

## **JOB VARIABLES AND WORK RE-ADJUSTMENT AMONG REPATRIATES: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, to determine the relationship between job variables (role clarity, role discretion, role conflict, and role novelty) on work re-adjustment among repatriates. Secondly, is to test the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between job variables and work re-adjustment. Analyses of 104 repatriates using multiple regression analysis revealed that all job variables did not show relationship with work re-adjustment as hypothesized. However, it was found that social support is able to moderate the relationship between role discretion and work re-adjustment. Implications of the finding and areas for future research are discussed.*

*Keywords: job variables, work re-adjustment, social support, moderating effect*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The internationalization and globalization process of the past decades have resulted in increased mobility of human resources. Moreover, multinational corporations have to remain competitive in businesses particularly in the area of international human resource management and development of its employees. In international human resource management studies, much research attention has been given to the topic of expatriation (Brewster & Scullion, 1997). The area of repatriation after an international assignment has received relatively little investigation (Linehan & Scullion, 2002a, 2002b). Repatriation is the final link to the completion of the international assignment (Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001; Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Repatriation or cross-cultural re-entry is the transition from the foreign country back into the home country and organization (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). There is an unanticipated re-entry culture shock or reverse culture shock resulting from a lack of current behavioral understanding of the repatriates' home country (Linehan & Scullion, 2002a, 2002b).

MacDonald and Arthur (2001) mentioned that poor repatriation practice reflects significant human resource management problems. In addition, poor repatriation

practice is costly (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992), restricts the effective utilization of employees (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Adler, 1991), and often results in to the loss of valued personnel (MacDonald & Arthur, 2001; Black & Gregersen, 1991). Findings from a survey of US corporations by Bland (2002) found that 25% of repatriates leave parent companies within one year of coming home and more than 50% of the executives said they experienced social re-entry problems upon repatriation. Upon returning to the home country, repatriates often experience problems similar to those encountered in initial cross-cultural entry into the foreign environment. As highlighted by Black et al. (1992), these involve readjusting to the home country work and non-work environments as well as interacting again with home country nationals.

Empirical studies of repatriation have largely sampled American executives and managers (Harvey, 1989; Hammer, Hart, & Rogan, 1998; Black, 1992), Finnish repatriates (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002), Japanese repatriates (Black, 1994; Gregersen & Black, 1996), Taiwanese repatriates (Lee & Liu, 2006) as well as Malaysian repatriates (Ali & Yusoff, 2002; Yusoff, 2002; Yusoff & Ramayah, 2005). Yet, despite the growing concern with repatriation adjustment study, the present study therefore will examine the relationship between job variables on work re-adjustment. Using the basic theoretical framework of repatriation adjustment provided by Black et al. (1992) as well as model of international adjustment by Black et al. (1991), this study focuses of four job variables: role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty. These predictor variables have been investigated in prior studies on repatriates. For example, researchers (Ali & Yusoff, 2004; Yusoff, 2002) have examined these variables as direct predictors to repatriation adjustment.

Furthermore, social support was included in this study because this construct has received relatively little attention as a moderator in the repatriates adjustment literature. Past studies have examined social support as a direct predictor of repatriates adjustment (e.g., Ali & Yusoff, 2004; Yusoff, 2002) as well as expatriate adjustment (e.g., Andreason, 2003; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). In addition, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) is emphasizing on the social exchange processes in the establishment and maintenance of the relationship between an employer and an employee (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is the central theme of the social exchange theory in which it is suggested that the act of reciprocity between employer and employee takes place when the employer provides and adequate level of support to the employee. Putting it into perspective, social support is important to increase the impact of role clarity and role discretion as well as to reduce the impact of role conflict and role novelty on work re-adjustment. Thus, it is further worth to study social support as a moderator on the relationship between these two variables. It is thereby would give organizations an edge to use these factors for successful adjustment and retention of repatriates.

