

THE CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES AND
INDIVIDUAL WORK PERFORMANCE

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Globalization in the past few decades has been marked by increased mobility of highly skilled workers from one country to another. Even though self-initiated expatriation is a widespread phenomenon, it is a relatively under-researched phenomenon in the academic literature, especially in an organizational context. Existing literature shows that not all individuals are equally suited to embark on a new life in another country, and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) could be particularly susceptible to failure since they have no support from a home organization. This study was designed to investigate the experiences of self-initiated professional expatriates and the effect it had on their work performance. The purpose was to understand how their organizational and social experience affected their cross-cultural adjustment process and in turn affected their individual work performance. The researcher used a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents with ten self-initiated expatriates. This study contributed to the expanding literature on the experiences of self-initiated expatriates, specifically how different support systems affected cross-cultural adjustment and individual work performance.

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CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES AND INDIVIDUAL WORK PERFORMANCE

Introduction

The internationalization of businesses has seen an explosion in research on cross-cultural research, and a focus in general on expatriates (Dabic, Gonzalez-Loureiro & Harvey, 2015; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008). Expatriates are individuals who relocate from one country to the other for at least one year (Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley & Riedel, 2006). In the past decade, there has been focused research on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). Self-initiated expatriates are defined as "expatriates who self-initiate their international relocation, with the intentions of regular employment and temporary stay, and with skills/professional qualifications" (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1293).

While the research focus of those investigating the field has expanded significantly in recent years, expatriate management issues remain a critical concern for organizations (Collings and Scullion, 2006; Lazarova, 2006; Schuler, Budhwar, & Florkowski, 2002; Stahl and Björkman, 2006). Additionally, emerging economies and a more competitive global business landscape shape how employers try to attract and retain talent. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) workplace forecast discusses an aging workforce and problems finding skilled workers (2013). There are a large number of SIEs who work in positions where there are labor and skilled worker shortages. In an age of global war for talent, organizations, especially in the information technology (IT) industry, find it difficult to find highly skilled employees. SIEs have the possibility to fill this gap. National economies, therefore, have an impetus

to create favorable conditions to attract SIEs. The interest in understanding SIEs who can live and work successfully in cross-national settings has increased (Vaiman, Haslberger & Vance, 2015; Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010).

Prior research on SIEs has examined the reason they moved, their experiences and subsequently their career experiences (Richardson, McKenna, Dickie, & de Gama, 2013; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013). While this has been important in understanding individual motivations for and experiences of SIEs, it has left a paucity of research and a gap in our understanding of the adjustment and performance of SIEs within the organizational context in the host country. Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) emphasize that SIE research lacks contextualization. Moreover, while research points towards a positive relationship between perceived organizational support, social support, and expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (Cao, Hirschi & Deller, 2013; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002), there is surprisingly scarcity of research in understanding how these variables consequently affect SIEs individual performances at work.

Suutari, Brewster and Tornikoski (2013) noted that little of the work to date on SIEs has been published in the top academic journals. This is perhaps due to the shortage of research in the United States and the different publishing motivations of many outside the United States and probably also mirrors the lack of theoretical and statistical rigor in the work so far. They stressed that self-initiated expatriation and the careers that are linked to it are vital aspects of the international labor market, and more empirical research is needed. Joshua-Gojer and Allen (2013) also highlighted the lack of empirical research in the study of SIEs in the United States. Vaiman, Haslberger, and Vance (2015) specifically emphasized that studies on SIEs are limited, particularly with

respect to adjustment issues. Al Ariss and Crowley Henry (2013) state that much of the earlier scholarship focused on SIEs from developed Western countries. Vaiman, Haslberger, and Vance (2015) echo that claim. Doherty, Richardson and Thorn (2013) recommended that comparing SIEs from different cultural contexts in the same location is necessary to further SIE research.

To address the aforementioned research gap, the present study aimed to draw on a qualitative case study of SIEs from different cultural contexts in the United States in the IT field. It aimed to contribute to international human resource development and performance improvement literature by advancing the understanding of how organizational and social support contribute to the adjustment of expatriates, and how it relates to the SIE's individual performance at work.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how the organizational support and social network support that self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) receive affected their cross-cultural adjustment process, and in turn affected their individual work performance. The objective of this research, therefore, was to investigate the experiences of professional SIEs in the United States. It aimed to gain an insight into career issues of expatriates who work in a country that is different from their home country. The four variables relevant in this study were organizational support, social network support, expatriate adjustment, and individual work performance.

Taking into consideration the purpose of the study, the research questions were as follows:

1. How does perceived organizational support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

2. How does social support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

3. How does the cross-cultural adjustment in the host country affect the self-initiated expatriates' work performance?

Definition of Terms

The objective of the study was to study the organizational and social support that SIEs receive and the effect it has on their adjustment, and how that relates to their individual work performance. The four variables that guided this study were social support, perceived organizational support (POS), expatriate adjustment, and individual work performance. Each are described and defined in turn below.

Social Support

Leavy (1983) defined social support as “the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships” (p. 5). Kahn and Quinn (1976) detailed social support as being of three types: aid, affect, or affirmation. Kraimer, Wayne, and Jaworski (2001) explained that in the expatriate context, aid involves providing pertinent information and support to the expatriate in order to reduce his or her stress and help him or her make sense of the work environment. The second type of social support, affect, is the relationship between the source of social support and support seeker. Affect is similar to reciprocal liking and provides high-quality encouraging relationships. The third type of social support is affirmation and refers to confirming the support seeker's abilities and beliefs in oneself to deal with the stressful situation. According to

Kraimer, Wayne, and Jaworski (2001), relationships that are reaffirming will be more helpful than those that are not reaffirming.

Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) summarized that social support involves some kind of relationship transaction between individuals. They add that the nature of the transaction is specified in a variety of ways. Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) describe social support in an expatriation context as support received from family members and host national colleagues, compatriots, expatriates from other countries. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose Caligiuri and Lazarova's definition of social support in the SIE context.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' overall beliefs about the extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986). The researcher used this definition of POS for the purpose of this study. POS represents an employee's general assessment about all organizational members who control that individual's resources and rewards (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) literature review of over 70 studies suggested that basic antecedents of POS included fair organizational processes, supervisor support, and promising rewards and work conditions and that consequences included increased emotional commitment to the organization, improved performance, and reduced withdrawal behaviors.

Expatriate Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment, for the purpose of this study, refers to the cross-cultural adjustment of the SIE to the host country. Black and Stephens (1989) recognized three

relevant facets of expatriate adjustment: work, general, and interaction. Work adjustment refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort with respect to the job tasks in the host country. General adjustment is with respect to the general living conditions and culture of the host country. Interaction adjustment is with respect to interacting with the host-country nationals.

Individual Work Performance

Individual work performance, in the context of this study, refers to the subjective judgments of quantity and quality of work from the employee him- or herself. Work performance is an intangible, latent concept that cannot be pointed to or quantified directly. It is made up of multiple facets or dimensions. Campbell defined work performance as behaviors or actions that are pertinent to the goals of the organization. Koopmans, Bernaards, Hildebrandt, Schaufeli, de Vet and van der Beek (2011) note that diverse approaches of studying individual work performance can be observed in literature, depending on the field of study. Individual work performance is a significant outcome measure of studies in the professional setting.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher chose three theories to encompass these variables – the U curve of adjustment theory (UCT), the theory of met expectations and Black, Mendenhall and Oddou's comprehensive model of international adjustment (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1999; Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Bürgi, 2001; Holopainen & Björkman, 2005).

UCT, first proposed by Lysgaard (1955), includes four stages (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Church (1982) explained that expatriate adjustment can be

described as a function of time. In the beginning there is excitement, followed by a dip in the level of adjustment and some frustration and confusion whilst adjusting, finally followed by near complete adjustment.

In the initial stage (honeymoon stage), individuals are intrigued by the new culture of the host country and are excited about all the new and interesting things around them. This initial cultural infatuation is followed by a period of disillusionment and frustration (the disillusionment or culture shock stage) as the individual tries to cope with living in the new culture on a day-to-day basis. The third stage (adjustment stage) is characterized by gradual adaptation to the new culture and learning how to behave appropriately according to the social and cultural norms of the host country. The fourth stage (mastery stage) is characterized by small incremental increases in the individual's ability to function effectively in the new culture.

A related theory that helps explain performance of expatriates is the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique & Bürgi (2001). This theory proposes that the more congruent an individual's expectations are with the individual's reality once on the job, the greater the individual's satisfaction and adjustment (Porter and Steers, 1973; Wanous, 1980, 1992). Porter and Steers (1973) were the first researchers to define met expectations in an organizational context. An important aspect of Porter and Steers' (1973) definition of met expectations, discussed further by Locke (1976), is that only expectations for important aspects of the job (or organization) are relevant to the met expectations hypothesis.

Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) proposed an influential theoretical model incorporating domestic and international adjustment. It was one of the most prominent

theories following a line of investigation into expatriate experiences. They supported prior research suggesting that there are at least three specific facets of international adjustment: (1) adjustment to work, (2) adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and (3) adjustment to the general environment. This supported the argument that international adjustment is not a unitary construct. Since adjustment appears to be multifaceted, it implies that different antecedents to adjustment may have different influences on each facet of adjustment.

These theories aided in the analysis of data. They helped identify and analyze the different stages that SIEs go through during their adjustment.

Literature Review

Studies on expatriation have been quite extensive over the past four decades (Dabic, González-Loureiro, & Harvey, 2015). Most of it, however, deals with assigned expatriates, also known as traditional or organizational expatriates. They are professionals sent by their organizations on international assignments. Much has been done to develop knowledge about this population. With rapid globalization, however, they are not the only mobile professionals working abroad (Lidström & Laiho, 2014). Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) are an increasingly common type of expatriate in today's global economy. Research on SIEs is increasing because academic scholars, business, and policy makers recognize that SIEs are valuable international human resources that benefit organizations and economies (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013, Dickman & Baruch, 2011). While research on SIEs hardly existed in the 1990s (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry, 1997), it has particularly been prolific in the past decade (Doherty, 2013).

