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A STUDY OF CAREER SATISFACTION OF SRI LANKAN SELF - INITIATED EXPATRIATE PROFESSIONALS IN QATAR AND OMAN

D.M. Mudalige

Department of Industrial Management, Faculty of Business, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.

ABSTRACT

With the impact of globalization, number of expatriates across the world is increasing at a rapid rate and most of them are Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE) workers. Substantial number of Sri Lankan migrant professionals are currently working or hoping to work in Middle East. Past research indicates several social issues arising out of these migrant workers as well as their career satisfaction is low. There is little research on antecedents of career satisfaction of SIE professionals working in Middle East from South Asia. The objective of this research was to identify the antecedents of career satisfaction of Sri Lankan SIE professionals in Oman and Qatar. A quantitative research study was designed, and three hypotheses were tested. The data used in this study were obtained from 105 respondents. Results indicate that career capital significantly positively affect the career adjustment and career satisfaction of the migrant professionals. Further, career capital and career adjustment explained 33% of the variance of career satisfaction. This research highlights the importance of proactive personality, motivation for expatriation, cultural intelligence on cultural adjustment and career satisfaction. This research gives valuable input to policy making in selection and encouragement of most suitable professional migrant workers who expect to migrate to Middle East from Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Self-Initiated Expatriate, Career Satisfaction, Proactive Personality, Cultural Intelligence

Corresponding darshanadm@uom.lk

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1. Introduction

Number of expatriates across the world is increasing at a rapid rate and a majority of them are expatriate workers (Global Mobility Consulting Services, 2022). International Labour Organization indicates that migrant workers made up one in 20 of the world's workforce in 2019 (UN News, 2021). This trend is likely to continue with globalization and technological advances further assisting flow of knowledge, mobility of factors of production and consolidation of markets. Expatriation and management of expatriation has become a topic of significant research interest (Crowley-Henry, 2012). Large volume of literature still focuses on corporate assigned expatriates. The interest on "Self-Initiating Expatriates" (SIE) is growing in contemporary research in addition to corporate expatriates (Al Ariss, 2010), it remains unclear how SIEs adjust to cultural nuances and achieve career success (Yin 2020; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013). The term "SIE" is defined as "individuals undertaking international career experience on their own initiative rather than on corporate arrangement". They are defined as employees who are not assigned to another country by an organization but have instead chosen to move to another country to work and live on their own arrangement (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010),

The recruitment of foreign professionals would allow for a healthier knowledge sharing environment amongst professionals in the organizations and would be a positive move to increase the competitiveness of these organizations (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). SIEs are in demand due to the talent shortages in many countries and the increasing demand for inter-culturally flexible employees with more differentiated skills set (Merchant, Rao-Nicholson & Iheikhena, 2023). This study hopes to investigate the antecedents of self-initiated expatriates' adjustment and career outcomes for foreign professionals to determine how these professionals are progressing in Qatar and Oman. In this research, SIEs in the forms of foreign professionals are the central focus of investigation due to the increasing number of foreign professionals employed in organizations in Qatar and Oman.

This research is based on an adaptation of a conceptual framework proposed by Cao, Hirschi and Deller (2013) that emphasizes on the psychological processes in SIEs' career development. The framework, based on career capital theory by Inkson and Arthur (2001) explains how SIEs achieve career success during expatriation.

Eby *et al.* (2003) further developed Inkson and Arthur's (2001) career capital theory by categorizing the predictors of career success into "career competencies". Career competencies are also known as career capital. The first competency, knowing-why refers to sense of purpose, motivation, self-confidence and evaluation of a certain career path. As such, in this regard, the foreign professionals in Qatar and Oman are aware of their motives in seeking for career development in Qatar and Oman. The constructs that will be investigated to represent the 'knowing-why' competency are proactive personality and motivation for expatriation.

The second competency as delineated by Eby *et al.* (2003), knowing-how includes technical, conceptual and interpersonal skills, expertise and knowledge one form in their specific career setting. With regards to this research, the 'knowing-how' competency is represented by the construct cultural intelligence (CQ). Although there might be some constructs that can aptly represent the 'knowing-how' competency such as global mindset and intercultural competency, CQ is chosen because due to the nature of the chosen location, Qatar and Oman, which is a multiracial and multiethnic country.

