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Cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates: The role of emotional intelligence and gender

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) of expatriates on international assignments. Based on a sample of 269 French expatriates operating in 133 countries, our analysis finds a significant and positive relationship between EI and expatriates' general living, interactional and work-related CCA. Additionally, it shows that cultural similarity only facilitates general living adjustment and not interactional or work adjustments. Finally, our analysis reveals an interesting interaction effect between gender and the ability to appraise and express emotions: the influence of the latter on all three dimensions of CCA tends to be slightly stronger for male than female expatriates. The study offers important practical implications for organizations concerning the identification and development of successful expatriates.

1. Introduction

Expatriation, defined as a voluntary, temporary migration of a person abroad for a specific purpose with an ultimate return to his/her home country (cf. Cohen, 1977), is a central part of international business activities undertaken by multinational companies globally. One of the largest surveys of expatriates and globally mobile employees, conducted by Mercer, showed that, in 2008–9, 243 multinational companies worldwide employed over 94,000 expatriates (compared to around 50,000 expatriates in 2005–6).[1] In many ways the success of companies' international business activities today depends on expatriates, for example, how well they are able to function in the new environment to which they are transferred, cooperate with locals, apply their competences and knowledge, learn new things, and cope with uncertainty. Whether expatriates can succeed in these tasks depends to a large extent on their cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) to the host environment/country, that is, the extent to which an expatriate feels psychologically comfortable in relation to a variety of aspects of a new environment (e.g. Caligiuri, 1997; Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Tung, 1998).

Research has provided ample evidence suggesting that expatriate adjustment is a challenging and difficult process (e.g. Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri, 2000; Tung, 1998). Several seminal articles in the field have stressed the critical role of adjustment for successful expatriation and underlined the complex and multidimensional nature of the adjustment process, differentiating between general living, interactional, and work-related adjustment (e.g. Aycan, 1997; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). Research to date has been insightful in explicating the impact of different individual and contextual (i.e. work, organizational, or institutional) factors on CCA. The former included studies that examined the impacts of the Big Five personality traits (e.g. Caligiuri, 2000; Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005); locus of control (Black, 1990; Lii & Wong, 2008); socio-ability and flexibility (Black & Stephens, 1989); interpersonal and social skills (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003); language skills (Kim & Slocum, 2008); and, recently, cultural intelligence (Rose, Ramadu, Uli, & Kumar, 2010; Wu & Ang, 2011) on CCA. The latter stream of research focused on: cross-cultural training (e.g. Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Bürgi, 2001; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011); psychological contract (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009); spousal/family support (Black & Stephens, 1989; Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998); organizational support (Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999); mentoring (Mezias & Scandura, 2005); role novelty and role ambiguity (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999); cultural distance/cultural similarity (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999); international experience (Selmer, 2001, 2002); as well as several

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[1] www.globalhrnews.com/story.asp?sid=1149 (accessed on 20.6.13), "Companies increase number of expats," October 27, 2008.

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other factors (see Hechanova et al., 2003, for a more comprehensive meta-analysis of the literature).

With a few exceptions (e.g. Gabel, Dolan, & Cerdin, 2005; Lii & Wong, 2008; Tan, Härtel, Panipucci, & Strybosch, 2005) the role of emotions, and specifically of emotional intelligence (EI), for expatriates' CCA has received relatively little attention. EI is defined as an array of capabilities, competences, and skills that influence one's ability to cope with environmental demands (e.g. Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, & Dornheim, 1998). The lack of research on this topic is surprising for two main reasons. First, it is recognized that often the success of the expatriation process depends on choosing a culturally attuned and emotionally sensitive person who can respond appropriately to the host environment of another country and different interpersonal work situations (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Huang et al., 2005). Second, in other streams of research the level of EI was found to be critical for success in emotionally intensive areas of human activity, such as leadership (e.g. Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008), work, and education (e.g. Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). Therefore, it could be expected that EI would be critical for expatriates, who get deeply involved in interactions with locals and need to cope with emotional stress and different acceptable forms and norms of emotional behavior. In this study we claim that there is a need to examine expatriates' EI levels to be able to better explain their CCA.

In order to further our understanding of the role of EI in expatriates' adjustment and add to the (so far) very limited empirical studies on the topic, we analyzed a sample of 269 overseas French expatriates in 133 countries working for Alliance Française, a government-recognized public interest foundation. This is an interesting sample of expatriates to test for adjustment because their primary tasks are to promote French culture and language globally and to establish a dialog between cultures by collaborating closely with foreign partners in other countries. To succeed in these tasks, one would expect these people to be very well adjusted to their host environments in order to invoke interest among locals and make them willing to collaborate with and learn from them. Moreover, the cultural homogeneity of the sample allows us alleviate potential differences across cultural groups in experiencing, registering and expressing emotions, noted in the literature examining the impact of national culture on individuals' emotional processes (e.g. Elfenbein, 2007; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992).

The analysis contributes to the literature on expatriates' CCA in three important ways. First, it indicates that EI has important explanatory power for expatriates' adjustment and success and, therefore, needs to be examined more thoroughly in the future. Second, the analysis sheds new light on the impact of cultural similarity, which has predominantly been presumed to facilitate all three dimensions of adjustment (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black et al., 1991). Finally, it adds to our understanding of the role of gender in moderating the relationship between EI and CCA.

