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Personality in context: effective traits for expatriate managers at different levels

The purpose of this article is to assess how management level as a contextual factor interacts with personal characteristics in predicting expatriate performance. In particular, we focused on proactive personality (the individual's disposition to change the organizational environment) and self-control (the individual's disposition to change oneself to fit the organizational environment). Surveying 307 business expatriate managers in China, we hypothesized that in relation to work outcomes, the effect of proactive personality would be stronger for CEOs while the effect of self-control would be stronger for non-CEOs. We found both proactive personality and self-control to have favorable effects on our performance indicators: job performance, effectiveness, and time to proficiency. In line with our prediction, we also found the effect of proactive personality on job performance to be stronger for CEO expatriates while the effect of self-control on performance was stronger for non-CEO expatriate managers.

Keywords: Expatriates, CEOs, Management level, Proactive personality, Self-control, Contextual factors, Performance

Introduction

The management of foreign subsidiaries is a prime concern for MNCs operating in an increasingly globalized world (Birkinshaw and Hood, 2016). This has led to a growing interest in the competences of expatriate CEOs and other senior expatriates (Arp, Hutchings, and Smith, 2013; Sekiguchi, Bebenroth, and Li, 2011). Because expatriate CEOs are central actors in managing the subsidiary, they must be able to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers when leading the top management team (Peltokorpi, 2015; Tseng and Liao, 2009), identifying local opportunities (Almeida and Phene, 2004), and aligning the subsidiary's activities with those of the parent company (Gong, 2003).

In domestic research, a large number of studies have focused on how the personality of CEOs affects organizational outcomes (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, and Doerr, 2014). Personality traits such as overconfidence (Simon and Houghton, 2003) and narcissism (Chatterjee and

Hambrick, 2007) have been explored and generally found to negatively affect performance. CEO openness to experience, conscientiousness (O'Reilly et al., 2014) and extroversion (Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt, 2002), however, were shown to have positive implications on performance.

The role of personal characteristics and personality traits has also received much attention in expatriate research (Ren, Harrison, Shaffer, and Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2016; Selmer, Luring, Zhang, and Jonasson, 2016; van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2013). Here, a number of studies have focused on the Big Five: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Caligiuri, 2000; Huang, Chi, and Lawler, 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, and Ferzandi, 2006). In general, these studies have found emotional stability to be predictive of expatriate adjustment while openness to experiences was linked to performance (Furnham, 2017). Moreover, Zimmermann and Neyer (2013) found extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to predict the likelihood of becoming an expatriate. Similarly, in a recent study Furnham (2017) found that people who were curious and open to new experience chose to work abroad while those who were prone to anxiety and depression (neuroticism) did not. More recently specific traits, such as cultural empathy (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2012) and dispositional affectivity (Selmer and Luring, 2013), have been explored.

While the research on personality has provided useful guidelines for the selection of expatriate managers, the context in which the traits affect the expatriates seems to be ignored (Froese and Toh, 2015; Langinier and Froehlicher, forthcoming; Selmer, Luring, Normann, and Kubovcikova, 2015). This could be problematic because it has been argued that there needs to be a fit between the type of personality and the context in which the individual acts in order to produce favorable work outcomes (Hogan and Roberts, 2000; Moynihan and Peterson, 2001).

One piece of research that includes both personal disposition and contextual factors is Stahl and Caligiuri's (2005) qualitative article on expatriate problem- and emotion-focused approaches to stressors in the local environment. Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) argue that problem-focused individuals actively manage the person-environment relation so that the context comes to fit the personal needs, e.g. through information seeking and social networking (see also O'Sullivan, 2002). The other approach is an emotional-focused reaction to disharmony in the person-

environment relation where regulations of personal emotion is applied to facilitate a greater fit, e.g. maintaining composure and accommodating strenuous requests from locals. Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) argue that for adjustment, a problem-focused approach is more effective. However, this differs across management levels because higher level managers are often better adjusted to start with. Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) base a similar distinction on personality research arguing that expatriates may be achievement-oriented (with initiative as a personal characteristic) or adjustment-oriented (with self-control as a personal characteristic). Although the work of Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) and Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) does not deal with personality traits as such, the idea of an outward (problem/achievement orientation) or inward (emotion/adjustment orientation) approach to the person-environment relation is useful to explore how the context (management level) can determine the effectiveness of personal traits. This is because individuals in different positions will not have the same opportunities to use an outward response. Hence, in line with the above, we focus on two personality traits that have only received scant interest in expatriate research; namely proactive personality (outward orientation) and dispositional self-control (inward orientation).

Proactive personality and self-control have been argued to represent particularly positive personal characteristics for organization managers. For example, in a meta-analysis Fuller and Marler (2009) show that proactive personality's relationship with job performance is particularly noteworthy in that it is stronger than that reported for any of the Big Five factors or the Big Five collectively. In relation to the international context, being proactive and having initiative has been found to predict expatriate performance since these individuals have to be particularly self-reliant in the new context (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). Also self-control has been found to be one of the most prominent predictors of performance and success across different samples (Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone, 2004; Wang, Karns, and Meredith, 2003). Expatriates that are high in self-control have been found to be better able to adjust to external, situational factors thus being the right person in the right place at the right time (cf. Caligiuri and Day, 2000; Harrison, 2006). In a study on Canadian technical expatriates, Hawes and Kealey (1981) found self-control to be among the best predictors for adjustment.

