ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT OF EXPATRIATE MANAGERS IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

In response to the problem of high expatriate failure rates in China, this study investigates organisational commitment issues in relation to a community of Western expatriate managers working in a private, Chinese-owned, academic college in China. Through individual interviews, the study examines the various processes, experiences, and interactions of six expatriate managers in order to gain a deeper insight into the factors that are most influential to their organisational commitment. Organisational commitment is found to be most likely increased as the expatriates improve their managerial effectiveness through promoting organisational and cultural harmony, maintaining supportive spousal/familial relationships, and establishing influential hierarchical relationships within the organisation.

Key words: expatriate, China, organisational commitment, organisational effectiveness, managerial effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The present study is an investigation into the phenomena of organisational commitment amongst a group of Western expatriate managers working in a private, Chinese-owned, academic college in South Eastern China. The investigation first explores the factors identified through existing studies to be most influential to organisational commitment. The findings are then applied to the context of the sampled community of Western expatriate managers working in China. The issue of organisational commitment is of particular relevance to the expatriate community and their employers, because research finds Western expatriate failures in China to range as wide as 25% to 70% (Ralston, Terpstra, Cunniff & Gustafson 1995; Hendry 1994; Shay & Bruce 1997; Valner & Palmer 2002; Tung 1981, 1984; Garonzik, Brockner & Siegel 2000; Milkovich & Newman 1996; Harzing 2002; Selmer 2002). Such high failure rates impact upon the expatriates themselves, their families, their employers, the economies in which they are employed, as well as potential future business relationships between Western expatriates and Chinese organisations. The study herein reported addresses the research problem identified in the literature of high Western expatriate failure rates in China, as it relates to the organisational commitment of the sampled managers of this investigation.

Expatriate failure is commonly defined as the early return or departure of expatriates, whereby a financial loss can be calculated or inferred, due to disrupted operations or damage to business relationships as a result of low commitment levels and cultural improprieties committed by the expatriate (Garonzik et al. 2000; Harzing 2002; Hutchings 2003; Milkovich

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& Newman 1996; Selmer 2002). For some companies, short to long-term costs for such failures are estimated to range from US\$ 250,000 to US\$ 1,000,000 per expatriate (Valner & Palmer 2002; O'Boyle 1989). The issue of organisational commitment is, therefore, of considerable concern to expatriates, the organisations that employ them, and to researchers investigating this area. As the first phase of a larger longitudinal study, the intent of this research is to gain a deeper insight and understanding into the issue of organisational commitment, as it relates to Western expatriate managers working in China. The study first reviews the literature on organisational commitment and its correlates in relation to attaining, maintaining and improving organisational commitment for the Western expatriates of the investigation. Following the literature review, the interview study further investigates the phenomena of organisational commitment amongst the sampled population by identifying the factors perceived as being most influential to their organisational commitment.

ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

There are numerous studies on the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organisational commitment, within the context of Western nationals working in Western nations, while studies in international contexts are relatively recent (Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Boyacigiller & Adler 1991; Randall 1993; Harrison & Hubbard 1998). Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982. p. 27), after compiling a comprehensive list of definitions for organisational commitment, define it as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation, as characterised by strong beliefs in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a strong desire to retain membership in the organisation. Based on this definition, research has tended to focus on identifying the factors that affect attitudinal development of organisational commitment and on the effect that varying levels of individual commitment has on organisational life (Meyer & Allen 1987; Harrison & Hubbard 1998). Commonly, these factors are categorised according to personal characteristics or situational factors (Angle & Lawson 1993). A brief outline of each category follows.

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics include demographic variables such as gender, age, tenure, and education (Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Randall 1993). In regards to gender, Matheiu and Zajac (1990) find that women tend to be more committed to organisations than men, primarily due to the fact that they are offered fewer opportunities for employment (Aven, Parker & McEvoy 1993). Likewise, research finds age and tenure to be positively correlated with organisational commitment (Angle & Perry 1981; Mowday et al. 1982; Mathieu & Zajac 1990; Allen & Meyer 1993; Harrison & Hubbard 1998). As employees get older, their employment opportunities commonly decrease, thereby motivating them to invest more personal effort into the organisation, with the aim of being considered valuable to the firm and thus retain their position (Mowday et al. 1982; Meyer & Allen 1984; Gregersen & Black 1992; Harrison & Hubbard 1998). Conversely, education is found to have a negative relationship with organisational commitment, as employees with higher education have more opportunities for alternative employment and mobility (Mowday et al. 1982; Mathieu & Zajac 1990).

