

## **Improving expatriation success : the roles of regulatory focus and burnout**

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# IMPROVING EXPATRIATION SUCCESS: THE ROLES OF REGULATORY FOCUS AND BURNOUT

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## **IMPROVING EXPATRIATION SUCCESS: THE ROLES OF REGULATORY FOCUS AND BURNOUT**

### **Abstract**

The study empirically and theoretically contributes to the HRM discipline by developing and testing a cohesive model drawing on the pertinent literature from expatriate management, burnout, and regulatory focus theory. Drawing on data from 233 expatriate managers, the study aims to examine the relationships between expatriate adjustment and the outcomes of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions via expatriate burnout. Specifically, the findings reveal that: a) higher levels of both work adjustment and interaction adjustment lead to reduced expatriate burnout, with the former having a greater effect on burnout than the latter; b) burnout serves as a full mediator between work adjustment and withdrawal cognitions, and a partial mediator between work adjustment and job satisfaction; and c) regulatory focus serves to moderate expatriate adjustment – outcome consequences, i.e. promotion-focused (as opposed to prevention-focused) expatriates demonstrate a stronger burnout – job satisfaction relationship. Several implications are extracted from the study for regulatory theory, burnout and expatriation management practices as well as suggested avenues for future research.

*Keywords:* expatriate, adjustment, burnout, regulatory focus, job satisfaction, quit.

## **IMPROVING EXPATRIATION SUCCESS: THE ROLES OF REGULATORY FOCUS AND BURNOUT**

### **Introduction**

In striving towards global competence, multinational firms (MNCs) have long since recognised the advantages of posting their employees on overseas assignments (Brookfield, 2010, 2014). Some scholars suggest that although many such expatriates tend not to return home prematurely, around a third of them fail to successfully perform when overseas (Stroh, Black, Mendenhall, and Gregersen, 2005). As the impact of psychological withdrawal among expatriates can be detrimental to organisations, assignees and their families, the importance of understanding factors that influence expatriation success has been widely recognised (Bartlett, 1950).

Ever since the seminal work of Black (1988), Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) and Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), a number of studies have investigated expatriate adjustment and its antecedents (see summaries in: Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk, 2005; Harrison, Shaffer, and Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Hechanova, Beehr, and Christiansen, 2003). Adjustment represents the degree of comfort (or absence of pressure) associated with being an expatriate (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The most commonly researched adjustment outcomes that are also considered as expatriation success measures are job satisfaction, thoughts about quitting and performance (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997).

Historically, early research on burnout tended to be anecdotal and descriptive in nature. Much of this work often lacked precise theoretical contributions or any empirical evidence to support the advancement of the subject. More recently however, we have experienced a significant movement aimed at both conceptualizing and testing burnout frameworks in a range of different contexts (Gil-Monte and Peiro, 1998). Specifically, the pertinent literature suggests there are several potential antecedents of burnout including role ambiguity and role conflict

(Chong and Monroe, 2015; Low, Cravens, Grant and Moncrief, 2001), job-related tension (Chong and Monroe, 2015), social support and coping (Greenglass, Burke and Konarski, 1998), intrinsic motivation (Low et al., 2001) and work exhaustion (Shih, Jiang, Klein and Wang, 2013).

Similarly, several outcomes have been derived resulting from burnout, including job satisfaction (Chong and Monroe, 2015; Low et al., 2001; Ybema, Smulders and Bongers, 2010), organizational commitment (Chong and Monroe, 2015), emotional exhaustion (Greenglass, Burke and Konarksi, 1998), salesperson performance (Low et al., 2001), depersonalization and lessened feelings of personal accomplishment (Shih et al., 2013), and time lost at work (Ybema et al., 2010). Overall, a number of instruments have been successfully developed to measure burnout, including Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI), the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981; Kristensen et al., 2005; Demerouti et al., 2002).