In most expatriation studies, cultural adjustment is the most prominent indicator of expatriation success and has been extensively researched (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005). In this research, cultural adjustment is also regarded as important criteria that can mediate the relationship between the components of career capital (proactive personality, motivation for expatriation and cultural intelligence) and expatriation outcomes in the forms of career success and job performance. Defined as the degree of comfort or absence of stress associated with being an expatriate (Black & Gregersen, 1991), successful cultural adjustment is considered to be a fundamental initial step for SIEs' career management in the host country and can positively influence long-term career success.

The knowledge gap that is addressed in this research is a result of various factors. First, there is a dearth of research on different expatriates who live and work in non-Western environments. In the expatriation literature that bases its case on the motivation factors for the SIEs, host nations like the Middle East are underrepresented (Alshahrani, 2021). Even though the number of Sri Lankans living abroad has considerably increased, little research has recently been done on Sri Lankan SIEs. Context is an essential variable in understanding research outcomes, thus creates this research gap.

In this research, the expatriation outcomes investigated are career satisfaction and job performance. These are important indicators that signify whether these foreign professionals are doing well in a new environment. Career satisfaction here denotes satisfaction with career progression, development of new skills and meeting

career goals. Job performance here indicates both task and contextual performance, which are meeting job expectations and able to integrate effectively in the new environment.

The following Research objectives and hypotheses are developed to investigate the influence of career capital aspects (proactive personality, motivation for expatriation, cultural intelligence) on the foreign professionals' cultural adjustment and in turn positively affects their career outcomes (career satisfaction, job performance) while working in organizations in Qatar and Oman.

- To investigate the relationship between between career capital and career satisfaction of SIEs
- To findout the relationship between career capital and cultural adjustments
- To investigate the relationship between cultural adjustments and career satisfaction

The following hypotheses are formed based on above research objectives.

H1: There is a significant relationship between career capital and career satisfaction

H2: There is a significant relationship between career capital and cultural adjustments

H3: There is a significant relationship between cultural adjustments and career satisfaction

2. Literature Review

Theory of Career Capital

Career Capital is defined as “the value of competencies, knowledge and individual personality attributes that an employee has to produce economic value” (Malek, Budhwar & Reiche, 2015). It is important for the career success of an individual. Career Capital can be increased through education, experience and attitudes and personality attributes that lead to identify and convert opportunities (Alonso-Garbayo & Maben, 2009).

Given the more volatile and unstable environment in contemporary university settings, more professionals are likely to engage in boundaryless careers. According to Eby et al. (2003), success of boundaryless careers depend on extend of career capital possessed by the individual.

According to recent literature, career capital comprises of three dimensions of knowing namely knowing why, how and whom (Cappellen & Janssens, 2005).

Knowing-why competency of academics is measured using established scales of proactive personality (Bateman & Crant, 1993) and motivation for expatriation (Doherty, Dickman & Mills, 2011). Knowing-how component of career capital includes work-related skills, knowledge and understanding needed for good job performance. Recent research has proven that cultural intelligence significantly contributes toward task performance of expatriates (Jyoti & Kour, 2015). A broad knowledge spectrum about host country cultures and a high level of interaction skills with nationals of host country are very likely to enable effective intercultural communication and propel SIEs into better career success (Cao, Hirschi & Deller, 2013). Individual-level cultural intelligence (CQ) is measured using scale developed by Ang et al. (2007) to capture knowing-how dimension.

Proactive Personality

Crant (2000) defined proactive behavior as “taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new one; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions”.

Proactivity is one of the most important personal qualities for employees facing an increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing work environment. Proactive personality can be intrinsic (e.g. focused on goal setting, achievement etc.) or relational orientated (i.e leader member relationships, network development).

Proactive personality can be linked to career capital in such a way that one can acquire information and resources required for career growth by being proactive (Podolny & Baron, 1997). It plays an important role in expatriation career success and behaviour because international opportunities are grabbed and materialized through conscious seek of information and relationships (Yang, Gong & Huo, 2011). More proactive expatriate employees are likely to develop productive workplace relationships and trust (Scheufele & Shah, 2000), engage in frequent information exchange (Yang, Gong & Huo, 2011) and initiate new ideas in the organization (Crant, 2000). Previous research links proactive personality to career satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2001), job performance (Crant, 1995) and career success (Yang & Chau, 2015).

