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Expatriates' withdrawal intentions

The influence of organizational culture and satisfaction with the assignment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of perceived home and destination organizational culture characteristics and general satisfaction with the assignment as antecedents of expatriates' withdrawal intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through a web survey of an international sample of expatriates with a broad representation of industries, organizations and countries of origin and destination.

Findings – The results indicate that home and destination organizational cultures affect expatriates' withdrawal intentions, after controlling for demographics and national cultural differences, namely: home organizational culture has a stronger influence on withdrawal intentions from the organization, while host organizational culture affects withdrawal intentions from the assignment. Further, the relationship between host organizational culture and expatriates' intentions to withdraw from the assignment is mediated by expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment. Evidence was also found supporting a stronger and negative influence of the goal orientation dimension of organizational culture, thus suggesting that a collective orientation toward common business goals (i.e. solidarity) may help retain expatriates.

Originality/value – This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the influence of organizational culture on expatriates' withdrawal intentions, and the mediating role of expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment, on that relationship.

Keywords Organizational culture, Quantitative, Expatriates, General assignment satisfaction, Withdrawal intentions

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The literature has consistently shown that turnover intentions and withdrawal cognitions are predictors of turnover and expatriates are no exception (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005). Withdrawal cognitions involve both a perception and a plan to voluntarily change one's circumstances (Koslowsky, 2009) related to the job, the organization or the occupation (Blau, 2000, 2007; Carmeli, 2005). Despite a long tradition of turnover research, less is known about the way organizational culture influences turnover. Some organizational cultures were found to foster loyalty and long-term commitment, while others fail to nurture positive attitudes that ultimately encourage withdrawal and voluntary turnover (Abelson, 1993; Iverson and Deery, 1997). The evidence available shows that the organizational culture can have a strong influence on job attitudes and workplace behaviors (e.g. Jain, 2015), including withdrawal intentions (Carmeli, 2005). For example, a study of college graduates working for accounting firms found that an organizational culture emphasizing interpersonal relationship values is more attractive and better at retaining professionals over time than an organizational culture valuing work task values (Sheridan, 1992). And Carmeli (2005), in a research involving social workers from Israel, found that job challenge – one of the organizational culture dimensions studied – was the strongest predictor of withdrawal intentions. The results suggest that the higher the job challenge, the lower the intention to withdraw from the job, the organization, and the occupation. In this study, Carmeli (2005) followed Blau's (2000, 2007)



three distinct dimensions of withdrawal intentions: from the job defined as the individual's intentions to leave the current job in the near future though remaining in the same organization; from the organization reflecting the individual's intention to leave the employing company in the near future; and from the occupation referring to the individual's intentions to leave his/her current career (Carmeli, 2005).

In the international context, this framework seems particularly valuable to discern the diverse and unique antecedents of expatriates' turnover intentions. Knowing how organizational culture precludes expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment and the organization (Blau, 2000, 2007; Carmeli, 2005) can be particularly useful to anticipate expatriates' attitudes and reduce voluntary turnover. Organizations are increasingly expecting employees to take expatriate assignments (Bolino *et al.*, 2016; Collings, 2014) but employees often accept them unwillingly, leading to the development of negative attitudes toward the assignment (Pinto *et al.*, 2012) and the company (Pinto and Caldas, 2015), and ultimately triggering a premature return from the assignment and exiting from the organization. As turnover intentions and withdrawal cognitions are antecedents of actual turnover they can anticipate a behavior (voluntary turnover) that can be avoided if companies act proactively. Over time, if employees feel connected to the company they are more likely to stay despite the hardship of the assignment; however, when the employees do not connect with the perceived and observable behaviors of household members and of the foreign company they are more likely to leave.

This study extends earlier research (e.g. Boyle *et al.*, 2012) and tests these assumptions by examining how perceived home and host organizational cultures influence expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment and withdrawal intentions. Drawing on Goffee and Jones' (1998) organizational culture model this research examines how home and host perceived social interactions (e.g. sociability) and perceived goal attainment behaviors (e.g. solidarity) affect expatriates' attitudes and cognitions, such as satisfaction with the assignment and withdrawal intentions from the assignment and the organization. A research design was adopted using an international diversified sample of corporate expatriates, defined here as employees who are sent by their employers to live and work abroad on a temporary basis, to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organizational goal (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012). The terms expatriates, corporate expatriates and assigned expatriates are then used interchangeably.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature in various ways. First, it examines the influence of organizational culture in the international context. Following previous suggestions to further investigate the impact of goal congruence between home and host companies (Pattie *et al.*, 2013) and examine the integration of global mobility with talent management (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016), this study looks at the influence of perceived organizational culture at the individual level, despite the impact of cultural distance. By doing so, this study extends the debate on national culture and organizational culture interactions in the global setting (Boyle *et al.*, 2012; Stahl and Tung, 2015), and illustrates the usefulness of recognizing that organizational culture is reflected and expressed at an individual level, affecting job attitudes and intentions. Second, it examines the influence of both home and host organizational cultures in terms of expatriates' satisfaction and withdrawal intentions. Implicit is the assumption that the perceived characteristics of both organizational cultures can influence expatriates' satisfaction and turnover intentions, and therefore, can enhance retention. Whereas earlier research has emphasized the importance of person-situation fit (e.g. O'Reilly III *et al.*, 1991; Wheeler *et al.*, 2007), this study examines the dimensions of both organizational cultures that can predict expatriates' attitudes and withdrawal intentions. Third, it provides empirical validation to the conceptual distinction between the intentions to leave the job/assignment and the organization suggested by Blau (2000, 2007) and Carmeli (2005). As pointed out above, this distinction is particularly