2. Theoretical framework and development of hypotheses

Research has shown convincingly that EI and emotions in general play a significant role in individuals' intellectual functioning (Elfenbein, 2007; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI has been defined as an enduring personal trait, which underlines an individual's ability to adaptively identify, understand, manage, and harness the emotions of self and others and use these emotions to facilitate cognitive processing (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Schutte et al., 1998; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). The term EI was originally coined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), who, based on their literature review, proposed dividing it conceptually into three categories of adaptive ability: appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others); regulation of emotion (in self and others); and utilization of emotions in solving problems (i.e. flexible planning, creative thinking, redirected attention, and motivation). Later, Schutte et al. (1998, p. 169), in an attempt to develop a "*brief, validated measures of emotional intelligence*" that would measure EI as a homogeneous construct, derived and validated a 33-item measure of EI. The resulted measure fitted well with the three conceptual categories originally suggested by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Among the 33 items, 13 measured appraisal and expression, 10 measured regulation, and 10 measured utilization of emotions. We rely on this classification in deriving and testing our hypotheses.

Research on EI found it to be positively related to well being (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005), optimism (Schutte et al., 1998), positive mood, and high self-esteem (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002), and negatively to depression (Schutte et al., 1998). In interpersonal relations, EI was found to result in higher social skills, self-monitoring in social situations, and in more cooperative responses to others (Schutte, Malouff, Bobick, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Phodes, & Wendorf, 2001). EI has been widely tested and applied in organizational behavior research (e.g. Joseph & Newman, 2010; Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011) and was shown to be an important predictor of, for example, job performance and leadership (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Humphrey et al., 2008) as well as stress (Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002).

Overall, higher-level EI seems to address exactly those areas that can be potentially difficult for an expatriate on assignment. Therefore, it is to be expected that EI can be important for expatriates' CCA, because it might help them to cope with uncertainty and the complexity of the surrounding environment. Although the literature on expatriates' CCA has hinted at the importance of EI in determining its effectiveness (e.g. Caligiuri et al., 2001; Caligiuri & Tung, 1999), so far very little research has examined the impacts of EI on CCA in detail. In a rare study examining the impact of EI on expatriates' adjustment, Gabel et al. (2005) found that EI directly influences adjustment but not assignment success. More specifically, their findings suggest that, although EI is not a direct predictor of assignment success, some dimensions of EI play an important role in explaining CCA and, by extension, the success of internationally assigned managers. These inter- and intrapersonal abilities and adaptability are predictive indicators of general living, interactional and work adjustment. However, the study used a relatively small sample (two subsamples of 39 and 20 managers) and all expatriates were from different countries, making it difficult to control for the potential impacts of national culture on respondents' emotions.

Now we turn to deriving our hypotheses around the three categories of adaptive abilities of EI proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990): (1) appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others); (2) regulation of emotions (in self and others); and (3) utilization of emotions in solving problems.

2.1. Appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others) and CCA

The first adaptive ability in Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model refers to appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others). The authors claim that the processes underlying EI are initiated when affect-laden information first enters an individual's perceptual system. At this stage EI facilitates the accurate appraisal of feelings, which then influences how emotions are expressed. Individuals' ability to appraise and express emotions facilitates quicker perception of their own emotions, and responses to them, and better expression of those emotions to others. This ability also helps their recognition of others' emotional reactions and their empathic responses to them, ensuring smooth interpersonal interactions. This is undoubtedly a crucial ability, and absolutely

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necessary for adequate social functioning, enabling the choice of socially adaptive behavior when interacting with others. In support of this argument, research has found that the ability to appraise and express emotions helps in conflict resolution and the general maintenance of effective relationships (Morris & Keltner, 2000).

It is likely that possessing this ability will help expatriates' CCA a great deal. The ability to appraise their own emotions, show empathy and accommodate the feelings and emotions of others may allow them to be perceived as warm and caring by co-workers. This characteristic will have a positive effect on an expatriate's interpersonal interactions in and outside of work. Supporting this argument, Gabel et al. (2005) found that expatriates' performance on international assignments is predicated on their capacity for empathy and social relations. Furthermore, having this capacity will make expatriates more assertive, sociable and outgoing with others. They will be more likely to spend time with locals and try to understand their culture and emotions (Black, 1990). This will increase their general appreciation and comprehension of their new broader, not just work-related, environment. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1. There is a positive relationship between individual expatriates' ability to appraise and express emotions (self and others) and their general living, interactional, and work adjustments.

2.2. Regulation of emotions (in self and others) and CCA

The second adaptive ability in Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model concerns regulation of emotions (in self and others). This, the authors claim, provides individuals with access to knowledge of their own and others' moods, allowing for the monitoring, evaluation and regulation of emotion. Being able to control one's own mood makes individuals more emotionally stable, while the ability to influence others' emotions allows individuals to control the impressions others form of them. Emotionally intelligent individuals may "*enhance their own and others' moods and even manage emotions so as to motivate others charismatically toward a worthwhile end*" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 198). EI may help individual expatriates achieve their goals in the new environment, control negative emotional experiences and stresses caused by interactions with locals, and reinforce positive experiences instead. Existing research has shown that the ability to regulate one's emotions is important for expatriates, as it facilitates "*better mood adjustment, self-encouragement and social skills*," makes them "*more careful in speech and action*," and more involved in observing others' feelings (Lii & Wong, 2008, p. 310). Expatriates who can control their emotions are likely to be better at interacting with local organizational members and locals in wider societal context, as well as coping with new rules, regulations and policies of their new work environment. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. There is a positive relationship between individual expatriates' ability to regulate emotions (in self and others) and their general living, interactional, and work adjustments.