## **STUDY OBJECTIVES**

Having highlighted the issues, this paper, therefore, endeavored to investigate the effect of various job variables such as role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty on work re-adjustment. In addition, it also addresses the role of social

support as the moderator in job variables-work re-adjustment relationship. Thus, to further elucidate the underlying factors, the intermediate objectives are listed below:

1. To examine the relationship between job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) and work re-adjustment.
2. To investigate the role of social support as the moderating variable on the relationship between job variables and work re-adjustment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment

The phenomenon of “culture shock” is largely a set of negative affective reactions to be faced by the individuals in a new and foreign environment (Torbiorn, 1982). One of the earliest studies on repatriation was carried out by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) as cited in Hammer et al. (1998). They argued that the cross-cultural adjustment process leads to a U-shaped curve of adjustment model (Figure 1). The model can also be applied to repatriation adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Returning managers often lack current understanding of the home country and the process of reducing uncertainty is the most important aspect of repatriation adjustment (Harvey, 1989; Adler, 2002). Based on these theoretical arguments of uncertainty reduction, one would expect that, in general, factors that reduce uncertainty would facilitate repatriates’ adjustment while factors that increase uncertainty would inhibit adjustment.

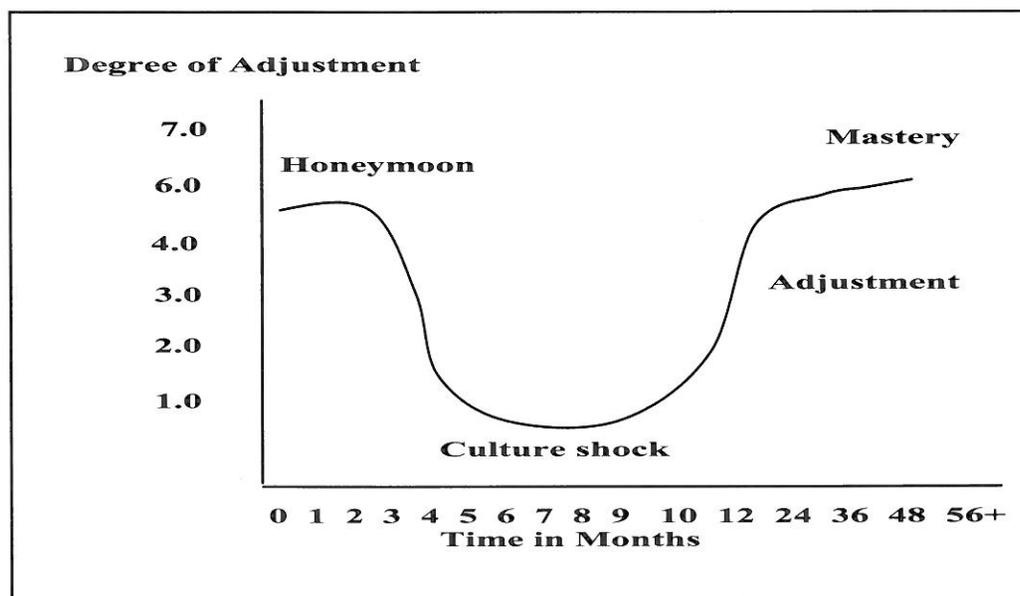


Figure 1. The U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.

Source: Black and Mendenhall (1991)

According to Black and Mendenhall (1991), The U-Curve Theory of Adjustment has been classified in terms of four phases of adjustment. The first phase is referred to as the honeymoon phase and could range from two weeks to the first couple of months.

During this phase, much of what is different in the new environment is viewed as “interesting” and “exciting”. Then, it is followed by culture shock/disillusionment phase. During this phase, the individual must deal with the new environment on a daily basis. Meanwhile, the novelties in the new environment and the lack of sufficient understanding of them and their relationship to appropriate and inappropriate behavior leads to affective reactions such as anxiety and frustration, which are common indicators of culture shock (Adler, 1986). The third phase is often termed as the adjustment phase. It is where individual feel comfortable and gradually accept the new culture and the ability to “fit in” over time. Scholars have estimated that it takes approximately a year to a year-and-a-half for full repatriation adjustment (Adler, 1986). The final phase is the mastery phase where repatriates possess the ability to function and live effectively in their home country.

Thus, we would argue that repatriates who just returned home would face the same u-shape of adjustment. That is, repatriates may feel happy upon returning home. However, the phase will fade and repatriates start to realize the difference between home and host country and start not to like few things. As time goes by, repatriates will slowly adjust to the home country situation. This of course, will take time to reach this period.