useful in the international context, to understand the unique antecedents of expatriates' turnover. Additionally, the findings suggest that expatriates' turnover can be deterred by organizational influence, thus stressing the need to carefully conceptualize turnover and empirically examine a broader range of organizational causal factors in the expatriate setting (Naumann *et al.*, 2000; Naumann, 1992, 1993).

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Turnover and expatriates' withdrawal intentions

Reviews of the domestic turnover literature (e.g. Steel and Lounsbury, 2009) focus on three core mechanisms in the turnover process: affective factors (such as job attitudes and satisfaction), perceptual factors (such as intentions to withdraw), and job market factors (such as job search and market offer). The underlying rationale is that a disappointing work environment leads to tensions that affect job attitudes (such as satisfaction and organizational commitment), which trigger withdrawal cognitions and job search mechanisms. The efforts to overcome the tensions may lead to voluntary turnover. Substantial empirical evidence supports this rationale and suggests the influence of other secondary mechanisms, such as personal factors (e.g. age, tenure, training, personal traits and skills), job factors (e.g. job rewards, job stress, role conflict) and organizational characteristics (e.g. organizational size, industry). Turnover intentions are then part of this withdrawal process (Mobley *et al.*, 1979), and shape the self-perception that the individual will be leaving the current employer in the near future (Mowday *et al.*, 1982). Moreover, turnover intention is a strong predictor and often used as a proxy for actual turnover (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000).

Among the antecedents of turnover, there has been an increasing interest in exploring the individual differences, such as personality traits (Zimmerman, 2008), the contextual and environmental factors, and the linkages between the environment and the individual decision process (Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009). The latter stresses the influence of organizational characteristics, though the dominant view is based on the idea of fit. The focus is on the level of congruence between organizational and personal characteristics (person-organization fit) and the interaction between job and individual attributes (person-job fit). For instance, O'Reilly III *et al.* (1991) explored the influence of person-culture fit on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, finding that people whose values did not fit the organizational values (low person-organization fit) were less committed to the organization, less satisfied with their job and more likely to leave the organization.

Among international employees, some unique antecedents of expatriates' turnover were explored (e.g. Birdseye and Hill, 1995), such as expatriation adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), job satisfaction (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Bonache, 2005), goal congruence (Pattie *et al.*, 2013), perceived career support (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009), and lack of appropriate job alternatives upon return (Vidal *et al.*, 2007).

In researching turnover, increased attention has been paid to variables affecting staying instead of leaving (Holtom *et al.*, 2008), which is best illustrated by Mitchell *et al.* (2001) concept of "job embeddedness." According to this construct, employees' retention is predicted by the strength of the links established with others, the perceptions of fit (with the job, the organization and the community), and the perceived sacrifices upon leaving (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). This concept has also been applied to the retention of expatriates (e.g. Reiche *et al.*, 2011; Shen and Hall, 2009), thus suggesting that assignment embeddedness, and home/host organizational embeddedness can explain expatriates' retention in the assignment and the organization. From this viewpoint, expatriates tend to remain in the assignment when the assignment fits their values and goals, feel linked to the locals, and guess that a premature return would entail personal and/or professional

sacrifices. In contrast, when expatriates fail to adjust and/or the international assignment fails to fit their career-goals, withdrawal intentions tend to increase either regarding the assignment and/or the organization. While this stream of research looks promising, it overlooks the process by which other major contextual and organizational variables influence expatriates' work attitudes and behaviors. For instance, in a recent study, Pattie *et al.* (2013) found that the degree of congruence between the home supervisor and the expatriate, regarding the expatriate assignment fit into the organizational career path, was negatively related to turnover intentions. The fact that the social connection with the home supervisors can improve expatriates' experience abroad suggests that other organizational variables, such as home and host organizational cultures, can contribute to expatriates retention. Yet, research exploring the consequences of organizational culture remains scarce and organizational culture has not been included into expatriation turnover models (Siers, 2007; Van Dick *et al.*, 2004).