2.3. Utilization of emotions in solving problems

The third adaptive ability in Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model deals with utilization of emotions in solving problems. The authors suggest that this ability has four main outcomes. First, it may help individuals in anticipating a wider variety of possible outcomes when considering the future thus helping them to foresee a larger number of possible future scenarios and thereby be better prepared to take advantage of future opportunities. Second, positive emotions may help people remember information and boost creative problem solving; people with positive moods "*are more likely to give especially unusual or creative first associates to neutral cues*" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 199). Third, emotions may help in directing attention to new problems rather than current problems, helping people "*to reprioritize the internal and external demands on their attention, and allocate attentional resources accordingly*" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 200). Finally, emotions can motivate persistence and facilitate the solution of complex intellectual tasks.

It seems that expatriates who are skillful in this ability are more likely to be successful than those who are not. Those who are flexible, imaginative and persistent are more likely to learn new things, and be creative and motivated in new settings. Even more important, they are more likely to avoid falling into the trap of excessively relying on stereotypes when making judgments about their new environment. This was shown to constitute a great danger for expatriates on international assignments, especially in locations that are culturally less familiar (Caligiuri et al., 2001). Relying on stereotypes has been found to lead to false expectations about the new environment (e.g. Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), which in turn affects expatriates' adjustment. Emotionally intelligent expatriates are less likely to rely on stereotypes and are more likely to redirect their attention away from stereotypical judgments. Supporting this argument, Huang et al. (2005) found that openness to experience among expatriates is positively related to their general living and work adjustment. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3. There is a positive relationship between individual expatriates' ability to use emotions in problem solving and their general living, interactional, and work adjustments.

2.4. The moderating role of gender

Several studies have found that women consistently score higher than men in terms of EI (e.g. Schutte et al., 1998; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000). The literature on gender differences in emotions has also found that women are better than men at perceiving nonverbal emotional cues (McClure, 2000) and respond with more appropriate affective responses to others' mental states (cf. Joseph & Newman, 2010). Women were also found to respond more adaptively than men to stressors, were more willing to seek help from others, and use emotion-focused strategies when appropriate (e.g. Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2001). Other studies showed that women express emotions more than men (Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989), are more affectionate (Briton & Hall, 1995), and experience more intense joy and sadness (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991). Hence, there is a burgeoning evidence suggesting that on average women are more emotionally intelligent than men.

In the context of expatriation, this may be one of the reasons why female expatriates are consistently reported to be more successful on international assignments than male expatriates (see Adler, 1987; Caligiuri & Tung, 1998; Taylor & Napier, 1996). Further, when examining the adjustment process of male and female expatriates, Selmer and Leung (2003) found that female expatriates had higher interactional and work-related adjustment than their male colleagues. Similarly, Haslberger (2010) showed that female expatriates have significantly higher levels of adjustment than men due to their superior social skills, which help them to learn faster and be more confident about establishing and maintaining relationships in the host environment. Therefore, combining (a) the research on emotions, which shows that women tend to have higher levels of EI than men, with (b) the growing evidence that female expatriates have higher CCA than their male

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colleagues provides us with good grounds to expect that the relationship between EI and CCA will be stronger for female than for male expatriates. To examine whether gender has this impact, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. Gender will moderate the relationship between EI and CCA, so that the relationship will be stronger for female than for male expatriates.

Fig. 1 shows the overall theoretical model tested in this study.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The subjects in this study are expatriates working for Alliance Française, a public interest foundation set up under private law and recognized by the French government. Its mission is to promote French culture and language by working in close collaboration with French and foreign partners in more than 130 countries. The data were collected through a survey administered in French. All 340 Alliance Française directors currently employed overseas were approached (i.e., our targeted sample was 100%) and 269 responses were received (yielding a response rate of 79%). All were French nationals expatriated for three-year assignments. The average age of the respondents was 41 (SD = 11.10) and the average experience in expatriation was 10 years (SD = 7.85). The sample was gender balanced: 53% of the respondents were men and 47% women. About 60% of the respondents were married or in a partnership and 51% had children. The respondents were based in six geographical locations: Europe (16%), North America (8%), Latin America and the Caribbean (36%), Africa and the Indian Ocean (16%), Asia (20%), and Oceania (4%).

3.2. Measures

Cross-cultural adjustment. Our dependent variable, cross-cultural adjustment, was measured from the point of view of the expatriate using 14 items from the three-dimensional inventory developed by Black and Stephens (1989). The tri-dimensionality of the construct has been tested and validated in the literature (e.g. Black et al., 1991; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Shaffer et al., 1999). It is comprised of *general living adjustment* (seven items measuring adjustment to cost of living and entertainment, recreation facilities and opportunities); *interactional adjustment* (four items measuring adjustment to interactions with host nationals on a day-to-day basis); and *work adjustment* (three items measuring adjustment to performance standards and expectations). The scales ranged from 1 for "very unadjusted" to 6 for "perfectly adjusted." The higher the total score, the better the expatriate's adjustment. The items of the construct were translated by the authors, who are both native French speakers and fluent in English. Validity and reliability tests were conducted to validate the psychometric properties of the translated scale. The French version of CCA fulfilled the required fit criteria: $\chi^2(74) = 193.60$; $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.914; CFI = 0.897; NFI = 0.884; RMSEA = 0.051. The reliability test for the three dimensions of CCA gave the following satisfactory results: general living ($\alpha = 0.86$), interactional ($\alpha = 0.91$) and work ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Emotional intelligence. We used the 33 items construct from Schutte et al. (1998) as our independent variable. The construct has been widely used in the literature to date (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004), which indicates, at least to some extent, its wide acceptance and legitimacy among researchers as an adequate and established measure of EI. For our research purpose, we used a French translation of the construct developed by Haag and Laroche (2009). The construct is composed of three key dimensions conceptually proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and empirically validated by Schutte et al. (1998)[2]: (1) appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others); (2) regulation of emotions (in self and others); and (3) utilization of emotions in problem solving.

