIEs meant they were more adjusted to interaction with host country nationals than AEs. Furusawa and Brewster (2018) found that Japanese organisations have used Japanese nationals in China, who equally had been there longer and had better language proficiency, as boundary-spanners between the local operation and headquarters or AEs from headquarters.

Differences in cross-cultural adjustment between AEs and SIEs probably relate to the motives of SIEs to undertake international work (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2016). Froese (2012) found that among the motives of SIEs in South Korea are a desire for international experience and family ties in the host country: Both likely to lead to better adjustment. Doherty et al. (2011) found that SIEs were significantly more focused on factors such as location and reputation of the host country, suggesting that the desire to move to a particular country and characteristics of that country were the primary drivers; AEs placed significantly more emphasis on specific career motives including job, skills and career impact – meaning that they have less motivation to adjust to a place they

were only likely to stay for a short time. There are also differences between SIEs and AEs in terms of their experiences once in the host country. SIEs work at lower levels of organisational hierarchy (Suutari & Brewster, 2001) where language skills and adjustment to local mores are more necessary that in the mostly-expatriate executive suite, and are likely to stay longer in the country but less likely to stay in any one organisation (Mayrhofer, Sparrow, & Zimmerman, 2008). They will be more motivated to adjust as quickly as possible.

Another difference between SIEs and AEs concerns future prospects, particularly potential repatriation or returning home. Studies (De Cieri, Sheehan, Costa, Fenwick, & Cooper, 2009; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) suggest that SIEs' intentions to remain in the host country are generally associated with their career prospects in the host country. Hence, they may be more motivated to adjust.

An empirically based adjustment process model for SIEs vs. AEs

Differences regarding the motives of SIEs and AEs to relocate abroad are likely to influence the adjustment through time of individuals in both groups. In order to address this, we advance a theoretical model based on the previously mentioned empirical evidence, suggesting some differences between SIEs and AEs (Figure 1).

<FIGURE 1: An empirically based adjustment process model for SIEs vs. AEs HERE>

We follow Haslberger et al.'s (2013) conceptualisation and claim that these aspects are likely to generate different patterns of adjustment through time in different dimensions: Attitudes, cognitions and behaviours.

Before the move

For SIEs, the beginning and the end of an experience abroad are often not well-defined. This is relevant because of its potential implications on the adjustment process. AEs have the opportunity (even if most do not receive it in practice) to be provided with cross-cultural training before leaving on an assignment (Selmer, 2005; Morris & Robie, 2001). They will generally have organisational support throughout the process with such aspects as housing, children's education and other family support. SIEs are less likely to have had such support or training. On the other hand, they may have researched the host country extensively and the process of themselves sorting out everything related to the move (visas, housing, children's education, bank accounts, taxation, healthcare and insurance), mean they are better cognitively prepared for the host country than AEs, which could facilitate their adjustment. Hence, we suggest that, while both AEs and SIEs can initiate the adjustment process before the actual move to the host country, SIEs are likely to be more autonomous in the process, which could facilitate adjustment at the pre-move stage (see Figure 1). The line referring to AEs has a well-defined start, referring to the offer being made and the organisational processes that take place in order to facilitate the move abroad; the line referring to SIEs is represented by a dashed line intentionally portraying the way in which the decision to move and work abroad is likely to be thought and discussed with family and friends over a period of time (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013). The voluntary nature of the move suggests that some form of *affective* dimension of adjustment is also being developed before the move. Affective adjustment is less likely to be developed by AEs at such an early stage.

During the international experience

When expatriates arrive in the host country, a more realistic perception of the environment takes place and other dimensions of adjustment start to emerge (Haslberger et al., 2013). Contact with the work and non-work environment in the host country increases expatriates' knowledge of different norms and procedures (cognitive dimension), generates either positive or negative feelings about life and work in the host country (affective dimension) and provides the setting and the opportunity for expatriates to interact with locals and behave according to what they cognitively know to be customary in the local environment (behavioural dimension). While knowledge will probably increase steadily, and behaviour should gradually begin to fit better over time, the affective dimension may fluctuate on an hourly, daily or weekly basis.

While being in the host country provides the setting for the development of different types of adjustment, there may well be some asynchronies (especially related to dynamism in relationships) regarding the achievement of the different forms of adjustment: Cognitive, behavioural and affective (Mitchell & James, 2001). Those asynchronies will depend on individual experiences and on their organisational and social environment in the host country. Despite the idiosyncratic nature of those experiences, we believe that some differences between SIEs' and AEs' adjustment during the international experience are to be expected (Figure 1).

The central box in Figure 1 depicts some of the potential facilitators of adjustment for both SIEs and AEs, namely familiarity with or ability to learn the language spoken in the host

country, family adjustment, general organisational support and socialisation with locals. Host country language ability is a key antecedent for cross-cultural adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2015). It is common for expatriates to be accompanied by close family members, but the families of AEs travel with the expatriate and receive organisational support, while it seems that the families of SIEs tend to take longer to relocate, waiting for the SIE to finalise housing and schooling arrangements. In both cases, there will be spill-over between family adjustment and the expatriate's own adjustment (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Hechanova et al., 2003; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013), but the different circumstances may lead to differences in adjustment speed. Organisational support may also be a facilitator of adjustment for both AEs and SIEs (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) and impacts willingness to stay in the host country (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014). A recent longitudinal study by Fu, Hsu, Shaffer and Ren (2017) focusing on the organisational socialisation of SIEs, provides robust evidence for socialisation as a process that continues after the newcomer stage, and demonstrates that organisational socialisation tactics facilitate social integration and learning speed, which, in turn, are positively related to SIE adjustment. Social support and advice-seeking (from host country nationals) are also crucial for cross-cultural adjustment and even for performance among AEs (Lee, Veasna, & Wu, 2013; Mahajan & Toh, 2014), but may operate in rather different ways.

