How to conduct a cross-cultural adjustment? A cross-level research based on the theory of boundary spanning

Liang Wang and Xiongying niu

(University of International Business and Economics)

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed a clear trend where China has emerged as a major source of global outward foreign direct investment (FDI). According to its 12th five-year plan (2011-2015), China’s outward FDI will reach US$150 billion by 2015, representing an annual increase of 17 percent (MOFCOM 2012). As China becomes more active in the world economy, Chinese expatriates will become increasingly important to the success of Chinese multinational enterprises (MNEs). Research has found that expatriate failure in terms of early return is quite common (Zhang & Fan, 2014). Especially, for industry transfer and emerging markets, a large number of young employees were assigned to the team or department in developing countries, such as South America and Africa. These young employees are more likely to go home in a strange and complex conditions. There are many reasons for their early return, but one of the most important reason is that they have a low level of cross-cultural adjustment.

This paper will focus on the progress of young expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment, and to reveal its internal mechanism. First, this paper will define the physical boundary, social boundary and psychological boundary in different groups.
and individuals and explore whether the psychological boundary have a strong contribution to deep level cross-culture adjustment, such as the discussion and identification of values; Second, the boundary spanning behaviors will have different forms in cross-cultural field, for example, employees will communicate with the locals for reducing the boring life, in this paper, I will revise the measurement scale of boundary spanning; Third, this paper argues that cross-cultural adjustment is not just a kind of active behavior during boundary spanning by expatriates, but also a feedback behavior by host people, the finding will extend the existing theory of cross-culture adjustment; Fourth, this paper will investigate the effect of cultural intelligence and shared leadership on boundary spanning, and the effect of boundary spanning on cross-cultural adjustment by a cross-level perspective; Finally, this paper try to explain the “U-curve hypothesis” which suggest that cross-culture adjustment include initial adjustment, crisis and regained adjustment from the perspective of time pressure.

**Concepts**

*Cross-cultural adjustment* is defined as the degree of psychological comfort an expatriate has with various aspects of the host country (Black, 1988; Oberg, 1960; Nicholson, 1984). According to Black et al. (1999), expatriate adjustment has three facets. *Work adjustment* reflects the degree of psychological comfort regarding different work values, expectations and standards (Black and Stephens, 1989); *Interaction adjustment* deals with psychological comfort which is achieved when dealing or interacting with host country nationals in work and non-work situations.
(Black and Stephens, 1989); General adjustment deals with overall adjustment to living in a foreign land and adjusting to its cultural environment (Black, 1988).

**Boundary spanning** is defined as the employee and team’s actions to establish linkages and manage interactions with parties in the external environment (Ancona, 1990; Ancona & Caldwell, 1992a; Marrone et al., 2007). The representation category reflects team actions that persuade other parties of team decisions, ask for resources, and protect the group; Coordination of task performance represents team actions that coordinate work activities with mutually interdependent entities to accomplish individually and jointly set task goals; general information search reflects team actions to parties that hold specific knowledge and for gaining access to information and expertise (Marrone, 2010).

**Shared leadership** is defined as an emergent team property that results from the distribution of leadership influence across multiple team members. In keeping with the notion of collective constructs (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999), we argue that shared leadership originates with individual members of a team engaging in activities that influence the team and other team members in areas related to direction, motivation, and support (Yukl, 1989) and through the series of interactions that team members have with each other involving the negotiation and sharing of leadership responsibilities. (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007).

**Cultural intelligence (CQ)** is defined as the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse environments (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). CQ consists of four facets: meta-cognitive, cognitive, motivational, and
behavioral.

*Time pressure* is defined as the degree to which the respondent believed there was limited time to complete tasks (Andrews & Smith, 1996).

**Hypotheses**

H1: employee CQ is positively associated with his/her individual boundary spanning behavior;

H2: shared leadership is positively associated with employees’ boundary spanning behaviors;

H3: shared leadership is positively associated with team boundary spanning behavior;

H4: employees’ boundary spanning behaviors are positively associated with their cross-cultural adjustment;

H5: team boundary spanning behavior is positively associated with its cross-cultural adjustment;

H6: team boundary spanning behavior makes a greater contribution to employees’ cross-cultural adjustment when time pressure is low than when it is high.

*Figure 1.* Multilevel model of boundary spanning behavior in expatriate teams.

*Note:* The dashed arrow line denote compositional processes through which lower level phenomenon are compiled to form higher level phenomenon.
Method

Measuring levels: In this paper, there are three team-level concepts in the study model, but the data will be collected from individual-level team members. I need to calculate the Rwg and ICC of team-level concepts before we compile the individual-level data to team-level data. But in order to ensure that the data can be compiled from individual level, we should take five steps to design scales and compute date (Faraj & Yan, 2009).

Revise scale: I need to revise the scale of shared leadership and boundary spanning in the background of cross-culture management. According to Churchill (1979), we should take eight procedures to develop a better measure, for example, specify domain of construct and generate sample of items etc..

Research object and sample design: This paper focus on the project team, quality control team, temporary task group and other basic working units in other countries. A simple random sampling survey will be used to expand the number of samples and sampling range in research.

Questionnaire delivery and recovery: I will collect three rounds of data from 8-10 MNEs in various countries by Email or skype on web in 9 months.

Data analysis: I will use the software of SPSS, Amos and HLM to analysis the data.

References