Research has shown that it will benefit companies to understand the nature and management of SIEs (Vaiman, Haslberger & Vance, 2015; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). Prior literature has sought to clarify who SIEs are (Suutari & Brewster, 2001; Bhuian & Mengue, 2002; Selmer & Luring, 2012; Andresen, Al Ariss & Walther, 2013; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014), why they expatriate (Suutari & Brewster, 2001; Selmer & Luring, 2012), their inherent demographics (Selmer & Luring, 2010) as well as their motivation and cross-cultural adjustment (Doherty, Dickmann & Mills, 2011; Froese, 2012). Researchers have also compared traditional organizational expatriates to SIEs (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013; Andresen, Biemann & Pattie, 2015).

Literature has consistently identified organizational and social support as important factors in traditional expatriate adjustment and expatriate success (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro & Shin, 2010; Chen, 2010; Stroppa & Spieß, 2011; Shen & Kram, 2011; Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999). Within the SIE context, Fu, Hsu, and Shaffer (2008) examined the impact of organizational socialization tactics on SIEs and discovered that structured organizational practices assist in their social integration and are particularly vital to their cross-cultural adjustment. This suggests the importance of organizational support on facilitating SIEs' adaptation to the host culture.. Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) examined the role that human resource management (HRM) played in supporting the adjustment of SIEs to the organization and culture. Cao, Hirschi, and Deller (2014) examined the effect of POS on SIE employees' intention to stay in the host country, mediated by career satisfaction and moderated by career networks of host and home country nationals. They emphasized that previous literature on SIEs has

mostly focused on an individual perspective and rarely on SIEs in an organizational context. Their findings confirmed the positive effect of POS on SIEs' career satisfaction and intention to stay in the host country.

Research on social support and networks among SIEs is also sparse. Selmer and Luring (2011) found a positive association between being married and work effectiveness as well as with work performance among SIEs. Schoepp and Forstenlechner (2010) conducted a study to understand the importance of family in determining self-initiated expatriate retention. They found evidence of what they describe as an environment easing expatriate adjustment as well as questioning the impact of many of the problems previously identified in literature on expatriates. Their findings showed that while some of the stressors associated with living abroad were mitigated, the family more or less became a motivation to stay rather than to leave.

Suutari, Brewster, and Tornikoski (2013) reviewed the careers of SIEs. In the course of their study, they suggested that future studies should analyze the perspectives of spouses and families since they are clearly intertwined in the careers of SIEs. They also recommended that cross-cultural studies would be beneficial to understand of the motivations of SIEs across different countries. This would benefit organizations to identify differences that are imperative to take into account for their talent management.

Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer (2010) suggested future work in the field of expatriate and work-family interface research that could inform management practice. The work-family interface could be extended to include social support that includes

family and friends. Altman and Baruch (2012) suggest that there are advantages for the organization when they have conducive and supportive policies for SIEs.

Cao, Hirschi, and Deller (2013) studied the protean career attitudes of SIEs and found it to have a positive relation to career satisfaction, life satisfaction and intention to stay in the host country whilst being mediated by the SIEs' positive cross-cultural adjustment. McDonnell and Scullion (2013) argue that research continues to engage with the importance of adjustment to successful traditional expatriate assignments. They insist that currently little is known about adjustment and performance among SIEs. They further contend that organizations need to consider SIEs as a special case due to there being distinguishing human resource (HR) issues and challenges that occur when seeking to manage SIEs effectively. Peltokorpi and Froese (2013) explored the differences in traditional organizational expatriates and SIEs cross-cultural adjustment and the reasons for different cross-cultural adjustment patterns. They found that SIEs are better adjusted to general aspects of their host country and interactions with host-country nationals than traditional organizational expatriates.

Despotovic, Hutchings, and McPhail (2015) studied the importance of cross-cultural self-preparation for careers of SIEs. Their findings reflected that, firstly, there is value in cross-cultural self-preparation. Secondly there are differences in preparation needs for those who self-expatriate to urban versus rural areas. Thirdly, prior work and non-work experience affects cross-cultural self-preparedness among SIEs. Lastly, adjustments in attitudes plays an important role in SIEs cross-cultural self-preparation for careers in the host country.

It is highly attractive for organizations to have international staff, especially as the competition between companies grows more and more internationally. The competition for talent is ever increasing, especially, in areas of skills shortages. This is true of both the private and public sector in the United States, even in the midst of the recent economic crisis. Therefore, as organizations adopt an internationally focused HR strategy and employ expatriates, they may enhance competitive advantage for themselves if they offer support to their employees that will help them adjust better and sooner cross-culturally. From permanent residency to temporary visas not requiring employer sponsorship, different countries attempt to sweeten their offers to global talent so the latter would come to their shores (Duncan & Waldorf, 2010). Even more interestingly, notwithstanding the current global economic turmoil, countries continue to invite well-educated expatriates.

Doherty (2013) emphasizes that in extending the research base on SIEs, it is imperative to confirm that enough detail about individuals and their experiences are recorded, including variables such as home and host locations, motivation to move, demographic details, the type of employment in home and host countries and career outcomes.

We see, therefore, that there is research that examines SIEs' and the POS they receive, SIEs and their social networks as well as the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs. A cursory search of the literature, however, did not display substantial results linking POS and social support that SIEs receive to their adjustment and their individual work performance.

Methodology

The researcher chose a qualitative approach for this study for numerous compelling reasons. Qualitative research methods are useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, a qualitative approach is necessary when the nature of research questions requires exploration (Stake, 1995). The present study intended to explore how the organizational support and social network support that self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) receive affects their adjustment process and their individual work performance. The present study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.

Creswell (2003) argued that quantitative methods are appropriate when identifying those factors that might influence a specific outcome or when testing a particular theory. Qualitative studies are appropriate when the researcher is exploring and is not necessarily able to quantify the existing variables (Creswell, 2003). Moreover, Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) suggested that using qualitative in-depth interviews in SIE research helps provide better analysis and explanation.

Secondly, a qualitative study allows the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes, that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the present study, the researcher explored participants' perceptions and lived experiences of adjustment while having made the decision to live and work in a host country.

Thirdly, qualitative research methods emphasize the researcher's role as an active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). For the present study, the researcher

was the key instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings (Stake, 1995).

Research Design

Rowley (2002) enumerates three factors that determine the best research methodology for a study: “the types of questions to be answered, the extent of control over behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 17). Case studies are a useful tool for the preliminary, exploratory stage of a research project. They are especially suitable to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. In summary, Yin (1994) states that case study research is useful when “a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (p. 9). The researcher decided to use the case study research design based on these parameters.

Rowley (2002) asserts that the purpose of the research in an exploratory study needs to be defined. This study was designed to explore and investigate the experiences of professional SIEs. The purpose of this study was to understand how perceived organizational support and social network support that professional SIEs receive affected their adjustment process and their individual work performance. Based on this purpose and prior literature, the research questions for the study were as follows:

1. How does perceived organizational support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

2. How does social support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

3. How does the cross-cultural adjustment in the host country affect SIEs' work performance?

Case Study

Merriam (1998) suggested that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case. This case study is bounded or delimited by several contexts –

1. The SIEs and their experiences
2. Their work in IT
3. Work challenges
4. Organizational support
5. Social network support
6. Host country adjustment
7. Individual work performance

Through qualitative research techniques, the relationships and resulting interactions between these contexts in the careers of SIEs was explored. These experiences facilitated or hindered the career aspirations and satisfaction of SIEs and gave it meaning.

According to Schell (1992), case studies usually involve one of two types of research methodology: they may be based upon the use of multiple sources of evidence (multiple triangulation); or they may be based upon review of multiple case studies. This study should be considered a multiple-case study as there were ten SIEs participating in

the research. Yin (1984) designates cases with a single source of information as holistic cases, and cases with multiple sources of information as embedded cases. Using Yin's (1984) description, the present study uses embedded cases. Schell (1992) further adds that multiple cases may be used to compare and contrast different cases. Rowley (2002) asserts that multiple case designs are preferred because the more cases that can be organized to ascertain or contradict a theory, the more robust are the research outcomes.

Population Demographics

The target population for this study was SIEs in the United States. Expatriates are defined as individuals who relocate from one country to the other for at least one year (Littrell et al., 2006). Specifically, this study concentrated on SIEs from different countries working in the United States in the IT industry. The sampling strategy adopted in this study aimed to gain an insight into a particular population (SIEs in the IT industry) within a specific location (United States). Participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants were selected purposefully. Patton (2002) believed that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to pick information-rich cases, which helps the researcher to acquire an insight to the issue being studied. Participants are selected in purposive sampling because they possess characteristics that make them particularly worthy sources of information (Orcher, 2005).

Snowball sampling has proven successful in past research projects of a similar nature (Janssens, Cappellen & Zanoni, 2006), and has been accepted as a common method of sampling in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). For these reasons, a similar strategy was adopted in the present study. In snowball sampling, a

sample of individuals is drawn from a given finite population. Goodman (1961) explains snowball sampling as follows: Each individual in the sample is asked to name k different individuals in the population where k is a specified integer. For example, each SIE may be asked to name another SIE he or she knows. This set of referred individuals form the first stage of snowball sampling. Each of the individuals in the first stage is then asked to name k different individuals. This next set of individuals who were referred by those in the first stage, now form the second stage of snowball sampling. This process continues until the required sample is obtained.