### **Repatriates’ Adjustment**

This section will discuss repatriates’ adjustment, that is, the dependent variable of the present study. One of the primary theoretical processes related to adjustment is the reduction of uncertainty (Black, 1988). Adjustment is a subjective/psychological state and it refers to changes which individuals actively engender or passively accept in order to achieve or maintain satisfactory states within themselves (Torbiorn, 1982). Cross-cultural adjustment, in turn, has been conceptualized as the degree of psychological adjustment experienced by the individual or the degree of comfort, familiarity, and ease that the individual feels toward the new environment (Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

Returning expatriates must adjust to their jobs in their home country. In addition, they must adjust on a full-time and broad basis to interact with home nationals, and at the same time, they must adjust to the general non-work environment of their home country. Although it may seem that adjustment to home country may be relatively simple, scholars and expatriates tend to make these different facets of adjustment less relevant during repatriation. Adler (1981) found that most expatriates had more difficulty with adjusting back to their home country than they did adjusting to the foreign country. This suggests that repatriates’ adjustment is also a cross-cultural adjustment process. That is to say that cross-cultural adjustment involves moving from a culture in which one currently resides to a different culture in which one has never resided or has not resided for some period of time (Black & Gregersen, 1991). From this theoretical perspective, one would expect that repatriates’ adjustment to be as multifaceted as other cross-cultural adjustment. Furthermore, we would expect that past measures of cross-cultural adjustment with minor wording modifications would be a reliable measure of repatriates’ adjustment as well.

The term repatriation adjustment has been used as general repatriation adjustment as though the construct was unidimensional (Black & Gregersen, 1991). In addition, they mentioned that, most scholars in the past have indeed treated both cross-cultural and repatriates' adjustment as unidimensional constructs. However, there is at least preliminary evidence that cross-cultural adjustment is a multifaceted phenomenon. Black (1988) and more particularly Black and Stephens (1989) found evidence to suggest that the expatriate's adjustment consists of (1) adjustment to the job, (2) adjustment to interact with host nationals, and (3) adjustment to the general non-work environment. There are researchers that categorized facets of adjustment in terms of psychological adjustment and socio cultural adjustment (Armes & Ward, 1989; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000).

In the present study, the indicator of repatriates' adjustment is more on the work adjustment. Work re-adjustment involves the re-adaptation to new job tasks, work roles, and new work environment (Palthe, 2004). Work re-adjustment is aided by similarities in procedures, policies, and task requirements between the host subsidiary abroad and company in the home country (Black, Morrison, & Gregersen, 1999). In addition, Lueke and Svyantek (2000) highlighted that work adjustment include adjustment to job responsibilities, supervision, and performance expectations.

### **Job Variables**

Job variables refer to specific set of tasks and duties performed by a given individual. Work role transition research in particular has focused on several job variables that are important in work adjustment—these are role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty (Andreason, 2003). Thus, we want to examine the relationship between these variables and work re-adjustment.

### ***Role Clarity***

Role clarity refers to the level of assurance surrounding role anticipation (Palthe, 2004). Role clarity can enhance a sense of responsibility and can increase organizational commitment (Gregersen & Black, 1992; King & King, 1990; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Black and Gregersen (1991) argued that role clarity is an important factor contributing repatriation process. General theory and research on adjustment suggested that role clarity may reduce the uncertainty associated with the work situation (Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984; Pinder & Schroader, 1987). Apart from that, Gregersen (1992) argued that if repatriates do not clearly knowing what are expected of them upon returning home, they may find it difficult to develop an action-oriented sense of responsibilities. It leads to a negative relationship between role ambiguity and commitment, or conversely, a positive relationship between role clarity and commitment after repatriation (Gregersen & Black, 1996).

### ***Role Conflict***

Role conflict is defined as the dimensions of congruency-incongruency or compatibility-incompatibility in the role requirements (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). When an individual's perceptions of what is expected of him/ her in the new

work role conflict with his/her understanding, the individual is less able to decide which of these perceptions to ignore and which to take notice of (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002). Black (1994) found the connection between role conflict and interaction adjustment. However, in two other studies by Black and Gregersen (1991) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997), no significant correlations were found between role conflict and the three facets of cultural adjustment that is work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and interaction adjustment. Consequently, one can assume that the greater the role conflict, the greater the uncertainties that repatriates have to face (Black, 1988; Black et al., 1992).

### ***Role Discretion***

Intercultural adjustment theorists (Black, 1988; Nicholson, 1984) suggested that role discretion allows individuals to adjust to their work role by changing the role to fit the individual. Thus, making it easier for the individuals to utilize past, familiar behaviors. In Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical framework of repatriation adjustment, role discretion facilitates both behavioral and predictive control. Greater role discretion makes it easier for individuals to utilize past behavior patterns, which, in turn, reduces some of the uncertainty in the new situation and consequently, facilitates adjustment in the novel setting (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991).

