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An empirical investigation of job burnout among expatriates

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this study was to determine the level of workplace “job burnout” experienced by expatriate managers in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The study also examined the relationship between job burnout and intention to quit, and findings suggest that expatriates are affected by job burnout.

Design/methodology/approach – The study has assessed three key job characteristics (role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload) and their association with three dimensions of job burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal commitment). Data were collected from 189 respondents who were stratified via industry, age, size of organization, education and nationality. LISREL VIII was employed to evaluate the fit of the measurement model, and to examine the relationship between “job burnout” and expatriates “intention to quit”.

Findings – The results demonstrate that the three job characteristics are significantly associated with job burnout with role conflict being the main reason. Whilst role ambiguity was also a key issue, job burnout was least effected by role overload.

Research limitations/implications – The research has only begun to address the many issues that are of importance to the expatriates working in PNG and developing countries more generally. Also, this study was based on expatriates at a management level only; hence it is difficult to generalise beyond this.

Practical implications – Provides insights into the effects and consequences “job burnout” on expatriates in a developing country.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to understanding on relationship between the job burnout and expatriate failure.

Keywords Stress, Expatriates, Notice to quit, Role ambiguity, Papua New Guinea

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Notwithstanding the work of Harzing (1995) the literature on expatriation and cross-border assignments more generally indicates that premature returns from expatriate assignments are a persistent problem (Caligiuri, 2000; Ward and Kennedy, 2001; Harvey and Novicevic, 2001; Franke and Nicholson, 2002; Hechanova et al., 2003). Managers and their families may return early for a variety of reasons. It may simply be homesickness, or it may be as serious as an inability to adjust to such cultural nuances as housing conditions, health care facilities, or available leisure activities, or more seriously the job, the business environment, or the broader cultural circumstances. As a consequence “job burnout” may be occurring. Whilst few if any studies have occurred on “expatriate job burnout” a number of studies have shown that though...
expatriate assignments are costly from recruitment to placement, performance has been less than expected and indeed poorly managed (Bonache et al., 2003). In addition, expatriate satisfaction has been the focus of many firms in the course of achieving higher yields, but has reaped counter benefits (Fish and Wood, 1996).

“Failure” of expatriates to perform up to expectations may be the outcome of several contributing factors. Indeed, “failure” may result from a manager’s inability to adapt appropriately to the host culture. “Failure” may also result from a lack of fit between a manager’s personality or their emotional characteristics and the circumstances of the assignment (Caligiuri, 2000). Failure may also occur through an inability to cope with the complexity of the responsibilities of an international assignment (Katz and Seufer, 1996). Nevertheless, most premature returns seem to be attributed to the inability of the expatriate (and their spouse and family) to make the necessary cross-cultural adjustments. The direct costs resulting from this may include direct costs such as salary, training and relocation allowances (Black et al., 1992). Indirect costs such as a lack of effective knowledge transfer and the retention of expertise can also occur (Bender and Fish, 2000). Grove (1990) and Fish (2005, in press) have also indicated that expatriates need various abilities including an ability to deal effectively with frustration, stress, different political systems, interactions with strangers, and a host of other intercultural and business dimensions.

Nevertheless, it may be that “job burnout” is a contributing factor to why in a number of instances expatriate assignments are providing a less than satisfactory return on what is meant to be an important human resource management investment. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to provide evidence on the extent to which expatriates experience “job burnout” and to examine the relationship between expatriate “job burnout” and “intention to quit”.

Literature review

One issue that appears to be under researched with respect to the reported “failure” of expatriates is “job burnout” resulting from problems linked to the social, job and business environments. According to Shaffer and Harrison (1998), cognition is the primary factor determining “turnover” in many cross-border assignments, whilst job satisfaction and organisational commitment were unique and had direct implications on withdrawal cognition. Withdrawal cognition includes plans to search for other employment, general thoughts or considerations of quitting, and intentions to quit with the latter component being the strongest. The basic turnover process occurs when dissatisfaction and a lack of organisational commitment results in withdrawal cognition, and ultimately in turnover itself. “Job burnout” may be the cause of this.