The researcher first contacted prospective participants for the study by using personal contacts as well as the resources of an online expatriate portal named InterNations. All the participants were in the IT industry, living and working across the United States in different sectors. Those who responded to the study were contacted via phone and email. These participants in turn were asked if they knew other SIEs who would be interested in participating in the research. If they provided contacts for referrals, those referred SIEs were then contacted, and the cycle continued until the required number of SIEs agreed to participate. Rosenthal and Rosnow (2009) discuss the artifacts of volunteer bias in behavioral research. The results of their analysis suggest that in any given study of human behavior the chances are good that those subjects who find their way into the research differ appreciably from those who do not. They suggest that employment of volunteer samples can lead to biased estimates of various population parameters. While this has implications for generalizability of results, this qualitative study did not statistically generalize findings to the population. Instead, it

used analytic generalizations, using the study's theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations.

Due to the boundaries of the study, the participants had to meet certain criteria to qualify for inclusion in the study. All participants were

- SIEs working in the IT field, and living in the United States for a minimum period of one year.
- Working professionals in the IT field at the time of interview.

With regards to sample size, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) note that many qualitative researchers select the size of their samples in an arbitrary fashion. Literature suggests that sample sizes should not be so small that it is difficult to achieve saturation, but also not too large that it makes it difficult to undertake a deep case-oriented analysis (Mason, 2010). Past research has shown that at least five to six participants are required in a case study where the goal is to understand the essence of experience (Creswell, 2002; Morse, 1994). The researcher therefore, had a sample of ten participants in the study: five male and five female.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for the study included a semi-structured interview guide that was developed by the researcher. The interview guide was created based on prior literature discussing expatriate adjustment, perceived organizational support and social support as it relates to expatriation. The interview guide was sent to two SIEs who were not a part of the study in order to obtain feedback on the clarity and relevancy of the questions as it relates to their expatriate experience.

Data Collection

Multiple-case study designs investigate several cases to gain insight into a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003). Data collection in this multiple-case study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, observations, documents and a reflective journal (maintained by the researcher). According to Ratner (2002), semi-structured interview utilizes two types of questions; open-ended questions which give the participant the opportunity to discuss any effect he or she desires, and close-ended questions, which restricts the participant's response to given choices. The questions used to conduct these interviews were mostly open-ended, allowing the participants to discuss issues relating to their cross-cultural experiences. The interview guide created by the researcher was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews.

All data gathered from participant resources were collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. In accordance with qualitative research tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), multiple data sources were collected. Participants had a telephonic interview and a face-to-face interview. The researcher also observed the participants and asked them to share documents such as emails, letters, etc. that would aid in the data collection process. Some participants provided a few documents, while others did not think there were any documents that explicitly pertained to their adjustment process to provide. Data was also gathered from the reflective journal the researcher maintained throughout the study.

Given the research objectives and, in-depth interviews and observations were the most appropriate method for primary data collection. Triangulation of sources was

used to evaluate the data. The use of interviews is common in qualitative case study research, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). It is an opportunity to build a positive relationship between the researcher and the interviewee so as to gather information that genuinely illustrates the unique experiences of the SIEs. The following sections describe the different techniques the researcher used to gather the data from the SIEs. The entire process of data collection took two months.

Background Interviews

The aim of this interview was to gather demographic information and find out about the SIE's 'focused life history' (Seidman, 1998). The demographic information was gathered via email. The 'focused' portion of the interview comprised information about the SIE's past experiences, including professional training, linguistic background, and employment history. The researcher probed for information on whether the SIEs had prior expatriate experience in a different country, and used the opportunity to form a rapport to make it easier for the semi-structured interviews. This portion of the interview was telephonic, audio-recorded and transcribed.

Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews that focused on the SIEs' current experience and their reflection on the meaning they have constructed throughout the interview (Seidman, 1998). All person-to-person interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participants. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed using Express Scribe software.

All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, which allowed enough flexibility to allow participants to give their stories in their own way while ensuring that a basic line of inquiry was followed throughout (Patton, 2002; Janssens et al., 2006). Interviews also provided for consistent investigation of particular topics with the participant and basic introductory questions, leading to an engaging natural conversation that provided deeper insight. The use of a semi-structured interview was vital because, as Merriam (1998) notes, highly structured interviews do not afford a true participant perspective, they simply, “get reactions to the investigator’s preconceived notions of the world” (p. 74). Another important consideration was the observation and notation of body language and verification of shared meanings during the interview. These two elements contributed to the richness and integrity of the exchange.

All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants. Two digital audio recorders, with one acting as backup in the event that technological issues arose with one, were used. Participants and their organizations were given pseudonyms so as to protect their anonymity. All identifying information was redacted and pseudonyms were used during transcription. For example, any mentioning of real names or organizations by the participants during the interviews that may be in a direct quote in the presentation of the data were replaced with pseudonyms such as ‘Organization X’, or ‘Jane Doe’, or ‘John Doe’. A hardcopy with a key linking the participants’ names and the pseudonyms was kept locked in a file cabinet in the researcher’s office.

After transcription, the interviews were downloaded to a computer to ensure responses and discussions were accurately collected and could be listened to a number

of times after the event. Each interview transcript was further reviewed and summarized to identify any gaps that may have occurred during initial data collection and to include the personal thoughts, reflections and ideas of the researcher using a summary sheet (Anderson, 2004). This process of summarizing the interview also supported subsequent analysis of the data.

The researcher also contacted participants for clarifications about things they said during the interview. This served as member checking. Member checking is generally considered an important method for verifying and corroborating information transcribed by the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) and is meant as a check and critique of the data. Member checking also provides material for further investigation and triangulation (Stake, 1995).

Observation

The researcher observed the participants while conducting the interviews. The observations served as another source of data collection. The researcher conducted a less formal, direct observation by watching body language during the interviews. According to Yin (2003), observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied, in this case the SIEs and their thoughts about the perceived social and organizational support they received.

Documents

The researcher requested participants to share documents they thought were related to their adjustment process. These could range from letters, to minutes from meetings, diary entries, emails, and so on. Some of the participants sent links to websites they found useful, while others shared emails they thought were relevant to

their adjustment process. Yet some participants did not think there was any documentation that would further help the researcher understand their adjustment process.

Reflective Journal

Another form of data collection was maintenance of a reflective journal and field notes. The reflective journal allowed the researcher to describe her feelings about conducting research in this area of study. The use of such a journal added rigor to qualitative inquiry as the researcher was able to record her reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the interviews for the purposes of extending questions and to maintain personal notes for further investigation. These are referred to as field notes, and helped provide additional data for the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed throughout the process of data collection through transcription, followed by content analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The credibility and trustworthiness of the results was gauged through the process of triangulation, using multiple sources of data, to confirm emerging findings.

A qualitative study can utilize either the emic or etic approach. Borrowed from anthropology, the emic and etic approach refer to the two perspectives that researchers can use while studying phenomenon. It is possible to take the point of view of either the insider or the outsider. Pike (1954) defines the emic perspective as focusing on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society, and the etic perspective, as relying upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that have

meaning for scientific observers. Therefore, in the etic perspective, researchers are the sole judges of the validity of an etic account (Lett, 1996). The present study was studied from an etic perspective since the researcher was trying to make sense of the experiences of SIEs in the United States. The contrast between home culture and host culture led to the discovery of insightful findings. One of the strengths of the etic approach was that it allowed for comparison across contexts and populations, and the development of more general cross-cultural concepts (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

Qualitative case study research results in a build-up of large amounts of raw data; therefore, it is essential to maintain the data in an organized and timely fashion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Analysis of data was an ongoing process and began along with the transcription of interviews and the digitalization of field notes. According to Merriam (1998), collection of data and conducting preliminary analysis of data simultaneously, is “the right way” (p. 162) to conduct qualitative research. It is helpful because it enables the researcher to improve and build the study as it proceeds, through consistent reflection on the data and attention to what the data are saying (Glesne, 1999). Stake (1994) emphasizes that data is continuously interpreted since qualitative research is inherently reflective “in being ever reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating recollections and records....data [is] sometimes pre-coded but continuously interpreted, on first sighting and again and again” (p. 242).

Huberman and Miles (1983) outline a detailed procedure for data gathering and analysis, noting the simultaneous nature of the work. The procedure includes:

- Coding (organizing and theming data),
- Policing (detecting bias and preventing tangents),
- Dictating field notes (as opposed to verbatim recordings),
- Connoisseurship (researcher knowledge of issues and context of the site),
- Progressive focusing and funneling (winnowing data and investigative technique as study progresses),
- Interim site summaries (narrative reviews of research progress),
- Memoing (formal noting and sharing of emerging issues), and
- Outlining (standardized writing formats).

Research for this study utilized a similar format, making a few changes to accomplish a similar task for a smaller study with a single researcher.

Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a written journal of conceptual and interpretive memos. The conceptual memos provided for continuous reflection on the data and the research process, while still actively involved in the field and writing field notes. They allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes. In the interpretive memos the researcher began drawing forward firm interpretations of data collected, elaborating on ideas, and linking codes and bits of data together. In writing the interpretive memo, the researcher sought to explore relationships between the field notes. They provided a more sustained analysis of a theme or issue by linking separate observations made in the cases. These procedures helped to organize the data as it was collected. These procedures also maintained a fine line between data collection and analysis, thus easing the task of simultaneous collection and analysis.

After reviewing all the data sources, the materials (interview transcripts and the follow-up notes) were manually coded and preliminary meaning was generated from them. Following the case-by-case analysis, all themes were used to conduct the cross-case analysis. Themes salient across all cases, as well as those that were extremely different were examined. For the thematic analysis, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guidelines. The authors used the word guidelines to highlight the flexibility of this qualitative analytic method. The guidelines include

- Familiarizing yourself with your data,
- Generating initial codes,
- Reading through each transcript to immerse in the data,
- Reviewing themes,
- Defining and naming themes, and
- Producing the report.