Organizational culture and expatriates' withdrawal intentions

While the influence of national cultural differences and cultural distance have been well documented in the expatriation literature as a source of stress and one of the main reasons for expatriation failure (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), the influence of organizational culture has been largely overlooked. This may be a direct result of the difficulty to define organizational culture and distinguish it from national culture. Organizational culture was defined by Schein (1992, p. 12) as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions one group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration." While organizational culture distinguishes one organization from the others (Taras *et al.*, 2009) and shapes the perceptions, cognitions, and emotions of organizational members (Schein, 1992), expatriates might have difficulties distinguishing organizational cultural values from the national ones. On the one hand, expatriates are typically more familiar and identified with home company values than the values of the destination subsidiary (Ishii, 2012). On the other hand, host organizational values are often so embedded in the local national culture that expatriates tend to amalgamate organizational and national cultural values (Donga and Glaister, 2009; Osland and Osland, 2005). In addition, expatriate assignments are temporary, not allowing for the time and resources (e.g. host language fluency) needed to fully understand host company values. To overcome this constraint, Taras *et al.* (2009) suggest approaching organizational culture through the use of other indicators besides values, collecting data through the survey of perceived and observable behaviors among the members of home and destination organizations. Hence, in this study, organizational member behaviors are grouped into two cultural dimensions – sociability and solidarity – following Goffee and Jones' (1996, 1998) organizational culture framework. According to this model, sociability is a measure of perceived friendliness among people and surfaces when they share similar social values; and solidarity is a measure of observed relatedness motivated by mutual interests and goals. In an organizational context, sociability breeds informality, loyalty, closeness, and friendly relationships and, above all, a strong sense of belonging and commitment to the group (Goffee and Jones, 1996, 1998). While positive, a context of high sociability can have negative effects, especially when it endorses a disproportionate need for consensus and undue tolerance for friends' faults, ultimately leading to politicking and poor performance (Goffee and Jones, 1996, 1998). Differently, solidarity arises when people share common interests and perceive the advantages of pursuing them collectively (Goffee and Jones, 1996, 1998). A context of high solidarity displays collective energy and focus on the attainment of shared goals. Although solidarity is generally positive, high solidarity may have negative outcomes (Goffee and Jones, 1996, 1998). An excessive endorsement of collective goals and a disproportionate focus on winning (above all other values) can promote extreme competition and ruthless

relationships, ultimately damaging social networks and performance (Goffee and Jones, 1996, 1998). Goffee and Jones' (1998) framework has found earlier empirical support (Jain, 2015; Rashid *et al.*, 2004). In the Indian context, Jain (2015) found that the sociability dimension had a positive impact on the sense of belonging felt by the managers of a local company, while the solidarity dimension had a positive impact on their continuance commitment and organizational attraction. In an earlier study, Rashid *et al.* (2004) reported a positive association between perceived organizational culture and managers' attitudes toward change, as the findings suggest that a high solidarity work environment combined with a low tolerance for poor performance are more conducive to organizational change.

The rationale underlying the influence of organizational culture is that the behaviors exhibited by organizational members can be a source of information about what is acceptable or not, and is a valuable guidance for employees' behavior. To the extent that expatriates are exposed to substantial cultural, social, and professional challenges, perceived home and host organizational cultures are likely to influence their attitudes, guide their behaviors, and affect their withdrawal intentions. In fact, earlier research on the retention of international workers linked job challenge, goal congruence, commitment, and social embeddedness to their intention to remain in the organization (Carmeli, 2005; Nguyen *et al.*, 2015; Pattie *et al.*, 2013; Reiche *et al.*, 2011; Shen and Hall, 2009). Based on the empirical evidence available (e.g. Jain, 2015; Rashid *et al.*, 2004) and on Goffee and Jones' (1996, 1998) framework, it is expected that an organizational culture perceived as high on sociability and solidarity is likely to be negatively related to withdrawal intentions. As sociability forms an environment of informality, loyalty and friendly relationships, it will boost expatriates' social acceptance and integration that will decrease withdrawal intentions. Similarly, as solidarity promotes a competitive and challenging work environment, it is likely to foster the perception of goals orientation and attainment, which in turn may reduce withdrawal intentions. While observed behaviors of home co-workers are likely to indicate what to expect from the home company, the observed behaviors of host co-workers are likely to suggest what to expect from the assignment and the host company. It is, therefore, admitted that the characteristics of the home organizational culture are more influential of the expatriates' withdrawal from the organization, whereas the characteristics of the host organizational culture are more influential of the withdrawal intentions from the assignment, thus suggesting the following hypotheses:

- H1. Perceived home organizational culture dimensions of (a) sociability and (b) solidarity are negatively associated with expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the organization.
- H2. Perceived host organizational culture dimensions of (a) sociability and (b) solidarity are negatively associated with expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment.