In line with other studies (e.g. Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2004; Ciarrochi, Deane, & Anderson, 2002), we decided to begin by conducting a series of confirmatory factor analyses to confirm this solution and to ensure the convergent-discriminant validity of the measures. We did that because Schutte et al. (1998) did not report internal reliabilities of the original scales for the three-dimensional solution, and other (e.g. four- or six-dimensional) solutions were proposed in the literature (e.g. Ciarrochi, Deane, & Anderson, 2002; Gignac, Palmer, Manocha, & Stough, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Table 1 shows that Model 4, which corresponds to a three-dimensional structure, exhibits a better fit and smaller AIC compared to Model 1 (unidimensional), Model 2 (six dimensions), or Model 3 (four dimensions). Thus, the analysis confirmed the three-dimensional structure suggested by Salovey and Mayer (1990): $\chi^2(350) = 642$; $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.817; CFI = 0.835; NFI = 0.798; RMSEA = 0.047. The three-dimensional structure has been empirically validated in several other studies (e.g. Austin et al., 2004; Besharat, 2007; Schutte et al., 2001).

We used these factors as our EI dimensions. The scale reliability was tested by calculating Cronbach's alphas and showed satisfactory results: expression and appraisal of emotions (self and others) (13 items, such as e.g. "I like to share my emotions with others"), $\alpha = 0.81$; regulation of emotions (in self and others) (10 items, such as e.g. "When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last"), $\alpha = 0.82$; utilization of emotions in problem solving (10 items, such as e.g. "When I am in a positive mood solving problems is easy for me"), $\alpha = 0.68$.

Cultural similarity. We used culture similarity as one of the control variables based on the assumption that the more culturally distant expatriates' host environment to their home environment,

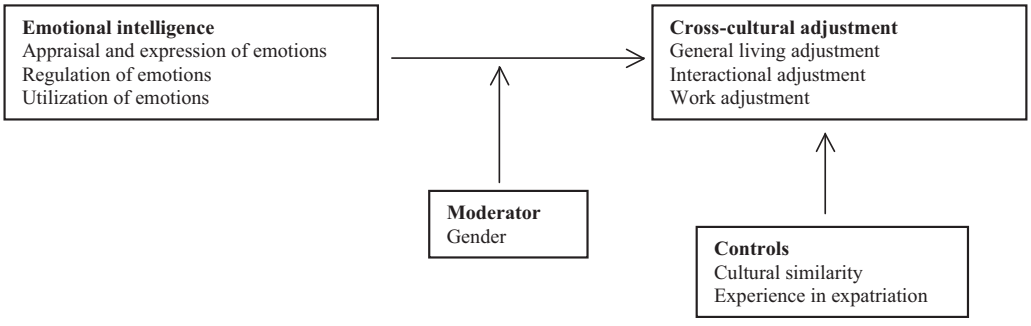

Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

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Table 1
Confirmatory analyses testing factor structure of emotional intelligence measure.

Model	Chi-square	*df*	RMSEA	90% CI for RMSEA	CFI	GFI	NFI	AIC
Model 1: One dimension solution	764	288	0.054	[0.048; 0.060]	0.741	0.739	0.717	135.49
Model 2: Six- dimension solution[1]	659	342	0.053	[0.046; 0.061]	0.811	0.795	0.757	96.87
Model 3: Four- dimension solution[2]	673	336	0.512	[0.045; 0.057]	0.817	0.803	0.793	69.82
Model 4: Three- dimension solution[3]	642	350	0.047	[0.043; 0.059]	0.835	0.817	0.798	57.35

1. Appraisal of emotions (self), appraisal of emotions (others), expression of emotions, regulation of emotions (in self), regulation of emotions (in others), utilization of emotions in problem solving (Gignac et al., 2005).
2. Optimism/mood regulation, appraisal of emotions, utilization of emotions and social skills (Petrides & Furnham, 2000)
3. Appraisal and expression of emotions (self and in others), regulation of emotions (in self and others), utilization of emotions in problem solving (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

the more important EI will be for their CCA. Culture similarity was measured using eight items adopted from Torbiorn (1982) and found in Black and Stephens (1989): everyday customs, general living conditions, healthcare facilities, transportation system, cost of living, climate, quality and type of food, and housing conditions. These items were measured on a five-point scale (1 for "very different" and 5 for "very similar"). The psychometric properties of the French translation of the construct were satisfactory: $\chi^2(74) = 193.60$; $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.898; CFI = 0.885; NFI = 0.819; RMSEA = 0.055. The reliability was confirmed with $\alpha = 0.87$.

International experience. Another control variable we used in the study was international experience of expatriates. We decided to include this variable as a control, because there is evidence in the literature that international experience positively influences CCA (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Selmer, 2001, 2002). The variable was measured by the number of years the respondent had spent on expatriate assignments prior to the current one.