As Huberman and Miles (1983) described, the data analysis proceeded from listing patterns and themes to arriving at comparisons and contrasts to determining conceptual explanations of the case study. Stake (2006) describes three different cross case procedures for a multiple case study. First, there is emphasizing the various situations and case findings. Second, there is merging case findings and third, there is providing factors for analysis. A theme or a finding, in this case, is a principal idea having importance related to its situation. For this qualitative study, the researcher followed the merging findings procedure. According to Stake (2006), the researcher whose priority is to merge the findings across cases should use this particular method. This method also allowed the researcher to find common themes.

Triangulation of the multiple data sources, as mentioned earlier, was built into data collection and analysis for the purpose of achieving trustworthiness. Triangulation, or using multiple sources of data or multiple methods, to confirm the emerging findings has been considered a procedure for establishing validity in case studies (Merriam, 1998).

Further, the researcher asked peers from similar doctoral programs to comment on the findings as they emerged. Peer examination has also been expounded in research as a strategy to enhance internal validity (Merriam, 1998).

Yin (2003) provides the following four tenets of high quality analysis. The analysis must firstly:

- Attend to all the evidence,
- Address all major rival interpretations,
- Address the most significant aspect of the case study, and
- Utilize the researcher's prior expert knowledge.

These four elements were considered and built into the research study design and was used to guide the data analysis and ensure its quality.

Researcher's Subjectivity

The study of self-initiated expatriate adjustment was of interest to the researcher because of her personal experience as an international student in the United States. She also had the honor of interacting with and sharing in the cross-cultural experiences of other close family and contacts, most of who were self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). She realized that they faced a different set of challenges compared to organizational expatriates because of their unique situation. She began to ask questions, and then

found out that the difficulties in adjustment experienced by these SIEs were due to various factors in addition to cultural factors. She sought a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of expatriate adjustment process based on her personal experience in adjusting to a new cultural environment. Her personal experience only served as an objective reference for this research. However, since her personal experience was similar to the phenomenon being researched, the possibility of having some bias cannot be overruled. In addition, she experienced a feeling of empathy which she thinks positively reinforced the trust of the participants to share their story without reservations.

Research Findings

According to Miles & Huberman (1994) qualitative research does not have a standard format of reporting its findings. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested that qualitative research accounts should be augmented with direct description to enhance the understanding of the conclusions and analyses derived by the researcher from the data collected. Similarly, Chenail (1995) believed that the “main focus of a qualitative research is the data itself, in all its richness, breadth, and depth” (p.2). He further noted that qualitative researchers should include this data in their final presentation. In line with these recommendations, the researcher explored the research questions using the participants’ direct descriptions of their experiences while working and living in the United States.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the organizational support and social network support that self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) receive affected their cross-cultural adjustment process, and in turn affected their individual work performance.

During in-depth interviews, participants described their experiences with self-initiated expatriation. The research findings are based on analysis of the following data sources: semi-structured interviews, researcher's observations, and researcher's memos. Based on the analysis, five major themes emerged – personality factors, social support, corporate/work culture, cultural differences, and adjustment as a function of time.

One common factor that ran across all ten cases was that none of the SIEs were provided cross-cultural training. The respective organizations hired the participants and petitioned for their visas (H1B category). Of the ten participants, nine required work visas. The tenth participant came on a family visa but intends to return to her home country (Estonia) after working in the United States (US) for a couple years. The H1B work visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations like IT. Under the visa, a US company can employ a foreign worker for up to six years. According to US rules and regulations, individuals cannot apply for an H1B visa to allow them to work in the US. The employer must petition for entry of the employee. In the words of participant DU, "There has been no employer in my case has ever provided any additional support or training to help me manage that cross-cultural change. It's always been the expectation that I would be treated no differently culturally from any other existing American employee. I think the only consideration provided to me as a foreigner has been in the most early days, in terms of processing my HB1 visa and permanent residence."

Personality Factors

Each of the participants displayed certain personality factors that helped them in their cross-cultural adjustment. Firstly, they were conscientious and displayed initiative.

Participant 1, a French national, initially moved to the US with her family. However, as a high schooler, she found the transition difficult. She later moved to Canada for college and went back to France to complete her Masters. She worked after her Masters and while working decided she would come back to the US to “give it another chance.” She said, “ I finished my Masters. I was still working with them (in Paris) and I wanted to come back to the US...considering I would like to move to the West, I thought it would be strategic for me to move back (to the US).”

Participant 9, from the Ukraine, first came to the US as an exchange student. She was required to return to Ukraine for two years to finish her undergrad education. After her exchange student experience she was motivated to return to the US. She showed initiative in her expatriation. She said, “But as soon as I, the two years were up, I started to think about my MBA like how do I go back, what's my pass back to the United States? So it's never been like a hazard, it was deliberate, I took GMAT, I took TOEFL, I applied to schools, I got scholarships...”

Participant 3, from Benin, said “But I knew I had some modicum of plan from the get go..... I was just eager to go. There wasn't really any preparation. I just wanted to go.” (this was in response to why he came to the US). Participant 8, from Latvia, first tried to initiate an intra-company transfer, but later gave up his position to self-expatriate. He said, “Yeah I had initiated that move, but they were too slow.” Participant 10, from New Zealand, was hired by a US based organization. However, he and his family did not know anyone in the US when they first arrived. In response to how they forged social contact, he said, “I've taken it upon myself to develop my own network so I'm quite involved with organizations outside of my employer...”

The second personality factor that was displayed was tenacity. Participant 3 said “I would say that I had to learn to mature very early in my life. So coming here with that background I knew that there was nothing that they were going to throw at me that was going to destabilize me. I felt like that was an advantage that no one could match. And that's why the reason of assimilating the culture was really easy for me.” In response to why he chose to come to the US instead of a French speaking country, he said, “Yeah it was going to be easy to blend there but I wasn't looking for easy.” In response to whether the adjustment to culture affected work performance, Participant 7, from India, said, “You know if at all if you're having adjustment issues or anything, the main issue that comes about is loneliness sometimes and things like that. I think most of us are mentally strong to not let that affect us because you know that if it does then you would be caught on it at some point in time. So no I don't think it has affected my work in any way...”

The third personality factor displayed was openness to experience. Participant 1 said, “I go on websites like Meet Up, like InterNations and I was looking events to meet people. That's what I did.” Participant 10 said, “I think a lot of it comes down to mindset...very much the attitude that you come to a different country, you come with the intention to reach out and enjoy the differences that people from different cultures offer.”

Participant 5, from India said, “And I feel just like being open to all of it, participating and just being curious and being open helps a lot.... I am extremely open to it (other cultures) personally. It just like, it fascinates me. Like food and their life style, the language that they speak..” Participant 6, also from India, said, “....actually more because I'm an extrovert. I have this... I would go and say hi, I would go talk. I don't

have any problem talking to anyone I find it.. for me as I said, I am kind of open to meet people. I want to know about people. I like maintaining lots of friends and everything. So it was never an issue with me to adapt to any place.” Participant 9, from Ukraine, said, “so like taking leadership roles in the college, being part of student government, so it was just a good overall personal growth experience for me.”

This finding confirms prior research that shows a relationship between expatriate personality factors and work, as well as cross-cultural, adjustment (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2006; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010).

Social Support

Participants emphasized the importance of social network support in their cross-cultural adjustment. Participant 2, from Estonia, said, “I have to say that he (her American husband) has been extraordinary supportive especially because sometimes I express my frustration about American culture which definitely is intertwined with his beliefs and background right? But he has been supportive and yes, he always tries to give his feedback, tries to explain, tries to just listen and as a man he tries to fix.”

Participant 4, who expatriated as a student, from China, mentioned that he benefited a lot from the host family program that his college offered. He said it was “almost critical in my adjustment.” Another factor he said helped was being in a relationship with someone who is a host country national. He also stated that his work is collaborative in nature. “I needed to develop personal relationships with my co-workers to be effective in completing my tasks, and being able to speak the cultural language at large, figuratively speaking, is fundamental in building personal relationships with co-

workers. I spend 8 hours a day, 5 days a week at work, and without being part of the social culture, work would have been a lot less pleasant.”

Participant 5, when asked what helped in his adjustment said, “ I think friends probably matter more than family, in this sense depending on your scene, if it was work, kind of mentors at work, they kind of matter more.” He emphasized this because his family was overseas and he felt that as a student, the seniors in the program provided more tangible social support than his own family could, at that point in time.

Participant 7 said of her experience, “The major support comes from the student body. The seniors. So they play a big part in helping you to get settled in..... So, seniors are very welcoming in that they will let you board with them in their apartment even though there is only four per apartment. They will still let you board for two weeks till you get your own place and stuff.” As international students, their first social circle was the student body they connected with and they emphasized how important that support was in their adjustment.

Participant 9, who first came to the US as an international exchange student, mentioned that her social network earlier consisted primarily of people from her home country. However, because she thought it was hindering her cross-cultural adjustment, she made an effort to branch out and reach out to non-home country nationals. She said, “I think I've learnt from my first experience and I've also like one mistake I made when the first time that I came, I only hung out with Russian speaking people. I had a very close-knit circle and we would always speak Russian and go everywhere together. So that resulted in me not learning English as fluently as I could have and then also not expanding on my network of friends. I had very superficial relationships with other

international students..... we never had deep conversations or never had joint experiences where you truly get to know people. So I actually regret about that. And because of that my second time around I purposefully avoided Russians and Ukrainians. I still knew who they were, I was nice to them, I spoke to them but I wasn't seeking out their attention and I tried to like talk to as many people as possible. So that was good because I do believe that I have very interesting friendships out of my experience second time around. However, I have to admit, there is something about home country that binds you instantly together and it's just so much easier and just so much more natural to become friends even if you haven't had long history going back, it's like you click. You don't have any effort. So but I did put a lot of effort second time around so that paid of." Again, it demonstrates that the immediate community of peers and fellow students provide the support for those who expatriate as students.