We follow the work of Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) focusing on managerial level as an important

contextual factor. There is substantial documentation that the job role of higher and lower level managers vary (O'Sullivan, 2002). What particularly distinguishes top managers is the greater degree of freedom and authority that grants them access to a larger base of social influence (Manning, 2002; Moon, 2000). It has, for example, been argued that higher level expatriate managers would have a larger budget and greater possibilities to, e.g., hire interpreters and other types of international assistance (Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005). Hence, an aim of this exploratory study is to assess differences in effectiveness of particular personal traits between expatriate managers at the top of the organization and those lower in the hierarchy.

This research endeavor is important for several reasons. Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) explored problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches to the organizational environment among expatriates. However, using qualitative research, the result of their study was a comprehensive taxonomy sorting different types of action into either problem- or emotion-focused. We focus on two personality traits representing a similar distinction: Proactive personality as outward-oriented and self-control as inward-oriented. Moreover, by using quantitative research we take this a step further statistically testing the effect of the two different traits on expatriate performance. Similar to the work of Stahl and Caligiuri (2005), we include the managerial level as an important factor that could constrain and enable expatriates with different personalities differently. This can be related to the argument by Furnham, Crump, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2007) and Furnham (2017) that the link between personality and managerial level is underexplored. These publications call for further studies assessing other traits than the Big Five in relation to position. Moreover, our study answers recent calls for more research including contextual factors in expatriate research (e.g. Froese and Toh, 2015; Langinier and Froehlicher, forthcoming; Selmer et al., 2015). In this line of thinking, Caligiuri and Day (2000) have encouraged future studies to further disentangle the complex relationship between personality, performance dimensions, and context. A main aim of this article is to contribute to this.

We look at the effect of proactive personality and self-control on performance-related variables, namely job performance, effectiveness, and time to proficiency. Job performance refers to the undertaking of core technical duties of the job, also known as task performance or in-role performance (Fisher, 2003). Effectiveness describes to which extent a person's job behavior is

congruent with a role sender's expectation (Tsui, 1984). Moreover, time to proficiency indicates how quickly the expatriate manager reached full performance after taking on the foreign assignment (Waxin, Brewster, Ashill, and Chandon, 2016). Hence, our performance dimensions cover carrying out the job role as the individual sees it and as the role sender sees it. Finally, since this is an expatriate manager performing in a new context, we assess how fast this was achieved after arriving.

Conceptualization and theory

In this section, we describe the two personality constructs as well as the managerial level concept. Finally, we depict the theoretical foundation for our article.

Proactive personality and self-control

One personal attribute that has attracted attention the last couple of decades is proactive personality. This is not least because organizations as a consequence of heightened global competition and the need for continuous innovation rely increasingly upon the initiatives of their leaders (Frese, Garst, and Fay, 2007; Zhang, Wang, and Shi, 2012). The proactive personality concept was originally developed by Bateman and Crant (1993) defining it as a tendency to effect one's immediate environment. Such individuals, according to Crant (2000), "identify opportunities and act on them, show initiative, take action, and persevere until meaningful change occurs" (p. 439). Hence, proactive personality can be argued to be a relatively stable disposition to take personal initiative in a broad range of activities and situations (Fuller and Marler, 2009).

Self-control has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of long-term success (Tangney et al., 2004). This is because self-control enables a person to make decisions and to act on more calculated reasoning rather than on basic impulses (de Ridder, Lensvelt-Mulders, Finkenauer, Stok, and Baumeister, 2012). Hence, self-control helps to promote desirable behavior and inhibit undesirable behavior in close relation to the environment in which the individual is situated. It can be argued that if restrictions from the immediate environment are high, the need for self-control in order to achieve positive outcomes is also higher.

Managerial level

The role of a manager normally varies with the position level at which he or she is employed (Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005). Being a CEO includes strategic decision-making, monitoring, and internal and external transmission of information as well as interacting with internal and external parties (Crossland and Hambrick, 2011; Mintzberg, 1975). Boone et al. (1996) argue that what especially characterizes a CEO is the leading of a company through a persistent attempt to control the organization in relation to its environment.

This is in contrast to CEOs' lower level managers who take responsibility for the daily operations and deal with goal setting and decision making at the department level. Such managers generally need information from above to know what the strategy is and information from below to track progress and current conditions. Therefore, they spend their time determining specific tactics for reaching organizational objectives set by the CEO (Mantere, 2008). Hence, differences between CEOs and non-CEOs can be related to the level of strategic and tactical decision making they are involved in. Here, strategic concerns can be thought of as plans to change the organization from its current state to a new, desired state. For example, Peltokorpi (2015) found that expatriate CEOs in foreign subsidiaries were able to change the language policy in the local organization.

As such, what differentiates managers dealing with the strategic level and those dealing with the tactical level is to a high extent the position power of the individual. Position power stems from the individual's formal position and implies the legitimate authority to use positive and negative sanctions such as rewards and coercion (Wisse and Sleebos, 2016). Hence, the greater position power of CEOs allows them to make strategic decisions involving changes to the organization while non-CEO managers deal with the tactical level where the ability to adjust decisions to the organizational environment is in greater demand.

Theoretical foundation

Hogan and Roberts (2000) outline what they term a social analytic theory on the relation between the person, the environment, and job performance. In this model, there should be a fit between an individual's role in an organization and the personal characteristics of that individual

to achieve the best work outcomes. For example, Hogan and Shelton (1998) show that while ambition is positive in many jobs, this trait can have negative consequences if there are no immediate possibilities for advancement. In other words, according to their theory, there is an interaction between the job role and personal characteristics that can increase or decrease individual work outcomes depending on the fit. This idea is closely related to the person-environment fit theory predicting that a correspondence between a person and the organizational environment will result in positive outcomes such as job performance (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2009). In this context, personal characteristics can be, e.g., personality or skills while environmental characteristics could include job role, cultural values, but also managerial level (Boon, den Hartog, Boselieb, and Paauweb, 2011).