Organizational culture and expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment

The influence of organizational culture on expatriate's job satisfaction has also received limited attention. In the domestic context, it was found that a supportive and results-oriented organizational culture focused on professional features increases employees' job satisfaction (Bellou, 2010). This evidence supports the predictions of Goffee and Jones (1998), in that an organizational culture perceived as high on sociability (i.e. supportive) and solidarity (i.e. competitive) is likely to promote employees satisfaction. Consistent with research in domestic settings, expatriates' job satisfaction, defined as a positive emotional state related to one's job (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011), has a set of work-related predictors, such as work-role clarity (Black and Gregersen, 1990), among other unique predictors such as expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), perceived social support (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011), and national cultural differences (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011).

Overall, unmet expectations, lack of organizational support, and high cultural differences seem to reduce expatriates' job satisfaction in the international context.

Given the complexity of expatriate assignments and the influence of many work- and non-work-related requirements (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), this study targets expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment instead of job satisfaction. The overall satisfaction with the assignment, in terms of a positive attitude and appraisal toward the assignment, is expected to be influenced by work and non-work variables, such as the perception of the characteristics of home and host organizational cultures. Because both companies frame the scope, the context, the resources, and the support provided during the expatriate assignment, the dimensions of both home and host organizational culture are likely to influence expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment, as follows:

H3. Perceived home organizational culture dimensions of (a) sociability and (b) solidarity are positively associated with expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment.

H4. Perceived host organizational culture dimensions of (a) sociability and (b) solidarity are positively associated with expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment.

Earlier research shows that job satisfaction and turnover intentions are inversely related (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Holtom *et al.*, 2008) and expatriates are no exception (e.g. Stahl *et al.*, 2009). Because the way expatriates experience the assignment is likely to influence their intentions to withdraw from the assignment, and ultimately determine their intentions to withdraw from the organization, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5. General assignment satisfaction is negatively related with expatriates' withdrawal intentions from (a) the assignment and (b) the organization.

Because expatriates satisfied with the assignment might intend to remain, while expatriates dissatisfied might intend to withdraw and return earlier, one expects that satisfaction with the assignment mediates the unique relationship between perceived host organizational culture and expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment. The following hypothesis is then formulated:

H6. General assignment satisfaction mediates the relationship between host organizational culture dimensions of (a) sociability and (b) solidarity, and expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment.

Figure 1 presents the theoretical model and the hypothesized relationships between the dimensions of organizational culture and expatriates' general satisfaction and withdrawal intentions.

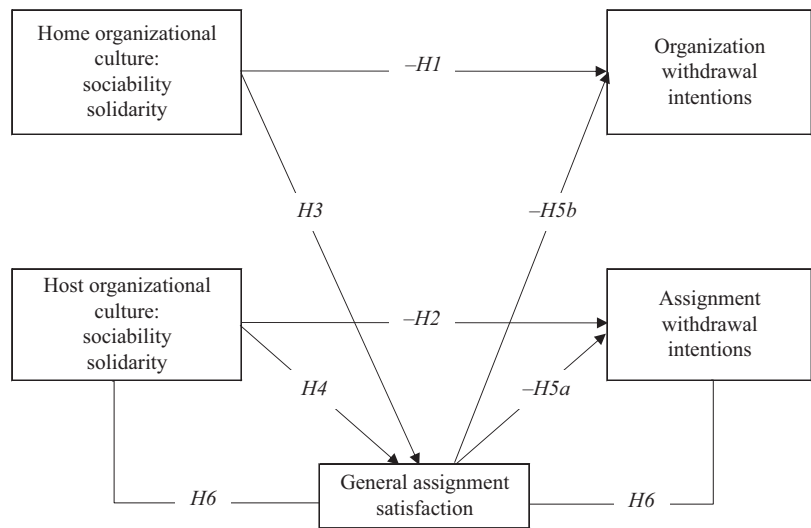
Method

Procedure and sample

To ensure a diversified sample of corporate expatriates several multinationals, from various industries and origins, were approached. Requests for participation were targeted to the heads of the human resource departments who were invited to join the research and forward a web survey to all potential respondents. While individual participation was voluntary and anonymous, the participating companies received a short final report in return for their collaboration.

Overall, eight multinational companies joined this research and 166 expatriates completed the survey. The overall reported response rate was 49.3 percent, which is in line with other studies with expatriates (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). The typical respondent was male (76.5 percent), married (57.9 percent), highly qualified (only ten were not graduated) and aged 40.79 years ($SD = 10.13$). Most held managerial (63.3 percent) and professional

Figure 1.
Proposed framework
and hypotheses



positions (19.3 percent) abroad. The average tenure in the company was 9.82 years ($SD = 7.61$) and were displaced for 2.81 years ($SD = 3.83$). Most respondents originated from the USA (24.7 percent), India (13.9 percent), the UK (10.0 percent), and Germany (6.0 percent) and were displaced in China (16.0 percent), the USA (10.0 percent), and Switzerland (10.0 percent). Over 80 percent of the participants had previous international experience, having been abroad before, on average, for five years ($SD = 6.58$). While participants came from different companies and industries, no significant differences were found according to company provenience. Also, there were no significant differences between the dependent variables, related to expatriates' gender, age, earlier international experience, tenure in the company, and the assignment. Overall, these demographics are similar to what has been reported in earlier cross-cultural studies (Selmer and Leung, 2003; Stahl and Cerdin, 2004), and depict a sample of "traditional and prototypical expatriates" (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016, p. 127).