Participant 6 mentioned that she experienced true culture shock much later because her first social circle as an international student consisted of home country nationals. She said, "when I came here, I came to university - of course you knew that. And Masters degree I was doing, even the professors were Indian so it was more like getting used to the fact that I'm in the US but I'm actually don't have any non-Indian friends. I had culture shock in the sense of my first job because I got used to the university life and suddenly I came to a place where I couldn't find any Indians or students or anybody. So that's when it kind of hit me like Oh I'm actually in the US. So now I need to get used to the fact that I have different people around me." She differentiates her experience from other students who she thinks adjusted faster because they interacted with host country nationals. She mentioned, "talking to a couple

of friends who were already here - they were part of the East Coast where the universities don't really have a big Indian population. So they got used to the fact that they are living in the US, very fast than myself when I came to the US.”

Participant 3, who also expatriated as a student, stayed with his cousin. His cousin had a lot of French (native language) speakers. He mentions how he expressly made an effort to broaden his social circle. He said, “As far as my accent goes and speaking English fluently, I have to make a conscious effort of stepping away from the social circle that I got from my cousin. Because a lot of those people spoke French and it wasn't going to help my accent if I came from school and spoke French the rest of the day. Then the next day, went to school, spoke English, came back home and spoke French the rest of the time. So I had to make a conscious effort, you know, exposing myself to more English speaking people just so I could get more proficient at English speaking.”

Participant 8, who expatriated directly for work, and doesn't have a family in the US, said, “the biggest progress for adjustment came not from the work but rather from my decision to live with room mates. So that way I got into the culture more than through the work. At work I have maybe few people as closer friends, like 1 or 2 that I used to hang out with and I used to have very good connections with them. And I have obtained sort of cultural sense that way. But that's about it.” Of his roommates, one is a host country national while the other is an expatriate.

Participant 10 self expatriated with his family. He said, “..we all came together. I think they helped me in the sense that we all went through this experience together. So we had plenty to talk about each day when we came back together about what we had

experienced and observations that we'd made. Still continue to do so.” He further attested that while they had each other for support, having connections outside helped as well. He added, “they (his wife and children) were, contrary to common misperceptions, very involved with the homeschooling community, very early on. And we have church connections, as well. The homeschooling community is actually huge, large degree of socialization that goes on with homeschooling. So, I'm thinking back and remembering all the things that they had and they made friends very quickly.”

Participant 1 said “When you move with other people, it’s easier as you are sharing the same difficulties with other people. Adapting to a new culture, learning a new language.” After self-expatriation, she mentioned that she did gravitate to familiarity because it took her longer to form a social circle. She mentioned, “For years I would say “I don't want to speak with French people, I want to adjust, adapt, be in with real Americans.” Right now, when I moved here, because it took longer for me to adjust and make friends in Herndon, because there was this lack of social places, when I met French speakers - they're not French people but they are French speakers - in Reston, which is the town right next door, it was easier for me.”

The findings with regards to social support are consistent with prior research (Cao, Hirschi & Deller, 2013; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

Corporate/Work culture

The third theme that was identified in expatriate adjustment was corporate or work culture. None of the organizations that the participants worked for provided cross-cultural training. However, the participants mentioned how having a corporate culture that enriched and supported their goals helped in their adjustment.

Participant 5 said, luckily I'm in a field where you know, your background or the things that you do apart from your work don't matter much. Like my work culture here is very open, they are very supportive. Mostly, as long as you're working and doing what is required, they don't actually care about how well you are adjusted to the US culture. So it's not a big deal in my work at least. I won't say social skills don't matter that much but I feel culture doesn't play a very big role..... and in general people kind of realize in my work environment that culture is very important but more important is what kind of work you do and how good you are at it. So finally, the bottom point is that is what matters. We have our own corporate - not corporate - own culture at work based on things like being able to freely communicate, like other things probably to do with the business side of things. So that's our work culture. It's not dependent on where you're from at all."

Participant 8 said, "So one of those things was, that I really appreciated was, professional development program so to speak, that is the official name of it. Where essentially that is where the company tries to grow the next generation of leaders for itself. It is nothing related to expats at all and we were there like a bunch of us were there in that program. But that one helped me really build contact and relationships within the company real fast and I got to know what each department does."

These findings were in support of prior research that asserted that the success of the expatriation process depended, in part, on organizational support and socialization (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014; Fu, Hsu, & Shaffer, 2008; Aycan, 1997; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991).

Cultural differences

The fourth major theme that was identified was cultural differences. Participants noted the differences between their home country and the host country.

Participant 2 said, "I mean that my natural behavior that is triggered by my cultural background and upbringing is different from American and a lot if I would behave as an Estonian then I would be perceived as Americans as rude or as ignorant or as you know not friendly or obnoxious. And even though I am not this for Estonian standards but I would be that for American standards..... I think in my previous company, it affected positively the fact that I'm from a different culture. It affected positively because I was working for, I was helping out in production where I was running the production line where people were working for me and I was organizing that line and it was, it had to be, it was a very busy and stressful environment and because coming from my culture I'm very Germanic, very straight forward, very straight to the point. As a production manager it was a great advantage. So it made production to run faster and organized without extra hassle..... In my current work I just knew that it takes extra energy from me to behave like an American so it's just a double exhausting for me to pursue my career here."

She added, "one of the big differences is that Estonia is the most non-religious country in the world and I'm not religious. And our relationship to religion in general is opposite to the main picture of America. America, as compared to other countries is religious..... sometimes I wish I would be more open about my true understandings of political views or religious views. This country in general is very politically correct and my country does not care about this at all."

This perception about religion was echoed by Participant 9 who was raised in Communist Ukraine. She mentioned that religion was a major factor in America and that she thought it was “weird”. She also thought her first experience as an expatriate was less to do with cross-cultural experiences and more to do with moving to a rural US town as opposed to a big city. She also mentioned how the experiences of SIEs can be different. She said, “I do have to say that my exotic nature, the fact that I have an accent and I don't come from America and my ideas are some times strange to Americans, was sometimes an impediment. Many companies claim that they love diversity and they want fresh thinking but I don't think that every employee at every level and every organization is truly ready and embraces that.”

Participant 7 said, “the culture in the US is, it's something that is different from what we are used to in India..... However there is always in my mind, even though I have lived abroad, there is always a disconnect when it comes to social settings. The way.. but it's not something you cannot overcome, but there is a little bit of a struggle when you want to socialize when you want to hang out and stuff like that. Yeah that is something which I am still kind of getting used to.”

Participant 5, also from India, said, “I think one thing which I found very odd, not odd but kind of surprising was how religion was a very personal matter over here and people don't like to talk about it in general and it's like a big personal thing over here.”

Participant 1 said, “that real Americans, that grew up in an American culture, have a tendency to be more reserved about what they think and what they say. And they are more shocked about what you say if you are direct..... And you're up.. I don't

know why, I don't know if it's because of stability of employment and it's less risky, but in Europe, you say what you think. And I know here it can shock people.”

Participant 3 said, “They were more situations where I had to acknowledge that you know, okay it’s done differently here so that’s.. I can say..... I had to adjust to that.” Participant 6 referenced the difference in verbiage, even though she is a fluent English speaker. She said, “Because the way I talk to the person I know from India is different from the person when I know is not from India and that I should be respectful in the way of asking the question as well. So that definitely helped to understand a few words, because the words are actually make a difference coming from British English to American English. It did help a bit in the earlier days.” Participant 10, who is from New Zealand mentioned how the difference in verbiage was a little bit of a culture shock. He said, “We all experienced some culture shock, yes.... The drive thru....umm..just learning some new words for the same things or different things. Saying 'wahter' instead of water (pronunciation)..just different things of doing things.” Another factor Participant 10 mentioned was personal interaction. In NZ, we did a lot more with our neighbors than American culture allows for. It's kind of interesting that Americans are really not that familiar with their neighbors, I think.” Participant 7 said, “the culture here is one where people are very polite..... On the flip side, it's sometimes too polite where they just ask you how you are when they don't really care. So you kind of tend to get used to being polite, not really saying what you want to say. Being politically correct and stuff like that.”

The findings about cultural differences are in line with Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory. Hofstede (1984) developed a model based on cultural differences as

they were revealed by research in more than 50 countries around the world. Initially, there were four dimensions in the model. By 2010, Hofstede had 6 dimensions in the model, namely; power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance index, masculinity versus femininity, long term orientation versus short term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint.

Adjustment as a Function of Time

Participants mentioned that time was a factor in their adjustment. Participant 1 said time, patience, and motivation to adapt helped in the adjustment process. Participant 3 said, “after the first six months, I was used to most things I would consider American.” Participant 8 said that trying to adjust to the culture affected his work performance initially. He said that over a year and a half, he started improving and has “come to more of a leadership position that I was before.” When asked if there was any other factor that helped in adjustment, Participant 10 replied, “...I suppose time, of course, time's one because I don't....I'm not surprised quite as often as I was initially.” Participant 4 said it took him more than four years to adjust. “It took a while (to adjust). So 4 years of college and then some after I left college. I felt like college prepared me in terms of the mentality but in terms of the background and cultures, I think that was accumulative.”

Participants 4, 8, 3, and 10 said that the social and psychological context of the culture also took time for them to adapt to. In Participant 4's words, “So when people talk about you know, just like, the every day things that we talk about at work for example the TV shows, pop stars, sports, all those things, it took time to accumulate. It's just that imagine when you talk about the things you talk about every day back home in

my hometown in China, you talk about the things on TV, you talk about the food or the restaurant you go to. Those are the things - once you switch from country A to country B, those things are lost. So you have to accumulate that all over again. So for me it took years to build, to be really comfortable talking about the everyday things.”