The contingency perspective in personality research has made similar predictions (Miskewicz, Fleeson, Arnold, Law, Mneimne, and Furr, 2015). Here, it is argued that personality interacts with task characteristics or organizational culture influencing work outcomes (Furnham, 2017; Moynihan and Peterson, 2001). This idea has been supported by empirical studies. For example, Hogan, Raza and Driskell (1988) showed that task types moderated the relation between, on the one hand, conscientiousness, extroversion, and agreeableness and, on the other hand, performance. Similar results have been demonstrated by Chatman and Barsade (1995). Based on these notions, we theorize that for expatriate managers, some personalities will be more suitable at a higher managerial level while other are more useful for lower level managers. This will be elaborated on below.

Hypotheses

In order to establish a baseline, we first develop predictions concerning the relation between expatriate managers' personal characteristics (proactive personality and self-control) and performance indicators (job performance, effectiveness, and time to proficiency).

Proactive personality and self-control

Proactive personality has been positively associated with objective (salary and promotions) and subjective (career satisfaction) indicators of career success (Bertolino, Truxillo, and Fraccaroli, 2011; Rauch and Frese, 2007). This may be related to proactive personality being positively

associated with overall performance (Chan, 2006) and task performance (Thompson, 2005). Moreover, individuals that are rated high on proactive personality are also more learning-oriented (Briscoe, Hall, and Frautschy DeMuth, 2006). For example, proactive personality has been found to be positively associated with learning self-efficacy (Fuller and Marler, 2009). This is important in the case of expatriates because learning orientation and initiative is needed to be able to adjust one's performance to fit the job role and to do it in a timely manner (O'Sullivan, 2002; Shaffer et al., 2006; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). Hence, as proactive personality is central for expatriate managers at all levels, we expect to find that the level of proactive personality is positively associated with expatriate managers' job performance and effectiveness as well as negatively associated with their time to proficiency.

High self-control is relevant to nearly all forms of behavior conducive to a successful life. Individuals rated high on self-control generally also have higher achievement and task performance (de Ridder et al., 2012). Dispositional self-control has also been found to correlate with interpersonal functioning and psychosocial adjustment which may assist in adjusting the individual to the functioning in a foreign job (cf. de Ridder et al., 2012; Harrison, 2006). Moreover, individuals with high self-control have been found to enjoy better interpersonal relations which could extend beyond the immediate in-group and make greater accommodations in close friendships. High self-control also makes individuals better and more desirable relationship partners and contributes to relationship success (Tangney et al., 2004). This could indicate that expatriate managers with high self-control at all levels would perform better and be quicker to reach full performance in the new job situation (Hawes and Kealey, 1981). We thus predict that the level of self-control is positively associated with expatriate managers' job performance and effectiveness as well as negatively associated with their time to proficiency.

The role of managerial level

Hambrick and Finkelstein's (1987) use the concept 'managerial discretion'. This can be understood as the latitude of managerial action or the strategic leeway (Crossland and Hambrick, 2011). Managers have discretion to the degree that a potential action falls within the 'zone of acceptance' of other powerful stakeholders – e.g. host country national managers. Constraint, on the other hand, exists when an action falls outside this zone of acceptance; for example, if an

action is seen as objectionable and those who perceive the action as objectionable have power enough to object it. An action will be perceived as objectionable to the extent that it contravenes accepted business practices and, more broadly, to the extent that it contravenes the local social norms in the organization (Crossland and Hambrick, 2011). As expatriate CEOs have more managerial discretion than non-CEO expatriate managers they will have greater possibilities to influence the organizational environment, opposing existing norms that locals hold in the organization. CEO expatriates will then often have the power position to launch initiatives that may seem unusual to the local staff – e.g. implementing a new international language policy (Peltokorpi, 2015). For lower level expatriate managers, too much effort in actively changing the organization, however, could lead to objections from local peers and top managers. Since the zone of agreement is smaller for them, due to their lower power, adjustment to the current situation (e.g. learning the local language) will often be a more effective approach.

Proactive personality, according to Bateman and Crant (1993), is held by individuals who are “relatively unconstrained by situational forces, and who effects environmental change” (p. 105). As such, proactive personality is about the individual imposing change on the local organization. Because CEOs have more freedom to enforce their proactivity, this trait could have stronger effect for them than for non-CEO expatriate managers. Proactive behavior also involves taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones which will be more difficult for expatriate managers lower in the organization (cf. Crant, 2000). Being too proactive can be problematic for lower level expatriate managers that have recently arrived in a new country as they may not yet be trusted to implement foreign initiatives (cf. Wang and Kanungo, 2004). This is supported by Frame, Roberto, Schwab, and Harris’ (2010) study that found top managers seeing their agentic behaviors and attitudes as being more important for success than those lower in the organization did. On basis of this, we present the first hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a-c: For CEO expatriate managers, compared to non-CEO expatriate managers, there will be a stronger association between proactive personality on a) job performance, b) effectiveness, and c) time to proficiency.