Motivation for Expatriation

Little research has been done on employee intrinsic motivation for an international assignment (Fischer, Malycha, & Schafmann, 2019). Motivations for expatriation are important in international assignments where performance is not only task-specific but includes dealing effectively with the cultural environment of host country. Baruch and Altman (2002) stated that contemporary expatriates are driven more by personal choices or desires than lured by organizational incentives such as better rewards, promotional opportunities etc. But, how expatriation motivational aspects relate to variables of career success in international expatriation research remains largely unexplored (Haines, Saba & Choquette, 2008).

When a professional decides to take employment opportunity abroad, it is necessary that his or her motivations for expatriation and measures of career success are well-matched. Recent research identifies that individual, organisational and macro-level motivations of Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) not only influence the choice of foreign employer and location, but also influence how his/her career success is defined and achieved (Ceric & Crawford, 2016).

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

CQ is defined as “the capability of a person to function in culturally diverse settings” (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Ang et al. (2007) defined “CQ as an ability that can be applied to different cultural settings”. Several empirical research state that CQ is positively linked to the capability of the individual to adapt to the host country (Huff, 2013). Moreover CQ reduces stress levels in foreign assignments, increase the chance of positive outcomes of cross cultural negotiations and expatriate adjustment (Huff, 2013). A number of research have stated that CQ helps the expatriate employees to perform better in an overseas assignment (Aditi & Avery, 2009). Lee and Sukoco (2010) found empirical evidence to prove that CQ is positively related to expatriate job performance.

Further, some components of CQ have been reported to influence cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates (Templer et al., 2006). In a study of international students, Ward et al. (2009) reported that students with high CQ had fewer cultural adjustment problems. Following the past research, in this research CQ is linked to career success and cultural adjustment of foreign academics.

Cultural Adjustment

Both organizations and expatriate employees encounter unique difficulties in foreign assignments. Costly failures in international secondments are common from the organizations side while individuals who have failed in international assignments suffer from negative psychological impacts (Isakovic, & Whitman, 2013).

Inability of expatriate staff adapt to living and working in the novel environment is the main root cause for majority of international staff failures. Hence past research indicates that expatriates will be able to utilize the career capital for career success through the mediation effect of their ability to adjust to host culture (Cao, Hirschi & Deller, 2013).

Cross-cultural adjustment is one of the well-established concepts in expatriation literature (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Cultural adjustment is defined as the “degree of comfort or absence of stress associated with being an expatriate” (Black & Gregersen, 1991). According to the definition of Caligiuri (2000) it is “the degree of psychological comfort of an individual with several aspects of a new environment”. Expatriates need to adjust to three facets of cultural adjustments namely work adjustment, relational adjustment and general adjustment.

The link between career capital and cultural adjustment can be further elaborated through the following argument. SIEs with a high career capital (proactive personality, motivation for expatriation and cultural intelligence) are well aware of cultural differences (i.e they possess high CQ) thus in a position to understand and adjust to nuances in host cultures. On the other hand, SIEs with high proactive personality proactively update their social behavior (e.g. rapid and productive networking with nationals of host country) and thinking patterns to work effectively with peers in host country. Hence those with high career capital are likely to adjust faster and effectively to host country culture (Cao et al., 2013).

Cultural adjustment can be linked to expatriate job performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). As Shaffer and Harrison (1998) pointed out, cultural adjustment is a key predictor of expatriate job performance. If career satisfaction is considered, the more SIEs are able to adjust to host country conditions, more emotional, cognitive or interpersonal support and resources will be at their disposal to achieve career success and general well-being.

