



The Effect of Personality Traits on Turnover Intention amongst Expatriate in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of cultural empathy, emotional stability, and flexibility of an expatriate's personality traits on the turnover intention through the mediation effect of perceived cultural values. Personality traits are always used to explain an individual's behavior in various situations. Thus, it is important to study the effect of personality traits amongst expatriates in the selection process before they commence on an international assignment. This study surveyed on expatriates who are working in the manufacturing companies located in Penang, Melaka, Johor, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. The finding showed a significant effect of expatriate's personality traits on turnover intention. Cultural empathy was one of the three constructs used in this study to have a significant impact on the turnover intention through the mediation effect of perceived cultural values. Methodological and practical implications were discussed at the end of this study. In conclusion, this study emphasized the importance of personality traits in selecting expatriates for an international assignment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many countries around the world have undergone a radical expansion in political, economic and social perspectives due to intensive internationalization process. As the primary focus of expansion is often in the economic sector, the effect of globalization could be seemingly found in all business

activities. Internationalization of business always involves the establishment of a temporary or permanent presence in a foreign country that away from the company originally based in, hence bringing in the need of international managers. Nowadays, people also mobilize across the national

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boundaries due to the globalization of capital, goods, and ideas. In Malaysia, without exception; the inflow of expatriates into the country is necessary to meet the demand of skillful and professional manpower especially during the transition of globalization and meeting the country's vision to become an advance industrialized nation.

Globalization has increased the opportunities for people to work in the organizations outside the boundaries of their home country as an expatriate today. According to Ramalu, Rose, and Wei (2011), the management is aware that individual-level components such as personality traits, abilities, skills, gender, marital status, overseas experience, and local language fluency are important indicators of expatriate effectiveness. For instance, the examples of expatriate effectiveness are cross-cultural adjustment (CCA), job performance, completion of assignment during their international assignments.

In addition, Malaysian government has taken much initiative to invite and encourage foreign expatriates to work in Malaysia by sharing their expertise with the local workforces for national development. Malaysian Investment Development Authority (2016) had presented a current statistic that showed a decrease trend of FDI in all sectors, i.e., primary sectors, manufacturing sectors, and service industries. Hence, the researchers are interested to focus on manufacturing sectors whereby the foreign investment has experienced an extreme reduction (MIDA, 2016). It is the researchers' desire to discover why this phenomenon is happening in Malaysia.

Moreover, in the research realm, differences in the expatriates' personality traits have appeared to gain considerable attention in recent years. A personality trait could be a reliable indicator in a working environment with the international setting (Furnham, 2017; Lie, Suyasa, & Wijaya, 2016; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012; Ramalu, Rose, Uli, & Samy, 2010; Rozaimie, Sarkawi, Johari, & Kasuma, 2014).

Undoubtedly, many expatriates have encountered cultural challenges (i.e., liability of foreignness) while working in Malaysia. Inevitably, cultural clashes are bound to happen when local and foreign beliefs, values and expectations are different. Deliberately, such cultural challenges can be resolved by acknowledging the existence of cultural differences; continuing with the expatriate's willingness to learn; and respecting those differences (Migliore, 2011). Therefore, expatriate needs to improve their interpersonal skills, trust, and consensus building, especially with the increased use of the internet and networked environments.

Furthermore, Kim and Slocum (2008) highlighted personality differences as a potential predictor to an expatriate outcome. The expatriate outcome will influence the expatriate's behavior towards job satisfaction and turnover intention. A study by Hassan and Diallo (2013) in Malaysia had found that many expatriates faced difficulties in familiarizing themselves in the new working environment. Thus, this finding leads to the researchers' interest to unveil the expatriate's work satisfaction during the international assignment and the reasons why they resign before the completion of the international assignment.

The dimensions of personality trait are adopted in this study to investigate the turnover intention of expatriates assigned in Malaysia. Specifically, the research is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To examine the influence of personality traits on the perceived cultural values.
- ii. To investigate the effect of perceived cultural values on expatriate's turnover intention.
- iii. To study the mediating effects of perceived cultural values on the relationship between expatriate's personality traits and turnover intention.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality Trait

High Cultural Empathy can adjust better to interact with Host Country Nationals (HCNs) and general living. Cultural empathy is known as cultural sensitivity that indicates the expatriate ability and sensitivity to perceive the emotions and consider individuals from other cultural backgrounds (Hawes & Kealy, 1981; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003). Emotional stability is required for self-grounding to perform adequately under distressing circumstances (Korzilius, Van Hooft, Planken, & Hendrix, 2011; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, & de Grijjs, 2004).