Situational Factors

Situational factors are commonly divided into factors related to job characteristics, work experiences, and organisational characteristics (Mowday et al. 1982; Glisson & Durick 1988; Gregersen & Black 1992). Job characteristics include such phenomena as job satisfaction,

which the literature argues is a result of organisational commitment, as opposed to being a determinant of it (Bateman & Strasser 1984; Johnson et al. 1990; Mathieu & Aajac 1990; Randall 1993). Work experiences include all of the experiences that occur during an employee's tenure with an organisation (Mowday et al. 1982; Harrison & Hubbard 1998). The most influential of these experiences on organisational commitment are those related to an employee's opportunities for leadership, in terms of participative planning, coordinating, disciplining, organisational problem solving, and decision making (Yukl 1981; Glisson & Durick 1988; Mathieu & Aajac 1990; Randall 1993). Finally, managerial effectiveness has been cited in various studies as being a significant positive correlate of organisational commitment (Mott 1972; Angle & Perry 1981; Mowday et al. 1982; Harrison & Hubbard 1998; Adler & Corson 2003). While few studies have examined the organisational commitment of expatriates in cross-cultural or China-specific contexts, some studies have been done in terms of the managerial effectiveness of expatriates in these contexts. The link, therefore, identifying increased managerial effectiveness with increased organisational commitment, is of central importance to this investigation. A review of the literature on managerial effectiveness of Western managers in domestic, cross-cultural, and China-specific contexts follows.

Managerial Effectiveness

Managerial effectiveness, in the context of an employee's specific role within an organisation, is a product of the individual's effective or ineffective work-related behaviours (Drucker 1967, 2001; Page, Wilson, Meyer & Inkson 2003). The organisational effectiveness of managers, therefore, is assessed on the basis of their role-specific managerial effectiveness and the degree to which they are able to accomplish the goal requirements of the organisation (Page et al. 2003). In terms of identifying factors which are most influential to the manager's plight to effectively accomplish organisational goals, Wood and colleagues (2004) and Drucker (1967; 2001) focus on what a manager does and how they do it, while Page et al. (2003) emphasise the organisational and environmental contexts in which a manager works.

Contrary to both of these views, Deming (1982) argues that before a manager, or the organisational contexts that they are working in, can be judged in terms of effectiveness, the entire organisation needs to be transformed into an 'effective' environment, after which effectiveness will be a resultant endemic norm. While these views differ in their assessment of the path to effectiveness, there is agreement that managerial effectiveness occurs when a manager's efforts result in the ongoing satisfying of organisational goals. The term 'satisfying' here implies that the goals are met in such a way that provides for sustainable repeatability within the context of the organisation and its environment (Page et al. 2003). The managerial effectiveness of managers, therefore, in a Western context, can be defined as the ongoing satisfying of organisational goals through purposeful managerial efforts. This definition is explored further in the international context below.

MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

There are various prominent views expressed in the literature about which factors are most contributory to managerial effectiveness in cross-cultural contexts. With the development of the emotional intelligence index for determining global managerial leadership competencies, Coleman (1995; 1998; 2000) reveals that 90% of the difference between average and exceptionally effective managers is due to emotional intelligence, as opposed to cognitive abilities. The competency factors that make up the emotional intelligence index are

self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Coleman 1995; 1998; 2000). Managers who are found to have acceptable attributes in each of these areas are considered to be potentially effective managers, suitable for foreign postings.