Self-control, on the other hand, can be understood as the capacity to change and adapt the self so

as to produce a better, more optimal fit between self and the environment (Tangney et al., 2004). Central to this concept is also the ability to override or change one's inner responses (de Ridder et al., 2012). That this is more important for lower level managers than for top managers may be supported by Furnham, Crump, and Chamorro-Premuzic's (2007) study. Here, they found that lower level managers showed less opposition to being controlled. They also found that individuals lower in the organization had a greater need for being diligent and dutiful than the top managers. In this regard, Furnham et al. (2007) argue that senior managers cannot afford to be too dependent as it would affect their ability to do the job. This suggests that for lower level expatriate managers, a reduced position power will often make it important to act in accordance with the local norms in the organization (Crossland and Hambrick, 2011). Adjusting in this way will be particularly important in an Asian context where self-control is a highly appreciated virtue (Zhou, Lengua, and Wang, 2009). Moreover, self-control has been linked to the ability to develop interpersonal relationships important for expatriate performance and for the speed of which this is reached (van Bakel, van Oudenhoven, and Gerritsen, 2015). Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a-c: For non-CEO expatriate managers, compared to CEO expatriate managers, there will be a stronger association between self-control on a) job performance, b) effectiveness, and c) time to proficiency.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Method

Target population and place of investigation

In this study, expatriate business managers residing in China were targeted. China was originally chosen for this study because the cultural and linguistic contexts have been argued to differ extraordinarily from most other countries to the extent of making them very challenging destinations for expatriates to adjust to (Selmer, 2006; Selmer, Luring, and Feng, 2009; Shi and Franklin, 2013). Under such different circumstances, described as a 'weak situation', personality has been argued to play a particular great role (Shaffer et al., 2006). Moreover, China has been argued to have a relatively large difference in position power between the different management

levels (Takahashi, Ishikawa, and Kanai, 2012). The Chinese context therefore is well-suited to explore the effect of management level on the relation between personality traits and expatriate performance.

Three screening questions were applied to only retain members of the targeted group. We asked whether the respondents were currently living in China and whether their nationality was different than that of the host country (indicating expatriate status). The status of being a member of the managerial staff was gauged by the direct question: “What is your current position?”. The fixed response alternatives included (1) CEO/GM, (2) Top manager, (3) Middle manager, (4) Team leader, and (5) Non-managerial staff. Since only managerial staff members were targeted in the current study, respondents selecting the last category were eliminated.

Data collection

A web-based survey software package was used to administer the questionnaire. To develop a database for launching our survey, we used information from various commercially available country lists of foreign businesses in China. From these documents we were able to identify names and e-mail addresses of foreign organization members at different levels. To ensure a broad sample, we also employed a number of student assistants to identify foreign employees in Chinese located organizations. This was done by using LinkedIn. From these sources a long list of names and e-mail addresses for expatriate managers in China was created. Subsequently, the online questionnaire was sent to 1,702 business expatriates. Eventually, 351 responses were received amounting to a response rate of 20.6 per cent. Of these, 347 respondents passed the screening questions indicating that they were all expatriate business managers residing in China. Of those, the largest groups of expatriates came from Germany (113), Denmark (50), Italy (28), Switzerland (26), the US (24), and the UK (21). The remaining respondents were distributed over 21 nationalities. Accounting for all the missing values on the variables in the model, the final sample consists of 307 individuals.

Sample

For the purpose of this study, the total sample of business expatriates in China was divided into two groups based on whether they were CEOs (n=166) or non-CEO managers (n=141). The

CEO expatriates had an average age of 46.74 years ($SD=8.85$). On average, they had spent 8.03 years in their host location in China ($SD=5.20$), they had spent 5.57 years in their current job ($SD=3.53$) and had worked abroad as an expatriate for 12.28 years ($SD=7.54$), including their current job. A clear majority of the CEO expatriates were male (93.37%) and married (87.95%), and most of them had a higher education degree (57.23%).

As could have been expected, some of the demographics of the non-CEO expatriate managers were different. Their average age was lower, 41.33 years ($SD=9.94$). On average, they had spent only 5.97 years in their host location in China ($SD=4.72$), they had spent only 4.03 years in their current job ($SD=3.56$) and had worked abroad as an expatriate for only 8.62 years ($SD=6.74$), including their current employment. Even for the non-CEO expatriate managers, most were male (71.63%) and married (71.63%), and almost half had a higher education degree (48.23%).

Instrument

Background variables were measured by single direct questions to the respondents, and the two personality trait variables as well as the work outcome variables were assessed by established multi-item scales.

Personality traits

Proactive personality was gauged by a six-item, seven-point scale (Parker, 1998). Response categories were 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree", sample item: "If I see something I don't like, I fix it." ($\alpha=.77$).

Self-control was assessed by a thirteen-item, four-point scale (Tangney et al., 2004). The scale was anchored at 1 = "not at all" and 4 = "very much", sample item: "People would say that I have an iron self-discipline." ($\alpha=.85$).

Performance indicators

Job performance was measured by a four-item, seven-point scale by Early (1987). Response categories ranged from 1 = "Poor" to 4 = "Neutral" to 7 = "Excellent", sample item: "How would you rate the quality of your performance?" ($\alpha=.74$).

Effectiveness was gauged by a three-item, seven-point scale by Tsui and Ohlott (1988). The response categories of this scale ranged from 1 = “Not at all” to 4 = “Neutral” to 7 “Entirely”. A sample item is “Overall, to what extent do you feel that you are performing your job the way your boss would like it to be performed?” ($\alpha=.87$).