Role discretion is one key job that correlates with commitment among Americans (Gregersen & Black, 1992) and Japanese (Near, 1989; Gregersen & Black, 1996). The more discretion an individual has about what, when, and how to do work, the greater the person feels a sense of responsibility for those activities (Stewart, 1982). Furthermore, role discretion is important during repatriation because many expatriates return from international assignments having held positions overseas with high levels of autonomy and discretion (Adler, 1991; Black, 1988; Feldman, Tompson, & Holly, 1993; Harvey, 1989). Thus, role discretion is said to have a positive relationship with work re-adjustment.

### ***Role Novelty***

Role novelty involves the degree to which the current role is different from past roles (Black, 1988). Black (1988) noted that if the new position is different from the previous position, a repatriate may experience greater feelings of uncertainty and unpredictability. Pinder and Schroeder (1987) found that the greater the difference between the new and previous position, the longer it takes for the person to reach a level of proficiency after a domestic transfer. A study carried out by Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) found that the higher the degree of role novelty, the lower the degree of work and general adjustment. Interestingly, role novelty has also been suggested as a relevant antecedent variable in repatriates' adjustment situation (Feldman, 1991). Consequently, repatriates experience greater adjustment if they are less role novelty of their jobs.

### **Moderator**

#### ***Social Support***

As defined by Shumaker and Brownell (1984)(as cited from Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003, p.55), social support is defined as “an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient”. They argued that people in support are physically and emotionally healthier than non-supported people. In addition, Tsang (2001) mentioned that help received from other people when encountering difficulties in coping with a new environment facilitates the individual to adjust to the environment. In a similar vein, Cohen and Wills (1985) defined social support of co-workers and superiors in terms of sources and quality of helping that act as a stress reduction of work re-adjustment among repatriates. The importance of social support for successful adaptation has been well documented in the literature (Adelman, 1988; Church, 1982; Golding & Burnam, 1990; Ali, et al., 2003; Ali, 2003). Thus, social support seems seriously needed by the repatriate in order to adapt and adjust effectively to the new surroundings.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The research model developed for this study is shown in Figure 2.

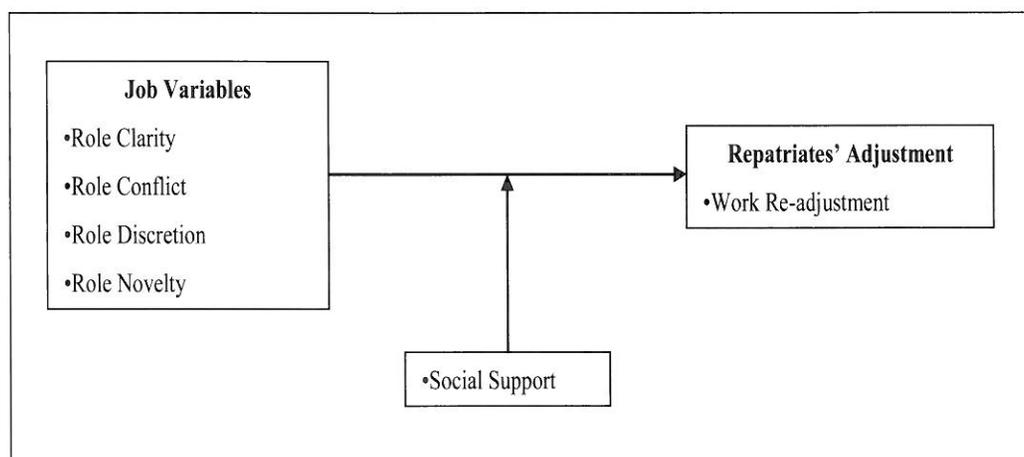


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Relating to Job Variables, Work Re-Adjustment, and Social Support.

## Hypotheses

### *Role Clarity and Work Re-Adjustment*

Role clarity concerns the extent to which an individual knows what is expected of him/her job (Rizzo et al., 1970). Consequently, one would expect that role clarity would reduce uncertainty associated with the work situation, and thus, would facilitate repatriation work adjustment for the repatriate (Black et al., 1992b). In addition, Black and Gregersen (1991) found that role clarity had a significant relationship with repatriates' work adjustment. Gregersen and Stroh (1997), in their study among Finnish repatriates found that role clarity was significantly and positively correlated to work adjustment.