Measures

Organizational culture was measured by the sociability and solidarity scales of Goffee and Jones's (1998). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 1-5 Likert scale, their level of agreement with 23 statements reflecting individual behaviors observable at home and destination companies. A sample item for the solidarity dimension is: "At Home/Host company poor performance is dealt with quickly and firmly," while an example for the sociability dimension is: "At Home/Host company, people often socialize outside work." Following a confirmatory factor analysis, four items with factor loadings below 0.5 were discarded. The final solidarity scale contained ten items, whereas the final sociability scale included nine items. Both scales had good internal consistencies with α coefficients (Cronbach's α) ranging from 0.807 for home sociability to 0.843 for host solidarity.

Withdrawal intentions from the assignment and the organization were measured adapting Carmeli's (2005) scale. A five-point agreement scale was used with items such as: "I think a lot of leaving the present assignment/organization," "As soon as it is possible, I will leave the present assignment/organization," and "I am actively searching for an alternative to the present assignment/organization." The results of the confirmatory factor analysis confirmed a two-factor structure that explained 83.74 percent of the total variance, and the

internal reliability (Cronbach's α) of the two scales ranged from 0.860 to 0.880. The results are consistent with the analysis of Carmeli (2005) and support the use of these measures.

General satisfaction with the assignment was measured using a 1-5 agreement scale adapted from Bonache (2005) and containing five items, such as: "I am satisfied with my present assignment," or "My overall satisfaction with the present assignment is excellent." From the confirmatory factor analysis, a single five-item factor was extracted, explaining 79 percent of the variance, with an internal reliability (Cronbach's α) of 0.931.

Several demographic variables found in previous studies to influence domestic and international turnover and withdrawal cognitions (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Holtom *et al.*, 2008) were included as control variables, such as: age, gender, marital status, education, tenure in the company and in the assignment, origin and destination, and cultural distance. Gender, marital status, and education were dummy coded (0 = female, 1 = male; 0 = not married, 1 = married; 0 = no higher-education, 1 = high-education). Age and tenure (in the company and the assignment) were computed in years. Origin and destination were first listed and then used to compute cultural distance following Kogut and Singh's (1988) procedure. Cultural distance was calculated as the deviation along each one of the four cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980) (i.e. power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and individualism) for the reported home and host countries.

Data analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out using the SPSS statistical computer package and a four-stage procedure was adopted. In the initial stage, responses to the items measuring organizational culture, general satisfaction, and withdrawal intentions were factor analyzed and factor scores obtained used for subsequent data analysis. The Cronbach's α reliability for each scale was computed and is indicated in Table II. In the second stage, descriptive statistics, and correlations between the research variables were computed and reported in Table II. In the third stage, multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses and assess the extent to which the dimensions of home and host sociability and solidarity predict expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment and withdrawal intentions (as reported in Table II). All regression analyses were controlled for demographics (age, gender, marital status, education, tenure in the company and the assignment), and cultural distance. Finally, to test the mediating effect of general assignment satisfaction (*H6*), three sets of regressions were conducted separately for each dependent variable, following Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure. In the first step, the mediator – general assignment satisfaction – was regressed on the independent variables: host sociability and solidarity dimensions. If, as expected, host cultural dimensions affect the mediator, their regression weights are expected to be significant (*H4*). In step 2, the dependent variable – withdrawal intentions from the assignment – was regressed on the host organizational culture dimensions. If, as expected, organizational culture dimensions predict assignment withdrawal intentions, then a significant β weight is expected for these dimensions (*H2*). In step 3, the dependent variables were regressed on both the independent and the mediator. If the mediating condition holds, the mediator should be related to the dependent variables (*H5*) and the effects of host organizational culture dimensions on the withdrawal intentions from the assignment are expected to be lower in this third step, when compared to step 2. Hence, the β weights for these dimensions are expected to be lower, in this third step (*H6*).

Common method bias

To mitigate the risk of common method bias several actions were taken following Podsakoff *et al.*'s (2003) recommendations, such as using different response formats, pilot-testing the

questionnaire and providing instructions that there were no right or wrong answers. Besides, all measures were factor analyzed to investigate whether a compressed range of answers emerged, due to a social desirability effect. The interpretation was based on factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and items with a loading of at least 0.5. Since the factor analyses confirmed the underlying constructs and the independence of the variables, the theoretical integrity of the research model was supported.

Results

Table I indicates sample means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the main research variables.