Building on stress management and social support theories, Kraimer, Wayne and Jaworski (2001) take a more situational-specific approach to expatriate managerial effectiveness and argue that perceived organisational support and supervisory support are the most influential factors affecting expatriate managerial effectiveness (Feldman & Brett 1983; Fisher 1985; Pinder & Schroeder 1987). Using their Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) contend that openness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility are the four areas which cover the range of personality traits most relevant for analysing and predicting international orientation and inspiration and, therefore, expatriate managerial effectiveness. Finally, Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) assert that the five most influential factors affecting expatriate adjustment and, therefore, managerial effectiveness, are pre-departure training, previous foreign experience, organisational selection mechanisms, individual skills, and what they categorise as non-work factors (Kreimer & Jaworski 2001). Non-work factors include general dispositions towards cultural adventuring and family relationships (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991). An overview of managerial effectiveness, in the broad context of Western expatriates in China, follows.

Managerial Effectiveness of Western Expatriates in China

With China's November 2001 inclusion into the World Trade Organisation, its encouragement of foreign joint-ventures in China and its welcoming of individual expatriate professionals, many being from Western nations, it has become evident to those involved that many Chinese management, leadership and general business norms and practices differ considerably from those of the Western nations (Bond 1991; Blackman 1998; Phillips & Pearson 1996; http://www.wto.org). These differences have considerable influence on the organisational effectiveness of Western expatriates working in China (Bond 1991). The approaches to and values associated with such things as the management of workplace and home relationships, business meetings, negotiation practices, honesty, and the importance of relational and hierarchical harmony differ greatly between the collectivist and Confucian styles of China and the individualistic styles of the West (Bond 1991; Phillips & Pearson 1996; Zhu, Speece & So 1998; Selmer 1998; Fan 2000; Tung & Yeung 1998; Luo 2000; Tung 1982, 1989; Hitt, Lee & Yucel 2002; Tang & Ward 2003; Blackman 1998; Luo 2002). Western expatriate managers working in China must contend with each of these factors.

Tung (1982; 1989) found that while knowledge of and adherence to Chinese cultural norms did not necessarily guarantee business success for American partners, ignoring cultural differences, especially those associated with relationships, almost always guaranteed the failure of any venture in China. Tung's finding is reinforced by Hitt et al. (2002), who found the nurturing of Confucian relationships to be essential for the sustainable success of any foreign individual or business venture wanting to thrive in China. These relationships are based on the Confucian notion that places one individual in respectful duty-based subordination to another. In order of importance, these relationships include those between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger, and friend and friend (Fan 2000). Each relationship is coupled with a corresponding principle governing that relationship: Loyalty and duty, love and obedience, obligation and submission, seniority and modelling subject, and trust (Fan 2000). Many studies also identify positive correlations between spousal relationships, expatriate adjustment and organisational effectiveness (Adler

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2002; Aycan 1997; Black 1988; Black & Gregersen 1991; Black & Stephens 1989; Caliguiri, Hyland, Joshi & Boss 1998; Feldman & Brett 1983; Fisher 1985; Pinder & Schroeder 1987). The literature also cautions against causing organisational disharmony or conflict and argues that the organisational effectiveness of expatriate managers working in China is largely dependent upon an attainment of even the most basic cultural understanding of Chinese society and its values (Osland & Bird 2000; Osland, DeFranko & Osland 1999; Kay & Taylor 1997; Tang & Ward 2003; Bond 1991; Luo 2000; Tung & Yeung 1998).

Organisational Commitment through Managerial Effectiveness

The literature clearly identifies that the problem of expatriate failures in China is costly for many organisations from both the short and long-term perspectives. Although many theories propose methods for determining what factors may help to predict or support effective managers in domestic, cross-cultural, and China-specific contexts, there is little agreement as to the identification of these factors. In the context of China, the focus of this study, the literature suggests broad cultural adaptations are needed on the part of expatriates attempting to do business in China, yet studies specifically exploring the phenomena of organisational commitment, as it relates to expatriate failures, are lacking. The literature does, however, identify that organisational effectiveness is positively linked to managerial effectiveness. Using this link to address the research gap in this area, this investigation is an inferential exploratory study into the phenomena of organisational commitment, as it is identified through the managerial effectiveness of Western expatriates working in China. In particular, the investigation seeks to gain a deeper insight into the factors most influential to managerial effectiveness and, therefore, to the organisational commitment of Western expatriates in China. The study is accordingly guided by the sample-specific research question of: What are the factors most influential to the organisational commitment of Western expatriate managers working in a private, Chinese-owned, academic college in South-East China?