*H1: Role clarity will be positively related to work re-adjustment.*

### ***Role Conflict and Work Re-Adjustment***

In contrast, one would expect that role conflict would increase the uncertainty associated with a new job in the home country (Black, 1988). When the individual's perceptions of what is expected of him/her is different from his/her own understanding, the individual is less able to decide which of these perceptions to ignore and which to take notice of. Hence, one can assume that the greater the role conflict is, the greater the hindrances for a successful repatriation process (Black, 1988; Black et al, 1992). Thus, in the present study, it is expected that this connection will appear.

*H2: Role conflict will be negatively related to work re-adjustment.*

### ***Role Discretion and Work Re-Adjustment***

The lower the role discretion, the greater the level of uncertainty, and thus, a repatriate may be facing severe adjustment challenges (Feldman, 1991). Gregersen and Black (1996) found that role discretion among Japanese repatriates showed a positive trend relationship with organizational commitment upon their return to home country. Meanwhile, Black and Gregersen (1991) in their study among Americans repatriates found that role discretion had a significant relationship with work adjustment. This assumption is supported by other empirical studies, for examples Black (1994), Gregersen and Stroh (1997), and Palthe (2004). Apart from that, Black and Gregersen (1991) mentioned that individuals in jobs with high role discretion adjust better cross-culturally. Thus, we would expect that role discretion would facilitate work re-adjustment for repatriates.

*H3: Role discretion will be positively related work re-adjustment.*

### ***Role Novelty and Work Re-Adjustment***

Suutari and Valimaa (2002) conducted a study on the antecedents of repatriation adjustment among 79 members of Finnish repatriates, and found that role novelty did not have any significant relation with work adjustment. Black's (1988) study also did not support the relationship between role novelty and work adjustment. However, Shaffer et al. (1999) found that expatriates with high role novelty was a significant predictor of lower expatriate's general and work adjustment.

*H4: Role novelty will be negatively related to work re-adjustment.*

### ***Social Support and Work Re-Adjustment***

Stress management scholars have highlighted the role of social support in helping individuals reduce uncertainty when in novel situations (e.g., Feldman & Brett, 1983; Fisher, 1985; Pinder & Schroeder, 1987). The role of social support in the successful acculturation of immigrants and sojourners has also been recognized (Aycan & Kanungo, 1997; Berry, 1997). Likewise, adjustment of repatriates to home country is

also frequently dependent on the type and amount of social support received. Therefore, we expect support provided by the organization, supervisor, and family to be particularly important to repatriates. Examining the role of social support both within the family unit and various social support networks between the family and others offers a potentially useful framework for understanding in greater depth the dynamics of international repatriation. Moreover, to further explain, the higher the social support in the organization, repatriates will feel the clarity and discretion of their role to the organization, therefore this increase their re-adjustment to work. It is also believed that, the lack of social support or the absence of social support will result in higher conflict and novelty in their role and as a result of lower work re-adjustment. Therefore, in line with these reasoning and findings, the following were hypothesized:

*H5: Social support moderates the relationship between job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) and work re-adjustment.*

*H5a: The positive relationship between job variables (role clarity and role discretion) and work re-adjustment will be stronger when social support is higher.*

*H5b: The negative relationship between job variables (role conflict and role novelty) and work re-adjustment will be stronger when social support is lower.*

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample and Procedure**

Population of the present study was Malaysian repatriates. A repatriated employee is defined as an employee who has returned to his/her country after spending at least nine months working abroad in continuous duration (Linehan & Scullion, 2002b; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Gregersen, 1992; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Black & Gregersen, 1991). The present study's sample comprised of Malaysian repatriates who at least had spent nine months working overseas and now working for manufacturing firms in Penang. The non-probability purposive sampling method was chosen because it was a viable alternative and due to the constraint of time, cost, and manpower in conducting the present study. To determine the sample size, we can use a general rule that is the minimum number of respondents needed is to be at least five times of the number of variables to be analyzed. However, the more acceptable size would be a ten-to-one ratio (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). Thus, the determined sample size of the present study will be 100. Of a total 200 questionnaires were distributed to repatriates and 108 were returned. However, only 104 were usable yielding a 52% response rate.