Participant 8 also referenced the time it took for him to obtain cultural references. He said, “...But people have grown up in different parts of the world. They grew up with different, I want to say, TV series... It comes down to simple as that. So a lot of references that are being made to something obtained in childhood. I don't have them. Or maybe I kind of have something similar but I don't recognize them. That's pretty much the one deficiency which I think is the hardest to adjust to, the hardest to obtain. The rest of them, you can adjust to and I feel like I have adjusted as much as I want to. The sports and sports history are huge here in the States, especially for males, I think. A lot of conversation happens around professional sports, teams, their history, who the best player is, the trades that happened between teams, how they're doing this season and so on. So following NHL or NBA or other major sports league would give people a better chance to communicate with others - to join and participate in a lot of conversations that do not require the same cultural background otherwise.”

These findings about how adjustment is a function of time is in line with the theoretical framework that was adopted for this study. According to the UCT, in the beginning there is excitement (honeymoon stage), followed by a dip in the level of adjustment and some frustration and confusion whilst adjusting (disillusionment or culture shock stage), finally followed by near complete adjustment (mastery). All the participants described their adjustment process as taking time that involved the above

mentioned stages. Participants used the words excited and eager to describe their initial foray to the US (in keeping with the first stage of the UCT).

They also described the transition phase. For example, Participant 2 said, "I can quite honestly say that the years in America have been the most stressful years of my life (despite wanting to adapt)..... I would say work is still the most...the center of my stress. But not always in a negative way. There is also good stress. There are times where I really enjoy that."

What was different for each of the participants was how much time they spent in each stage. While Participant 4 mentioned that it took him more than 4 years to reach the mastery stage, Participant 3 said he felt adjusted in six months ("after the first six months, I was used to most things I would consider American). He credits his quick adjustment to the time he spent in Ghana. He said that even though Ghana was in Africa, his adjustment there was more difficult than his adjustment to culture in the US. "so after my graduation, I left and went to Ghana and lived by myself without my parents, so I wasn't 18 yet. So I would say that I had to learn to mature very early in my life. So coming here with that background I knew that there was nothing that they were going to throw at me that was going to destabilize me..... if I were to talk about true cultural shock? Yeah I would say Ghana. Definitely. Hands down. By far. And it's simple. Ghana is a former British colony. It's a British system, they speak English and they have two local languages, we do too, but they have different food. They have different habits. It was just day and night. Polar opposite. I really did not feel like I was in Africa, at least not in the Africa I was used to. And the funny thing is that was my second time in Ghana. I had visited Ghana before as a tourist with my family where we

were in a 5 star hotel, you know, it was different. Until you find yourself with pickpockets in transportation where you jump on the bus and get cursed on the street and things like that. Things I did not experience as a tourist.”

Participant 4 spent two years in Britain learning English before he came to the US to pursue his degree. He said, “I had two years in between college and to be able to adjust to a new way, a different way of education..... when I spent those two years, I spent it in Britain..... And in those two years I studied things, most of the things I had already studied.” When asked if he first experienced culture shock when he arrived in the US, he said “not so much. Cause I was transitioning from Britain to the United States.... the difference between British culture and American culture is much less than the difference between Chinese culture and British culture. So for me that difference wasn't that significant.”

Participant 8 also stated that he didn't experience culture shock because he lives and works in Boston. He said, “First is, I had lived in London before, for a month granted, But I have lived in a very similar culture, in my mind. Second of all I have traveled a lot so I've experienced a lot of cultures and a lot of places. So when I came to Boston, it felt like alright this is just another European country. I didn't really feel any much more difference. And so no cultural shock at all. The only time when I did finally “feel” (I'm using air quotes here) I feel like I'm in America, was when I traveled to California. California had a totally different culture. And then I finally, Alright, now I'm in America.”

Participant 2 said she still hadn't adapted because “I don't feel like I am an American or I behave as an American naturally.” Participant 9 said, “I'm not an anxious

person, I'm pretty comfortable in my skin. So I would totally say it took me less than most maybe? And I'm curious about other people so I'm not shying from opportunities to meet other people. I think, probably three months or so I realized that this is not going to be horrible.” After her first expatriation as an exchange student, she reminisces returning to Ukraine and experiencing reverse culture shock. “But, you know I truly appreciated America and realized how much I missed it when I went back because I had a reverse culture shock ...but that was a lot more stressful for me especially because it didn't have a clear picture of how I get back.” Her self-expatriation back to the US was difficult though because she did not have the logistical support that she had as an exchange student.

Participant 10 mentions how he and his wife encouraged their family to adjust. “my wife and I we very much encouraged our children, two daughters, that the success of our move would be in embracing the change and continuing to not only pick up what American culture we were comfortable with, still retaining the best of what we brought along with us.” He, too, does not consider himself completely adjusted. He said, “I think I am better adjusted though I'm still finding surprises even after 16-17 of having lived here and still finding the things that I don't quite understand.. I don't think I will ever be a true American.... I don't think I will fully assimilate, certainly not to the point where anyone would misjudge me for an American.”

Participants also touched on how they don't quite feel at home in their home country or host country. Participant 10 said, When I get back to NZ, my friends there accuse me of having developed an American accent. So, I'm surely a person with no home anymore...I feel a bit of an outsider now.” Participant 9 said “To the Russians I'm

a completely Americanized sold out. Sell out. They think I am loving, very capitalistic but I think there are more shades to me than that. I have an identity crisis cause I've kind of thought of myself, Ukraine is behind, I don't care about it now. Since 2014, when all this stuff started happening (political scenario), I am glued to facebook, I'm glued to twitter, I'm glued to all the news coverage about it. And it's just a big part of me. So again, it's very fluid. Your identity kind of fluctuates. I don't think it (US) ever becomes 100% home and obviously your question is about how do you maintain your friendship with your circle of friends, I still know a lot of people who speak Russian in my circle. But I truly don't think Ukraine is my home any more because when I go back to visit, I'm not comfortable there so I'm sure you know, it's a weird situation where nothing truly fits 100% but it's okay. You do so much, you benefited form living in different places and you learn so much so this is a very small price to pay where you never truly feel like this is me.”

A related theory that helps explain performance of expatriates is the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique & Bürgi (2001). This theory proposes that the more congruent an individual's expectations are with the individual's reality once on the job, the greater the individual's satisfaction and adjustment (Porter and Steers, 1973; Wanous, 1980, 1992). Participants explained that they had expected the transition since they self-expatriated. Also, some of the participants, like 2, 10, 9, had either visited the US or lived here for a short period of time.

Participant 10, when asked if he and his family experienced a huge difference in culture, said, “more than we anticipated.... it's funny you would think that coming from NZ, NZ, Australia, Canada, UK and US...are supposedly very, very similar but the

differences are much more startling than one would expect.” Similarly, Participant 8 said, “In the beginning, I kind of, yes, I was.. these like lots of additional hardships were expected because it's like taken from one place and moved to another place.”

These were the major themes that emerged in the findings during and after data analysis.

Discussion

This section will discuss the emerging themes and patterns from this study in line with findings from previous research reviewed earlier in the literature review section. The researcher will also examine the impact of these themes in relationship to cross-cultural adjustment and work performance of the participants in this study. The implication of the findings from this study to the growing community of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) working and living in the United States and management literature will be discussed. In addition, the limitations encountered during this study will be reviewed, as well.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the organizational support and social network support that SIEs receive affected their cross-cultural adjustment process, and in turn affected their individual work performance. Based on the interviews conducted, the data collected, and the data analysis, five major themes emerged as factors that can influence expatriate adjustment in the United States. The five major themes were: personality factors, social support, corporate/work culture, cultural differences, and adjustment as a function of time. Each of these themes will be discussed in relation to previous research, in these areas. In addition, the researcher

will also discuss the impact of these themes in relationship to cross-cultural adjustment, and individual work performances of the participants in this study.

The personality factors that were found to impact cross-cultural adjustment in SIEs were conscientiousness, showing initiative or motivation, tenacity, and openness to experience. SIEs had to seek out employment in the United States and each one of them showed initiative in seeking out employment and adjusting cross-culturally. They also displayed tenacity during of the adjustment phase because they did not necessarily receive any cross-cultural training that prepared them for work and life in the United States.

Those participants who arrived as international students (six participants) had brief one-day orientations, onboarding and events to help them acclimatize to life as students in the United States. They relied heavily on senior international students and host families to adjust to life in the United States. Once these SIEs graduated, they applied for jobs to work and continue living in the United States. A majority of them felt that they had already adjusted cross-culturally by the time they joined the workforce. Of the remaining participants, two SIEs expatriated directly to work. Neither of them had any cross-cultural training provided but they both had visited the United States earlier for brief visits. One SIE first expatriated with her family as an organizational expatriate. However, she and her family did not receive any training prior to relocation. She then went back to her home country and self-expatriated to explore work and living options in the United States. The last SIE expatriated because her husband lived here. She, too, did not receive any training or help from the organizations she worked for. While all their experiences were different, one common thread that ran through the SIEs experiences

was that they all went through the transition and adjustment cycle mentioned in the literature review section.

The SIEs' adjustment mirrors the stages explained in the UCT theory as well as the theory of met expectations. They first experienced excitement at the prospect of living and working in a new country, followed by the culture shock or disillusionment stage where they all learned to adjust living day to day life in the new culture, finally followed by gradual acceptance and adjustment in the host country. They were also aware that they would face challenges while adjusting to the new culture and were not necessarily fazed by it while going through it. The tenacity that these participants displayed helped with their adjustment. The findings also supported Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou's (1991) theoretical model because participants discussed adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with host nationals, and adjustment to the general environment.