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate how managerial effectiveness can be attained, maintained, and increased, in order to promote organisational commitment among Western expatriate managers working in a private, Chinese-owned, academic college in South-East China. The study consisted of six 30-60 minute semi-structured telephone interviews with six senior expatriate managers in the organisation. At the time of the study, the college employed six senior expatriate managers, 22 expatriate teachers and approximately 200 Chinese teachers, administrators, general staff and executive managers. All of the participant managers of the study, as a function of their positions, interact in English with both Chinese and expatriate colleagues on a daily basis. In the larger study, of which this current investigation is a part, each manager was asked to respond to the following three questions: 1) How do you define managerial effectiveness for yourself while working in China; 2) What would be an effective day as a manager for you here in China; and 3) How do you think your managerial effectiveness could be increased? The present exploration focuses on the third question, as the aim of the interview investigation is to uncover and identify the processes and interactions that are most influential to the organisational commitment of the Western expatriate managers of the study, by way of their managerial effectiveness.

DATA

Data were collected through personal interviews with the sample of the study. The participants are Western expatriate managers who, at the time of this investigation, were

working in the private Chinese-owned college in South-Eastern China. Of seven telephone interviews that were requested, six expatriate managers agreed to participate. Their biographical and demographic details are as follows.

Allan. Allan is a 56-65 year old male. He is the top ranking expatriate in the organisation. He has a Bachelor degree and has lived and worked in China with his wife and their adult son for more than ten years. He has more than ten years experience in a variety of other developing countries and has worked as an education manager for 5-10 years. Allan speaks the Chinese language at an intermediate level.

Jill. Jill is a 35-40 year old female. She is the head of her department. She has a Master degree, is single and has lived with her adult son in China for 2-5 years. She has worked as an education manager for 2-5 years and has not worked in another developing country. Jill and her son are fluent in the Chinese language.

Larry. Larry is a 36-45 year old male. He is the head of his department. He has a Bachelor degree and has lived and worked in China with his wife and their young son for 2-5 years. Larry has 2-5 years experience as an education manager and has not worked in another developing country. He has no Chinese language skill.

Michael. Michael is a 70-75 year old male. He is a senior manager in the organisation. Michael has a Master degree and has lived alone in China for one year. His wife remains in England with their children. He has more than ten years experience in the education management field and has worked for 1-2 years in another developing country before coming to China. Michael has no Chinese language skill.

Ned. Ned is a 46-55 year old male and is the head of his department. He has no formal education beyond high-school, but has a long and distinguished work history in international business consulting. Ned has lived in China with his wife for less than one year. He has 1-2 years of work experience in other developing Asian countries and has worked in his current field for more than ten years. Ned has no Chinese language skills.

Sam. Sam is a 26-35 year old male. He is the head of his department and has a Master degree in Business Administration. Sam is single and has lived alone in China for 1-2 years. He has worked in other developing Asian countries for 1-2 years as an education manager. Sam has no Chinese language skills.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data were recorded by way of note taking. Notes included examples given by the participants about their current experiences in China as expatriate managers and direct quotes identifying context-specific phenomena that they perceived as important. The notes were then reviewed multiple times until distinct categories and themes emerged. When asked the interview question of how do you think your managerial effectiveness could be increased, the participants' responses consistently involved the three descriptive categories of organisational and cultural harmony, hierarchical relationships, and spousal/familial relationships. Each category emerged with equal importance. For the exploratory purposes of this phase of the study, these categorisations are used as organisational tools from which further phases of the investigation may develop.