Table I shows low to moderate correlations between the dimensions of organizational culture, general assignment satisfaction, and withdrawal intentions. Home solidarity is negatively and significantly correlated with organization withdrawal ($r = -0.20$; $p < 0.01$), while host solidarity is negatively correlated with assignment withdrawal ($r = -0.24$; $p < 0.01$) and is positively correlated with general assignment satisfaction ($r = 0.39$; $p < 0.01$). General assignment satisfaction is negatively and significantly correlated with the two withdrawal measures that are highly and positively correlated ($r = 0.73$; $p < 0.01$). Cultural distance is not significantly correlated with the research variables.

Table II depicts the results of the regression analyses. Multicollinearity is indicated by tolerance values close to 0 and variance inflation factor (VIF) over 10 (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). The collinearity statistics for the regression analyses showed tolerance levels of 0.657 and above, and VIF values no greater than 1.520, thus suggesting that multicollinearity was not an issue.

H1 predicted a negative association between home sociability and home solidarity, and expatriates' intentions to withdraw from the organization. This hypothesis is partially supported. In the regression and after controlling for demographic variables and cultural distance (in step 2), the results indicate that home sociability has no significant effect but home solidarity has a negative effect on the intentions to withdraw from the organization ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.05$), as predicted. This finding fully supports *H1b* and suggests that a stronger focus on business goals among headquarters' organizational members is associated with lower intentions to withdraw from the organization.

H2 predicted a negative association between host sociability and host solidarity and expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment. This hypothesis is partially supported. In the regression, and after controlling for demographic variables and cultural distance (in step 2), host solidarity has a significant and negative effect on expatriates' intentions to withdraw from the assignment ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$), which supports *H2b*.

H3 and *H4* predicted a positive association, respectively, between home and host organizational culture dimensions of sociability and solidarity, and expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment. After controlling for the influence of demographic variables and cultural distance, only host solidarity is positively correlated with general assignment satisfaction ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), which supports *H4b*.

H5 stated a negative relationship between general assignment satisfaction and expatriates' withdrawal intentions from the assignment, and the organization. After controlling for the influence of the demographic variables and cultural distance, the results of step 3 for both models of withdrawal intentions indicate that general assignment satisfaction is negatively related with the assignment and organizational withdrawal intentions, thus fully supporting *H5*. As predicted, this finding suggests that an increase in the satisfaction with the assignment reduces the intentions to withdraw from the assignment, and ultimately the organization.

H6 stated that general assignment satisfaction mediates the relationship between host organizational culture dimensions of sociability and solidarity, and expatriates' withdrawal

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	40.79	10.13														
2. Gender	0.77	0.43	0.15													
3. Marital status	0.73	0.45	0.30**	0.11												
4. Education	0.91	0.28	0.08	-0.12	-0.04											
5. Tenure in the company	9.82	7.61	0.50**	0.19*	0.23**	-0.01										
6. Tenure in the assignment	2.81	3.83	0.34**	0.16	0.20*	-0.17*	0.43**									
7. Cultural distance	2.06	1.41	0.09	0.13	-0.05	-0.16*	0.09	0.10								
8. Home sociability	28.83	6.04	-0.17*	-0.06	-0.01	0.08	-0.01	0.00	-0.04	(0.82)						
9. Home solidarity	33.23	6.30	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.12	0.16	0.06	0.00	0.47**	(0.82)					
10. Host sociability	26.92	6.40	-0.05	-0.03	0.07	0.06	0.21*	0.05	0.02	0.14	0.20**	(0.83)				
11. Host solidarity	31.39	7.02	-0.06	0.09	0.15	-0.07	0.13	0.11	-0.12	0.24**	0.38**	0.35**	(0.84)			
12. General assignment satisfaction	3.56	0.98	0.10	0.06	0.07	-0.04	0.22**	0.12	0.10	0.12	0.15	0.30**	0.39**	(0.93)		
13. Assignment withdrawal intentions	2.31	1.19	-0.17*	-0.10	-0.17*	-0.04	-0.22**	-0.05	-0.08	0.06	-0.12	-0.14	-0.24**	-0.56**	(0.86)	
14. Organization withdrawal intentions	2.09	1.23	-0.06	-0.11	-0.16*	0.01	-0.18*	0.05	-0.10	0.04	-0.20**	-0.12	-0.18*	-0.45**	0.73**	(0.88)

Notes: $n = 131$ -166; two tailed. Gender: "female" = 0; "male" = 1; marital status: "not-married" = 0, "married" = 1; education: "no higher-education" = 0, "high education" = 1. Cronbach's α estimates in parentheses, along the main diagonal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table I. Mean, standard deviations and correlation among study variables

Table II.
Multiple regressions
of the hypothesized
relationships between
the dimensions of
home and host
organizational
culture and the
dependent variables