Career Satisfaction

Career success has long been measured using objectively observable indicators such as status, promotions and salary (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). On the other hand, subjective career success has been operationalized as job satisfaction or career satisfaction in some studies (Erdogan et al., 2004). Career satisfaction measures “the extent to which individuals believe their career progress is consistent with their own goals, values and preferences” (Erdogan et al., 2004). The career satisfaction is measured based on the 5-item career satisfaction scale by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) in this research to represent more subjective variant of expatriate career outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

This study is explanatory in nature and quantitative research approach was adopted where primary data were collected using survey questionnaires. Survey questionnaire was developed based on measures used in previous related studies to gain information on the level of career capital psychological aspects of foreign professionals, their level of cultural adjustment and career satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

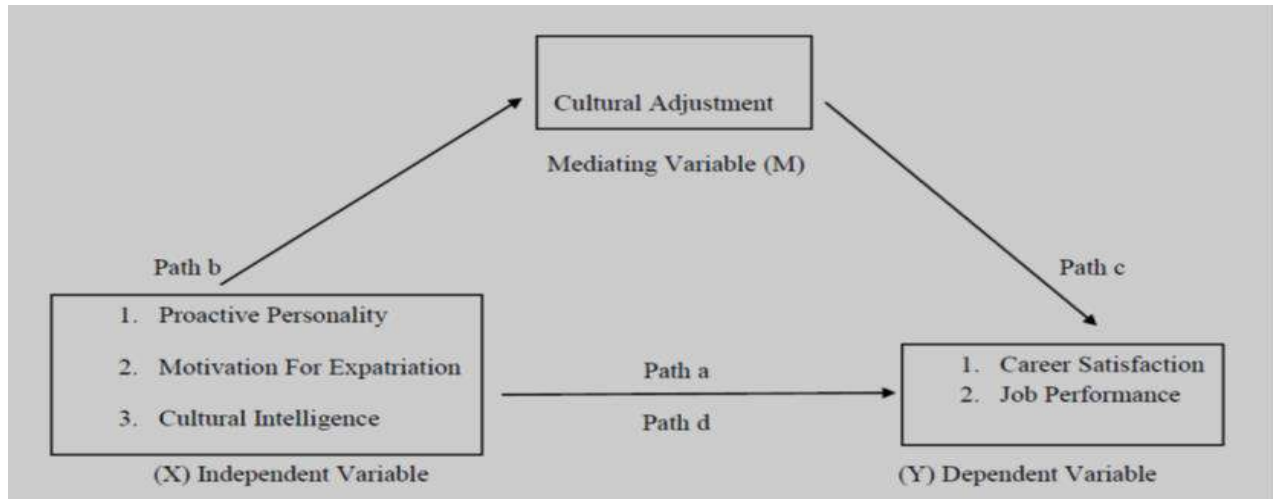


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Research

Population of the study is all self-initiated expatriates; i.e. foreign professionals working in public and private organizations in Qatar and Oman. The sampling frame used for this study is the company members' directories of selected companies in Qatar and Oman. The total population is estimated to be 165,00 where 140,000 is in Qatar and 25,000 in Oman (Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 2017).

The required sample size depends on a number of factors including homogeneity of sampling unit, confidence, precision, statistical power, analytical procedure, cost, time and personnel. However, there are various suggestions for determining sample size. Roscoe (1975) defined that a sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 is appropriate for most studies. For this research, the selected sample size is 200. A simple random sampling method was adopted in selecting the respondent.

The survey questionnaire for this study has 4 different sections where the first section looks at the respondent's demographic profile. Second section consists of questions for all the variables. Variables were measured using five points Likert scale. The investigated variables are proactive personality adapted from Bateman and Crant's (1993) proactive personality scale. Motivation for expatriation of these foreign is investigated using Dickman et al. (2008) and Doherty, Dickman and Mills (2011) motivation drivers to expatriation scale. Individual- level cultural intelligence (CQ) is operationalised using a 20-item CQ scale suggested by Ang et al. (2007). Cultural adjustment is measured by adopting the adjustment framework by Black (Black, 1988) and an updated version of the same scale by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (2000). The career satisfaction of the foreign professionals are measured based on the 5-item career satisfaction scale by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990).

Before the actual distribution of questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted to determine the readers understanding of the items and to confirm the internal reliability. A total of 10 foreign professionals were selected based on convenience basis for this pilot study. They are deemed as the experts in their respective fields. This is to ensure that the items in the questionnaire will be understood by the targeted group.