One interesting finding was that a majority of the participants had clear intentions of how much they wanted to adapt. Participant 10 said, "the success of our move would be in embracing the change and continuing to not only pick up what American culture we were comfortable with, still retaining the best of what we brought along with us." When asked about his willingness to adapt to the host culture, Participant 8 said, "I'm going to call it restrained or limited because there are quite a few things that I understand but I don't necessarily want to adapt as my own. I can sort of speak live with them, I can work with them, I can accept that that's the way it is, but not necessarily adapt it as my own, like personal. But generally I'm willing to do as things are done here. As in there is a saying, when in Rome do as Roman's do. I try to adhere to that. If

that's how things are being done here, I'll try to do that." Participant 2 said, "I always do my best to adapt while still trying...keeping my personality and keeping my core package right." Participant 7 said, "It's (US culture) a very polite culture. On the flip side, it's sometimes too polite where they just ask you how you are when they don't really care. So you kind of tend to get used to being polite, not really saying what you want to say. Being politically correct and stuff like that. So that is one aspect of their culture, which is something that I don't really want to be. You have to be like that. But there's a lot of other aspects of their culture that I really like and would like to imbibe."

The findings support prior research on personality traits in expatriates (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2006; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010). The personality traits that have been found to lead to success in assignments with organizational expatriates are also true for SIEs.

SIEs also emphasized how social support helped in their adjustment process. For those who expatriated with their families, the shared experience of going through the adjustment process helped. SIEs who expatriated directly for work found social support through roommates and other communities they engaged in (for example, the homeschooling community, churches they are a part of, hobbies they indulge in, friends obtained through family (spouse's/sibling's/relative's friends). Those who expatriated as students found community primarily in fellow students who had come before them. The findings support prior research on the effects of social support on expatriation (McGinley, 2008; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002)

While none of the organizations provided training to the SIEs, a positive work culture was found to have a favorable effect on the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs.

The findings support prior research findings that emphasize the positive effects of a supportive work culture on successful cross-cultural adjustment (Aycan, 2011; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001).

Lastly, findings suggest that the process of cross-cultural adjustment did not affect most SIEs' individual performance directly. Participant 3 said, "I won't say it had been, well, as far as how it impairs my work, I won't say work performance because when I think work performance, I think about how I do my job and my social adjustment or what I went through, I don't think it had any direct impact on my performance because I have always been extremely driven so as long as work performance, it was a no brainer. The only way my experience in my social adjustment impacted me at work is in my interaction with my team mates and you know, giving me the confidence to just walk up to people from other teams and striking up a conversation, making them feel at ease and establishing a common ground because of, they say that the best way to make people at ease is to find the common ground with them.... if I weren't socially adjusted, where I am clearly adjusted, those people (co-workers who he collaborates with) wouldn't have been as eager to help me, that would result in longer delivery time..... So yeah you will have a little bit of impact but not too much but definitely little bit."

Participant 2 said the fact that she was from a different culture (she described her personality as being more Germanic, very straight forward) actually helped in her first job. As a production manager, she needed to make production run faster and possibly lay off those who weren't working or performing. She said she had no problem doing that due to her personality. However, that is not the case in her present role as an IT

program manager. She said, “I am not that friendly as Americans are. So in that way it actually affected positively. In my current work I just knew that it takes extra energy from me to behave like an American so it's just a double exhausting for me to pursue my career here.”

Participant 6 said that since she works for a multinational company, her work performance is affected by the culture of the person she is working with. She said her interactions with her present manager, who is Canadian, are very different from her previous manager, who was a fellow Indian. This brings into the forefront Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension of power distance. In this dimension, inequality and power is perceived from the followers, or the lower level. A higher degree of the Index indicates that hierarchy is clearly established and executed in society, without doubt or reason. A lower degree of the Index signifies that people question authority and attempt to distribute power (Hofstede, 1984).

The power distance index for India is 77, indicating an appreciation for hierarchy and a top-down structure in society and organizations. In Indian culture, managers count on the obedience of their team members. The attitude toward managers are formal, communication is top down and directive in its style and often feedback which is negative is never offered up the ladder.

The power distance index for Canada is 39, which indicates that Canadian culture is marked by interdependence among its inhabitants and there is value placed on egalitarianism. This is also reflected by the lack of overt status and/or class distinctions in society. The low score on this dimension means that superiors are always accessible and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise. It

is customary for managers and staff members to consult one another and to share information freely. Canadians value a straightforward exchange of information with regards to communication.

This was indicated by Participant 6 when she said, “right now at the current company I'm working at which is called Organization X, I used to have an Indian manager before. The way things were happening were completely different because it was kind of they would come and tell you the work and go away. My part was like finish it and give. Right now, I have an, not Caucasian.. he's actually from Canada, so I have a Canadian boss right now. The way we work is completely different. In this sense I have more comfort with my current manager because I can kind of talk through and he asks me what my situations are if I have to adjust a schedule.....it also depends on the person....a person that is very open to see if the employee is having the comfort to finish the job or not. But it kind of helps me grow better because I have that open communication. I didn't have that before with my previous manager because it was more like I told you so you have to do so. So adapting to that, I felt like that the communication channel is more open and at least direct when I had different bosses from different countries.”

Participant 1 said that she was successfully able to compartmentalize her work and adjustment. She said, “I knew my mission, so I knew what I had to do and it's more, I guess, I did my job..do my job right and on this side I am adapting to the culture..... my priority is to grow my career and do what I have to do and meet people that can help me grow and at the same time, I'll adjust to the culture.... It won't be like for me, the other way around.... There is a connection because you have to understand the culture to

work with people in that culture. But, I mean as long as you understand that you can adapt it to your work.” Her experience was echoed by Participant 7. When asked if trying to adapt to the culture had affected her performance, she said, “Not really. I think human beings are very, when it comes to adaptability, we're very smart. We find that if we don't find acceptance at a certain place we gravitate to what we are familiar with. So a lot of times it's like you gravitate to fellow Indians to meet your social needs and you're comfortable there. And you gravitate to the Americans for work and business and stuff like that.”

Both Participants 1 and 2 expressed that American culture was more politically correct, whilst their European upbringing meant that they were more straight-forward and direct. While Participant 2 found it to be somewhat of an impediment, Participant 1 said it did not hinder her performance, if anything, it made it better, because she was honest. This was in stark contrast to what Participant 9 said about American culture. She said her Ukrainian friends considered her Americanized. In her words, “I'm a lot more American now than I used to be.... just the way that you behave, the way you speak, like American culture is very outspoken. You are loud, you're like opinionated, you're not trying to sugar coat, well Russians are like that as well, they're not trying to sugar coat things. They're not very diplomatic...” This indicates cultural differences and how SIEs respond differently to them.

Participant 5, who was raised in a metropolitan city in India kept making constant comparisons to his hometown and being in a large city like San Francisco or New York. He said he didn't feel as much of a culture shock because he drew parallels between the two. He did observe that the cultural differences between India and the United

States and how he thinks he gradually had to adjust. He did not think it impacted his work directly, but he said that having now noticed and being aware of the differences made him more confident. He said, "I think Indian culture promotes people being humble, soft spoken and not expressing your opinions compared to the culture over here where all students are taught that you are unique and your voice matters and to always speak up and those things like that. So Indian culture is kind of opposite I feel, where you're kind of expected to follow and not speak up that much. So that kind of hinders me and a lot of other people....the way Americans in general think about themselves, like they have a lot more confidence and are able to assert themselves, so they are kind of open to leading positions, like management kind of positions and I feel that for Indians that kind of plays against them.... So in that sense, as over the past few years I have gained more confidence and kind of understand the system where they expect you to be more assertive and express your opinions freely and that directly relates to performance at work."

Participant 10, who had a very multicultural background and experience, also did not think his adjustment process negatively affected his performance. In fact, he said, "I don't think it really had any impact or any effect on it because..um..none of the positions that I've had here in the United States have had any international aspect to them. I think, had they done so, it would have had a beneficial impact." He considered his multicultural experience and background an advantage. He narrated an anecdote where he was able to build rapport with, communicate with, and work better with an overseas team in India because of certain commonalities owing to India's past with British culture.

In contrast, Participant 8 said he thought his adjustment process affected his performance, not necessarily negatively, but where he thought he wasn't performing to the best of his abilities. He said, " I want to say initially it did. Even though I came into like a seniority position, a sort of senior expert position. Because I wasn't familiar or comfortable with knowing how things worked or the processes are, or the communication style, I want to say communication style, I couldn't bring as much to the table, or follow the discussion as good as I'm able now.... I feel initially that didn't happen for two reasons - A) I myself wasn't as eager to speak up because I wasn't sure if I had gotten the picture right and B) also the other parties in the discussion, they wouldn't necessarily understand what I meant when I spoke because even right now I have my distinct style of doing things and initially I don't think people understood that and I'm fairly sure they didn't and as a result, the communication effectiveness was reduced."

Participant 9 said her performance at university was affected, not so much due to cultural factors, but because of having to study in a language that she wasn't entirely fluent in at that point in time. Participant 4, who also came from a non-English speaking background, said that if he had not had the transition period in Britain, to learn English, the adjustment process would probably have been more difficult for him. Participant 3 spent some time in Ghana, studying English. He stated that his adjustment in Ghana was far more difficult for him than his adjustment in the United States. After studying English in Ghana and moving to the United States to get his undergraduate degree, he found jobs on campus. He said his first job on campus felt like an extension of his class. Therefore, he didn't think his performance was affected. He considered the first six

months he spent in the country his transition period and since he was already past that, he said his foray into work was “seamless”.

These findings suggest that language is an important factor in cross-cultural adjustment as well. Even though nine of the ten SIEs were non-native English speakers, those who were more fluent in the language before they expatriated had an easier time adjusting than those who were not. This finding supported Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley’s (1999) study where they comprehensively tested Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou’s model. Several significant moderating effects emerged in their study showing different patterns of adjustment for various factors, including levels of host country language fluency. These findings also support Chen’s (2012) findings that relational support and personal resources, including universal language spoken fluency, positively influence cross-cultural adjustment.