Organisational and Cultural Harmony

Initial responses to the interview question indicated that the managers vary in how they perceive their own managerial effectiveness and how that effectiveness could be increased. Their responses also revealed an emphasis by each participant on the importance of maintaining organisational and cultural harmony within the college in order to promote their own managerial effectiveness. Notably, only Sam indicates that he feels as though he is already fully effective as a manager in his position: *It's fine*, he explains, *no problem. They have no complaints. I don't argue. They tell me this, I do this. They tell me that, I do that.* Sam clearly asserts that he is sufficiently effective as long as he nurtures and maintains hierarchical and cultural harmony. While Allan also espouses the maintaining of organisational and hierarchical harmony, he acknowledges that his effectiveness could be increased:

It could always improve, I suppose. With the Chinese [executive] you never know what they're up to. I don't figure it out. I just let it flow and it does. There is nothing more. Just keep your head down, placate the powers at least every second day or so and always make them look good.

For Allan and Sam, managerial effectiveness is intimately linked to the nurturing of organisational and cultural harmony within the hierarchical organisational structure and sustaining or improving their effectiveness is based on how well they maintain cultural harmony within the organisation.

Jill, likewise, bases her sense of increased effectiveness on the degree to which she is able to avoid cultural instances of offending and to her ability to maintain organisational and cultural harmony within the hierarchical organisational structure: Luck. If I'm lucky, then I won't be disrupting anyone's face. If you embarrass anyone, that's it. You're credibility for them is over. It's serious for them. Very serious. Her reference to luck as her hope for maintaining organisational and cultural harmony reveals that she is otherwise uncertain as to how to increase her managerial effectiveness within the college, apart from avoiding embarrassing anyone. While Ned agrees with the need to avoid offending his Chinese colleagues, he refers to the issue as the Chinese culture game of learning what offends and what doesn't. He also strongly states that he won't play that game, indicating his strong resistance to adapting to the Chinese business norms of maintaining organisational and cultural harmony. If I wanted to play the game, he says, I could be effective here. His assessment of adapting to the cultural norms of the environment in order to be effective, although not adhering to it himself, is aligned with what that the literature consistently identifies as the primary key for expatriate managerial effectiveness in China (Holden 2002; Adler 2002; Van Der Zee & Van Oudenhoven 2000; Bond 1991; Blackman 1998; Phillips & Pearson 1996; Zhu, Speece & So 1998; Selmer 1998; Fan 2000; Tung & Yeung 1998; Lou 2000; Tung 1982, 1989; Hitt, Lee & Yucel 2002; Tang & Ward 2003; Blackman 1998; Yadong 2002).

Larry indicates that *Chinese language skills* would significantly increase his effectiveness and also reveals his cautionary and mistrusting attitude towards his Chinese colleagues when he adds that this is so he *can understand what they are saying in front of [his] face every day*. He sees the improvement of his managerial effectiveness as being linked to his ability to know what is being spoken in Chinese within the organisation, thereby limiting what he perceives to be instances of disrespect and organisational disharmony.

Finally, Michael believes that there is *nothing more* that he can do to increase his effectiveness other than to *start again in another organisation*. I'm not effective here, he says, and goes on to say, I won't be effective here. I can't be. They need me but they don't see it. Notably, Michael's response focuses on his ineffectiveness and how his Chinese colleagues are unable to see their need for his contributions. When I first arrived, he says, they ate up my words like honey. It was beautiful. They loved me. Now they don't even look at me in the halls. It's awful. The change in Michael's reception within the college indicates a shift from a harmonious organisational and cultural situation to one of awkward disharmony. Indications of this shift are identified throughout Michael's interview data. Michael also refers frequently to his wife and to his admiration for her. If she were here, things would be better. She knows how to deal with this sort, he says, further revealing the difficulty that he his having in maintaining a harmonious, non-adversarial, working relationship with his Chinese colleagues. The influence of spousal and familial relationships on improved managerial effectiveness is revealed further in the following section.

Spousal/Familial Relationships

All of the participant managers consistently indicate the importance of their spousal and familial relationships to the success of their overall adjustment to living in China and to their managerial effectiveness and, therefore, organisational commitment, within the college.