Whilst the above research and several models have helped to explain relationships involving burnout (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), this study is particularly novel as it is amongst the first to examine burnout as a potential mediating attribute in connecting adjustment with pertinent outcomes i.e., job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions in the context of expatriate management. This study therefore, seeks to answer the question of whether or not burnout has the potential to partially or fully mediate such adjustment – outcome relationships. In addition, drawing on regulatory focus theory, the study also seeks to answer if expatriate managers with higher degrees of promotion-focus tendencies (than prevention-focused attributes) moderates the burnout – job satisfaction relationship. The study therefore aims to make a conceptual and

empirical contribution in terms of advancing our knowledge surrounding burnout and incrementally adding to RF theory in the context of expatriation management.

Research in the area of burnout has attracted global attention and although much of the work in this domain stemmed from Western economies, including North America and Europe, there is some evidence to suggest that it is not unique to these territories. In recent times a growing number of studies have been undertaken in emerging economies such as China, Africa and India. It is interesting to discover that studies have emerged in-line with the economic development of nations (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

Drawing on the international dimension further, this investigation focuses on the relationships between expatriate adjustment and its consequences. The study's context is novel, as burnout has not tended to be examined in an expatriate context. The work is also unique in the fact that it examines the potential mediating role of burnout and overall the investigation makes a useful contribution to theory in several ways. Although burnout has been somewhat neglected and not included in prior expatriate research, this study extends the literature by strengthening our understanding of the processes taking place for maladjusted expatriates.

We conceptualise burnout as a central and critical variable in the expatriation experience and our proposed model provides two main differences from what has been tested so far (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). First, we introduce burnout as a potential mediating variable, and second we posit further relationships between adjustment and work-related outcomes to examine work adjustment as a potential mediating variable. We believe that such tests of mediation can conceptually and empirically advance our knowledge and understanding of the subject, due to the evident direct linkage between such work-related variables. Finally, our study also

contributes to research surrounding burnout, by illustrating its relevance to non-service workers, specifically in the context of expatriate management.

Within the stressor-stress-strain perspective, only a few stable personal traits have been proposed as predictors of adjustment and individual differences. The Big-Five (e.g. Caligiuri, 2000) for example has typically been considered as a framework to illustrate the antecedents of adjustment. Similarly to the way in which the Big-Five has received growing attention among scholars, regulatory focus (RF) theory (Higgins, 1997), concerning the way that individuals set and attain personal goals, is also of pertinent value within this context. From a theoretical stance, RF theory highlights several basic individual differences that are highly relevant to overseas-based assignees. Promotion-focused individuals appear to pursue goals for achieving positive results and feel somewhat dejected when these goals are not met (Higgins, 1997).

Prevention-focused individuals however, seem to pursue goals for avoiding negative results. Using vigilant strategies they feel agitated when such goals are not met. In these circumstances, work-related goals tend to focus more on completing their assignment term and performing satisfactorily. In doing so, promotion and prevention-focused expatriates look to pursue such goals in a variety of ways and may feel different if they have difficulties in achieving these goals. We therefore propose that promotion and prevention focused expatriates' strategic inclinations and emotions are likely to induce different relationships between various expatriate adjustment outcomes. Moreover, in establishing the foundations of RF theory, Higgins (1997, 1998) explained that in contrast to prevention-focused individuals, those with a promotion focus appear willing to take increased risks, are more persistent in the face of difficulties and seek more alternative solutions.

Studies have found that RF theory can explain a wide range of behavioural differences that seem relevant to expatriates, particularly as it has been found to affect individual behaviour

towards out-groups i.e. host-country nationals – HCNs (e.g. Sassenberg and Hansen, 2007). Here, RF was also found to affect the way in which individuals are committed to their organisation (Markovits, Ullrich, Dick, and Davis, 2008) and as a personal trait it needs considering in the context of relocated personnel (Fulmer et al., 2010). RF theory therefore provides a useful backdrop for further advancing the current debate, as well as for understanding the mental processes associated with expatriate workers.

In summary, our current study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the proposed cohesive model combines RF theory with burnout to better explain relationships between adjustment and its outcomes i.e. job satisfaction and potential termination of expatriate assignments. Second, it is among one of the first studies to demonstrate the relevance of RF theory to expatriation management and illustrates the moderating and mediating roles of RF and burnout. In previous studies, most models describing such relationships rely heavily on direct links (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), which may be over simplistic. Third, taking into account that a large portion of MNCs consider identifying and selecting appropriate assignees as their most significant challenge (GMAC, 2008), our combined approach may also have practical implications, in allowing for both better candidate selection and preparation, as well as the potential identification of differential treatment in the case of difficulties.