Expatriates need to be relaxed, handle stress well and remain calm in tense situations. High Emotional Stability is trusted in their organizations and adjust better to their work (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). Flexibility is the ability to learn from mistakes and adjustment of behavior whenever it is required, particularly associated with the ability to learn from new experiences (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). High Flexibility is proposed to respond effectively to the ambiguous situation and adapt activities in non-work and work contexts (Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006).

There are consistencies between personality traits and culture, which are culturally influenced/related characteristic adaptation (Allik & McCrae, 2004; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Hofstede and McCrae (2004) also emphasized that culture is no longer validating on how culture shapes personality but focused on how personality and culture interact to shape the behavior of individuals and social groups. In the current study, the multicultural personality is assessed based on perceived cultural values among expatriates in their workplace. From the proposed framework in Figure 1, hypotheses are formed to examine the relationship between multicultural personality and perceived cultural values.

H1: *Cultural empathy positively influenced the perceived collectivism culture.*

H2: *Cultural empathy positively related to the perceived long term orientation culture.*

H3: *Cultural empathy negatively related to the perceived masculinity culture.*

H4: *Cultural empathy negatively influenced the perceived high power distance culture.*

H5: *Cultural empathy positively related to the perceived low uncertainty avoidance culture.*

H6: *Emotional stability positively influenced by the perceived collectivism culture.*

H7: *Emotional stability positively related to the perceived long term orientation culture.*

H8: *Emotional stability negatively related to the perceived masculinity culture.*

H9: *Emotional stability positively influence to the perceived high power distance culture.*

H10: *Emotional stability positively related to the perceived low uncertainty avoidance culture.*

H11: *Flexibility negative influence on the perceived collectivism culture.*

H12: *Flexibility negatively related to the perceived long term orientation culture.*

H13: *Flexibility negatively related to the perceived masculinity culture.*

H14: *Flexibility negatively influenced by the perceived high power distance culture.*

H15: *Flexibility negatively related to the perceived low uncertainty avoidance culture.*

Turnover Intention

Turnover intention is one of the important variable to be studied in the turnover literature (Joarder, Sharif, & Ahmmed, 2011). Expatriate turnover is one of the most important outcomes due to high cost incurred and prevalence. Various individual differences, including personality, would affect the turnover decisions (Jeswani & Dave, 2012; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979).

Moreover, one of the prominent factors - cultural values also will lead to turnover intention of an expatriate. Cultural differences are expected to cause a growing distance and uncertainty and thus increase the expatriate intentions to withdraw from the international assignment (Diemer, 2016). In this study, five dimensions of cultural values namely; [1] power distance, [2] collectivism, [3] uncertainty avoidance, [4] masculinity and [5] long-term orientation were used to assess expatriate's turnover intention. Referring to the proposed framework in Figure 1, hypotheses were formed to examine the relationship between perceived cultural values and expatriate's turnover intention.

H16: *Expatriates who perceived of long term orientation*

culture negatively leads to turnover intention.

H17: *Expatriates who perceived of masculinity culture positively tend to turnover intention.*

H18: *Expatriates who perceived of high power distance culture tend to high turnover intention.*

H19: *Expatriates who perceived of low uncertainty avoidance culture negatively to turnover intention.*

H20: *Expatriates who perceived of collectivism culture tends to turnover intention.*

Perceived Cultural Values

Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz (2011) have stressed that the impression of the culture at the individual level is more vital and applicable. The dimensions of cultural values, i.e., power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, collectivism, and masculinity should be studied to generate holistic understanding. Malaysia has high score in the dimensions of power distance and collectivism; and low score in the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and long-term orientation. Cultural values play an imperative part in predicting the success of a person who will carry on a specific part or status in a given society. Both social learning theory and social cognitive theory used in this research highlighted the criticalness of expatriates in figuring out how to appreciate and adapt appropriate specific cultural norms for psychological and social-cultural adaptation (Adler, 1975; Bandura, 2002).

Diemer (2016) also highlighted that cultural differences are expected to lead a growing distance and uncertainty which increase expatriate's intentions to withdraw from the international assignment. Moreover, perceived cultural values will mediate the relationship between personality traits and turnover intention. Based on the proposed framework in Figure 1, hypotheses were formed to examine the relationship between multicultural personality and turnover intention mediated by perceived cultural values.