Michael

Michael clearly states that he desires the support of his wife who is not with him in China: *I miss my wife...I haven't seen her for three months. I need her.* It is notable that many studies have found positive associations between spousal relationships and expatriate adjustment (Adler 2002; Aycan 1997; Black 1988; Black & Gregersen 1991; Black & Stephens 1989; Caliguiri, Hyland, Joshi & Boss 1998; Feldman & Brett 1983; Fisher 1985; Pinder & Schroeder 1987). Furthermore, Kreimer and Jaworski (2001), building on previous research, found positive correlations with expatriate adjustment and managerial effectiveness, indicating important links between spousal relationships, expatriate adjustment, managerial effectiveness, and organisational commitment.

Ned

Confessing that his refusal to *play the Chinese game* affects his effectiveness as a manager in China, Ned extols the support of his wife, who was with him only for the first few months of his posting in China:

That's why it was so good to have my wife here. I could tell her everything, so didn't feel the need to tell anyone else. I could stay out of trouble. You have to guard your words here. They can be used against you.

The sense of sharing that Ned receives from his spousal relationship satisfies his need to discuss the issues that he encounters working in the organisation. He implies that this protects him from saying things in inappropriate contexts to others within the organisation and having his words used against him in an adversarial manner. The notion of needing someone to *vent* with is also critical to Ned's assessment of the value of having his wife with him: *If I wanted to play the culture game, I would need her to vent with at the end of each day...and maybe even find something funny in it to laugh about.* Although admittedly ineffective as a manager in China, Ned is aware that he could be effective if he were to attempt to honour and maintain

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organisational and cultural harmony. To do so, he contends that he would need the daily support of his wife in order to *vent* and *laugh* with about the events of each day.

Larry

Larry states very clearly that much of his effectiveness is due to the support of his wife:

The first thing, the most important for my sanity...physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual sanity, is my wife. We've been here together, sharing the hardships and the good times. She's my comrade. I couldn't do it without her.

As with Ned, Larry values the *sharing* element of having a supportive spouse with him in China. The support that Larry feels he receives from his spouse is substantial. His insistence that his spousal relationship is the *most important* overall element for his personal well-being suggests that it is also a fundamental factor for his managerial effectiveness in China (Kreimer & Jaworski 2001; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991). While Kreimer and Jaworski (2001) did not find a direct correlation of any kind between spousal support and managerial effectiveness, they did find significant positive correlations between foreign country adjustment and expatriate managerial effectiveness. Larry clearly identifies the relationship with his wife as being of primary influence to his overall adjustment. It is, therefore, also of influence to his managerial effectiveness and organisational commitment (Kreimer & Jaworski 2001).

Jill

Jill, though not married, lives with her adult son. She also emphasises the need to have someone to talk with about the events of the day:

If it wasn't for his company, I couldn't do it. No way. I couldn't handle it. Not alone. It's too disrupting. We talk about everything. Without that breakdown person, winding down, unwinding...getting the garbage out that happens in the day and letting each other know it's just a job. Need that. Seriously. Need that.

As with Ned and Larry, Jill stresses the need to have someone to debrief with on a daily basis. She asserts the critical nature of the familial relationship for her well-being and overall adjustment by indicating that she *couldn't handle it*, without her son to *unwind with* each day. Though not a spousal relationship, Jill's connection with her adult son functionally fulfils a degree of the elements of aid, affect, and affirmation that Kreimer and Jaworski (2001) attribute to a spousal relationship.

Sam

Sam, while firmly declaring that his effectiveness is adequate and not in need of improvement, admits that he misses his familial relationships:

It's lonely here. Of course it is. I miss my whole family. Friends here are ok for a laugh but you can't trust them. If I had a wife, not Chinese, from my own culture, life would be sweet.

While contending that he is managerially effective, Sam admits having personal difficulties as he misses trustworthy family and romantic relationships with those of the Western culture. He makes no direct connection between his personal and professional life. Though he states that

he is *lonely*, he earlier states that he is sufficiently effective in his job and not in need of improvement. He also states that the friendships he has developed in China are *ok for a laugh*, but lack the element of *trust* that he desires, thus indicating dissatisfaction with some aspects of his adjustment process of living in China.

Allan

Allan makes no reference to his spousal or familial relationships.