### *Burnout*

Often conceptualised within a stress framework, burnout consists of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion (Pines and Aronson, 1988). It is mainly considered as a consequence of one's exposure to chronic job stress (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001). Indeed, the fact that burnout and stress are positively related has rarely been disputed in the literature (e.g. Jackson, Turner, and Brief, 1987; Lee and Ashforth, 1996). However, although



expatriates are often exposed to stressful situations, relatively few studies have examined burnout among expatriates. While Selmer and Fenner (2009) acknowledged that burnout may have a negative influence on expatriate managers, earlier research by Bhanugopan and Fish (2006) revealed that role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity are related to burnout – with the latter being related to intentions to quit.

Meanwhile, other studies have tended to focus on expatriates in different professions that are known to suffer from burnout, including teachers (Aydogan, Dogan, and Bayram, 2009), humanitarian aid workers (Eriksson et al., 2009) and nurses (Al-Turki et al., 2010). A more recent study by Silbiger and Pines (2014) illustrated the relevance of burnout to expatriation by examining the differences between stress and burnout, but failed to examine the more comprehensive role of burnout in expatriation success. While there is a general consensus that burnout is caused by stress, Pines and Keinan (2005) argued that stress is not the sole reason for burnout, as burnout results from a need among people to believe their life is meaningful. Typically highly motivated employees who are unable to meet their own expectations or goals at work feel less meaningful, which can trigger eventual burnout.

#### *Expatriate adjustment and its consequences*

Adjustment in a cross-cultural setting typically consists of three facets i.e., work, interaction and general adjustment (Black, 1988; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Black and Stephens, 1989). Work adjustment relates to the psychological wellbeing expatriates feel with reference to the job tasks of the overseas assignment. This includes comfort with performance standards and expectations, supervisory responsibilities, specific job responsibilities and other job demands (Selmer, 1999). Interaction adjustment refers to expatriates' psychological comfort with respect to interactions

with HCNs inside and outside work, and general adjustment refers to expatriates' psychological comfort with respect to non-work elements, such as transportation, food and healthcare.

Expatriation studies have conceptualized maladjustment as stress (see summary in Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). For example, Black and colleagues (1991) proposed a comprehensive model whereby adjustment was considered to be influenced by antecedents that either increase or decrease uncertainty. Stressors are demands or uncertainties that relate to the organisation (e.g. lack of support), job (e.g. role ambiguity), or non-work (e.g. family), that are mismatched with personal resources. When one fails to cope with these facets, stress emerges (Beehr and Newman, 1978), which is expressed as expatriate maladjustment (Jex and Beehr, 1991). The experience of stress then creates adverse response or outcomes of adjustment including withdrawal cognitions i.e., thoughts about quitting, job dissatisfaction and poor performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The stressor-stress-strain perspective has been validated in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (e.g. Takeuchi, Wang, and Marinova, 2005). Meta-analyses studies have also validated many of the propositions offered by Black and colleagues, as well as relationships between adjustment and work-related outcomes of job satisfaction, withdrawal cognitions and performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2004; Hechanova et al., 2003).

### *Expatriation and acculturation*

Recent research reveals expatriation as a nascent field spanning the cognate disciplines of Human Resource Management (HRM) and International Business (IB), developing from a 1960s-1970s focus on global executive pay, multinational staff management, expatriate communities and global MBA careers, to now emphasising cultural differences along with

challenges that multinationals face. As such, the main developments in expatriate research include its increasing international dimension and multiple foci.

Here, research has examined globalisation and managerial expatriation, drawing on expectancy and agency theory to understand how to better manage people globally, career progression and how expatriates improve corporate performance. Much of this work has originated from English-speaking countries (such as the USA, UK and Australia), and some evidence suggests that emerging Asian states (like China and Taiwan) are adopting US practice. There is also a growing body of work arising from countries like China and Japan, with culture and regulation appearing high on the agenda (Dabic et al. 2015). Further work by Hippler, Brewster and Haslberger (2015) has examined the role played by time, change and causation in expatriate adjustment. Moreover, contemporary work by Alshahrani and Morley (2015) has focused on the ‘mobility root trajectories’ relating to work/non-work, initial global exposure, company/industry changes and the cultural proximity or distance of home/host expatriate locations (Pocztowski, 2015).