Above the timeline in Figure 1 referring to AEs, there are also some variables that tend to be more frequently available for them, such as cross-cultural training during the assignment, informal briefings and shadowing (Harris & Brewster, 2001). They may also receive support for their families in terms of schooling, language training for family members, support for job

search for spouses, as well as additional help, such as providing house cleaners and chauffeurs. These may make affective adjustment easier.

Below the timeline in Figure 1 referring to SIEs are some of the potential facilitators of adjustment that are more salient to them, including the presence of extended family, potential economic gains that could improve one's quality of living in the host country and career progression. Where SIEs do not have a job before the move, they may rely on extended family living in the host country for support in the early stages of the expatriation process (Nolan & Morley, 2014). An important motivation of SIEs to move concerns improving their personal economic situation (Doherty, 2013), which may allow them to improve their quality of living. While economic benefits are also push factors for AEs, they are likely to already be in a favourable position while in the home country.

Leaving the host country

For AEs, the process of leaving the host country tends to be based on organisational decisions. The leave date tends to be fixed in advance and in many cases the future location of the expatriates and their families (either a repatriation or another international assignment) are determined by organisational needs. In contrast, SIEs' decision to leave the host country tends to be more related to their levels of adjustment in the host country, to their economic situation and to the lack of potential career advancement opportunities in the host country, or to different pull factors to return to their home country. SIEs are likely to be on their own in creating their career after repatriation and thus their situation is less certain (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

The aspect that is perhaps less visible in the model (since it is hard to visually depict) concerns the fact that these variables that facilitate expatriate adjustment take place at different moments in time. Expatriate adjustment is largely associated with person-environment fit (Nolan & Morley, 2014) and this fit has a dynamic nature (Shipp & Jansen, 2011) and involves changes in both the individual and the environment. For example, an SIE may initially have a moderate level of adjustment to the host country, mostly in the cognitive and behavioural dimensions, but then changes job and receives a lot of additional organisational support, and at a later stage they become friends with locals creating a social network – such SIEs are likely to increase their adjustment levels, and even develop more affective adjustment, through time based on these events. A contrasting example would be the case of a SIE who is cognitively, behaviourally and affectively adjusted to the host country, but experiences a situation of bullying in the workplace due to their nationality. This is likely to diminish levels of affective adjustment.

What happens next? Career capital development, repatriation opportunities and career advancement for SIEs

Overall, SIE adjustment has been associated with positive implications for the individual, particularly in terms of job satisfaction (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013) and psychological well-being, which may reflect on improved performance and intention to remain with the organisation (Peltokorpi, 2008). It is also likely to have positive implications for the organisation, as well-adjusted individuals will create fewer problems. The adjustment of SIEs has also been associated with their career success (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2012). The positive attitudinal implications of their individual adjustment (e.g., in terms of job

satisfaction and psychological well-being) are likely to positively impact individual performance (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000) and possibly later play a role in organisational performance.

Despite the large number of organisations that fail to provide AEs with suitable positions upon repatriation (Shen & Hall, 2009), it is clear that, overall, an international assignment helps develop one's career capital and facilitates career advancement, inside or outside the organisation's boundaries (Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen, & Tornikoski, 2018; Suutari, Brewster, Dickmann, Mäkelä, Tanskenan, & Tornikoski, 2018; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). The concept of career capital can be defined as a broad set of competencies that employees need in order to be successful in their employment paths (Suutari, Brewster, & Tornikoski, 2013). Career capital is often operationalised along three dimensions: Knowing-how (e.g., technical skills), knowing-whom (e.g., social networks), and knowing-why (e.g., motivation) (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). An international experience is likely to play a major role on the development of career capital. In turn, the development of career capital during an international assignment is likely to be related to the future career decisions expatriates make. Biemann and Andresen (2010) found that SIEs have more organisational mobility and expect higher benefits from international experiences for their future careers, than AEs. These authors also found that career orientation remains relatively stable among SIEs from different age groups, whereas it declines for AEs with increasing age. So, it is possible to take a wider view of adjustment that incorporates potential future adjustment (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Suutari, Tornikoski, & Mäkelä, 2012).

This chapter addresses the often neglected element of time in the development of cross-cultural adjustment. While there is some existing evidence regarding patterns of adjustment over time among AEs (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black & Mendenhall, 1991) there is little agreement regarding the average time points in the adjustment process. Furthermore, the population of SIEs has been largely neglected in determining the effects of time on their cross-cultural adjustment. We have advanced an adjustment process model for SIEs, in comparison with AEs, based on the latest empirical evidence. In particular, we have focused on what the differences between SIEs and AEs may be, in terms of the timings and processes of adjustment, considering their different motivations to work abroad, involvement in the preparation of the move, potential facilitators of adjustment during the experience in the host country, and future career motivations. In this model, we discuss the multidimensionality of adjustment, considering the three different dimensions advanced by Haslberger et al. (2013): Cognitive, affective and behavioural.

We conclude that, for SIEs, the notion of time in relation to adjustment may have less clearly-defined boundaries: There may be a longer preparation period, where both cognitive and affective dimensions of adjustment start to emerge, and a longer period also preparing a possible departure, assessing the different pros and cons of leaving and actively seeking further opportunities in their home country or in a different host country. SIE adjustment during the international experience will also be influenced by their social setting in the host country, including the existence of extended family, and by the economic and career opportunities that are created.

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