

Gender Stereotypes: Expatriates Job Performance and Gender Perception through Host Country Nationals (HCN's) Perspectives

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Abstract

In 21st century, organizations continuously expanding their business in the global market and to achieve their desired goals they mostly depend on diverse workforce. Gender diversity in workforce can bring fruitful results in organizational development if the managers provide equal employment opportunities to male and female candidates. Unfortunately, managers are reluctant to select female candidates for international assignment because of gender biased behavior or under estimating female capabilities. The purpose of this study is to examine expatriate male and female job performance and gender perception through host country nationals (Malaysian workers) perspectives. The data were collected from 200 host country nationals (Malaysian workers) about their 200 expatriate's coworkers from 12 countries working in Malaysia. For the analysis purpose, t-test was performed to examine the difference between expatriates male and female job performance and gender perception. The result of this study indicated that female expatriates perform better during international assignment in multicultural setting as compared to their male counterpart. Furthermore, Malaysian workers do not perceive any difference between male and female expatriates as their coworkers. The findings of this study contribute to body of knowledge about women expatriates and practically helpful for managers to build strong diverse workforce. In addition, this study suggested future research directions.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, job performance, HCN's, gender perception, women expatriates

1. Introduction

With the rising trends of globalization and expansion of organizational boundaries the demand of diverse workforce is increasing in order to cope with the global challenges. Ramalu, Wei and Rose (2011) argued that organizations receiving multiple advantages while having diverse workforce and expatriates. A survey conducted by (Windham International, 1999) on human resource managers and international relocation experts reported that organizations continue rely on expatriates and 41 percent of corporate revenues comes from outside the home country. Therefore, developing economies adopt international strategy for global expansion and recruit more expatriates for successful and smooth process of global expansion.

Multinational organizations consider many factors during recruitment and selection process for international assignment in which gender is one of the prominent factors. Mostly, MNE's reluctant to select female employees for international assignment as compared to their male counter parts. The MNE's reluctant behavior and male dominant society can be a reason of lower percentage of female's employees in local and international assignment. Fast moving economies and rapid advancement in the technology required competent and diverse workforce in order to get competitive advantage in global market. Organizations can get better results if they adopt effective staffing strategies including equal employment opportunities to male and female candidates. Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) proposed that global organizations need to wider their selection process in terms of selecting best male and female candidates. Adler (1987) have highlighted three reasons of low percentage of female expatriates: (1) lack of women interest in international assignment, (2) lack of organizational confidence on females abilities in terms of performance in foreign culture (3) discrimination against women in foreign culture. Adler (1993) further argued that believe of MNE's in above three reason may leads to low percentage of women selection for international assignment.

Sinangil and Ones (2003) argued that lower number of women in international assignment might be because of perception that some cultures strongly discourage the women involvement in work environment. In this regards, Owen, Javalgi and Scherer (2008) highlighted many factors that contribute to negative stereotype about women as managers in china which includes women's socialization, limited access to communist party, lower level of education and training and job segregation. Sinagil and Ones (2003) argued that in many societies all over the world there are biased views about the gender specifically biased behavior against women influence their performance. In addition, Holt (2000) highlighted that "the stereotypes of managers in foreign cultures suggest a sense of machismo that would impede a woman's effectiveness".

Past researchers have highlighted negative stereotypes against women but there is very limited research about host country nationals (HCN) perception about their expatriate performance. The evaluation of expatriate by host country nationals will provide clear views about the performance of male and females during international assignment. Past research in gender discrimination during international assignment was limited in scope. Mostly researcher pointed out the negative stereotypes or biased views about women expatriates. But in this study we tried to look at this phenomenon in slightly different direction. The point of discussion is that, the reason of women failure during international assignment or lower number of women participation in international assignment may not be due to lack of skills, abilities or knowledge but might be due to lack of managerial support, Host country nationals (HCN) gender discrimination or lack of cultural support. Based on theoretical understanding, it can be infer that women can perform better during international assignment if they get same facilities and support from management and host country nationals (HCN's). In this regards, Sinagil and Ones (2003) argued that women may actually be more suitable for international assignment than men because of their high social and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, Holt (1998) highlighted that women can adjust more easily in foreign environment, establish social network more effectively and develop personal relationship faster than men do.