Gender. As a moderator, we operationalized gender as a dummy variable where "0" stood for "male" and "1" for "female."

3.3. Assessment of common method bias

Because all the data were self-reported and collected through the same questionnaire, we evaluated whether the common method variance (CMV) could affect relationships between the constructs. We performed Harman's one-factor test and a confirmatory factor analysis (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The results suggested that CMV is not of great concern and is unlikely to confound the interpretation of results. All the variables were entered into an exploratory factor analysis, using the unrotated principal components factor analysis. Three distinct factors with eigenvalue greater than 1 were displayed, accounting together for 68% of the total variance. The first factor did not account for the majority of the variance (23%). The variables were loaded onto one factor to examine the fit of the confirmatory factor analysis model and showed that the single-factor model did not fit the data well ($\chi^2(1175) = 1599$, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.622; CFI = 0.083; NFI = 0.052; RMSEA = 0.044).

In addition, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the measurement model to examine whether the seven key measured variables (three dimensions of CCA, three dimensions of EI and cultural similarity) were distinct from one another. The results of the CFAs suggested that our seven-factor measurement model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(1155) = 812$, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.892; CFI = 0.869; NFI = 0.870; RMSEA = 0.034) and was better than the alternative models we also tested (i.e. Harman's single factor test, controlling for the effects of an unmeasured latent methods factor model, correlated uniqueness model) (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.4. Empirical strategy

The data from the 269 expatriate managers were analyzed using hierarchical regression models to estimate general living, interactional and work adjustment respectively. The method is appropriate to evaluate the distinct influence of a set of independent variables, controlling for the impact of a different set of independent variables. For each of these models, step 1 was the base model, which included only control variables. The influence of EI on CCA was tested with step 2, which included control variables and the three dimensions of EI. Step 3 then integrated the moderating variable. Next, possible moderating effects (Zedeck, 1971) were tested by adding an interaction term between gender and EI (step 4). The variable used as a component of the interaction term was centered (Aiken & West, 1991; Aguinis, 2004). Usual OLS assumptions of linearity and normality were screened. An examination for multicollinearity among independent variables was performed using variance inflation factors (VIFs). Normality, heteroscedasticity and homogeneity of residuals were also tested (Aguinis, 2004).

4. Empirical results

The summary statistics for all variables are provided in Table 2. The means, standard deviations and correlations for the variables indicate no multicollinearity. General living, interactional and work adjustment were above the mid-level point (4.91, 4.94 and 5.00 respectively). There was a positive and statistically significant correlation around 60% between all adjustment dimensions. Although slightly higher, these results are consistent with prior literature in the field (e.g. Selmer, 1999, 2006; Shaffer et al., 1999).

We tested our hypotheses using hierarchical ordinary least squares regression analysis with interactions. Following Aguinis' (2004) guidelines for models with categorical moderators, we checked the validity of the homogeneity of error variance assumption in our moderated multiple regressions. Type I homoscedasticity assumption was confirmed by non-significant White's tests ($p = 0.42$; $p = 0.26$; $p = 0.79$ respectively for the three dimensions of adjustment). Type II homoscedasticity assumption was also confirmed by calculating Bartlett's M ($p = 0.60$; $p = 0.21$; $p = 0.18$ respectively for the three dimensions of adjustment). Moreover, the results showed acceptable values of the VIF associated with the predictors, ranging from 1.10 to 2.00 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), suggesting no concern with respect to multicollinearity.

Table 3 displays the results of the regression models of general living, interactional and work adjustments respectively. In the first model (step 1), we entered the two control variables of cultural

[2] Schutte et al. (1998) have assessed the complicity of the EI construct within the Big Five framework, relating their measure of EI to the Big Five personality dimensions. They found that higher EI scores were significantly associated only with greater openness to experience and not significantly related to other dimensions. Hence, their study suggested that EI is in fact a construct distinct from other personality constructs, including the Big Five personality traits.

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Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	General living adjustment	4.91	0.77	1							
2	Interactional adjustment	4.94	0.94	0.63	1						
3	Work adjustment	5.00	0.78	0.64	0.63	1					
4	Appraisal and expression of emotions	4.43	0.60	0.29	0.31	0.27	1				
5	Regulation of emotions	4.85	0.52	0.27	0.23	0.26	0.18	1			
6	Utilization of emotions	4.29	0.74	0.39	0.37	0.49	0.24	0.26	1		
7	Cultural similarity	2.86	0.98	0.35	0.12	0.24	0.03	0.15	0.17	1	
8	Expatriation experience	9.34	7.85	0.09	0.15	0.15	0.03	0.17	0.08	0.02	1

$N = 269$. All correlations are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

similarity and experience. The model explained 11% of the variance for general living adjustment, 2% for interactional adjustment, and 4% for work adjustment. In the second model (step 2), we added the EI dimensions. The three dimensions, i.e. ability to appraise and express emotions (self and others), ability to regulate emotions (in self and others), and ability to utilize emotions in solving problems, were significantly and positively related to CCA. Moreover, these dimensions explained an additional 18% of the variance in general living adjustment beyond the variance explained by the control variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.185$; $\Delta F = 13.099$; $p < 0.001$), 23% for interactional adjustment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.229$; $\Delta F = 15.284$; $p < 0.001$), and 27% for work adjustment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.270$; $\Delta F = 19.589$; $p < 0.001$). These results support the positive relationship between EI and the three dimensions of CCA.