Certainly the initial exposure to the potentially stressful situations and strain that can accompany a person’s arrival in any new environment can be overwhelming and can lead to a premature exit. Indeed the failure of strategic decision makers to take into consideration the specific cultural and business circumstances of a cross-border appointment when designing a cross-border assignment may contribute as argued by Nicholson (1997, p. 1053), to various psychological problems in individuals as they attempt to balance their inherited natures with the particular circumstances built into a cross-border assignment. That is the fit between a person’s inherited nature and the requirements of a cross-border role may not be receiving the attention that appears to be necessary. Manning (2003, p. 10-20), for example, who identified a person’s
“attachment style” as an important “personal dimension” in deciding who are more likely to be successful in cross-cultural leadership roles argues that “style” may contribute to decisions to withdraw as negative feedback is received. “Job burnout” may be underpinning such decisions.

Nevertheless, some cross-border managers may remain steadfast in their jobs, with motives set primarily on the lurks and perquisites of the traditional “expatriate package” for no other reason than to reap the perceived benefits of seniority. Such people can easily slip into the habit of exerting minimal effort. As noted by Bonache et al. (2003, p. 10) “compensation of expatriates still seems to be handled by most organisations as an administrative rather than a strategic issue”. Such intrinsically unmotivated workers have the potential to compromise the integrity of a cross-border assignment and the potential to develop knowledge, retain expertise and establish lasting and effective strategic alliances.

Despite the critiques of the expatriate assignment process, little evidence is available which assesses the extent to which assignment problems are associated with key variables such as “expatriate job burnout”. While, Jackson and Schuler (1983), Jackson (1984) and Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that managers in domestic circumstances may experience “job burnout” resulting from a requirement to resolve the job related and personal difficulties of others, research does not appear to have explored whether “job burnout” might be associated to a cross-border manager’s intention to quit and hence be a key factor in turnover.

The term “burnout” has been originally defined as exhaustion, wearing out and failing by Freudenberger (1974) and has been extensively researched in the area of occupational health and applied psychology (Lee and Ashforth, 1993). For example, Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined “burnout” as the syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishments. It also took the form of physical, emotional, and psychological response to work-related stress. Physical symptoms may include low energy and chronic fatigue. Laschinger et al. (2001) indicates that “burnout” is a phenomenon commonly associated with work conditions at lower levels of autonomy, vis, lack of control over work practices, non-existent collaborative working relationships and a lack of organisational trust. “Burnout” then appears to occur when the gap between an individual’s expectations as to how they might fulfil the responsibilities associated with their role and the existing organisational structure becomes too wide. Garland (2002) has explained “burnout” in terms of representing a deteriorating condition that originates from ill-managed stress. As noted by Houkes et al. (2003) “burnout” and discouragement can be traceable to a person’s work setting.

Insufficient clarification of roles and responsibilities has also appeared as a source of “burnout” in cases. In other cases, workers are not given enough information to do their jobs adequately. There are also various factors that compose the precursors of “burnout”. The most critical variables are role characteristics, consisting of “role overload” “role ambiguity” and “role conflict”. Each of these variables has been shown to be associated with “burnout” to varying degrees (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Densten, 2001; Maslach et al. 2001).

“Role overload” can also be classified into qualitative and quantitative overload. When individuals feel that they lack the necessary skills to complete an assigned task, they are considered to be experiencing qualitative “role overload”. Whereas
quantitative “role overload” is when an individual finds it difficult to complete an assigned task within a stipulated time (Maslach and Jackson, 1984; Kahn, 1978; Pines and Maslach, 1978).

“Role ambiguity” has also been thoroughly researched, as they are attributable to “job burnout”. “Role ambiguity” is associated with one’s need for certainty and predictability, especially regarding one’s goals and means of accomplishing them. It may occur, that if an individual lacks sufficient information to accomplish required tasks and activities, such as when information is restricted or not clearly defined or articulated (Jackson and Schuler, 1985), that the work environment becomes ambiguous. Lack of clarity regarding proper procedures for performing job tasks or criteria for performance evaluations (Miles and Perreault, 1976) can also result in “role ambiguity”. “Role conflict” on the other hand occurs as result of incongruity or incompatibility of expectations communicated to a role incumbent by his or her managers (Kahn, 1978).

Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) assert that “role ambiguity” and “role conflict” were found to be associated significantly with “emotional exhaustion” and “depersonalisation” two important dimensions of “job burnout” noted earlier. Cordes and Dougherty (1993) have also indicated that “role ambiguity” and “role conflict” can effect “job burnout” but these were not limited to human service professions. It may be that an equivalent relationship exists between these role variables and “job burnout” in cross-border assignment settings as well.

Furthermore, a stream of research has been undertaken to develop predicative models of voluntary turnover of employees (Porter and Steers, 1973; Mobley et al., 1978; Steers and Mowday, 1977; Bluedorn, 1982). A number of studies have also explored reasons for expatriate turnover (Birdseye, 1990), which was associated significantly with organisational characteristics, job characteristics, and personal characteristics. Of the three broad categories of predictor variables, however, job characteristics appear to have received the most research attention (Glisson and Mark, 1988; Teely et al., 1971; Lyons, 1971; Abdel-Halim, 1981; Bedeian and Aichles, 1981; Bartel, 1982; Marsh and Manari, 1977; Price, 1977; Dewar and Werbel, 1979; Gerhart, 1987; Blau and Boal, 1989). Whilst numerous studies have investigated expatriate turnover tendencies in various contexts, it appears little if any scientific enquiry has occurred that associates the expatriate turnover tendencies with “job burnout”.

Maslach et al. (2001) assert that there is an underlying consensus that three dimensions of “job burnout” exist. Notwithstanding the work of Brenninkmeijer and VanYperen (2003, p. i16) who argue that “job burnout” possibly should be viewed in unidimensional terms, subsequent research of “job burnout” has led to the development of a multidimensional theory of “job burnout”.

Nevertheless, considerable research has been conducted to arrive at a universal definition of “job burnout” and disagreement appears to be the norm. For example, Maslach et al. (2001) argue there is no standard definition, and define “job burnout” as comprising three elements, namely “exhaustion” “cynicism” and “inefficacy”. Garland (2002) also defines “job burnout” as comprising three elements. First, as a process of “emotional exhaustion” resulting from wearing out, or failing. Secondly, as a syndrome consisting of “depersonalisation” derived from reduced personal accomplishment. Finally, as a three-stage process that includes, in order of progression, “job stress” “worker strain” and “defensive coping”. Nevertheless, Densten (2001) in a study of
Australian law enforcement officers identified “job burnout” as comprising five elements. These were, “emotional exhaustion” which comprised two sub-elements, namely “psychology” and “somatic strain”; secondly a “lack of personal accomplishment” which also comprised two sub-elements “self” and “others”; and finally “depersonalization”.

In addition, Almer and Kaplan (2002) have explained “job burnout” as a negative psychological response to interpersonal stressors. They provide a very similar categorization to that of Densten (2001) vis, “emotional exhaustion” “reduced personal accomplishments” and “depersonalization”. Emotional exhaustion is characterised by a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources have been used up. Reduced personal accomplishment involves low motivation and self-esteem. Whereas depersonalisation refers to detachment and an emotional callousness toward others such as clients and customers.

Nevertheless, Maslach et al. (2001) argue that the three dimensional framework continues to be the predominant model in the area of “job burnout”. First, “exhaustion” is viewed as the central quality of “job burnout” and the most obvious manifestation of this complex syndrome. When people describe themselves as experiencing “job burnout” they are most likely to refer to an experience of exhaustion. Of the three aspects of “job burnout” exhaustion is the most reported and the most thoroughly analysed. The remaining two are cynicism (a distant attitude towards the job) and reduced professional efficacy.

However, in a longitudinal study of Houkes et al. (2003, p. 428) examined “a theoretical model which incorporated both general insights regarding the influence of work on the well-being of employees and ... the relationship between such characteristics and outcome variables”. Findings confirmed that key relationships between the influence of work characteristics and work related outcomes were evident. For example, “emotional exhaustion” a key “job burnout” factor is primarily predicted by high workload and a lack of social support, both of which can be key issues in cross-border manager adjustment (Fish, 2005, in press). Whilst “turnover intention” a key “job burnout” outcome, is primarily predicated by unmet career expectations, a key issue linked to the design of cross-border manager assignments (Fish and Wood, 1996).