The objective of this study is to investigate the gender stereotypes in expatriate job performance from host country nationals (HCN's) point of view. More specifically, this study sought to answer two research questions: (1) Is there any difference of job performance between male and female during international assignment? (2) Can female expatriate be successful in multicultural setting like Malaysia? The reasons behind investigating these research questions are to expand the boundaries of knowledge about women selection for international assignment. Sinagil and Ones (2003) highlighted that gender stereotypes from host country nationals have not been examined previously. Furthermore, Sinangil and Ones (2001) pointed out that the area of expatriate management from host country national's point of view has been ignored. Past researchers have highlighted the importance and role of host country nationals in expatriate performance but still there is limited empirical research in understanding of host country nationals. Therefore, this study sought to determine the gender stereotype of host country nationals in expatriate job performance especially in multicultural setting like Malaysia.

2. Malaysia as Host Country

Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia; Malaysia is made up of Peninsular West Malaysia, bordered by Thailand to the north and Singapore to the south, and East Malaysia, Located on Borneo Island. About 80 percent of the nation's population of 25.45 million resides in West Malaysia. Malaysia is a democratic country that has undergone tremendous growth and prosperity over the last two decades. Malaysia is a multicultural society consisting of 60.7% Malays, 25.3% Chinese, 7.4% Indians and 6.6% others.

Agriculture was the dominant sector of the economy until about 25 years ago. Since then, the thrust of the Malaysian economy has shifted to industrialization. Now the main export of the Malaysia is electric and electronic products. Malaysia aspires to be full-developed nation by 2020. Towards that end, the government has deemed human resource development the primary concern for national development as reflected in various programs, policies and strategies.

In 1980s Malaysia geared education and training towards consolidation, embedding efficiency as a variable in meeting work force requirements to achieve the objectives of NEP. The country progressed from an agricultural-based economy tone based on manufacturing activities. Soft skills become an important dimension in the development of the labor force in the 1990s. To achieve balanced and equitable development, the NEP was followed by the National Vision Policy (NPV) in 1991. One policy introduced in the NVP addresses the development of Malaysia into a knowledge-based society. In 1990s, the concept Vision of 2020 was introduced to guide the country towards becoming a united and developed nation by 2020.

Malaysian women have been playing vital role in economic development. Even though women participation in economic development is increasing from 36% (2007) to 40% in (2011) but there is still huge number of women workforce has not been utilized effectively. Approximately 60% of women (3 million) working as house wives having worth of almost RM 25 billion. Malaysia is an Islamic country with multicultural society offers much more working opportunities to women as compared to other Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh Saudi Arabia etc. In order to encourage women participation in economic development, Malaysian government has been passed many resolution and policies to increase women participation in country development. Although Malaysian society still considered as male dominant but still there is many opportunities for women workforce.

In order to achieve the objectives of Malaysian 2020 plan, the government and private sector has been attracting highly skilled workforce from all over the world. The number of expatriates in 2007 was 35,583 (men: 29,432 and women: 6,151) which rose in 2011 around 48,568 (men: 40,152 and women: 8416). The possible reason behind very lower number of women in expatriate pool might be due to mindset of the employers “women cannot perform well during international assignment or might be due to women are not interested to work in other country” Some of the recent studies tried to clear the women view point about international assignment and found that women are also interested to work in other country (Stone, 1991; Stroh, Varma, & Vally, 2000). There can be small number of women who are not interested to work in another country might be due to they perceive the new culture is not friendly or lack of expected cultural support.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. (1) How Malaysian workers perceive gender differences among expatriate as their coworkers? (2) Is there any difference between gender based performances among expatriates?

3. Sample Design

The data were collected from 200 Malaysian workers to know their perception about expatriate’s gender as their coworkers and gender based performance differences among expatriates evaluated by host country nationals (Malaysian workers). The sample was design in such a way that the sample size reflects diversity in terms of gender. Sample size was selected based on gender representing 100 men and 100 women from expatriate pool and same number from Malaysian workers pool. The data collection procedure was divided in two sections. In first section, all 200 Malaysian workers were asked to respond to set of statements. The purpose of this section was to know Malaysian workers perception about expatriate’s gender as their coworkers. In the second section, all 200 Malaysian workers were asked to rate their expatriates coworkers performance in different dimensions (The details of the measurement will be explained in the following sections).