Predictors	General assignment satisfaction		Organization withdrawal intentions			Assignment withdrawal intentions		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Intercept</i>	3.37**	1.95***	2.37***	3.69***	5.41***	2.70***	3.97***	5.28***
<i>Demographics</i>								
Age	0.03	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.06	-0.09	-0.14	-0.09
Gender	-0.04	-0.06	-0.07	-0.06	-0.07	-0.04	-0.02	-0.05
Marital status	-0.02	-0.07	-0.12	-0.11	-0.11	-0.14	-0.10	-0.14
Education	-0.09	-0.07	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.01	-0.01	-0.04
Tenure in the company	0.20*	0.14	-0.17*	-0.13	-0.06	-0.22*	-0.18*	-0.10
Tenure in the assignment	0.03	0.02	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.05	0.06	0.07
Cultural distance	0.05	0.12	-0.09	-0.10	-0.08	-0.08	-0.13	-0.07
<i>Mediator</i>								
General assignment satisfaction					-0.39**			-0.53***
<i>Predictors</i>								
Home sociability		-0.08		0.13	0.12		0.15	0.11
Home solidarity		-0.10		-0.21*	-0.20*		-0.04	-0.09
Host sociability		0.08		-0.06	0.02		-0.04	0.02
Host solidarity		0.35**		-0.12	0.03		-0.25**	-0.07
Overall <i>F</i>	5.54*	12.39***	3.93*	4.92**	11.70***	6.69**	7.98**	22.46***
<i>R</i> ²	0.04	0.16	0.03	0.07	0.21	0.05	0.11	0.35
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.03	0.15	0.02	0.05	0.20	0.04	0.10	0.33
Change in <i>R</i> ²		0.12		0.04	0.14		0.06	0.24
Notes: <i>n</i> = 131-166. Standardized β coefficients are reported after Z-score transformation. * <i>p</i> < 0.05; ** <i>p</i> < 0.01; *** <i>p</i> < 0.001								

intentions from the assignment. The results indicate that host solidarity is negatively related with assignment withdrawal intentions and positively associated with assignment satisfaction. When assignment withdrawal intentions are regressed on the independent variables (host organizational culture dimensions), and the mediator (general satisfaction), the β weight for host solidarity decreases (in step 3), and has no significant effect on assignment withdrawal intentions (R^2 change = 0.24; $\beta = -0.07$, $p > 0.05$). This result supports *H6b* and suggests that satisfaction with the assignment mediates the influence of host solidarity on assignment withdrawal intentions. As predicted, general assignment satisfaction reduces the magnitude of the relationship between host solidarity and assignment withdrawal intentions.

Though not hypothesized, the results also show that when organizational withdrawal intentions are regressed on the independent variables (home organizational culture dimensions), and the mediator (general satisfaction), the β weight for home solidarity slightly decreases (in step 3) but remains significant ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$), which suggests that home solidarity is a relevant predictor of expatriates' intentions to leave the organization regardless of expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment.

Discussion

This study attempted to fill a gap in the literature by examining the influence of home and host organizational cultures on expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment and withdrawal intentions.

Regarding the influence of organizational culture, the results show that home and host organizational cultures are both influential, regardless of cultural distance. This finding questions the dominant cultural distance causality (McSweeney, 2016) and supports the view that expatriate research should focus the contexts where expatriates operate (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016). Participants were inquired neither about the degree of fit between both companies nor the degree of consistency between their behaviors and the ones observed among co-workers (e.g. person-environment fit). The findings are indicative of the dimensions of the organizational culture that best predict expatriates' satisfaction and withdrawal intentions, regardless of matching or not their preferences. In fact, the observation of a high degree of relatedness among organizational members motivated by mutual interests and goals (e.g. solidarity) influence expatriates' attitudes and withdrawal intentions. As predicted, home solidarity precludes expatriates' intentions to leave the organization; and host solidarity fosters expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment and decreases assignment withdrawal intentions. These results corroborate earlier findings on the importance of a goal orientation approach (Wang and Takeuchi, 2007) and the provision of challenging assignments (Preenen *et al.*, 2011). Yet, they also open new avenues for researching the link between person-organization fit and organizational culture (Silverthorne, 2004), although the impact of the specific characteristics of the home and host organizational cultures is worth considering, regardless of cultural distance and expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment. Unexpectedly, a social interactive and supportive organizational culture (e.g. sociability) is innocuous to promote expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment and decrease withdrawal intentions. The explanation for this requires further research. It is possible that while observed solidarity reduces stress and uncertainty, thus fostering a performance oriented environment where it is advantageous to remain; observed sociability can increase stress and uncertainty about social engagement and networking, driving expatriates to search for less hectic organizational environments. Perceptions of organizational politics may increase in high sociability contexts, as suggested by Goffee and Jones (1998) leading to psychological strain, low morale, and increased turnover intentions (Chang *et al.*, 2009). While this is speculative, it is indicative of the need to further extend turnover models and include employees' social networks and attachment to the job and the organization.

Regarding turnover, while withdrawal intentions from the assignment and the organization were positively correlated, the findings demonstrate these are two separate dimensions of the withdrawal process. As expected, expatriates might return earlier from the assignment but remain in the organization or may grow the intention to leave the organization despite the satisfaction with the assignment. Among the individual antecedents, only tenure in the company is a negative predictor of both withdrawal dimensions, thus confirming that a long employment relationship can deter turnover even among expatriates.