Any individual can experience “job burnout” so long as they have room for stress in their work life. Fogarty et al. (2000) emphasize that the “job burnout” construct is intended to capture the cumulative effect of multiple stressors. That is, each of the stressors may be manageable individually, but when occurring with other stressors in a person’s professional life and workplace, may overwhelm certain individuals.

In summary, current literature indicates a considerable amount of research has been devoted to developing extrapolative models of various dimensions of “job burnout” experienced by professionals working in service sectors. Some studies have attempted to investigate the “job burnout” among professionals from non-service sectors, but there is paucity of systematic studies on “expatriate job burnout”.

“Expatriate job burnout” then can be summarised into a theoretical model (Figure 1) and can be described as the personal experience of work withdrawal resulting from a failure to appropriately consider the potential for “role conflict” “role overload” and “role ambiguity” when designing an expatriate assignment. This situation appears to contributing to outcomes such as “emotional exhaustion” “depersonalisation” and
“reduced personal accomplishments”. Experiencing these outcomes over a long period of time may lead to individuals developing the symptoms of “job burnout”.

**Research hypotheses**
The purpose of this study was to determine the level of workplace “job burnout” experienced by expatriate managers in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In PNG expatriates occupy all managerial positions. This is due to the fact that the nationals are not fully trained and thus do not have required skills to occupy the top decision-making positions. Therefore, the expatriates are working under demanding time schedules; work that requires exacting attention or repetitive detailed work. Expatriates must always be aware of the potential in their day-to-day dealings of becoming involved in business affairs. The simple gesture of offering a ride to a local person could result in a complicated compensation issue if the party were to be injured. The extent of lawlessness has tarnished PNG’s international image, and undermining investor confidence. In a recent survey, employers rated crime and theft, then corruption, poor infrastructure, and public policy instability as the biggest impediments to doing business in PNG. The average company spends some 8-10 per cent of its turnover on private security and losses from theft. This security payout, when combined with high interest rates (around 18 per cent), rising utility costs (fuel, electricity), increases in license fees and bureaucratic delays in getting work permits, frequent and sudden changes in public policy, and bribes to corrupt officials, means businesses are forced to look for savings. They move offshore, close down or lay off workers (Windybank and Manning, 2003).

The changing scenario in business dovetailed with competitiveness and general economic conditions transpired an ever-demanding work setting for professionals who are likely to experience job related stress leading to “job burnout”. “Job burnout” is characterised by a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s energy has been exhausted. This may lead to a general situation whereby critical numbers of expatriates in environments for which they have not been appropriately prepared, where adjustment strategies are inadequate, where their job have not been designed to take account of
local circumstances, and large workloads are pursued with little support, may experience “job burnout”. The following hypotheses are listed to provide specific direction for the research:

**H1.** There will be a significant positive relationship between expatriates’ role conflict and dimensions of job burnout in the workplace.

**H2.** There will be a significant positive relationship between expatriates’ role ambiguity and dimensions of job burnout in the workplace.

**H3.** There will be a significant positive relationship between expatriates’ role overload and dimensions of job burnout in the workplace.

**H4.** The emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment experienced by the expatriates will lead to job burnout.

**H5.** There will be a significant relationship between expatriate job burnout and turnover intention.

**Methodology**

**Survey instrument**

The data for this research were obtained by administering a Likert-scaled English language questionnaire to expatriate managers from leading international business organisations operating in PNG. The burnout dimensions namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were measured using subscales drawn from Maslach’s widely accepted Burnout Inventory (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Corcoran, 1995). For the current study, job characteristics for role conflict (three items), and role ambiguity (five items) were measured by employing, a shortened version of the questionnaire developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). For the variable role overload (three items) a measure developed by Beehr et al. (1976) was employed. An analogous approach to measure these variables had already been attempted by Fogarty et al. (2000) and Almer and Kaplan (2002). Finally, the questionnaire comprised 20 questions, which were transformed to suit the cultural conditions and circumstances, attitudes and backgrounds of expatriate managers’ on assignment in PNG (Table I). Respondents were asked to respond on a seven-point Likert scale from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7) to a series of questions regarding their experiences with their work in PNG.

**Measures**

A number of scales employing seven-point Likert scales were administered to measure the relationship between “job characteristics” and “dimensions of job burnout”.

**Role conflict.** This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). A sample item is: “I have to work under vague orders”.