### **Variables and Measurements**

The predictor variable in this study relates to the job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) whilst repatriation adjustment (work re-adjustment) is the criterion variable. Moderator variable, which is social support, was also tested in this study. Role clarity (the reverse of role ambiguity) was measured by

using the scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970). Respondents were asked to evaluate themselves on seven items of a 5-point Likert like scale, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree and (5) Strongly Agree. Role conflict was also developed by Rizzo et al. (1970) and has nine items. Respondents answered the questions by using a 5-point Likert like scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. Eight items on a five-point Likert like scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) were adapted, based on the work by Stewart (1982) in order to measure work role discretion. Meanwhile, role novelty describes the difference between the past and the new roles. The variable was measured by using Nicholson and West's (1988) four items. Each items is answered by using a 5-point Likert like scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). A total of three items were used to measure work re-adjustment (Black, 1988). A 5-point Likert like scale ranging from (1) Completely Unadjusted to (5) Completely Adjusted for both socio-cultural re-adjustment and work re-adjustment was used. Lastly, social support was developed by Ali et al. (2003) which was aimed to measure the support that repatriates received after the expatriation period. The instrument has five items and was measured on a 5-point Likert like scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

As shown in Table 1, there were 63.5 percent males and 36.5 percent females. With regards to marital status, 68.3 percent of the respondents were married, 26.9 percent were single, and 4.8 percent were divorced. They were predominantly Chinese (47.1 percent), followed by Malay (37.5 percent), Indian (14.4 percent), and others (1.0 percent). In terms of age, 46.1 percent of the respondents were between 30-39 years old, followed by 27.9 percent were between 20-29 years old, and 26.0 percent were more than 40 years old. Nearly half of the respondents (44.2 percent) hold Bachelor Degrees, 35.6 percent hold Master Degrees, followed by 11.5 percent were Diploma holder, and only a small portion (8.7 percent) hold PhD. With respect to time spent in international assignment, 33.7 percent of the respondents spent their life overseas more than 36 months. About 56.7 percent of them spent between 13 to 36 months overseas and only 9.6 percent of the respondents spent their time in the ranges of 9 to 12 months. Lastly, about 31.7 percent of the respondents have returned to Malaysia less than 12 months, followed by 13-24 months (28.8 percent) and about 39.4 percent have returned to Malaysia for more than 24 months.

Table 1

*Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution of Respondents on Demographic Profile*

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	63.5
	Female	38	36.5
Marital Status	Single	28	26.9
	Married	71	68.3
	Divorced	5	4.8

Race	Malay	39	37.5
	Chinese	49	47.1
	Indian	15	14.4
	Others	1	1.0
Age (in years)	20-29	29	27.9
	30-39	48	46.1
	40 and above	27	26.0
Educational Background	Diploma	12	11.5
	Bachelor Degree	46	44.2
	Masters	37	35.6
	PhD	9	8.7
Time Spent In International Assignment	9-12 months	10	9.6
	13-24 months	31	29.8
	25-36 months	28	26.9
	More than 36 months	35	33.7
No of Months Since They Returned to Malaysia	Less than 12 months	33	31.7
	13-24 months	30	28.8
	25-36 months	20	19.2
	36-48 months	21	20.2

## RESULTS

### Measure Intercorrelations and Reliabilities

Table 2 depicts the correlation among the measures and the reliability coefficient for each measure. As can be seen in Table 4, all the measure of the variables exceeded the acceptance level .70 (Nunnally, 1978 as cited in Gregersen & Stroh, 1997).

Table 2  
*Measure Intercorrelations and reliability estimates*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Work Re-Adjustment	(0.84)					
Role Discretion	-.129	(0.87)				
Role Clarity	-.168	-.442**	(0.72)			
Role Novelty	.170	.245*	-.286**	(0.81)		
Role Conflict	-.019	-.220*	.250*	-.281**	(0.70)	
Social Support	-.278**	.354**	-.209*	.221*	-.124	(0.90)

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients are reported on the diagonal in parentheses.

### Descriptive Statistics

The mean value for work re-adjustment is 3.23 and the standard deviation is .85. In terms of job variables, the mean values ranged from 2.53 to 3.56 and standard

deviation in between .63 to 1.17. Moreover, social support had mean value of 3.00 and standard deviation of 1.01. The mean and standard deviation of the study variables are shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
*Overall descriptive statistics of the study variables*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Work Re-Adjustment	3.23	0.85
Role Discretion	3.56	0.71
Role Clarity	2.53	0.63
Role Novelty	2.79	1.17
Role Conflict	3.11	0.83
Social Support	3.00	1.01

### **Hypotheses Testing**

The results of the three-step hierarchical regression undertaken to test the hypotheses of this study is shown in Table 4. When the four job variables were entered into the regression equation in the first step, the coefficient determination ( $R^2$ ) was found to be 0.106 indicating that 10.6% of work re-adjustment is explained by job variables. The  $R^2$  change (0.106) is significant. Results revealed that role discretion ( $\beta = -.230, p < .05$ ) and role novelty ( $\beta = .226, p < .05$ ) had significant effects on work re-adjustment. However, these results did not provide evidence to support H1 and H3. It is because the direction of parentheses is different from what was hypothesized. In a similar vein, H2 and H4 are also not supported.

