

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter will present the analysis of research findings. Two major aspects have been studied and it will be presented in the following manner:

- 4.1 Characteristics Of The Respondents
- 4.2 Findings Of The Study

4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

A total of 105 questionnaires have been distributed to the selected respondents. Out of the total number, only 35 questionnaires were returned back. However, one respond was invalid, since it has been filled up by HR executive. Therefore the total returned questionnaires that can be used were 34, which made up 32 percent from the total sample.

The data that have been gathered from the survey were then analyzed using the SPSS program. The frequency has been run to have the general idea on the data (Appendix 3). From the analysis, the demographic profile of the respondent can be summarized into a table 1 as follows:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of The Respondents

		N	%
Sex	Male	26	76.5
	Female	8	23.5
Age	Below 30	12	35.3
	30-39	15	44.1
	40-49	6	17.6
Race	Malay	29	85.3
	Chinese	4	11.8
	Indian	1	2.9
Marital Status	Married	21	61.8
	Single	13	38.2

From Table 1, male expatriates were the dominant group in this study. Male expatriates accounted for 76.5 percent of total respondents. This is because, most of the companies surveyed for this study preferred to send male employee for any overseas assignments. One of the reasons that were most frequently stated as why female expatriate is not preferable was due to the problem of commitment by their spouse. This can be justified by the finding, where, majority of female expatriates in this study were single (75%) (Appendix 4). However, the relation cannot be justifiable unless being studied further.

The majority of the respondents were in the age bracket of 30 to 39 years old. They represented 44.1 percent of the respondents. Beside that, the majority of the respondents were Malay and 61.8 percent of the respondents were married.

Table 2: The Job Profile of The Respondents

		N	%
Job Status	Middle Management	15	44.1
	Management Executive	9	26.5
	Non-Managerial	10	29.4
Years on assignment/s	Less than 2 years	7	21.9
	2 ≤ 4	14	43.8
	4 < 6	10	31.3
	6 years and more	1	3.1
Training prior assignments	Yes	18	56.3
	No	14	43.8
Companion during assignments	Spouse	2	6.5
	Spouse and Children	15	48.4
	None	14	45.2

According to table 2, most of the respondents that had been sent for overseas assignment were in the capacity of middle management. This group of expatriates is considered very important, since in most cases they will be the intermediaries between the operation overseas and the parent companies. Usually, they will be the means for transferring of headquarters' philosophy,

culture and strategy from the parent to the foreign operations. However, what more important is, control is established (Downes and Thomas, 1997).

Apart from that, the respondents for this study also consist of non-managerial expatriates. They were the people who involved in more technical aspect of the foreign operations and considered as a mean of transferring the technology. Generally, they were sent abroad if the host country lack of the people with technical and technological expertise. This group consists of among others, computer programmers and various technical expertise.

Other findings from the respondents' profile of the study showed that most of them have spent two to four years in their overseas assignments (Table 2). In the assignments, 54.8 percent have been accompanied by at least their spouses, in which, 48.4 percent have brought along their children. And those who went alone for their foreign assignments accounted for 45.2 percent.

In a preparation for them to go for each assignment, 56.3 percent of the respondents have claimed to be given training before they were sent for the assignments. And 78 percent of those who received the training found it was adequate.

4.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In order to further analyze the data, descriptive analysis has been used to look at the mean score of the variables concerned. The outcome of the analysis can be referred to appendix 5.

4.2.1 Traits

In earlier study, traits or personality has been considered as an important factor that can influence a performance in foreign assignment (Harris, 1973). It was even considered to be more important than the technical competence. Scholars like Hays (1974), Tung (1981), Mischel (1984), Baliga and Baker (1985) and Gertsen (1992) have identified various kind of personalities or traits that purportedly ideal for an expatriate. Out of those traits, extroversion, self-confidence and openness to experience have been constantly ranked high in number of studies (Hays, 1974; Sieveking et. al., 1981; Tung, 1981).