**Role ambiguity.** This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). A sample item is: “I have just the right amount to do”.

**Role overload.** This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Beehr et al. (1976). A sample item is: “The performance standards are too high”.

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Emotional exhaustion. This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). A sample item is: “I feel emotionally drained from my work”.

Reduced personal accomplishments. This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). A sample item is: “I deal very effectively with the problems of my clients”.

Depersonalisation. This variable was measured by employing a scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981). A sample item is: “I find the work that I do is hardening me emotionally”.

Intention to quit. This variable was measured by employing a question “Do you intend to quit your present job?” yes /no.

Sampling and data collection procedure
A sample of 300 companies was drawn from the list of companies obtained from the PNG Chamber of Commerce and Industry directory. Only those companies that employ staff from overseas (expatriates) were selected. Major industries represented in the population were transportation, consumer products, financial services, manufacturing, consultancy services, construction, retail, and food services. The companies are located in all major cities of PNG such as Port Moresby, Lae, Goroka, Rabaul and Mt Hagen. Respondents were guaranteed their anonymity, and no specific data that might personally identify the participants was elicited. Prior to the actual study a pretest of questionnaires was performed with 15 expatriates who had been asked to comment on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then modified according to their suggestions.

The questionnaires were delivered to specific contacts at each company. Out of 300 questionnaires mailed, 189 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 63 per cent. Respondents were stratified via industry, age, size of organization, education and nationality. This sample size was more than 100, which was sufficient for structural equation modelling (SEM) with LISREL analysis (Jackson et al., 1997).

Confirmatory factor analysis technique
A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess the distinctiveness of the measures. LISREL 8 (Joresborg and Sorbon, 1996) was employed to evaluate the fit of the measurement model, and to examine the relationship between “job burnout” and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement scale examples</th>
<th>VSD</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>VSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job characteristics- role conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I have to work under vague orders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I work under incompatible guidelines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I received assignments without manpower to complete it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of job burnout -emotional exhaustion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel emotionally drained from my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel used up at the end of my workday</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel burned out from my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I.
Scale examples
expatriates “intention to quit” using the sample covariance as the input. Tests such as root-mean-square residual (RMSR), with the goodness-of fit index (GFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) were employed.

Analysis and results
Demographic profile
The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised in Table II. As can be seen from the table, the sample respondents represented the general expatriate population in PNG and a significant number of them were between 30 and 45 years of age. As much as 75 per cent of the respondents were male and 25 per cent were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultancy services</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer products</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food services</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 200 employees</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-400 employees</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 400 employees</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 years</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-70 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealander</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>British</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-level managers</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant managers and deputies</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical consultants</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Demographic profile of respondents
Australians and 68 per cent were working as top executives and nearly 21 per cent of respondents were working in manufacturing companies.

**Underlying burnout factors**

The correlation matrix of Likert-scaled items relating to “expatriate burnout” was examined, to determine if any related concepts in line with the main issue of “job burnout” were available. An orthogonal (uncorrelated) rotation was performed on the six factors of the study whose Eigen values were greater than one. Table III presents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>Cronbach α</th>
<th>Eigen values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>1-1. I have to work under vague orders</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.981</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2. I work under incompatible guidelines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-3. I received assignments without manpower to complete it</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role conflict</td>
<td>2-1. I have just the right amount of work to do</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-2. I know that I have divided the time to do my job properly</td>
<td>0.945</td>
<td>0.976</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>2-3. There are clear plans and goals for my job</td>
<td>0.731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-4. I know exactly what is expected of me</td>
<td>0.702</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-5. I feel certain how I will be evaluated for a raise or promotion</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role ambiguity</td>
<td>3-1. I am given enough time to do what expected of me on the job</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-2. It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do</td>
<td>0.637</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td>3-3. The performance standards set for my job are too high</td>
<td>0.731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role overload</td>
<td>4-1. I feel emotionally drained from my work</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-2. I feel used up at the end of my workday</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>4-3. I feel burned out from my work</td>
<td>0.521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4</td>
<td>5-1. I deal effectively with the problems of my clients</td>
<td>0.567</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced personal accomplishment</td>
<td>5-2. I feel I am positively influencing other people’s lives through my work</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-3. I can easily understand how clients feel about things</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5</td>
<td>6-1. I feel I treat some clients as if they are impersonal objects</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalisation</td>
<td>6-2. I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-3. I feel that I am becoming insensitive with people since I took job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table III.**

Factor analysis of burnout of expatriate managers
the six orthogonal factors, their subjective interpretations, the factor loadings of variables on each of these six factors and their respective reliability coefficients and the Eigen values.