Time to proficiency was measured by four items from Pinder and Schroeder (1987). On two of the items, respondents reported on a seven-point scale how quickly they became proficient/comfortable in their new job after relocating, sample item: “Overall, how quickly do you feel you became proficient at your new job (starting from the day you arrived in the host location)?”. The scale ranged from 1 = very quickly to 7 = very slowly (this is reversed compared to the original scale to make a high score indicate a relatively long time to proficiency). The other two items directly asked how many months it took for the respondents to become effective at their new jobs, sample item: ‘How many months did it take you to become effective at your new job (counted from the day you arrived in the host location)?’. In order to match the two scales involved and achieve, as far as possible, a normal distribution, the 7-point Likert scale that resulted in a skewed distribution was recalibrated into a 5-point Likert scale by merging the three highest points. The two items originally measured in months were transformed into a 5-point Likert scale by dividing the months into intervals approximately one standard deviation under and two standard deviations over the mean to match the distribution of the first two items. The five intervals equal to the five points on the Likert scale are therefore ≤ 1 month (1-point), >1 and ≤ 5 months (2-point), >5 and ≤ 9 months (3-point), >9 and ≤ 13 months (4-point), >13 and ≤ 24 months (5-point) which was the highest value in the dataset. The four items were then tested for internal consistency through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) among the other scales ($\alpha=.75$).

Finally, in order to test the distinctiveness of the separate factors, a CFA was carried out on the aforementioned five scales; the goodness-of-fit estimates reported the following values for the main decision criteria, indicating a reasonably good fit of the model: SRMR=0.070, RMSEA=0.062, CFI=0.842, TLI=0.826. This denoted a significant improvement in comparison to the poor fit of the unrestricted model where all dimensions were represented by a single factor (SRMR=0.110, RMSEA=0.114, CFI=0.454, TLI=0.414). The results of the step-wise CFA can be viewed in Table

1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Controls

Work outcome variables may be affected through the learning-curve of the respondent, making a better outcome possible over time in the same job. Similarly, larger places of work may offer more learning challenges than smaller ones (Bontis, Crossan, and Hulland, 2002). About half of the total sample consisted of assigned expatriates (AEs) and the other half of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), and these two categories of expatriates could be different in salient respects that may be associated with work outcomes (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013). Accordingly, these three aspects were controlled for in the regression analyses. *Time in current job in host location* was estimated by a direct question to the respondents: “How long have you had your current job in the host location?”. The expatriate managers in our samples had relatively high seniority abroad: in average, 6 and 8 years for the two groups. A definition in Aycan and Kanungo’s (1997) book chapter stated that for expatriates assigned by their organization, the time is usually between six months and five years. This is a relatively restrictive definition developed in a time where expatriates were seen as synonymous with traditional assigned expatriates. In consequence, the time limitation has been left out in more recent definitions of expatriates (see Harrison, Shaffer, and Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; McNulty and Brewster, 2017). Moreover, it has been noted that for Japanese expatriates, even the traditional organizational ones, time abroad can be considerably longer than five years (Tungli and Peiperl, 2009). Since we are not only dealing with traditional assigned expatriates, we believe that a tight time-based definition is not appropriate for this study. The dummy variable *AE/SIE*, where AE=1 and SIE=0, was based on the response to the questions: “Was your current job (1) Assigned to you by your parent country firm or a similar organization? (2) Acquired independently (self-initiated) or recruited directly by the host company?”. Finally, *Size of subsidiary* was applied and measured by a direct question: “How many employees work in your current workplace?”.

Data analysis techniques

The intergroup differences between CEOs and non-CEOs were determined via the moderating

dummy variable, CEO/non-CEO where CEO=1 and non-CEO=0. Before comparing the CEO and non-CEO individuals in a regression analysis, we have also checked whether the dependent variables have identical meaning and metrics across the different groups through multi-group CFA. The three dependents were modelled as reflective scales with three latent factors reflected in their respective items. The three factors were allowed to covary between each other. The items, however, were allowed to correlate only with one factor. This model was then constrained to have the same positive or negative charge of coefficients (configural invariance), magnitude of coefficients (metric invariance), and finally magnitude of intercepts (scalar invariance) across the CEO and non-CEO groups. The results were overall positive, looking at the gradual changes in goodness-of-fit measures. The only minor problem was the drop in CFI by 0.012 in scalar invariance which is slightly higher than the allowed 0.01 for a sample with more than 300 observations (Chen, 2007). However, other parameters were showing no significant changes, and the SRMR and RMSEA changed within limits. Accordingly, we concluded that the dependent variables have the same meaning and metrics for the two groups and therefore can be compared in relative terms (final fit for scalar invariance RMSEA=0.073, CFI=0.929, TLI=0.920, SRMR=0.075). The exact same analysis was carried out comparing assigned and self-initiated expatriates that are pooled in the regression. The results confirmed configural, metric, and scalar invariance for the three dependents (final fit for scalar invariance RMSEA= 0.059, CFI=0.954, TLI=0.948, SRMR=0.062). This made it acceptable to proceed with the analysis. Lastly, to allow for simple interpretation of the results, the continuous variables used in the interactions (proactive personality and self-control) were standardized prior to plotting the results, one standard deviation above the mean as the high mean, and one standard deviation below the mean as the low mean (Aiken and West, 1991). We also tested whether the simple slope was statistically significant.

Results

Sample means, standard deviations, and zero-order Pearson correlations of all variables are provided in Table 2. It is notable that the AEs tend to work in larger subsidiaries while SIEs have a higher mean score for *time in current job in host location*.