In model 3 (step 3), we did not observe any significant influence of the moderating variable (female) on any of the three dimensions of CCA. The inclusion of a direct gender effect did not improve the model (i.e. non-significant ΔR^2). To examine whether the main effect of EI includes a more complex pattern of amplified or attenuated impacts due to gender differences, we tested the fourth model (step 4), which included an interaction term *female* × *emo-emotional intelligence*. A difference between the genders was observed for only one dimension of EI – appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others) – ensured by a marginally significant *T*-test ($p = 0.087$). We found that women have a higher average score in terms of expression and appraisal of emotions (0.161 versus −0.072 for men and 0 for the sample average). Therefore, the moderating effect of gender on EI was tested only for the appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others) dimension. As shown in step 4 of Table 3, the results provide evidence for the interaction between gender and appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others). Adding the interaction term improved the model for general living adjustment by 1.4% from the initial model ($\Delta R^2 = 0.014$; $\Delta F = 2.987$; $p = 0.086$), by 1.7% for interactional adjustment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.017$; $\Delta F = 3.491$; $p = 0.064$), and by 1.3% for work adjustment ($\Delta R^2 = 0.013$; $\Delta F = 2.819$; $p = 0.098$).

Overall, we observed that appraisal and utilization of emotions have stronger relationships with the three dimensions of CCA than regulation of emotions. Furthermore, the inclusion of the interaction term increases the positive relationship between appraisal

Table 3
Results of regression analysis.

$N = 269$	General living adjustment				Interactional adjustment				Work adjustment			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Intercept	4.22***	4.36***	4.35***	4.33***	4.54***	4.79***	4.72***	4.69***	4.54***	4.76***	4.77***	4.75***
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Control variables												
Cultural similarity	0.23***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	0.08	0.02	0.02	0.02***	0.13**	0.07	0.07	0.07
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Experience	0.009	0.011*	0.01*	0.01*	0.017**	0.02**	0.02**	0.02***	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**	0.01**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Independent variables												
Appraisal and expression of emotions		0.09*	0.09**	0.17**		0.17**	0.18**	0.29***		0.09*	0.08**	0.16**
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Regulation of emotions		0.12**	0.12**	0.12**		0.16**	0.15**	0.14**		0.09*	0.09*	0.09*
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Utilization of emotions		0.20***	0.20***	0.19***		0.26***	0.26***	0.24***		0.30***	0.30***	0.29***
		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Moderator												
Gender			0.02	0.03			0.12	0.13			0.01	0.01
			(0.10)	(0.10)			(0.13)	(0.13)			(0.10)	(0.10)
Interaction												
Gender × appraisal and expression of emotions				−0.18*				−0.25*				−0.16*
				(0.10)				(0.13)				(0.11)
R^2	0.107	0.292	0.293	0.307	0.023	0.252	0.256	0.273	0.041	0.311	0.311	0.324
ΔR^2	–	0.185***	0.001	0.014*	–	0.229***	0.004	0.017*	–	0.270***	0.000	0.013*
ΔF	–	13.099	0.040	2.987	–	15.284	0.839	3.491	–	19.589	0.006	2.819
Sign. ΔF	–	$p < 0.001$	0.843	0.086	–	$p < 0.001$	0.316	0.064	–	$p < 0.001$	0.941	0.098

$N = 269$. Standard deviation in brackets.
For gender: '0' = 'male' and '1' = 'female'.
* $p \leq 0.10$.
** $p \leq 0.05$.
*** $p \leq 0.01$.

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and expression of emotions and adjustment (beta from 0.09 to 0.17 for general living adjustment; from 0.17 to 0.29 for interactional adjustment; and from 0.09 to 0.16 for work adjustment). These results clearly support our Hypotheses 1–3.

The interaction term crossing 'female' and 'appraisal and expression of emotions (self and others)' has a marginally significant and negative influence on CCA. To elaborate Hypothesis 4 and illustrate this last result, we plotted the interaction effect in Fig. 2. The graph shows that the relationship between EI and CCA is stronger for male than female expatriates. Because no significant differences were found between male and female expatriates for the ability to regulate emotions and utilize emotions in problem solving, and because the moderating effect of gender on the ability to appraise and express emotions is negative for women, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