Table 3: The Perceived Traits That Should Be Possessed By An Expatriate

Rank	Traits	Mean
1	Self-confidence	4.82
2	Flexibility	4.47
3	Openness to experience	4.44
4	Low anxiety	3.85
5	Extroversion	3.74

In the case of Malaysian expatriates, the results in table 3 showed that, self-confidence (mean: 4.82) has been perceived as the most important trait that an expatriate should have to be successful. It followed by flexibility and

openness to experience. What is interesting about this finding is that Malaysian respondents have considered extroversion, unlike previous findings that consistently rated it as one of the most important traits, less important.

The different view on extroversion may be due the different culture, norm and behavior of Malaysian in general, compared to the westerners, where the previous studies were based on. This was supported by the Tung (1981) in her study, where she suggested that extroversion is more important in some cultures than the others. And from the finding, it is quite obvious, based on the perception of this group of respondents; extroversion is not perceived important in Malaysian culture.

The idea of being more introverts to be successful in expatriation job also being shared by Eysenck (1967) and Smith (1989). According to them, introvert person would be more tune with the environment and consequently more aware of changing environment s than the extrovert. Thus, they will be more alert and adaptable to the different surrounding. Hence, that explained why they have rated flexibility as the second important trait in their view.

Nevertheless, there have no other findings on the matter in the Asian region to be compared and to derive into generalization. Therefore, the idea of Asian expatriates is more introvert is not justifiable unless further studies being conducted.

4.2.2 Competencies

Table 4: The Perceived Competencies That An Expatriate Should Have To Be Successful In Their Assignments

Rank	Competencies	Mean
1	Technical Skills	4.47
2	Management Skills	4.44
3	Ability To Handle Stress	4.41
4	Relational Ability	4.29
5	Learning Skills	4.26
6	Risk Taking	4.03
7	Linguistic Skills	4.00
8	Cultural Sensitivity	4.00

Table 4 shows the perceived competencies that an expatriate should have to be successful in their assignments by Malaysian expatriates. The finding has shown similarity with previous studies, in which work related competencies (technical and management skills) have been rated the most important competencies that should be possessed by expatriates. Previous studies by Mendenhall et. al. (1987), Tung (1981, 1982) and Suutari and Brewster (2001) also have documented that technical or work related competence has been the primary criterion for selecting expatriate for assignments.

One of the reasons on why Malaysian expatriates perceived that work related skills were the most important criteria was because; the reason that they were

sent for the overseas assignments was due to the lack of management and technical skills in the host countries. Thus it is very important for them to be equipped with the work related skills in order for them to run the foreign tasks smoothly.

Ability to handle stress also rated high in its importance by the Malaysian expatriates (mean of 4.41). This is due to the fact that, working and living in new environments can be a stressful experience for the expatriates. If the expatriates succumb to the problems and burden that they might face in the new environments they might fail in their assignments. According to Coyle and Shortland (1992), the ability to handle stress has become important since there were overwhelming indications from previous studies (Torbiorn, 1982 and Furnham, 1990) that there is a worrying prevalence of stress outcomes result from working abroad. Among the inevitable stress that the expatriates were expected to face usually related to culture shock and the mundane hassles of everyday expatriate life.

Another important skill perceived by the respondents was the relational ability. According to one of the expatriates that have been interviewed, he has pointed out that, relational skill is very important for expatriates to be accepted by the local society. By having a good rapport with the locals, the expatriates also can gain respect from them. This is very crucial for the foreign assignments to be successful, especially for tasks that need teamwork to achieve it.

In conclusion, conforming to other findings, Malaysian expatriates that had been surveyed, perceived that work related competence as the most crucial skills that need to be possessed in order for them to be successful.

4.2.3 Factors That Affect Expatriate's Performance

Having known the important traits and skills perceived by Malaysian respondents, they are also other factors that can contribute to the outcome of the assignments given. These factors, which most of it relates back to the personalities and skills, are among the factors that can influence how the expatriate will perform in their assignments.