Table 1. Sample characteristics of malaysian workers (host country nationals)

Gender		
	Male	121
	Female	79
Average Age		37.20
Average working experience (Years)		11.32
Average years in last assignment		4.21
Average years in current assignment		2.65
Average working period with expatriates		5.85
Average working period with current expatriate		2.55
Job Position in comparison with Past Expatriates		
	Superior	43
	Coworker	110
	Subordinate	47
Job Position in comparison with Current Expatriates		
	Superior	37
	Coworker	98
	Subordinate	65

All Malaysian workers were asked to state their demographic information including gender, age, working experience, number of years in current organization, education. The similar demographic information collected

from expatriates which further include number of years in international assignment. All Malaysian workers were represented five sectors which include Hotel industry, Tourism, Education, Information Technology and manufacturing. Expatriates were citizens of 12 countries which include Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, England, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan and Thailand.

Table 2. Sample characteristics of expatriates

Gender	
Male	158
Female	42
Average Age	42.14
Average working experience (Years)	13.21
Average years in last assignment	3.20
Average years in current assignment	2.50
Average working period as expatriate	6.23

4. Measurement

In order to measure gender perception about expatriates coworkers (GPAEC) 7 items scale constructed. The purpose of this scale was to know about the Malaysian workers perception (host country nationals) about their expatriate's coworker's gender. To measure the expatriate's performance scale consisted on 42 items were constructed. Expatriates performance were measured in terms of adjustment to foreign business practices (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Establishing and maintaining business contacts (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Technical skills (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Team work (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Communication skills (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Initiative and efforts (Hough & Dunnette, 1992), Self Improvement (Campbell: 1990; Viswesvaran; 1993) Interpersonal relation (Campbell: 1990; Viswesvaran; 1993), Productivity (Viswesvaran; 1993). The respondent were asked to rate their level of agreement based on 5 point likert scale.

Table 3. Reliability of the scales

Description	No. of Items	Reliability
Job Performance		
Foreign business adjustment	4	.76
Establishing and Maintaining Business contacts	5	.89
Technical Skills	3	.65
Team work	4	.91
Communication skills	3	.74
Personal skills	4	.87
Interpersonal skills	6	.93
Productivity	8	.81
Initiative and effort	5	.74
Gender perception about Expatriates Coworkers	5	.88

5. Data Analysis and Findings

In order to examine the differences between expatriates male and female job performance and gender perception about expatriate's coworkers by host country nationals (Malaysian workers) t-test were performed. In addition, d-value (effect size) also reported with (+)(-) values. Sinangil and Ones (2003) argued that d-value can range from +2.00 to - 2.00. Furthermore, Cohen (1988) highlighted that small value of d's which is around .20 explain small effect, medium d which is around 0.50 explain medium effect and large d value which is around 0.80 explain large effect size and d value above 1.00 consider extremely large effect size. With reference to t-value,

the positive t-values explained that male expatriates scored higher than female expatriates on performance and gender perception dimensions.

During the data collection process, the respondents were asked to mention the gender of expatriates and then rate their level of agreement towards all job performance dimensions and their comfort ability (gender perception). Later at analysis stage, the respondents segregated on the bases of gender and perform t-test with computed d-value.

Table 4. Gender perception and job performance among expatriates

Description	t-value	d-value
Job Performance		
Foreign business adjustment	-1.20	-0.10
Establishing and Maintaining Business contacts	-0.95	-0.15
Technical Skills	1.23	0.19
Team work	-0.64	-0.20
Communication skills	-0.73	-0.21
Personal skills	-1.10	-0.13
Interpersonal skills	-1.57	-0.15
Productivity	0.21	0.11
Initiative and effort	-0.88	-0.12
Gender perception about Expatriates Coworkers		
	-0.67	-0.02

The results of the study indicated that among all job performance dimensions only in technical skills (t-value = 1.23, d-value = 0.19) and productivity (t-value 0.21, d-value = 0.11) male expatriates scored higher than female expatriates. Rest of all job performance dimensions female expatriates scored higher than their counterparts. In terms of gender perception about expatriates by host country nationals (Malaysian workers), the results of the study indicated that there is no such difference between perception of host country nationals (Malaysian workers) about expatriates gender (d-value=effect size= -0.02).