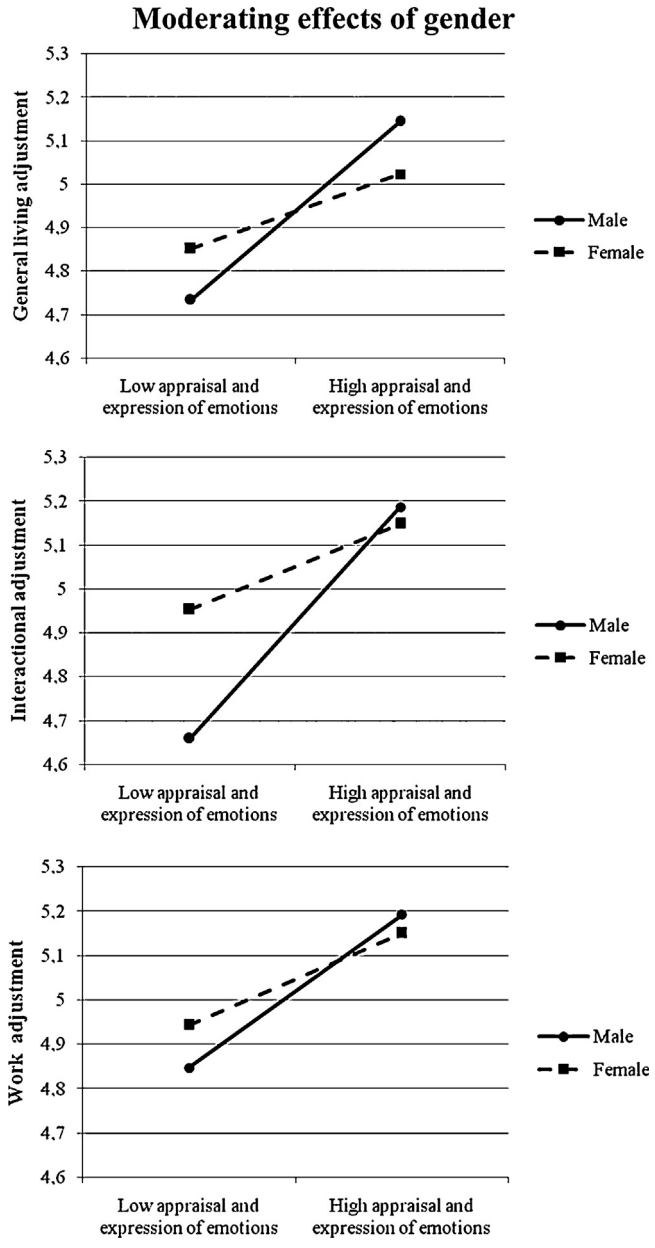

Fig. 2. Moderating effects of gender. Slopes for adjustment on appraisal and expression of emotions for male and female expatriates. Low appraisal and expression of emotions: 1 SD below mean. High appraisal and expression of emotions: 1 SD above mean.

To sum up, in support of Hypotheses 1–3, the direct relationships between the three adaptive abilities of EI and all three dimensions of expatriates' CCA were found to be significant and positive. Further, Hypothesis 4 was refuted, because our results show that the interaction between EI and gender is negative. As Fig. 2 demonstrates, the pattern of the two-way interaction is the opposite of what we hypothesized.

5. Discussion

5.1. Contributions

Because cognitive ability of human beings accounts only for approximately 25% of the variance in their job performance (i.e. Goldstein, Zedeck, & Goldstein, 2002), it is important to find other predictors that may tap into and help explain the remaining 75%. One such predictor is EI, which has recently attracted increasing attention among scholars (e.g. O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). However, until now the role of EI has been somewhat under-researched in relation to one of the most emotionally intensive managerial tasks in many contemporary organizations – expatriate assignments. This analysis sheds some light on the role that EI plays in the CCA of expatriates on assignment.

The analysis examined a unique representative sample of 269 overseas French directors of Alliance Française, a government-recognized public interest foundation, operating in 133 countries. The sample covered 79% of all overseas directors operating in the organization and so allowed for testing the role of EI in expatriates' CCA on a large group of expatriates from a unique home country. All had undergone standard pre-assignment cultural training before being sent off for standard three-year assignments. The cultural homogeneity of the sample minimized potential differences across cultural groups in experiencing, registering and expressing emotions, previously noted by scholars who examined the impact of national culture on individuals' emotional processes (e.g. Elfenbein, 2007; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Finally, the fact that the sample consisted of French expatriates was in line with recent calls for more research on expatriates from outside the USA (e.g. Kim & Slocum, 2008; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011).

As expected, we found emotions and EI in particular to be important for CCA. The variance in CCA cannot be explained by cultural similarity, experience and gender only. Moreover, depending on the type of adjustment considered, EI has much more profound corresponding impacts than the two control variables and gender taken together. In line with what we argued, the analysis confirmed our key hypotheses, showing that high levels of all three adaptive abilities of EI appear to be conducive to better general, interactional and work-related CCA. However, it also revealed that, although all are significant, different abilities of EI tend to be related to a different degree to the three dimensions of CCA. For instance, utilization of emotions seems to be positively and most strongly related to all three dimensions of CCA with the largest magnitude. Overall, we conclude that the ability to utilize emotions for problem solving is the most influential and universal EI ability in facilitating all three dimensions of expatriates' CCA. It means that flexibility, innovativeness, creativity, and motivation–all qualities associated with the ability to utilize emotions – appear to be conducive to better expatriate CCA. The other two dimensions were also found to be important but to a lesser extent. Nonetheless, the key point of our analysis is that emotions matter and that, as others have already argued (e.g. Gabel et al., 2005; Tan et al., 2005), EI needs to be included in the research on expatriates and their CCA as an important explanatory factor in determining expatriates' success.

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We also found some interesting results concerning the influence of cultural similarity on expatriates' CCA. Some studies have argued that the closer the culture of the host environment is to the expatriate's home culture, the easier it is for an expatriate to adjust (e.g. Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999). However, our analysis indicated that this is mainly true for general living adjustment and less so for interactional and work-related adjustments. It is easier to adjust to a culturally similar general living environment at the level of a host country. However, the latter two adjustment dimensions deal with much more varied and unpredictable environments, encompassing the different organizational, professional, regional, and departmental cultures that expatriates need to cope with when interacting and building relationships in their new workplaces. Furthermore, we found previous expatriation experience to be positive and significant in influencing expatriates' CCA. This result is expected, considering the extant literature (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Selmer, 2001, 2002), and shows that EI, as one form of cognitive ability and intelligence, tends to develop with experience (Mayer et al., 1999). It also means that EI can and should be nurtured and learned through training and other assignments.