H21: *The relationship between cultural empathy and turnover intention was mediated by the perceived cultural values.*

H22: *The relationship between emotional stability and turnover intention was mediated by the perceived culture values.*

H23: *The relationship between flexibility and turnover intention was mediated by the perceived culture values.*

Research Framework

The literature review led to the development of the conceptual framework for this research (Refer to Figure 1). The selection of variables in this framework is based on the concept on how people learn their behavior from the social learning theory and social cognitive theory.

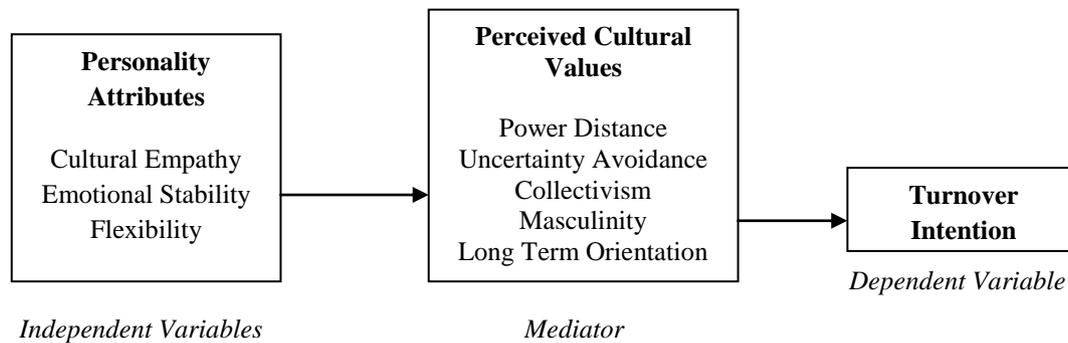


Figure 1:
Theoretical framework

3. METHODOLOGY

Data and Sample

1000 questionnaires were circulated through mail to the selected companies of the major industrial areas in Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, Melaka, Johor Bahru, and Selangor based on the FMM directory 2014. One hundred thirty questionnaires were received with a response rate of 13 percent. Only 114 completed questionnaires which exceed the minimum G*power of 77 samples. Of these, 94 were male respondents and 20 were female respondents. About 35.1 percent of the participants were in the range of 26-35 years old. About 30.1 percent of the respondents had an overseas experienced and 27.4 percent of the participants had no overseas experience during expatriation. Technically, this research adopted purposive sampling to select the respondents.

The questionnaire used five-point Likert-type scales to measures the items of the following:

- *Personality traits.* Cultural Empathy ($\alpha = 0.89$), emotional stability ($\alpha = 0.82$) and flexibility ($\alpha = 0.81$). 8-item scale for each variable from Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, Ponterotto, and Fietzer (2013) was used to assess the expatriate's personality traits. The five-point Likert-type scales (ranging from 1 – Totally not applicable to 5 – Completely applicable).
- *Cultural values.* 5 dimensions of cultural values; power distance ($\alpha = 0.69$), uncertainty avoidance ($\alpha = 0.80$), collectivism ($\alpha = 0.80$), masculinity ($\alpha = 0.77$) and long-term orientation ($\alpha = 0.76$) was measured using 26 items from Yoo et al. (2011). The five-point Likert-type scales (ranging from 1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree).
- *Turnover intention* ($\alpha = 0.89$). This construct was measured using a 5 items scale developed by Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997). The five-point Likert-type scales (ranging from 1 – Strongly disagree to 5 – Strongly agree).

Data Analysis Technique

In performing the analysis of the research, the hypothesis testing was conducted by using Partial Least Squares through the SmartPLS 3.0 software. The main reason to adopt PLS as the main analysis technique in this study is due to the use of a large number of latent variables and complex modeling of the research model. According to Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009), PLS is suitable for large complex models with many latent variables. Furthermore, this research also focuses on testing the relationships according to the prior theoretical knowledge. The ability of PLS-SEM to estimate the correlations between residuals and to assess their impacts on the model makes this technique an appropriate approach.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Assessing the Measurement Model

The measurement model consists of relationships among the latent variables and the item indicators underlying each latent variable. Figure 2 demonstrates the research model. Before examining the research model with hypothesis testing, it is crucial to establish construct validity for the measurement model. The loadings for all items exceed the recommended value of 0.5.