Insert Table 2 about here

Hypotheses were investigated via a series of multiple regression analyses. Table 3 displays the results. Some of the control variables were significant entering regression independently, so *AEs* seemed to have a slightly higher *job performance* ($\beta = -.14$; $p < .10$), but this relationship disappeared after more variables were entered into the regression. The *CEO status* seemed to have a significant effect only on *effectiveness* ($\beta = -.19$; $p < .05$), but this again disappeared after entering the final independent variables of interest. *Proactive personality* had positive associations with *job performance* ($\beta = .23$; $p < .001$) and *effectiveness* ($\beta = .11$; $p < .10$) as well as a negative association with *time to proficiency* ($\beta = -.16$; $p < .05$). *Self-control* had positive relationships with *job performance* ($\beta = .27$; $p < .001$), *effectiveness* ($\beta = .13$; $p < .05$) as well as a negative association with *time to proficiency* ($\beta = -.23$; $p < .01$). Finally, the interaction terms were tested and added to the regression, yielding the results shown in Table 3. The significance of *proactive personality* and *self-control* disappeared in the regression with *time to proficiency* and *effectiveness* as dependent variables. The relationship with *job performance*, however, remained significant. Moreover, *proactive personality* $\times$ *CEO/non-CEO* had a positive relationship with *job performance* ($\beta = .20$; $p < .05$) and *self-control* $\times$ *CEO/non-CEO* had a negative association with *job performance* ($\beta = -.22$; $p < .05$). All *F* values were statistically significant, indicating a proper fit between the regression model and the data. The adjusted *R* squared of the *job performance* regression was the highest, resulting in almost 20% of variance explained.

To explore the character of the moderating relationships, the significant interactions were plotted in Figures 2 and 3. In Figure 2, for the CEO group, *proactive personality* had a stronger positive association with *job performance* than for the non-CEO group. Tests of the simple slope indicated that the linkage between *proactive personality* and *job performance* was significant with gradient of the slope being 0.34. In Figure 3, for the non-CEO group, *self-control* had a stronger positive association with *job performance* than for the CEO group. Also, tests of the simple slope in this case indicated that the linkage between *self-control* and *job performance* was significant with gradient of the slope being 0.155.

These results support H1a and H2a as well as the baseline predictions related to job performance.

The remaining hypotheses were not supported.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

Insert Figure 3 about here

Discussion

Main findings

Our study found that self-control was initially positively correlated with all of the three performance indicators as was proactive personality. This suggests that the two personality variables were relevant for the studied group of expatriates. Hence, and in line with existing literature on domestic managers (de Ridder et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012), for expatriate managers, there is generally a favorable effect from proactive personality and dispositional self-control. For both traits we only found an effect on job performance and not on effectiveness and time to proficiency since the effects remained significant only for job performance after adding the control variables into the regression. This indicates a more direct influence on the quality of the job than on meeting the required job role or the time it took the expatriate to reach a proficient level.

Of specific interest to this study was the finding that for expatriate CEOs, proactive personality had a stronger positive relationship with job performance than for the non-CEOs. Similarly, we also found that for expatriate non-CEOs, self-control had a stronger positive association with job performance than for the CEOs. These findings are consistent with contingency theory in personality research suggesting a moderating effect of the context on the relation between personality traits and job performance. The work by Hambrick and associates (1987; 2011) describes how the discretion of a manager increases with position level making activities that are novel and proactive in relation to existing practices and local social norms more accepted. Lower level expatriate managers with less discretion will face greater obstacles dealing with local peers

and superiors in the new country.

While we found moderating effects on job performance, we did not find any for effectiveness and time to proficiency. This may, as mentioned above, be related to job performance being more directly related to proactive personality and self-control. In other words, the two personality traits could more directly affect the accomplishment of the job tasks while having a weaker effect on the fit with the job role from others' point of view or the time it took to reach full performance. Putting it differently, CEOs with high proactive personality may well deviate from the expected role and thus not be considered effective in the eyes of others in all aspects. This is because they could follow unusual paths to pursue their goals. This may also be a reason why they are not quicker than lower level managers to reach full performance in the new country. Similarly, lower level managers with high self-control may also be taking too few risks therefore being slower to adjust. Finally, self-control may be equally important to meet the expected role for both CEOs and non-CEO managers – not least in China.

Limitations

As all studies, this investigation may have a number of potential shortcomings that could limit to what extent it may be generalized. First, although the studied expatriate managers overwhelmingly were from a variety of non-Asian countries, the findings emanate from only one host country, China. Hence, the results may not be generalizable to other host countries.

Second, the cross-sectional self-reports of this study may have created common method variance (CMV). However, the general and automatic condemnation of cross-sectional self-report methods have been found exaggerated (cf. Crampton and Wagner, 1994; Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Spector, 2006) to the extent that it may have achieved the status of a methodological urban legend (Spector, 2006). In the current study, the electronic questionnaire prevented respondents to go back to previous pages thus preventing any possibility of editing answers retrospectively. To further lessen the potential bias of CMV, a number of procedures were implemented. As usual, the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were assured. Also, the items measuring performance-related work outcomes were placed at the middle of the questionnaire, and the items assessing the personality trait constructs were located at the end of the questionnaire. These design