In the second step, social support was entered into the equation in order to gauge its impact as an independent predictor. The  $R^2$  increased from 10.6% to 22.0% indicating a change of 22.0% which is significant ( $p < .01$ ). In the final step, the four interaction terms were entered into the model. From the table, it can be seen that the additional variance explained by the interaction terms (10.5%) was significant ( $p < .01$ ), indicating that there is a moderation effect. It was also discovered that only the interaction of social support\*role discretion was significant at the 0.01 level. This result was derived from the final step provided partial support for the hypothesis 5a.

Table 4  
*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Work-Re-Adjustment*

<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>Std Beta Step 1</b>	<b>Std Beta Step 2</b>	<b>Std Beta Step 3</b>
<b>Model Variables</b>			
Role Discretion	-.230*	-.038	1.003**
Role Clarity	-.218	-.214*	.068
Role Novelty	.226*	.305**	.678*
Role Conflict	.069	.079	.211

<b>Moderating Variable</b>			
Social Support		-.517**	2.126*
<b>Interaction Terms</b>			
Social Support*Role Discretion			-2.460**
Social Support*Role Clarity			-.577
Social Support*Role Novelty			-.506
Social Support*Role Conflict			-.130
R <sup>2</sup>	.106	.326	.431
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.068	.289	.372
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.106	.220	.105
Sig. F Change	.032	.000	.005

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

### *Moderating Effects of Social Support*

Based on the information gathered from Table 4, only interaction terms of social support\*role discretion was significant at the .01 level. To portray the interaction between social support and role discretion more clearly, graph was drawn. To draw the graph, work re-adjustment and social support were initially recoded into three categories namely Low, Moderate, and High by dividing the respondents into approximately equal group using percentile (0-33%=Low, 1-66%=Medium, and 66.1-100%=High) for the work re-adjustment whereas median was used to recode the social support variable into two categories (below median = low social support, above median = high social support). The result of the significant interaction is presented in Figure 3.