Table 5: Factors That Can Affect Expatriates' Performance In The View Of Malaysian Expatriates

Rank	Factors That Influenced Expatriates	Mean
1	Training	4.35
2	Family	4.32
3	Management Skills	4.29
4	Language Skill	4.24
5	Learning Skills	4.21
6	Previous International Experience	3.85
7	Local Culture	3.85
8	Superior in Host Countries	3.82
9	Climate Adaptation	3.74
10	Local Authority	3.65

From table 5, training has been rated as the most important factor that can influence expatriates performance. According to one of the expatriate that being interviewed, training was perceived important, as it is the preparation given to the expatriates before they were heading for any overseas assignments. Through the training given, they were equipped with information related to their new jobs and more importantly, what to expect in a new environments in different countries. The respondents also agreed that, sufficient training will reduce the possibility of failure.

Training also is one of the most important aspects of expatriations. Various studies have been done on training and preparation for expatriates. Training can cover various activities. According to Ashamalla and Crocitto (1997), in order to reduce expatriate failure, training activities for them should include; cross-cultural training, language training and leadership training. And since training also is one of the important area of expatriation, a study on how training can influence the successful outcome of overseas assignments would be very interesting to look at.

Another prominent factor that perceived to have a significant impact on the expatriates' performance was the 'family' factor. This factor has becoming more significant recently, and many studies have been done to look at the role of family in expatriation. Fukuda and Chu (1994) have suggested in their study that the family of expatriate has a profound impact on the success of international assignments. Their finding revealed that the family situation is the factor that contributes most to the failure of expatriate assignments. In most of the cases, family, which always refers to the spouse and sometimes to the children, failed to adjust to the new environments.

Referring to the same issue, in Malaysian scenario, many expatriates had declined the opportunities of going abroad because of family factors. The dilemma was supported by Hayes (1996) in her study that identified family

obligations were the number one reason for many overseas assignments being refused. Thus, it shows how crucial the factor can be to the expatriation exercises.

Apart from the family factor, other adjustment issues (language, culture and climate) were perceived less important. Therefore, the emphasis on work related competence in contributing to the success of overseas assignments has shadowed the respondent view on the factors that can affect expatriates' performance.

4.2.4 Problems Commonly Faced By The Expatriates

Besides looking at the factors that can influence expatriates performance, this study also trying to identify the common problems that being faced by the respondents, which can lead to their failures. The respondents were asked to choose four problems that were commonly faced by them during their overseas assignments. There were eight problems listed in the questionnaires based on previous literatures. Those listed problems were among the common reason for expatriates failures (Suutari and Brewster, 1998).

As indicated in table 6, the respondents have chosen problems in work-role adjustment and new responsibilities as the most common problem faced by them. These problems linked to the inability of the expatriate to execute the assigned tasks to them in different environments. Suutari and Brewster (2001) have suggested that the ability to be successful in one environment does not necessarily imply that the person will be successful in all circumstances. Thus it shows that, most of the respondents have found that they had faced an adjustment problem with their new work environments in at least one occasion through out their expatriation experiences.

Table 6: The Common Perceived Problems That Can Lead To A Failure In Expatriation Assignments

Rank	Common Problems	%
1	Problems in work-role adjustment/ new responsibilities	71%
2	Inadequate of Technical competence	65%
3	Problem of interaction with host country nationals	56%
4	Family unable to adjust	47%
5	Conflict with local superior	47%

In addition to that, inadequate technical competence also has been viewed as another common problem that could lead to failure. However, instead of viewing the possible inadequacy on their side, the respondents were more concerned about the lack of technical competence among the locals. The technical inadequacy among the locals has led to the difficulties for the expatriates to perform their job smoothly and effectively.

Other common problems that made the list were; problem of interaction with host country nationals (56%), family unable to adjust (47%) and conflict with local superior (47%).

What interesting with this finding is the similarity that it has with the finding from a study conducted by Tung (1982). In her study, Tung has made comparison of views between multinationals managers from United States, Europe and Japan on the reasons of expatriate failure. Distinctive views have

been gathered from American multinationals' managers in comparison to Japanese firms' managers.