In total, 200 survey questionnaires were distributed through email. Some questionnaires were also personally distributed in the workplace. In addition, respondents were also promised anonymity for themselves and their organisation, together with a guarantee of the confidentiality of data they provided. The valid data is total of 105 observation with a response rate of 53%.

The theoretical framework and its hypothesis were tested using SPSS-statistical software package (version 20) and SMARTPLS. Data screening was performed to identify data entry errors and to examine how appropriately the data meets the statistical assumptions which involves missing data, treating outliers, descriptive statistics of variables normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of error and multicollinearity.

4. Findings and Analysis

Demographic Profile

A total of 105 foreign professionals were surveyed from different organizations in Qatar and Oman. Majority of the foreign professionals that has being surveyed are female (55%) while 45% are male. 66% of the respondents are of age of 35 to 45 while 25% are between the age of 25 to 35 while the rest are above 45 years old or below 25. Majority of the foreign professionals in the public organizations in Qatar and Oman are married (70%) while the rest are single. 56% of them are staying by their own while 44% are staying here in Qatar and Oman with their family members. When asked why these Sri Lankan professionals chose to work in these organizations in Qatar and Oman, nearly 80% said it is because of the higher income. Some indicated because of good reputation, good career move etc.

Table 1 summarizes the reliability test of all measures after factor analysis has been done (all items of Compatibility factor were eliminated). As shown, the Cronbach alphas of the measures were all comfortably above the lower limit of acceptability that is $\alpha \geq .7$.

Table 1: Summary of Reliability Coefficients for All the Variables in the Study

Variables	Number of items	Reliability
Dependent Variable (s)		
Career Satisfaction (CS)	5	.872
Independent Variable (s) (CC)		
Proactive Personality (PP)	10	.881
Motivation for Expatriation (ME)	34	.945
Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	20	.958
Mediating Variable (s)		
Cultural Adjustment (CA)	11	.934

The histogram plots indicate that although the data is not perfectly normal, there is no serious violation of the normal distribution assumption. Past research indicates that concern of non-normal data is not surprising in social sciences (Osborne, 2010). However, PLS-SEM approach is still useful against non-normal data (Hair et al, 2014).

Multicollinearity was tested for IVs by observing VIF values for all IVs as seen in Table 2 Multicollinearity indicators are acceptable for multivariate analysis (i.e. All VIF values are less than 5 and close to 1).

Table 2: Results of multicollinearity tests

Collinearity Statistics	
Construct	VIF
CS	1.806
PP	1.441
ME	1.800
CQ	1.489
CA	1.856

Analysis of Data Using PLS-SEM (SMARTPLS)

All indicators and first order constructs were conceptualized as the reflective measures of the latent constructs of the study rather than the formative measures that cause the latent constructs as per operationalization in the related past studies.

Minimum factor component loadings of 0.70 or higher are normally considered significant for outer measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). Loading value of 0.5 is regarded as acceptable, the manifest variables with loading value of less than 0.5 should be deleted (Chin, 1998). (Note $t > 1.96$ at $p < 0.05$). All the indicators (i.e. manifest variables) of the outer measurement model of this research fulfilled this criteria of minimum 0.5. The maximum loading reported was from

Fornell and Larcker (1981) stated that if Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5 that is a necessary and sufficient condition for convergent validity of the instrument. AVE is a measure of the shared or common variance in a Latent Variable (LV). The amount of variance that is captured by the LV in relation to the amount of variance due to its measurement error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As seen from Table 3, all AVEs are above 0.5 for the constructs.

Table 3: AVE for the constructs

Variable	Num of items	AVE
CS	5	0.6657
PP	10	0.8066
ME	34	0.8087
CQ	20	0.6413
CA	11	0.5789

Note: The number of bootstrap samples was set to 500 to run the SMARTPLS program.

Table 4: Summary of structural model testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance
H1	CC>CS	0.4550	0.0517	Significant
H2	CC>CA	0.4411	0.0981	Significant
H3	CA>CS	0.2909	0.0837	Significant

R^2 is also called the coefficient of determination because it assesses the proportion (which is converted to percentage by multiplying by 100) of the variance of the endogenous construct that can be explained by its predictor constructs (Hair et al., 2014). There is no threshold for R^2 values as it is highly dependent on the research context (Hair et al., 2010). Falk and Miller (1992) suggest 0.10 as a threshold to identify a minimum level of prediction that can be practical significance. A R^2 0.1 does not add considerable value to the predicting power of the model.