Composite reliability values (see Table 1), which show the degree to which the items indicated the latent construct, ranged from 0.853 to 0.916. It is also exceeding the recommended values of 0.7. The average variance extracted is in the range of 0.495 to 0.733 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Discriminant validity concerns the degree to which the measures of different constructs are distinct from one another and is assessed by comparing the correlations between constructs with the square root of the AVE for a construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows the discriminant validity of the measurement model. The elements in the matrix diagonals, representing the square root of the AVEs, are greater in all cases than the off-diagonal elements in their

corresponding row and column, indicating discriminant validity has been achieved.

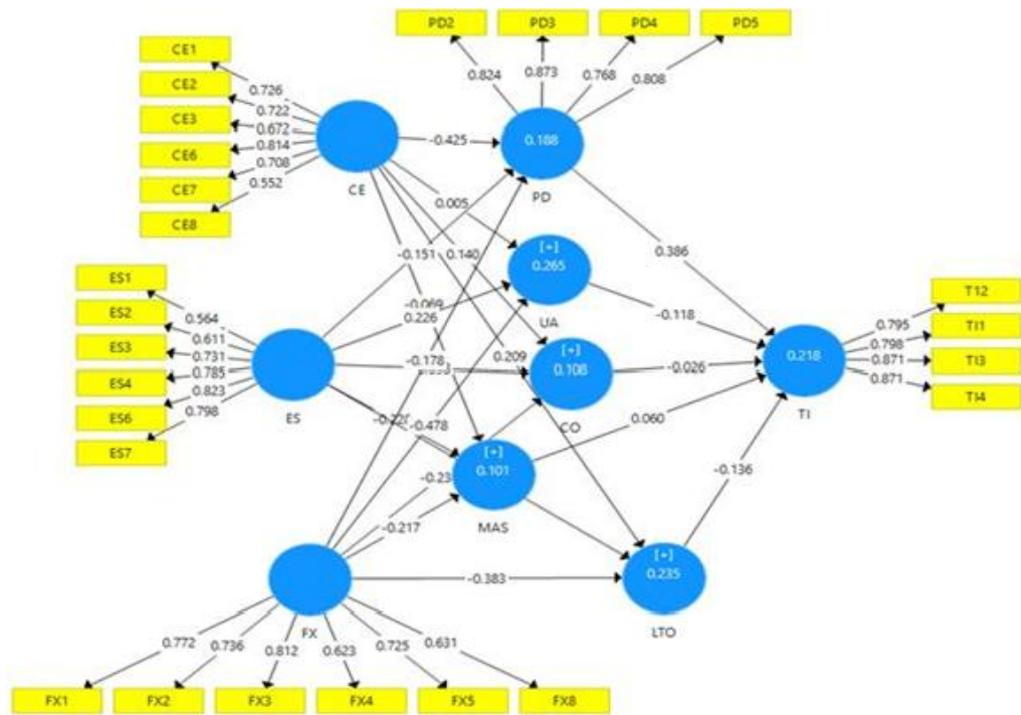


Figure 2: Research Model

Table 1: Result for Measurement Model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Cultural Empathy	CE1	0.726	0.853	0.495
	CE2	0.722		
	CE3	0.672		
	CE6	0.814		
	CE7	0.708		
	CE8	0.552		
Emotional Stability	ES1	0.564	0.867	0.526
	ES2	0.611		
	ES3	0.731		
	ES4	0.785		
	ES6	0.823		
	ES7	0.798		
Flexibility	FX1	0.772	0.865	0.518
	FX2	0.736		
	FX3	0.812		
	FX4	0.623		
	FX5	0.725		
	FX8	0.631		
Power Distance	PD2	0.824	0.891	0.671

	PD3	0.873		
	PD4	0.768		
	PD5	0.808		
Collectivism	CO1	0.752	0.874	0.539
	CO2	0.789		
	CO3	0.796		
	CO4	0.766		
	CO5	0.654		
	CO6	0.63		
Uncertainty Avoidance	UA1	0.604	0.887	0.615
	UA2	0.771		
	UA3	0.871		
	UA4	0.846		
	UA5	0.799		
Masculinity	MAS1	0.82	0.916	0.733
	MAS2	0.846		
	MAS3	0.914		
	MAS4	0.841		
Long Term Orientation	LTO1	0.722	0.859	0.506
	LTO2	0.644		
	LTO3	0.719		
	LTO4	0.773		
	LTO5	0.76		
	LTO6	0.638		
Turnover Intention	TI2	0.795	0.902	0.696
	TI1	0.798		
	TI3	0.871		
	TI4	0.871		