The six factors correlate highly with their own identical and specific questions related to each group. All six factors have reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s $\alpha$) variables well above the recommended level of 0.50 and 0.60 as indicated by Nunnally (1978). Factor 1 role conflict (0.981) and factor 6 depersonalization (0.976) had the highest reliability coefficients.

**Confirmatory analysis of the six factor models**

To examine the generalisability of the multidimensional measure of the concept of “job burnout” a confirmatory factor analysis and SEM was undertaken employing LISREL 8 (Joresborg and Sorbon, 1996). The confirmatory use of structural equation modelling allows for a statistical test of the goodness-of-fit for the proposed six-factor solution, not possible with principal components factor analysis. The null model positing that there are no underlying factors was compared with the fit of a model postulating the six factors (latent constructs). Results of the model fitting are shown in Table IV.

The output was examined for common anomalies (such as negative error variances and extremely large parameter estimates). No such anomalies were noted. Based on the overall goodness-of-fit statistics, the six-factor model yields satisfactory fit statistics (i.e. $\chi^2 = 169.70$, degrees of freedom (df) = 105, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.95, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.93, and RMSR = 0.03), indicating that the reproduced correlation nearly equals observed correlations in the model. Further, the TLI for the proposed model was 0.90, suggesting that most of the intercorrelations in the data were captured by the model. Many researchers (Bagozzi and Youjae, 1988; Bentler and Douglas, 1980) have discussed the problems with the overall $\chi^2$ test even in moderately large samples (e.g. $n > 200$; in this case $n = 189$). Unlike the $\chi^2$ statistic, the GFI, AGFI, and RMSR are less sensitive to the sample size. Hence, these indicators of fit are given greater importance.

When factor analysis was constrained to a one-factor solution, all 20 items loaded adequately onto the single factor. Table V shows the construct loadings of each of the six factor models along with their associated $t$-values. According to Table V, the largest significant modification index occurred for item (1-2) 1. Hence, this parameter was set free.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goodness-of-fit measures</th>
<th>Six factor model</th>
<th>Null model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>156.03 *</td>
<td>169.70 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGFI</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFI</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSR</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLI</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * $p < 0.001$

Table IV. LISREL goodness-of-fit measures for confirmatory analysis.
The lowest significant modification index occurred for item (3-2) 5. This parameter was considered to be of considerable importance and a determinant factor in the “job burnout” cases. The \( t \)-values gained for each of the loadings indicated that each of the variables reached the critical value for \( p, 0.01 \). Thus, all variables are significant to their specified constructs, verifying the posited relationships among indicators and constructs. There is a wider construct that the cumulative percentages of variance range between 40 and 55 per cent on average and the Eigen value range 1-1.5. This validates the outcome of this research as having outcomes well above the recognized standard of 0.5-0.6, the validity range as specified by Nunnally (1978). Further, the relationship between job burnout and turnover intention of expatriates, was examined. All the respondents were included in the analysis. The results demonstrate a highly significant relationship \( (r = 0.86, p < 0.01) \) (Figure 2), which indicates that “job burnout” significantly affects expatriate turnover intention.

To discern any significant differences existing between the dimensions of job burnout of the respondents’ demographics such as industry, size of organization, gender, age, nationality and position held, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. It was found that there was no significant differences exist between the dimensions of job burnout and the respondents’ demographic variables.