Table 5: Summary of coefficient of determination values for the structural model

Endogenous Latent Variable	R^2
CS	33%

Career Capital and Career Adjustment accounts for 33% of the variance of Career Satisfaction. This is a substantial significance in explaining the dependent variable.

5. Discussion

This study's findings are consistent with a large body of research that finds a link between cultural intelligence measures of career capital and successful career outcomes (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). According to research by Yari et al. (2020), career capital—specifically, training in cultural knowledge—had a significant impact on the professional achievement of immigrant workers in Canada. According to research findings, people acquire general management skills (like social and planning skills) as well as more specialized international competencies, like cross-cultural skills and intelligence, during an international assignment. These competencies are known to influence the career success of expatriate white-collar employees (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). Therefore, it seems sense that individuals with high cultural intelligence would do well at work and like their careers.

This study supports the findings of Barnett and Bradley's (2007) study, which found a favorable relationship between proactive personality and career satisfaction in Australia. According to additional studies, proactive personality exhibited appreciable favorable correlations with work success and career happiness (Ott & Michailova, 2018). This research presents novel insights into current literature on career studies with empirical evidence for South Asian professionals proving that motivational and attitudinal aspects of career studies are influential to career success in middle east context similar to cultural know-how.

The outcome is especially important as professionals who are prepared to take greater ownership of their career success. When selecting expatriation as a path for career growth, Sri Lankan professionals need to develop cultural skills. Associating and interacting with people who have different cultural backgrounds prior to expatriation and developing ability to tolerate cultural difference through personal coaching and education (Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992), increased cultural knowledge, cross-cultural training (Panaccio & Waxin,

2005) etc. are mandatory preparations for professional expatriates. The more different that culture is from that of the country of origin, the more important and necessary is the use of cross-cultural training programs. Stronger preparation on cultural knowledge and experience leads to easy cultural adjustment and career success.

The result is particularly significant since professionals are ready to assume more responsibility for their career success. Professionals must acquire cultural competency before choosing expatriation as a professional route such as interacting and associating with people from different cultural backgrounds before moving abroad and learning to tolerate cultural difference through personal coaching and education (Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992), increased cultural awareness, cross-cultural training (Panaccio & Waxin, 2005), etc. The utilization of cross-cultural training programs becomes more significant and required the more distinct that culture is from the nation of origin. Educated professionals who have had better training in cultural understanding and experience find it easier to adapt to new cultures and succeed in their careers.

Professionals who are aware of, adept at understanding, and capable of making accommodations for cultural differences may have a more positive outlook on their work, increasing career satisfaction (Barakat et al., 2015). Working in a nation with a great deal of cultural distance, like Qatar and Oman, might be difficult for the majority of professionals from Sri Lanka. Overly stressed people typically perform worse and are less happy with their careers. It is thought that by choosing and educating people with high CQ for employment in middle east, this stress can be reduced (Barakat et al., 2015). Therefore, Qatar and Oman institutions must improve the way they choose and hire foreign professionals. Universities can raise the retention rate by providing assistance in the form of programs that help employees become more culturally adapted during the early stages of their overseas assignments.

6. Conclusion

With the impact of globalization, number of expatriates across the world is increasing at a rapid rate in middle east and a majority of them are self-initiated expatriate workers. There is little research on antecedents of career satisfaction of these SIE professionals working in middle east from South Asia. The objective of this research was to identify the antecedents of career satisfaction of Sri Lankan SIE professionals in Oman and Qatar. A quantitative research study was designed. The data used in this study were obtained from 105 respondents and several tests were used to analyze the data. Results indicate that career capital significantly positively affect the career adjustment and career satisfaction. Further, career capital and career adjustment explained 33% of the variance of career satisfaction. Theoretically, this research adds to the scarce literature of SIEs in middle east and SIEs from Sri Lanka. Practically, this study offers significant policy-making insight into the most desired characteristics of the migrant workers who intend to leave Sri Lanka for the Middle East.

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