Another finding that must be mentioned is that the SIEs made references to the culture within the United States as being somewhat heterogeneous. Participant 8, who works in Boston, thought Boston was similar to any other European city. He felt like he was in America when he visited California. Participant 9, who currently lives in Cincinnati, went to college in North Carolina and Arizona. She mentioned that the cultures in all three places differs. Participant 5 went to school in Chicago and currently lives in San Francisco. He drew parallels between living in a metropolitan city in India and living in these large cities and how he thought it was similar, to an extent. Participant 1 lived in Connecticut and currently lives in Virginia and she mentioned a difference in the pace of life. She aspires to go to the West Coast because it is, after all, Silicon Valley. Participant 10 currently lives in Kansas City, but previously lived in

Indiana and Cincinnati, as well. He had an interesting observation. When asked whether he thought his experience would have been different if he had lived in a larger city on either Coast, he mentioned living in California for a year, while on furlough. He said, “I sometimes wonder....I don't think so...here's why. In 1987 we lived for almost a year in Santa Barbara, California. And although that's obviously different in geographic location, I don't think it is sufficiently different in terms of culture from the Midwest. I know people like to make a big deal of, you know, the coasts versus the Midwest but my perception is that it's largely related to pace of life as opposed to culture.”

Yin (2012) recommended that analytic generalizations were appropriate for case study research. Analytic generalizations are contingent on using a study's theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations. Based on these recommendations and the findings in this study, it can be generalized that:

- SIEs are self-motivated, show initiative, are tenacious, and are open to experiences.
- Relational support from family and social networks helps SIEs in their cross-cultural adjustment.
- An open and supportive work culture helps SIEs in their cross-cultural adjustment.
- Time is an important factor in cross-cultural adjustment. SIEs go through the different stages of adjustment, but depending on their past experiences, the amount of time each individual spends in each stage varies.

Limitations

This study was not without its limitations. One limitation was that the study sample was only within one industry (IT). Thus, this may raise questions about the generalizability of the findings when compared with the adjustment process of SIEs in other industries within the United States. Another limitation of this study was that the sample population was across different organizations and at different non-managerial and managerial levels. Cross-cultural adjustment could also be affected by what kind of work the SIE performed within the IT field. Also, the SIEs had varied number of years of work experience. Another factor was that while all participants were SIEs, their foray into expatriation was different. Some expatriated as students, others directly for work and one SIE first expatriated with her family as an organizational expatriate, went back to her home country and self-expatriated while working in her home country. This made it difficult to ascertain if prior cross-cultural experience exerted any influence on novelty and interactive adjustment for SIEs working in the United States. Finally, this study used qualitative methods where smaller participants are more appropriate. Therefore, these findings may not represent the larger population of the expatriates working and living in the United States.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how the organizational support and social network support that self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) receive, affected their cross-cultural adjustment process, and in turn affected their individual work performance. A multiple case study was conducted and data were collected from ten SIEs in the United States and analyzed. The data collected from the interviews in the case studies

revealed different themes influencing the cross-cultural adjustment and work performance of SIEs in the United States. Conclusions are discussed by research question below:

1. How does perceived organizational support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

Data revealed that a supportive work culture, which included open communication and mentors, helped in the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs. It helped them build contacts and socialize, which ultimately led to cross-cultural adjustment.

2. How does social support affect self-initiated expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the host country?

Data revealed that social support from family as well as host country nationals aided in the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs. Specifically, when SIEs expatriated with their family, it helped for them to talk about their experiences with each other. SIEs who had built social networks with host country nationals also adjusted faster than when they only had support from other fellow home country nationals.

3. How does the cross-cultural adjustment in the host country affect the self-initiated expatriates' work performance?

The findings of the study indicated that the cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs in the host country positively affected SIEs work performance in the long run. SIEs faced difficulties during the adjustment phase if they were not proficient in the host country language. But once they overcame it, their cross-cultural adjustment was much easier. Findings also suggested that because SIEs are motivated, tenacious and show initiative, they are more likely to overcome challenges during adjustment. Their work

performance was not hampered negatively during the adjustment phase because they were focused on their goal of developing their career.

Recommendations for Future Research

The influx of SIEs in the United States is steadily increasing; thus, it is necessary to continually study SIE adjustment, and performance. The findings of this study are of significant importance to the growing SIE population, and organizations that employ them within the United States. The success and competitiveness of these organizations in the global market depends on the successful cross-cultural adjustment and career development of the SIEs they employ. Although researchers have studied cross-cultural adjustment of SIEs quantitatively (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013; Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2013), it is suggested that future researchers seek to obtain additional qualitative data from SIEs working in the United States. The following recommendations are suggested for future research:

- Use a larger population from across a wider range of industries and locations within the United States, so as to shed more light on this phenomenon.
- Incorporate organizational variables while studying SIE cross-cultural adjustment, viz., how SIE cross-cultural adjustment affects organizational performance.
- Study how organizational mentors can help with the cross-cultural adjustment and career development of SIEs.
- Study how SIEs form social networks in the absence of family members.

- Investigate the repatriation of SIEs after having lived and worked successfully overseas.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT LETTER

To,

(Name of participant)

Sub: Participation in an interview.

Dear XYZ,

I, Ashwini Joshua-Gojer, am currently a doctoral student at the University of North Texas. This is regarding my dissertation about self-initiated expatriates currently working in the United States.

I am given to understand by Ms. ABC (a common contact) that you are a self-initiated expatriate. Would you be willing to answer a few questions about your experiences as an expatriate?

If you are willing, I propose to use one telephonic interview and one semi-structured interview to study the topic. We could meet in a designated room at the local library for the aforementioned interview. I would appreciate it if you could email me back and let me know of your willingness to take part in this research.

Thank you

Ashwini Joshua-Gojer

Doctoral Student,

Dept. of Learning Technologies,

College of Information

University of North Texas.

Email: ashwinijoshua@my.unt.edu

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Cross cultural adjustment and perceived work performance of self-initiated expatriates: a case study

Student Investigator: Ashwini Joshua-Gojer, University of North Texas (UNT)
Department of Learning Technologies. **Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Jeff M. Allen.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand how the organizational support and social network support that self-initiated expatriates receive affects their cross-cultural adjustment process and how it relates to their perceived work performance. A self-initiated expatriate is someone who chooses to move to another country to work and live on their own arrangement instead of being sent there by an organization. The objective of this research is to investigate the experiences of professional self-initiated expatriates in the United States. It aims not to generalize the findings but rather, to gain an insight into career issues of expatriates who work in a country that is different from their home country.

Study Procedures: You will be asked take part in a short telephonic interview and one semi-structured interview that will take about 30-45 minutes of your time. Both these interviews will be audio-recorded.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about self-initiated expatriate adjustment. This includes how a self-initiated expatriate adjusts to their socio-cultural and work environment in a new culture.

Compensation for Participants: None

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. No direct references will be made to you or the organization you work for.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact *Ashwini Joshua-Gojer* at ashwinijoshua@my.unt.edu or *Dr. Jeff M. Allen* at Jeff.Allen@unt.edu.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Ashwini Joshua-Gojer has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

Signature of Student Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name:

Age:

Home country:

Native language:

Languages spoken:

No. of years spent away from home country:

Organization:

Designation/Work title:

Marital status:

No. of children:

Highest level of education obtained:

Geographic location of degrees/certification:

No. of years for degree completion:

Specific name of degrees and institutions:

Professional involvements and affiliations:

APPENDIX D
BACKGROUND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background Interview Guide

Hello, may I please speak to [interviewee name]? This is {researcher name} calling.

Thanks for taking time out of your day to discuss your experiences as an expatriate living and working in the United States.

Just to give you information and a brief outline of this interview today:

The purpose of my study is to understand how your organizational and social experience affects or has affected your cross-cultural adjustment process and how it relates to your perceived work performance. The objective is simply to investigate your experience as a professional self-initiated expatriate in the United States.

I will take about 15 minutes to ask you a couple questions about your background as an expatriate in the US.

As you saw in the consent form I emailed you, I will be recording this interview. Is that okay?

Could you confirm for the record that you consent to this interview?

[If answer is yes, proceed. If the answer is no, end the interview]

I have emailed you a copy of the consent form. Do you have questions about that document?

[Response]

If at any time you want to stop this conversation, just let me know. You have the right to stop this interview at any time. And you don't have to answer any of my questions if you don't want to. All the information that we discuss today will be used for research, and will be included in various publications; however all of your personal information will be removed, so no one would be able to associate you or the organization you belong to with the responses that you provide today.

1. Besides a university/college degree, have you obtained any other professional training or certifications?
2. How many years of experience do you have in this particular field?
3. How many years have you spent in the United States as an expatriate?
4. How long have you worked at this organization?
5. How many US organizations have provided you employment?

Thank you for your time. I look forward to meeting with you soon and talking further.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your decision to look for work in the United States.
2. How long, in your opinion, do you think it took you to adapt to the culture in the United States?
3. How has your family helped you in your adjustment process?
 - Did you first experience culture shock when you first arrived in the United States?
 - Was it difficult for your spouse/children/family to adjust to a new environment?
 - How did you prepare for your arrival in the United States?
4. Do you think trying to adapt to a new culture affected your performance at work?
5. How has your company helped you in your adjustment process?
 - Did you have any training/program to help with the adjustment?
6. Does your organization organize social events that allow relationships between colleagues to go beyond just the workplace? Please elaborate.
7. What are your thoughts about your willingness to adapt to the host culture?
8. Tell me a little bit about your social circle.
 - Does it consist primarily of people from your home country?

-Do you think there were other social factors that helped or hindered you from adapting to the United States?

9. How do you think your experiences have impacted your organization as a whole?

- Do you think your adjustment has benefited your company?

- How does your performance affect your organization?

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