### Table V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables (item number)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
<th>Factor 5</th>
<th>Factor 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.90b</td>
<td>(0.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>(0.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>(0.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>(0.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.26c</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-1</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-2</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-3</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-2</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std deviation</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \( t \)-values in parenthesis; all \( t \)-values are significant at \( p < 0.01 \); ccorresponds to items listed in the order in Table I; bthe smallest significant value occurred for – (1-2) 1; cthe largest significant modification index occurred for – (3-2) 5. Hence, this parameter was set free.
Hypotheses testing

Each hypothesis was tested using both t-tests and confirmatory factor analysis methods. According to the results obtained, the $H1$ was accepted. A significant number of expatriates were found to be working in a setting where their roles have neither been clear nor articulated. The results also supported $H2$ that the factor “role ambiguity” has significantly contributed to dimensions of job burnout. The $H3$ is also supported as the results demonstrated that the factor “role overload” has been positively associated with, dimensions of burnout. Indeed, all the role characteristics were identified as having a significant positive relationship with all the dimensions of job burnout namely “emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishments” experienced by expatriates. The $H4$ has also been accepted as all the three dimensions of job burnout namely the emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishments, contributed significantly to burnout among expatriate managers. The $H5$ has been accepted as the results show that job burnout affects expatriate turnover.

Figure 2 exhibits the summarised results obtained from the data analysis. It can be seen that all values are significant at $p < 0.01$. The combination of role conflict (0.71), role ambiguity (0.75), and role overload (0.70); result in, “depersonalisation”. The group variables such as role conflict (0.91), role ambiguity (0.85), and role overload (0.90); result in, “emotional exhaustion”. The variables namely role conflict (0.71), role ambiguity (0.77), and role overload (0.75) collectively result in, reduced personal accomplishments.

The model shows that “emotional exhaustion” (0.87), “depersonalisation” (0.72) and “reduced personal accomplishments” (0.76) collectively contribute to “job burnout”. Further, there is a significant relationship between “job burnout” and “expatriate turnover intention” (0.86, $p < 0.01$). Expatriates leave jobs early and thus are a major expense to MNC’s. It could be deduced that “job burnout” is one of the main reasons of expatriates’ premature return.
Discussion
This study would not only have an impact on the burnout phenomenon in particular but would contribute in general enormously to the companies and MNC's that want to recruit expatriate staff. Whilst this study was undertaken in a developing country, the results are nevertheless important and the findings may be applicable to other developing and indeed developed countries. The importance of this study is that the results obtained appear to contribute to the little touched area of “job burnout” particularly amongst cross-border managers in the broad area of international human resource management.

Specifically, the most important results obtained were in the area of “role conflict”. This is considered as the major finding of this study. This may be because expatriates had different and unclear roles to assume in the workplace. Earlier studies (Laschinger et al., 2001; Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Densten, 2001; Maslach et al., 2001) provide evidence that specific work settings cause the person to experience “job burnout”. In particular, the subsystem, work shift and other psychological factors have been shown to contribute to “job burnout” (Garland, 2002; Houkes et al., 2003). Also, managers who perform boundary-spanning functions and have a high frequency of interpersonal contacts experience “job burnout” (Gaines and Jermier, 1983; Parasuraman and Alutto, 1981; Pretty et al., 1992). Gaines and Jermier (1983) also indicate that those officers experience “job burnout” due to their higher status and the enriched nature of their work.

The results also suggest that other factors such as “role ambiguity” and “role overload” contribute a great deal to expatriates experience of “emotional exhaustion” which eventuates in “job burnout”. This is an important area that needs to be looked into by expatriates who are willing to work in developing countries. Companies will need to look into organising their work settings and policies to accommodate these issues. The study further revealed that “role conflict” “role overload” and “role ambiguity” collectively lead to an experiencing of “job burnout”. These results are consistent with the study conducted by Cordes and Dougherty (1993). They concluded that “job burnout” was caused by job characteristics including “role conflict” “role ambiguity” and “role overload” of employees. Furthermore, Garland (2002) also indicates that the causes of “job burnout” lie within the organisation itself. This suggests that it is something to do with how roles are delegated or in other words the job design conditions in the organisation.

Furthermore, it could be deduced from the results of the study that high expectations in terms of job of expatriates can also be a source of “job burnout”. As expatriates are expected to do a great deal in a foreign work setting, any discrepancies between expectations and reality would make them react, and potentially have a greater consequence ultimately leading to “job burnout”. The studies of Stevens and O’Neill (1983) and Jackson et al. (1986) also corroborate the above findings as the job expectations have a direct bearing on the role characteristics and any shift in expectations contributes to burnout. On the other hand, unmet expectations can also be a source of burnout.