For US multinationals, the reasons, in order of importance, were;

1. Inability of spouse to adjust
2. Manager's inability to adjust
3. Other family problems
4. Manager's personal or emotional maturity
5. Inability to cope with larger overseas responsibilities

On the other hand, For Japanese managers, the reasons for failure were;

1. Inability to cope with larger overseas responsibilities
2. Difficulties with new environment
3. Personal or emotional problems
4. Lack of technical competence
5. Inability of spouse to adjust

(Hill, 2001)

The finding in this study was comparable with the Japanese managers views on the reasons for expatriate failure. This is because; Malaysian expatriates had chosen the most common problem that led to expatriate failure was the problem of coping with new responsibilities. The Japanese also gave the same reason. In addition to that, the two groups of respondents have put more emphasize on the work related problems/ reasons that contributed to the failure and both rated family factor as less important.

The striking difference between US managers compared to Japanese managers and Malaysian expatriates was the ranking of the 'inability of spouse to adjust' in their list. The US managers have put it at the top of their

list unlike their Asian counterparts who ranked it towards the end of the list. The reason given by Tung in explaining the difference was due to the different in cultures and norms. She pointed out that Japanese society traditionally relegates the wife and the fact that most of the Japanese expatriates studied were men. These same reasons apparently apply to the Malaysian context.

Looking at the similarities between the Japanese and Malaysian views, there is possibility to conclude that Asian expatriates shared the same perception on the reasons of expatriates' failure. However, this statement is not justifiable unless a proper study is conducted to look at the possible relations.

4.2.5 Implication on Expatriates

The respondents lastly were asked to choose the advice that they think need to be addressed to newly appointed expatriates based on their previous experiences. The list of advices was taken from a study by Suutari and Brewster (1998). Ten advices were listed (Appendix 1) and the respondents were expected to choose five that they think as the most important ones.

The respondents have chosen five most important advices in accordance to their importance as listed in table 7. From the table, Malaysian expatriates have stressed on the importance of job related competencies by chosen top two advices to be addressed were related to work competence issues.

They also have chosen to advice their successor on the importance of being positive and open-minded, while at the same time not being suspicious or too critical. Apart from that, the respondents did acknowledge the importance of family in expatriation exercises, by giving an advice to ensure the family is motivated and prepared for the time of assignment.

Lastly, in trying to reduce the failure's risk, they think that it is beneficial for the new expatriates to consult the their predecessor, so that they can get the valuable information and tips on working in the foreign countries.

Table 7: The Most Common Advice That Malaysian Expatriates Would Give To Newly Appointed Expatriate

Rank	Common Advice to New Expatriates	%
1	Clarify details of your job description so that you know what is expected from you	82%
2	Make sure you have good professional skills for your new job	74%
3	Be positive and open minded, not critical or suspicious	65%
4	Ensure your family is motivated and prepared for the time of assignment	56%
5	Discuss with expatriates who have worked in the country	44%

4.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the analyses that have been made, it is quite obvious that Malaysian expatriates were more concerned about their work related issues when dealing with expatriation issues. These include the perceived most important skills needed to be successful, factors that can influence expatriate performance and the problems that commonly faced by them.

The results also suggest that, previous studies did have some applicability to Malaysian scenario despite the uniqueness that Malaysia has. As Levy-Leboyer (1994);

"Although models used for selection of expatriates vary with the nationality of the organization, the core concepts have centered on functional capabilities and personal characteristics of potential candidates"

Nevertheless, the outcome also has highlight the different perception of Malaysian expatriate on the traits needed in order to be successful. Unlike previous studies, the respondents in this study have not rated extroversion, as one of the most important traits should be possessed by expatriates to be successful.

Besides, there were also some similarities regarding the views of Malaysian and their Asian counterpart (Japanese) on the reasons for expatriate failure. This similarity has enabled some generalization to be made. However it would not be valid until being justified by another follow up studies.