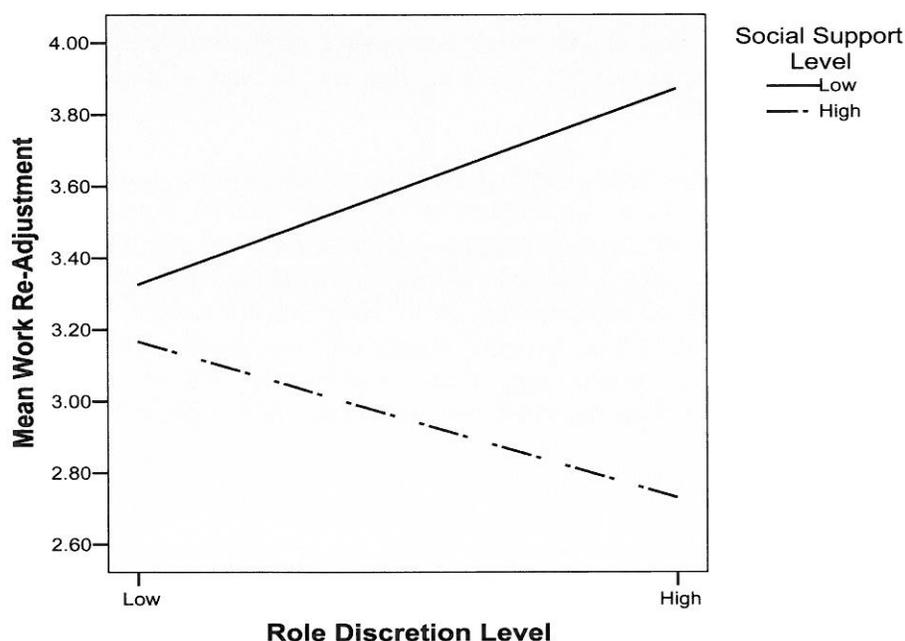


Figure 3. Moderating effect of social support

It can be observed that, the level of work re-adjustment among the repatriates with high level of social support showed a decreasing trend when the role discretion level is low to high. Whilst, for employees with low level of social support, their work re-adjustment level decreased with low to high role discretion level. Thus H5 is partially supported.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was two-fold: first, to determine the effects of job variables (role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty) on repatriates' adjustment (work re-adjustment) among repatriates within the manufacturing sector in Penang. This study found no relationship between role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty and work re-adjustment although such relations were expected to appear on the basis of the findings in the literature. The findings of this study did not support previous researchers on the relationship between role clarity (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997), role conflict (Morley & Flynn, 2003), role discretion (Black, 1988, 1994; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Palthe, 2004; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002), and role novelty (Shaffer et al., 1999) and work adjustment. However, insignificant relationship between role novelty and role conflict and work re-adjustment were consistent with the previous study by Black (1988), Gregersen and Stroh (1997), and Suutari and Valimaa (2002).

The lack of a significant relationship between role clarity, role conflict, role discretion, and role novelty and work re-adjustment might be explained by the nature of the work role transition (Black, 1988). It may be that in international transfer so much is novel (the job, the people, the culture, etc.) that the impact of job variables is diluted. Similar experience could be applied to the expatriates returning to their home country. They could be easily adapted to the changes in their job. In addition, future studies might rely on subjective measures of job variables. Possible method covariation problems could be reduced in future studies by using objective proxies of job variables as suggested by Black (1988).

The second objective was to test whether these relationships vary according to their level of social support. The result obtained in this study showed that social support moderates the relationship between role discretion and work re-adjustment. Repatriates with low level of social support showed the role discretion level is low to high, their adjustment to work showed an increasing trend. However, for repatriates with high level of social support, their level of work re-adjustment decreases with low to high role discretion level. This finding suggests that low to high level of role discretion would be more preferable among repatriates with high social support. On the other hand, the work re-adjustment level for repatriates with low social support continues to increase for various levels of role discretion.

As with all empirical research, the present study also has limitations. Firstly, the accuracy of the findings may depend on the years of repatriating back to Malaysia. The data may be more accurate if the respondents have just returned to Malaysia since the ability to recall their experience is greater than to those who have returned for quite some time. Secondly, the present study is cross-sectional in nature and clearly

eliminated the possibility of testing cause and effect about the determinants of repatriates' adjustment (Gregersen & Black, 1992). Future research should employ longitudinal research designs to overcome this limitation (Gregersen & Black, 1992). Lastly, there are no studies on the same topic that have been conducted by Malaysian researchers to be used as reference for the present study. Thus, in order to add insight to the present study, we had to make reference to expatriate's literature.

Future work can overcome limitations of the present study in terms of the number of the respondents. Increasing the number of the respondents may help in generalizing the findings. Perhaps, a longitudinal study on repatriates' adjustment may explain clearly the cause and effect of the determinants contributing to repatriates' adjustment. Furthermore, future research should also make a comparison between manufacturing samples and non-manufacturing samples. Lastly, we would also like to suggest future research to study the factors that contribute to adjustment among repatriate spouses and children. We believe that they may also face difficulties re-adjusting to their home country.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

There are several practical implications that can be drawn from the present study's results. HRM function has to be prepared to deal with different kinds of problems that will be faced by the repatriates. It includes the types of support should be given to them as well as how to adapt to the work.

First, with regards to the social support, each repatriate is different, so they need different kinds of support. Additional repatriation support (e.g., training, financial support, etc) should be given to those who have had difficulties abroad since they also suffer from repatriation difficulties.

The second major practical implication that can be drawn from the results of this study is that of role discretion. The impact of role discretion on adjustment process suggests that firms may be well served by providing a relatively high degree of discretion. This would require better strategic human resource planning by firms for the individual's return. Also, given that expatriates often experience high levels of role discretion while on international assignments, this study's findings may suggest that assignments upon return that maintain this discretion will reduce uncertainty for the repatriates. Thus, it will enhance work re-adjustment. It further strengthens the relationship with the existence of social support given by the company. By doing so, this study's findings suggest that adjustment to work among repatriates should improve.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the contribution of this study rests on the relationship between job variables and work re-adjustment and the role played by social support as a moderator in the relationship between job variables and work re-adjustment by Malaysian repatriates. The results obtained shows that all job variables did not have any significant relationship with work re-adjustment among repatriates, although role discretion and role novelty were significant but there were not in the direction

hypothesized. This point to some contradiction with the literature that may be worth looking at in the future studies. However, the major contribution of this study showed that social support plays a role in work re-adjustment.

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