The reactions of individuals over these job expectations, which were closely linked with job characteristics were investigated in several studies, as these expectations were divergent and difficulty with coping with the unfamiliar work setting had resulted in burnout (Cherniss, 1980; Jackson and Schuler, 1983; Maslach and Jackson, 1984). As the
expatriates take up their assignment in a foreign country, should there be mismatch between their early expectations with regard to their roles and the current situation, it leads them to feeling depersonalised and diminishes their personal accomplishment and that would eventually lead to burnout. Many expatriate managers experience burnout and may not be able to fully utilize their skills as expected. This may, in the end, result in other serious cases; for instance depression and psychosomatic problems and other consequences such as absenteeism and turnover. More often expatriates fail to continue their overseas assignments. The study has identified a significant relationship between job burnout and turnover intentions of expatriates. The results indicate that expatriate turnover or expatriate failure can be attributed to job burnout. The decision to quit the job by the expatriates may be manifested collectively due to role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload, which extensively leads them to experience job burnout. The core linkages among job characteristics, job burnout and expatriate turnover have validated by the results of the study. As noted by Naumann (1992), expatriate turnover is costly and troublesome in overseas operations and dysfunctional turnover damages the firm in some way by having a valued employee quit the organisation. Top management should take into consideration these antecedents to evolve strategies and develop cohesive paradigms to resolve the expatriate managers’ job related difficulties in order to enhance expatriate success.

**Future research**

In the midst of the recent changes in global trade, developing countries are now starting to unlock doors to MNC’s and other international business ventures with more emphasis on globalisation and liberalisation policies. However, to be more competent and well suited to global standards; well-qualified employees must be employed. Unfortunately, most developing countries lack skilled and highly qualified staff to do the job. This calls for hiring expatriates from developed countries. But human beings are destined to experience stress and burnout in the work place. Expatriates who have been victims of such trends in foreign work environments are no exception to these syndromes.

This study on expatriate “job burnout” in a developing country has a few limitations, which provide opportunities and may point the way for future research. For example, this study has only begun to address the many issues that are of importance to the expatriates working in PNG and developing countries more generally. Also, this study was based on expatriates at a management level only; hence it is difficult to generalize beyond this. In this study, job characteristics, namely “role overload” “role ambiguity” and “role conflict” have been found to be associated with “job burnout” to varying degrees. The correlation between each of the “job burnout” dimensions and other variables such as organisational and personal characteristics has not been studied. It is also logical that organisational characteristics and the personal values of expatriates have a bearing on the work environment. The understanding of “job burnout” in the context of organisational characteristics and the personal values of expatriates would provide a more complete picture of “job burnout” cases. However, the results of this study may be seen as avenue for more comprehensive studies involving many organisations, which employ expatriates, and to identifying the impact of “job burnout” on knowledge enhancement.
Conclusion
The research was conducted primarily to determine the effects and consequences “job burnout” on expatriates in a developing country. The findings confirm the presence of significant factors contributing to “job burnout” among expatriates. “Emotional burnout” was seen as the main factor for experiencing “job burnout” followed by “reduced personal accomplishment” and “depersonalisation”. It has also been found that the expatriate managers knew what was expected of them and anything apart from their role was seen as something far outside their ability to do. This is also likely to cause problems leading to “job burnout”. The businesses and government bodies recruiting expatriates should seriously consider these factors and redefine their staffing policies so as to avoid expatriate failure.

References


Further reading


About the authors
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Alan Fish is Professor in Business at and Head of the International School of Business at Charles Sturt University NSW Australia. He has strong publishing in internationally refereed journals and has presented his research at conferences in England, Hong Kong, Australia, the USA, Germany, Spain, Ireland and Thailand. He teaches HRM to both undergraduates and postgraduate students and is currently supervising a number of doctoral candidates. He was also Visiting Professor in International HRM at the University of Paderborn in Germany in 1998 and at Kansas State University in the USA in 1999. His research interests are in cross-border management, international hrm and in particular the more strategic use of cross-border assignments in enhancing business growth and development, cross-cultural management and strategic HRM. His current research project is titled, “Cross-border behavioural fit – identifying, selecting and deploying cross-border managers.” Alan Fish can be contacted at: afish@csu.edu.au

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