Notes: Items CE4, CE5, ES5, ES8, ES6, ES7, PD1 and TI5 are deleted due to low loading

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
CE	0.703								
CO	0.211	0.734							
ES	-0.079	-0.127	0.725						
FX	-0.268	-0.281	0.074	0.72					
LTO	0.313	0.477	-0.056	-0.44	0.711				
MAS	0.008	0.228	-0.239	-0.215	0.288	0.856			
PD	-0.366	-0.018	-0.131	-0.075	-0.008	0.119	0.819		
TI	-0.127	-0.141	-0.335	0.103	-0.214	0.035	0.403	0.835	
UA	0.116	0.478	0.19	-0.463	0.668	0.212	-0.068	-0.235	0.784

Notes: Diagonals (in bold) symbolize the squared root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while the other entries represent the correlations CE/1= cultural empathy, CO/2 = Collectivism, ES/3 = emotional stability, FX/4 = flexibility, LTO/5 = long-term orientation, MAS/6 = masculinity, PD/7 = power distance, TI/8 = turnover intention, and UA/9 = uncertainty avoidance.

Assessing the Structural Model

The structural model comprises of the hypothesized relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables in the model. It shows how well the theoretical model in predicting the hypothesized paths. Following the suggestion from Hair et al. (2010), the bootstrapping procedure (500 samples) is applied to generate the path coefficients and their corresponding t-values which then determine the statistical significance of each path coefficient. Table 3 presents all path coefficients and their corresponding t-values. Out of the 20 hypotheses, only 10 hypotheses were found to be significant.

Hayes (2009) and Preacher and Hayes (2008) mentioned that the mediation has occurred when the indirect relationship between independent and dependent variables are significant. In this research, one indirect relationship was proven to support (t value = 3.342, $p < 0.01$) while the others indirect relationships seem not supported based on the hypothesis formulated. However, eight of indirect relationships turned out to be not supporting the hypothesis formulated. The result of the mediation effects is shown as in Table 4. The cultural empathy attribute has a significant impact on turnover intention which mediated by the perceived cultural values as the t-values is negatively significant of 2.953 at the p-value, $p < 0.10$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indirect relationship of hypothesis, H21 is supported.

Table 3: Result of Structural Model

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	T Values	P Values	Decision
H1	CE -> CO	0.14	1.186	0.118	Not Supported
H2	CE -> LTO	0.209	1.675**	0.047	Supported
H3	CE -> MAS	-0.069	0.554	0.29	Not Supported
H4	CE -> PD	-0.425	4.505***	0	Supported
H5	CE -> UA	0.005	0.051	0.48	Not Supported
H6	ES -> CO	-0.098	0.632	0.264	Not Supported
H7	ES -> LTO	-0.011	0.081	0.468	Not Supported
H8	ES -> MAS	-0.228	1.799**	0.036	Supported
H9	ES -> PD	-0.151	0.888	0.188	Not Supported
H10	ES -> UA	0.226	1.522*	0.064	Supported
H11	FX -> CO	-0.236	1.78**	0.038	Supported
H12	FX -> LTO	-0.383	2.927***	0.002	Supported
H13	FX -> MAS	-0.217	1.942**	0.026	Supported
H14	FX -> PD	-0.178	2.005**	0.023	Supported
H15	FX -> UA	-0.478	3.979***	0	Supported
H16	LTO -> TI	-0.136	0.805	0.211	Not Supported
H17	MAS -> TI	0.06	0.64	0.261	Not Supported
H18	PD -> TI	0.386	3.375***	0	Supported
H19	UA -> TI	-0.118	0.961	0.168	Not Supported
H20	CO -> TI	-0.026	0.209	0.417	Not Supported

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ (based on one-tailed test)

Table 4: Result of Mediating Variables

Constructs	Relationship	Std. Beta	T Values	P Values	Confidence Intervals		Confidence Intervals		Bias
					5.00%	95%	Corrected Bias	5%	
Cultural Empathy	CE -> CO								
	CE -> LTO								
	CE -> MAS								
	CE -> PD								
	CE -> TI	-0.201	3.342***	0	-0.303	-0.094	-0.004	-0.285	-0.08
	CE -> UA								
Emotional Stability	ES -> CO								
	ES -> LTO								
	ES -> MAS								
	ES -> PD								
	ES -> TI	-0.094	0.947	0.172	-0.272	0.069	-0.022	-0.22	0.142
	ES -> UA								
Flexibility	FX -> CO								
	FX -> LTO								
	FX -> MAS								
	FX -> PD								
	FX -> TI	0.033	0.423	0.336	-0.099	0.17	0	-0.096	0.172
	FX -> UA								
Long Term Orientation	LTO -> TI								
Masculinity	MAS -> TI								
Power Distance	PD -> TI								
Uncertainty Avoidance	UA -> TI								
Collectivism	CO -> TI								