procedures may all have contributed to diminish effects of CMV (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003). To investigate the potential for remaining biases of CMV, Harman's single factor test was applied (cf. Andersson and Bateman, 1997; Aulakh and Gencturk, 2000). Harman's single factor test applies exploratory factor analysis to produce an unrotated factor solution. The exploratory factor analysis of the items, corresponding to all the variables of the study, resulted in a nine-factor, unrotated solution where none of the factors accounted for the majority of the covariance among the measures. The varying effect on the different dependent variables could also indicate the CMV was not the main cause for the relation between dependent and independent variables. Finally, it has been argued that moderation effects, commensurate with the one we have found, also cannot be caused by CMV (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, and Eden, 2010). Although other ways to test for CMV were not attempted, as, for example, to insert a marker variable in the questionnaire (Lindell and Whitney, 2001), the precautionary measures undertaken together with the favorable outcome of Harman's single factor test may suggest that common method bias was not a serious problem in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Third, all data was based on self-reports. For the personality trait variables, anything else may not be practically possible since rating personality variables may be difficult for others. However, the performance variables may also be problematic to assess for others than the respondent in question since they all refer to self-perceptions (Goffin and Gellatly, 2001). Nonetheless, the self-reported data may have included systematic biases. For example, the differences in the personality characteristics between management levels could have been affected by a tendency of some CEOs to exaggerate positive traits. The self-assessment of performance-related variables may also have been problematic due to the different characteristics of the job for a CEO and a non-CEO. We have, however, tested whether both groups found in our data, i.e. the CEOs and non-CEOs, conceptualize the dependent variables of interest in the same way (multi-group CFA), repeating the same analysis on the assigned and self-initiated expatriates in the sample. Since the results have shown solidity up to scalar level of invariance, we can compare them on these specific measures. We would still like to point out that when interpreting the results of the study, it is worth remembering that all variables of this study are based on self-rated, subjective assessments. Background variables were also self-reported, but such information can be argued to have a factual character and may not pose a substantial problem in relation to subjectivity or in relation to problems associated with CMV (cf.

Brough, Johnson, Drummond, Pennisi, and Timms, 2011).

Last but not least, the background variables we have controlled for are clearly stated in this study. However, a large number of other circumstances may have contributed to the differences we have found. These include, but are not limited to, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the respondents, the familial support that these persons can have had, their career prospects, bureaucratic requirements of China, etc. Future studies may benefit from incorporating more such variables in the empirical investigations of personality traits of different groups of expatriates and their work outcomes.

Implications

Calls for more research on contextual variables in relation to expatriate management has recently been made (Froese and Toh, 2015; Selmer et al., 2015). However, only few studies have yet engaged in exploring the link between personal characteristics and contextual factors for predicting expatriate performance. In this case, we focused on proactive personality and self-control in relation to management position level. Accordingly, our study contributes to an underexplored area. Especially, the use of management level as a possible moderator is novel and useful to the field.

There are two findings in this study that contributes to the expatriate field. First, by including two unexplored personality variables, proactive personality and self-control, we add to the knowledge of constructive dispositions in relation to expatriate job performance. Moreover, our research supports domestic studies (de Ridder et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012) on the same variables showing that these traits are important for managers also in an international context. Second, our results support a contingency model for personality demonstrating that the context of expatriates moderates the relation between their personality and their job performance. While different roles of expatriates have been studied (Edström and Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001), little focus has been directed to management position level. Finding that for expatriate CEOs and non-CEOs, proactive personality and self-control are differentially important for job performance, indicate that more expatriate research should include management level since that could affect results. Further studies, however, need to explore the moderating effect of management level on other relations within the expatriate field.

With regard to practical implications, our study shows that expatriate managers with an outspoken proactive personality and high self-control will have an advantage. This knowledge can be used for selecting expatriate staff for relocation to management positions abroad. Apart from selection-specific activities to enhance the emotional regulation of those low in self-control, training could also be applied.

Especially, lacking self-control could be a problem in many host locations but especially in China. The training of social skills, for example, has been found effective in reducing negative affective expressivity and other uncontrolled reactions (Edmondson, Conger, and Conger, 2007). Showing individuals with difficulty controlling themselves how their affective cues influence others can have a positive effect on understanding what is communicated. Subsequently, interventions that focus on skills, such as controlling facial and postural expressions and word choice in situations with a high risk of an unregulated response, can be used (Edmondson et al., 2007). Such procedures may be particularly important for expatriates relocating internationally.

In relation to the role of management position level, our study indicates that proactive personality is even more important for expatriate CEOs than for lower level expatriate managers. This suggests that, compared to middle manager positions, for candidates destined for CEO posts, the level of proactive personality should be even more carefully assessed. Here, organizations can use interviews and track records in relation to active involvement with the environment to select potential top managers for subsidiary positions. As opposed to CEO expatriate managers, testing and selecting for self-control may be more essential when recruiting expatriate managers for non-CEO positions.

Implications for future research may involve both trying to avoid limitations of the current study as well as expanding the scope and focus of this investigation. More precautionary attempts to avoid CMV problems and better diagnosis of remaining difficulties may enhance the confidence in the findings of future studies. Although self-reports to a certain extent may be unavoidable when investigating personality variables, concomitant scales can be used to create more reference points. More background variables or context-associated variables may also be used as previously

discussed. Expanding the scope of this investigation to other countries is also desirable as the specific cultural context of China may in certain ways have affected our findings. Comparing different types of expatriates may also be justified since the proliferation of different groups performing global work is increasing rapidly. Last but not least, our study could be replicated in a domestic context to assess to what extent our findings are specific to a cross-cultural environment.