Hierarchical Relationships

Along with indicating the importance of maintaining organisational and cultural harmony at the college and of having supportive spousal/familial relationships, the participants also highlight the need for establishing and nurturing relationships within the different levels of the organisation's hierarchical structure. They each stress the organisational value of having such relationships in order to accomplish their managerial tasks.

Sam and Allan

Sam and Allan offer a more placating approach than the other expatriates towards the Chinese executive. Sam, in particular, focuses on task accomplishment and unquestioned compliance in order to maintain his good relations with his employers:

They [the Chinese executive] don't have a clue about my job and they don't care...as long as it gets done. So I do it and learn the lesson of smooth relations. 'Yes' is the word for managerial effectiveness in China. 'Yes, yes, yes.'

Allan also focuses on the need for maintaining effective relationships with the Chinese executive of the college and does so, in part, by making *little calls to the executive at night*. By doing so, he contends that *everything flows smoothly*. They like to know they're in control, he says, further indicating his placating approach for pleasing the executive. Both Sam and Allan use words like *flow* and *smooth relations* to indicate the desired outcomes of their efforts. Sam contends that through submissively agreeing with the Chinese executive, his managerial effectiveness will be established, as long as he accomplishes his organisational duties. Allan, similarly, indicates that by letting the Chinese executive *know they're in control* through phone calls in the night time, he is able to indicate to them that he understands his position in the organisational hierarchy. Sam and Allan, therefore, each espouse the importance of respecting the hierarchical relationships within the college in order to maintain and enhance their managerial effectiveness.

Larry

Larry also agrees with the need to utilise hierarchical relationships, though his approach is concerned more with utilising a method of employee control than of honouring the positions of the Chinese executive within the organisation:

There is no survival unless you are connected with a [Chinese] person in authority who has power. That is everything here. My higher-up connections are able to make things go smoothly for me as I deal with the Chinese administration...meaning that because of social pressure from [above], things go smoothly.

Larry indicates that his connections within the organisational hierarchy and with the Chinese executive in particular, make things to go *smoothly* for him with the Chinese administrative

staff, in terms of the social pressure that can be applied on his behalf to accomplish certain tasks. He therefore sees his managerial effectiveness as being intimately linked to his ability to maintain and utilise effective hierarchical relationships.

Jill

Jill, while not directly referring to the nurturing of relationships high in the organisational hierarchy, does acknowledge the need to be *good* to people at all levels in the college in order to accomplish her managerial tasks and feel effective as a manager:

The people who hold the power here are the people who can get things done. Mainly Chinese. They're at all levels from the cleaning lady to the president himself. If you're good to them, they'll help you get things done. If you're on their bad side, even by accident, there's no way you can be effective here...and you'll be gone in a matter of time.

Task accomplishment and the added concept of job security are emphasised by Jill as the main reason for maintaining such relationships. Larry echoed Jill's view of job security as being linked to hierarchical relationships by asserting that there is *no survival unless you are connected* within the hierarchy. Although Jill sees a need to have good relationships at all levels of the organisation and Larry stresses the importance of executive level relationships, both view managerial effectiveness and job security as being intimately linked to the establishment of hierarchical relationships within the college. Jill also indicates how getting on someone's *bad side* and damaging a relationship within the hierarchy could cause managerial ineffectiveness and even dismissal from the organisation, thereby further emphasising the importance of maintaining effective relationships within the hierarchy.

Ned and Michael

Ned and Michael, unlike the other participants, do not feel as though they are managerially effective within the organisation. While Michael seems unaware of the reason for his ineffectiveness, Ned offers considerable insight into his own position:

I do things the way I know they should be done. If they would do it my way their whole operation would be world class. Be like the Chinese and you'll be effective here. Be like me and you can't be effective.

Though Ned acknowledges that he could be effective in China if he were to *be like the Chinese*, he rejects this notion and accepts his ineffectiveness. His conscious refusal to adapt to the Chinese organisational business culture, with its systems of hierarchical relationships and values of organisational harmony, limits his overall managerial effectiveness in the college (Hitt, Lee & Yucel 2002). Michael, conversely, seems unaware of how to adapt to the Chinese business culture, or even that there may be a possible need to do so:

It's not like the old days when a manager was a manager. You obey the manager because they are the manager. Everything's different here. They say 'yes' to your face and 'no' to your back. You look 'em in the eyes and they say, 'yes'. Then you turn around and it's 'no'. How could I be effective here?