Note: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

5. DISCUSSIONS

The key objective of this research is to investigate the effects of personality traits on the turnover intention with the perceived cultural values amongst expatriates in Malaysia. The concept of perceived cultural values is proposed and developed from the extension of social cognitive theory and the theory of social learning. Out of the three dimensions of personality traits used in this study, only flexibility attribute is negatively related to perceived high power distance, collectivism, long term orientation and low uncertainty avoidance culture amongst expatriates who are working in Malaysia.

In the context of the study, flexibility is referring to the capability of learning from recent occurrences and mistakes as well as the adjusting the conduct when required. Therefore, it is proven that expatriates working in Malaysia can gain from

oversights and adjustment of behavior connected with the ability to learn from new experience. Expatriates on these dimensions are seen to have created approaches in dealing with stress to adapt to the new environment. Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) mentioned that high flexibility means that the expatriates will be interested to replace those activities enjoyed outside work in the country of origin with activities that exist in the host nation.

In the current study, cultural empathy has a negative relationship with the perceived high-power distance culture. Cultural empathy also has a positive relationship with the perceived long-term orientation. According to Shafaei and Razak (2016), cultural empathy would minimize the cultural gaps and promote more enthusiasm towards their adaptation in the new cultural environment. Expatriates who are working in Malaysia also do not have empathy traits on perceived collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity.

Emotional stability found to have negative effect on the perceived masculinity culture. In contrast, emotional stability was found to have positive and significant influence on perceived uncertainty avoidance culture. Wu and Bodigerel-Koehler (2013) stated that some individuals can stay calm in stressful situations, while others demonstrate strong emotional reactions.

From the results, only cultural empathy and turnover intention are mediated by the perceived cultural values. However, the other two dimensions of personality traits have insignificant effects on turnover intention mediated by perceived cultural values. The reason might due to the contextual reality of this study. One of the main reasons is because those expatriates who are working in Malaysia are not very open to Malaysian cultural values. In Malaysian working culture, people are perceived as high power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, masculinity cultures, collectivism cultures and long term orientation culture. In high power distance cultures, less empathic attributes make them feel unable not being accepted or get along with other people who have strong pressure in meeting the expectation of others to maintain 'face' (high reputation/position).

Besides, in low uncertainty avoidance culture, less empathic attributes make them feel unable to be accepted or get along in associated contemplative, less emotional, and risk taker, and have a greater need to control the environment, events, and situations in their personal lives. In collectivism culture, less empathic attributes lead the individuals to be part of one or more in groups and are willing to give priority to the collective goals instead of personal goals. In addition, in masculinity culture, less empathic attributes lead to the individual inability to work in the condition of aggressive, competitive in valuing achievement and success environment. Furthermore, in long term orientation cultures, less empathic attributes make them unable to view time holistically, and valuing both the past and the future. Thus, this study confirmed that the perceived cultural values dimension has mediated the relationship between the cultural empathy dimensions of personality traits and turnover intention amongst expatriates in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results demonstrated the importance of perceived cultural values as the mediator in the relationship between cultural empathy and turnover intention amongst expatriates in Malaysian manufacturing industry. Malie and Akir (2012) stated that culture is not a critical factor to the expatriation process, but it can be a slight influential factor for the effectiveness of expatriation. The study findings revealed that the perceived cultural values were affected by three dimensions of personality traits, which were, cultural empathy, emotional stability, and flexibility. Therefore, it is important to increase the awareness on the potential of personality traits to improve the effectiveness of expatriation in a comprehensive manner. The finding of this study was drawing an attention to the research contribution by expanding the understanding on both theoretical and practical aspects of expatriate management. Every research has its own limitation, but most importantly, this research provides new niche

findings and forms the foundation for future works to build on. It is recommended to incorporate other factors such as cultural intelligence and language barrier that could possibly affect the expatriate's turnover intention for future study.

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