Conclusions

This exploratory study has examined the differences between expatriate CEOs and non-CEOs in relation to proactive personality and self-control. These are two personality traits that have been mentioned in the literature to be positive for performance. Our findings showed that both personality variables had favorable effects on job performance but not on effectiveness or time to proficiency. This result suggests that proactive personality and self-control appear to work in a similar way for managers in an international context as in domestic situations. We also found support for our hypotheses that proactive personality had a stronger effect on job performance for CEOs, and that self-control was more important for job performance for non-CEOs. These results are consistent with the contingency model for personality suggesting that the context (e.g. position power of an individual) can moderate the association between personal disposition and expatriate job performance. Our results point to consciously applying proactive personality and self-control as evaluation criteria when selecting future expatriate managers.

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TABLE 1: Comparison of Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results Estimated through Structural Equation Modeling

Model	χ^2 (df)	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC	CFI	TLI
Full measurement (5 factors)	860.70*** (395)	0.062	0.070	24150.530	24523.215	0.842	0.826
Model A (4 factors)	1230.04*** (399)	0.082	0.090	24511.867	24869.645	0.717	0.692
Model B (4 factors)	1016.54*** (399)	0.071	0.073	24298.375	24656.153	0.790	0.771
Model C (4 factors)	1117.64*** (399)	0.077	0.081	24399.473	24757.251	0.756	0.734
Model D (4 factors)	1153.26*** (399)	0.078	0.087	24435.091	24792.869	0.744	0.720
Model E (3 factors)	1512.35*** (402)	0.095	0.099	24788.181	25134.777	0.622	0.592
Model F (3 factors)	1576.73*** (402)	0.098	0.100	24852.566	25199.163	0.601	0.568
Model G (3 factors)	1496.12*** (402)	0.094	0.099	24771.956	25118.552	0.628	0.597
Model H (2 factors)	1580.43** (404)	0.097	0.093	24852.263	25191.407	0.600	0.569
Model I (2 factors)	1707.65*** (404)	0.103	0.101	24979.486	25318.629	0.557	0.523
Model J (1 factor)	2010.36*** (405)	0.114	0.110	25280.191	25615.607	0.454	0.414

Note 1: Number of observations= 307

Note 2: Model A: Proactive Personality and Self-Control combined into 1 factor. Model B: Job Performance and Effectiveness combined into 1 factor. Model C: Job Performance and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor. Model D: Effectiveness and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor. Model E: Proactive Personality, Self-Control and Job Performance combined into 1 factor. Model F: Proactive Personality, Self-Control and Effectiveness combined into 1 factor. Model G: Proactive Personality, Self-Control and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor. Model H: Proactive Personality, Job Performance, Effectiveness and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor. Model I: Self-Control, Job Performance, Effectiveness and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor. Model J: Proactive Personality, Self-Control, Job Performance, Effectiveness and Time to Proficiency combined into 1 factor.

TABLE 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Variables¹

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Job Performance	5.84	0.61								
2. Effectiveness	4.89	0.70	.37***							
3. Time to Proficiency	2.65	0.88	-.21***	-0.06						
4. Proactive Personality	5.44	0.73	.34***	0.16**	-.018**					
5. Self-Control	3.70	0.61	.35***	0.16**	-0.18**	0.25***				
6. CEO/non-CEO	0.54	0.50	0.08	0.14**	-0.04	0.18**	0.14*			
7. Time in Current Job in HL	85.02	61.01	-0.04	0.02	0.06	-0.01	-0.03	0.20***		
8. Size of Subsidiary	50.86	314.69	0.01	-0.01	-0.09	0.07	0.04	0.06	-0.08	
9. AE/SIE	0.47	0.50	0.11*	0.07	0.02	-0.003	0.20***	0.07	-0.26***	0.12*

Note 1: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

Note 2: CEO=1, non-CEO=0; AE=1, SIE=0, the time in current location is given in months (so average is around 7 years), the size of subsidiary is in dozens of employees

Note 3: Number of observations= 307

TABLE 3: Results of Regressions for Personality Traits on Performance-Related Work Outcomes Moderated by CEO/non-CEO Status

	Performance-related Work Outcomes					
	Job Performance		Effectiveness		Time to Proficiency	
	I	II	I	II	I	II
Time in Current Job in Host Location	1.7E-05	0.001	3E-04	0.018	0.001	0.065
Size of Subsidiary	-6E-05	-0.018	-6E-05	-0.020	-2E-04	-0.060
AE/SIE	0.086	0.043	0.071	0.036	0.150	0.075
CEO/non-CEO (CnC)	-0.307	-0.153	0.024	0.012	1.747*	0.872
Proactive personality (PP)	0.135*	0.099	0.078	0.058	-0.071	-0.052
Self-Control (SC)	0.378***	0.229	0.158	0.096	-0.106	-0.064
PP x CnC	0.205*	0.579	0.070	0.197	-0.176	-0.499
SC x CnC	-0.223*	-0.432	-0.073	-0.140	-0.220	-0.427
Adjusted R ²	0.196		0.029		0.055	
F	10.33***		2.15*		3.21**	
No of observations	307		307		307	
Note 1: AE=1, SIE=0; CEO=1, non-CEO=0; I= unstandardized coefficients; II= standardized coefficients the significance level for I and II is the same; Note 2: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001; two-tailed						

Figure 1: The role of managerial level

Figure 2: Moderation of the Effect of Proactive Personality on Job Performance by CEO/non-CEO Status.

Figure 3: Moderation of the Effect of Self-Control on Job Performance by CEO/non-CEO Status.