Michael possesses a parochial view of managing in China whereby he expects to be obeyed by everyone below him on the organisational hierarchy, yet seems unaware, as the literature supports, that the act of disregarding the Chinese business norms and hierarchical relationship needs could be a factor in his ineffectiveness at the college (Adler 2002). This isn't China anymore, Michael goes on to say, this is an international marketplace that needs to be run on the rules of the international culture of business. Both Ned and Michael display egocentric and ethnocentric views about their experience as managers in China. Michael and Ned hold tightly to the belief that they are in China to change the Chinese way of conducting business and to introduce a new approach which operates on the rules of the international culture of business. The attitudes of Michael and Ned are consistent with what Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) identify, through their Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, as lacking cultural openness and cultural flexibility and are therefore predictors of crossculturally ineffective managers.

SUMMARY

The overall findings of the interview study are consistent with the literature, which primarily argues that cultural adaptability, as it relates to organisational issues, is critical for achieving managerial effectiveness as a cross-cultural expatriate manager in China (Osland & Bird 2000; Osland et al. 1999; Kay & Taylor 1997; Luo 2000; Tung & Yeung 1998; Tung 1982, 1989; Hitt et al. 2002; Bond 1991). In response to the research problem identified in the literature of high expatriate failure rates in China, this exploratory first-phase of a longitudinal study has investigated the phenomena of the managerial effectiveness of a sampled group of expatriate managers. As a lack of organisational commitment has been found to be a factor of expatriate failure, and organisational commitment is positively correlated with managerial effectiveness, this study has explored the factors most influential to the managerial effectiveness of the participant expatriate managers in order to determine the factors most influential to their organisational commitment.

Common to each of the participant's views, except for those of Michael, on how to maintain or increase their own managerial effectiveness, were elements that included the factors of maintaining organisational and cultural harmony, having supportive spousal or familial relationship, and the establishing and maintaining of relationships with Chinese individuals at all hierarchical levels within the organisation. Consistent with all responses, including Michael's, was the stressed importance of familial and/or spousal relationships, which were highlighted as being of significant influence to expatriate adjustment and effectiveness in much of the literature (Adler 2002).

CONCLUSION

This research has sought to provide insights into the issue of organisational commitment, as explored through the study of the managerial effectiveness of the participant Western expatriates working China. As established in the literature that organisational commitment is increased as managerial effectiveness is increased, the study provides a deeper insight into the issues of organisational effectiveness and, therefore, organisational commitment (Mott 1972; Angle & Perry 1981; Mowday et al. 1982; Harrison & Hubbard 1998; Adler & Corson 2003). Managerial effectiveness, from the analysis of the data of this study, is found to be most influenced by the factors of the maintaining of organisational and cultural harmony, having supportive familial and/or spousal relationships, and the establishing and nurturing of relationships with Chinese individuals at all levels within the organisational hierarchy. It is through learning about and adapting to these factors that the managerial effectiveness of

managers in similar situations in China can be attained, maintained, and increased. Since managerial effectiveness is positively correlated with organisational commitment, it follows that increased competence in and attention to the identified factors for managerial effectiveness will lead to a more likely enhancement of organisational commitment amongst expatriate managers in their organisational communities, within the Chinese context of this investigation (Mott 1972; Angle & Perry 1981; Mowday et al. 1982; Harrison & Hubbard 1998; Adler & Corson 2003).

Overall, the results of this study provide insights into the phenomena of organisational commitment that are useful for the expatriate managers, their employers, and future researchers investigating this area. The study also demonstrates the need for further investigation to determine if these factors for expatriate managerial effectiveness can be generalised to expatriate managers across China, in a variety of organisational contexts. Further research, with a larger sample and more equitable distribution of male and female participants, could also benefit from exploring the relationships between gender and the organisational effectiveness of Western expatriate managers working in China.

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