The results of the study explained that women can adjust well in foreign business as compared to men in multicultural society like Malaysia. Although the difference between male and female is not higher when come to evaluate their performance in terms of foreign business adjustment. But still the results show higher score for female as compared to their counterparts. Furthermore, females scored higher in establishing business contact as compared to male but male scored higher than female when comes to technical skills.

The analysis of the data indicated that women expatriates perform better than men expatriates in terms of communication skills, team work, personal skills and initiative. In contrast, men expatriates perform better when come to productivity as compared their female counterpart. The reason behind better expatriate female performance might be due to the perception of host country nationals (Malaysian workers). The results explained that host country nationals (Malaysian workers) do not perceive any difference between expatriates male and female.

6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of host country nationals (Malaysian workers) about expatriates gender as their coworkers and the difference between expatriate male and female performance evaluated by host country nationals (Malaysian workers). The findings of this study suggested that host country nationals (Malaysian workers) do not perceived any gender difference among expatriates while working with them. One possible reason behind this finding might be multicultural setting of Malaysia. As pointed out earlier, Malaysian culture is based on different ethnicity which includes Malay (Muslims), Chinese (Christen & Buddhist) and Indians (Hindu). Each ethnicity practice their own culture, religion and rituals but at the same time all these ethnicities reflect one common Malaysian culture. Diverse workforce in Malaysian organizations helps expatriates to adjust in Malaysian culture faster and perform well. Since independence Malaysians enjoying the

taste of divorce workforce and this might be one of the reasons that Malaysian workforce don't perceive expatriate male and female differently. Owen et al., (2008) conducted study on Chinese culture and found that Chinese culture doesn't really encourage women as manager and women managers from west face problems at workplace. In contrast, Multi cultural setting of Malaysia supports expatriate women to perform well during their assignment.

Another finding of this study is that women perform better than men during international assignment especially in multicultural setting like Malaysia. More specifically, there is no difference between expatriate male and female performance. The finding of this study discourages the mind set claimed that women cannot perform well during international assignment. The important point is that management and selection committee should not under estimate women capabilities and skills. Women can also perform well if they get host country nationals support at workplace. If the host country culture is not friendly, proper pre-departure training and awareness can helps the expatriate women to perform well. The findings of this study suggested that multinationals organizations should select more female candidates for overseas assignment in order to enjoy the fruits of diverse workforce.

The findings of this study are important because of many reasons. Firstly, past research about host country national's perception about expatriate's gender is very limited. This study extends the boundaries of knowledge about host country national's point of views about expatriate gender. Second, a few studies tried to examine the expatriate performance host country national's perspectives. This study evaluates the expatriate performance through HCN's point of view and reported that there is no difference between expatriate male and female performance. In other words, expatriate female perform better than their male counter parts in multicultural setting.

As cross sectional study, the findings of this study may not be fully generalize. The future researcher should examine the host country national's perception about expatriate gender in different cultural setting like Saudi Arabia, China, India, and Pakistan. Furthermore, the future researcher should evaluate expatriate performance based on gender through host country national's point of view. Finally, future research about impact of host country national's gender perception on expatriate performance will open new avenue of knowledge. Future researcher should empirically test the effects of host country national's perception about expatriate gender on expatriates male and female job performance (rated by HCN's).

In theoretical perspectives, this study highlighted the important factors that contribute to successful completion of overseas assignment and reported that gender is not important factor to make the international assignment successful. The possible reason behind this claim is that the host country nationals may not perceive gender differences and treat expatriates equally. Furthermore, the findings of this study explain the HCN point of view to select candidate for particular job and their evaluation criteria.

Practically, the findings of this study are help full for the management and selection committee to appoint female candidate for overseas assignment. The findings of this study suggested that the managers should not under estimate the female candidate skills as they can even perform better in multicultural setting. Furthermore, there is no evidence suggested that women perform poorly during international assignment. Therefore, human resource managers should provide equal opportunity to male and female candidates for overseas assignment.

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