This study also shows that general satisfaction with the assignment is an important predictor of expatriates' withdrawal intentions, thus confirming previous studies with domestic employees (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Griffeth *et al.*, 2000). Yet, and contrary to earlier evidence among Japanese expatriates (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011), satisfaction with the assignment was unrelated to cultural distance, which can be explained by the higher cultural diversity of this sample. Regarding the relationship between host organizational culture and assignment withdrawal intentions, the mediation of general satisfaction suggests the possibility of other mediators, such as organizational identification (Ishii, 2012; Van Dick *et al.* 2004; Van Knippenberg and Sleebos, 2006), psychological strain and morale, and perceptions of organizational politics (Chang *et al.*, 2009; Miller *et al.*, 2008), which warrant further research.

Limitations and further research

This study has some limitations that are acknowledged. The cross-sectional design adopted is often used to examine unexplored relationships, but cannot be employed to ascertain a

one-way influence. Besides, results are limited by the use of self-reported data that could be under the influence of common method variance. Although precautions were taken to prevent it (cf. Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), the risk of a social desirability bias remains. On the other hand, the variance explained in withdrawal intentions is moderate, suggesting the presence of other independent variables and mediators that have to be taken into consideration in the future. Researchers are encouraged to extend the current findings by collecting data from multiple sources, including withdrawal intentions and actual turnover. Because data are limited to expatriates withdrawal intentions during the assignment, it would be beneficial to collect data at different moments in time (following a longitudinal approach) to better capture the development of satisfaction and withdrawal intentions over time. Following Holtom *et al.* (2008) call to further explore international differences, researchers are also advised to look at the influence of social ties, and determine how (unmet) expectations may affect withdrawal intentions, turnover decisions, and outcomes.

Practical implications

These findings have practical implications for international human resource managers (IHRM) seeking to increase expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment. Based on these results, practitioners and expatriates should not underestimate the role of organizational culture, namely the importance of defining, communicating, sharing, and fostering goals-oriented behaviors among all organizational members. A collective sense of direction both in the headquarters and the destination company nourishes the conviction that the assignment goals are shared and achievable, which in turn strengthens expatriates' general satisfaction with the assignment, and reduces assignment withdrawal intentions. When the home organizational culture has a collective sense of direction also fosters a positive attitude toward remaining in the organization. Overall, these results indicate IHRM should ponder what organizational practices are best to manage the turnover of expatriates. Since the solidarity dimension is likely to reduce withdrawal intentions to a large extent, actions intended to endorse collective goals and actions should be seen as a priority. Despite the fact that cultural changes are difficult and lengthy to achieve, IHRM can influence expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment and decrease withdrawal intentions by safeguarding that expatriate assignments have a clear and collective sense of purpose. Likewise, the findings urge all potential expatriates to reflect on what are the expected business goals for the assignment, and how collectively shared they are, just before they accept an international assignment.

Conclusions

This study attempted to empirically examine how home and host organizational cultures affect general satisfaction and withdrawal intentions among expatriates, regardless of national cultural differences. The findings support the rational underlying this research by showing that home and host organizational cultures are sources of information about what is acceptable or not, further guiding expatriates attitudes and behaviors. In particular, the solidarity dimension of organizational culture, that is the degree of observed relatedness driven by mutual interests and goals, influences expatriates' satisfaction with the assignment, along with the intentions to remain or leave the assignment and the organization, while the sociability dimension of the organizational culture, that is the observation of a social interactive and supportive organizational environment, has little to no effect. Furthermore, the impact of home and host solidarity persist regardless of the influence of cultural distance.

To the debate on the interplay between national and organizational cultures, the findings indicate that international companies can establish home and host organizational cultures distinct from the national cultures where they are located. While earlier research

emphasized the person-assignment fit in explaining expatriates' turnover, this study shows how an organizational culture valuing goal attainment behaviors can be more attractive and better at retaining, undermining the influence of cultural distance. More specifically, the findings suggest that in the global setting organizations can proactively and purposefully influence individual attitudes and deter turnover by fostering a collective sense of purpose and achievement. Overall, these findings open new avenues for researching cultural interaction in the global business, moving away from viewing this interaction in terms of differences.

Finally, this study also contributes to the understanding of expatriates' turnover and withdrawal process by extending Blau's (2000, 2007) conceptual approach to the international context. Distinguishing expatriates' intentions to withdraw from the assignment from their intentions to leave the organization is critical not only to understand the turnover process of these workers but to proactively prevent their turnover during the assignment and upon return. While the findings confirm that the satisfaction with the assignment can reduce expatriates' withdrawal intentions, this is not enough to overcome the negative influence of a low solidarity organizational culture. While additional research is required, this study illustrates the way organizational culture influences turnover even in the international context.

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