Although marginally significant, but yet another finding is a rather curious moderating gender effect yielded by our analysis. We found no direct effects of gender on CCA and mainly no differences in how EI is related to CCA between men and women, except for one interaction effect of "gender" and "appraisal and expression of emotions." This effect indicates that, even though women tend to score higher on average in this particular adaptive ability, the relationships between the ability to appraise and express emotions (self and others) and all three dimensions of CCA appear to be stronger for men than for women. In other words, higher levels of the ability to appraise and express emotions are relatively more beneficial for male than for female expatriates' CCA. This is a somewhat counter-intuitive finding, considering that previous studies found women consistently scoring higher in terms of EI (Schutte et al., 1998) and being more successful in international assignments than men (Adler, 1987; Caligiuri & Tung, 1998; Taylor & Napier, 1996).

One potential explanation for this finding, which remains to be verified in future research, follows from the work of Goleman (1996). He notes that being emotional, and expressing emotions about work and in work, is generally considered to be good for managers, as long as this emotionality is characterized by "appropriate" emotions. Both male and female managers are expected to employ emotional control in workplace situations where emotions are invoked. In this way, emotions are to be used as a functional tool in managerial work. However, it is one thing when a male manager is able to show that together with his inherently masculine management skills, he can also master "soft," "feminine" management skills in his work (e.g. Hatcher, 2003); and quite another when a female manager appears to be too "feminine" and excessively emotional in her work. This can slow down the process of adjustment of female expatriates.

Our study adds to the existing research on the role of EI in expatriates' CCA (e.g. Gabel et al., 2005; Lii & Wong, 2008) in several ways. Complementing Gabel et al.'s (2005) finding that EI is an important predictor of interactional and work-related, but not general, CCA, and in contrast to Lii and Wong's (2008) result that EI has no impact on expatriates' CCA, the current analysis, testing a relatively large sample, suggests that all three examined EI dimensions are important, though in different ways, for the three CCA dimensions. It provides one of the first attempts to increase our understanding of how the different adaptive abilities that comprise EI influence differentially various aspects of expatriates' adjustment to host environments. Additionally, it shows that, relatively speaking, EI has a larger effect on expatriates' CCA than their experience and cultural similarity taken together. Moreover, the current analysis also points out interesting gender differences in the relationship between expatriates' EI and CCA, thus contributing to the growing research of gender differences in CCA (e.g. Caligiuri et al., 1999; Haslberger, 2010; Selmer & Leung, 2003). However, because this result appears as only marginally significant, we encourage researchers to perceive it as a tentative indication of the gender differences' existence among expatriates and invest in investigating these differences in more detail in future research.

5.2. Managerial relevance

It is important and beneficial for organizations to identify emotionally intelligent individuals to be sent on expatriate assignments. It shows that high levels of EI positively impact expatriates' CCA in a new environment that arguably spills over into positive effects on expatriates' performance. It is worth pointing out that the three dimensions of EI are not equally beneficial. The ability to utilize emotions seems to be the most valuable of the three and individuals who master this ability should be especially noted by organizations as potentially successful candidates for expatriation. Importantly, the possession of this ability is directly linked with flexibility, creativity, and perseverance. These are all qualities that organizations may well wish to take advantage of, not only in expatriate assignments but also more generally, assigning such individuals more demanding tasks and responsibilities within the organization. At the same time, our analysis also suggests that EI can be developed over time through experience and training. For organizations, this means that they need to be active not only in identifying individuals with high levels of EI but also in organizing training and foreign assignments for them. Finally, the analysis provides some support for the claim that women are on average more emotionally intelligent than men. Given the relationship of EI and CCA found in this study, it implies that organizations can benefit substantially by sending women on expatriate assignments.

5.3. Limitations

The study has some limitations that need to be taken seriously when considering our results. First, we used perceptual self-reported measures of adjustment, which may have biased our results due to the social desirability problem (e.g. Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), i.e. the potential inclination of respondents to present their adjustment situation more positively than it actually is. To alleviate this bias future studies need to obtain more objective and potentially less biased measures of expatriates' adjustment. This can be done by surveying, for example, expatriates' superiors or coworkers.

Second, the respondents in this study came from the same organization, which doubtlessly limits the generalizability of the study's findings. Future research needs to examine expatriates' adjustment in other organizations and industries. At the same time, the fact that we surveyed employees of the same nationality and in the same organization constitutes an obvious strength of our study. It minimizes the impact of possible mixed effects, which may be difficult for researchers to spot due to non-comparable home-host experiences and the cultural backgrounds of expatriates.

Third, our sample is composed of corporate expatriates working for Alliance Française, the mission of which is directly related to expatriation activities. Therefore, it is plausible to expect that the expatriates of Alliance Française might be – by their very nature and personality – better prepared to cope with cross-cultural adjustment. This self-selection bias among our respondents may

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potentially underestimate our findings. At the same time, the corresponding results can be expected to be more significant when tested in future research on samples with less self-selection bias.

Finally, we acknowledge that, given our research design and the self-perceptual nature of our measures, we need to remain cautious concerning causal directions between our variables. It means that reverse causality between our variables could potentially be considered with a different theoretical perspective. We cannot exclude the possibility that by experiencing higher or lower levels of CCA expatriates can be motivated to inflate or deflate their perceptions of their EI abilities. Therefore, in this study we have been cautious in this respect describing the relationships between EI and CCA as being of associative rather than causal nature.

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