Research suggests that acculturation can be viewed through a psychology, sociology or anthropology (PSA) lens (Gonzales-Loureiro, Kiessling and Dabic, 2015). Within this particular context, studies have tended to examine immigrants and specifically their ability to adapt to local conditions (Berry, 1997). Pioneering work by Berry and colleagues has advanced the literature in this domain, specifically, in identifying an acculturation process whereby individuals evaluate attitudes in light of maintaining cultural heritage and participating in mainstream cultural groups, resulting in one’s acculturation orientation based on four particular attributes of integration, separation, assimilation and marginalisation (Berry, 1990; 2005).

From an international business perspective, several studies have explored employee relocation and their success rates (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). Specific works on global expatriation have been conducted with diverse groups, such as dual-career couples, female breadwinners, male trailing spouses and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender expatriates (Gedro, 2010; Kaplan, 2014). In addition, research on the acculturation experiences of female military public sector expatriates discovered that such women have a strong commitment to their profession and this along with their camaraderie successfully enables them to adapt to living conditions surrounded by exceptional danger (Fisher, Hutchings and Pinto, 2015). Meanwhile, drawing on a sample of 210 academics in China and Taiwan, Selmer, Luring, Normann and Kubovcikova (2015) found that expatriates in local organisations were more acculturated to host country contexts than those employed in foreign organisations, who typically found it more difficult to adjust to everyday life and interactions with host country nationals.

By and large, the growth and significance of international migration is receiving significant research attention among both academic scholars and public policy makers alike. In 2013, international migrant numbers globally reached 232 million, an increase of over 50% in two decades (UN-DESA, 2013). With such a trend predicted to continue and the hyper-diversity of migrants i.e., their country of origin, religion, gender, age and level of transnationalism set to continue, this will present a major challenge for governments to grapple with long into the future (Doucerain, Dere and Ryder, 2013; Harvey and Moeller, 2015). Acculturation can therefore be viewed through interdisciplinary lenses, with acculturation research containing a particular focus on global diversity, specificity and reach. Here, acculturation can be regarded as a somewhat multidimensional process that affects the lives of a range of people, including immigrants, sojourners, local natives and refugees (Berry, 2008; Berry and Sam, 2013).

## **Conceptual Development**

### *Expatriate adjustment and burnout*

The premise behind our concept (see Figure 1), is that the nature and type of adjustment needed to successfully manage in the host country among expatriate managers (expats) will have varying degrees of influence on the extent to which they ‘burn out’ in post. Burnout is therefore considered as a consequence of the pressure that is brought about by having to adjust to different foreign work conditions (Cooper et al. 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2001). Whilst it may be considered that burnout could be negatively correlated with each of the adjustment facets illustrated in the concept, we specifically argue that burnout is likely to occur due to aspects of the role that are work-related i.e., work adjustment issues including job responsibility, managing locals and having to meet performance standards and certain expectations (Fogarty et al., 2000; Low et al., 2001).

Our model also posits that interaction adjustment, as it involves interacting with host country nationals at work as well as outside work, can also be challenging for expats, perhaps particularly due to the need to communicate in a foreign language and having to adapt to different cultural understandings. An expatriate that finds it difficult to interact with co-workers is expected to feel frustrated, unable to fulfil his / her work ambitions or goals and will experience a sense of failure, thus resulting in burnout. However, due to this being only partially work-related, it can be expected to have a lower degree of influence compared with work adjustment. Finally, because general adjustment is not work related at all, it is considered to have no direct relation to work-related burnout. In fact, it could be a positive aspect, as anecdotal evidence suggests that the work conditions for expatriate managers are often enhanced. They often receive access to excellent sport facilities, frequently have private medical insurance and obtain excellent living expenses. We therefore feel that such benefits associated with the general

adjustment factor, if anything help prevent burnout rather than add to it (Fogarty et al., 2000; Low et al., 2001). Based on the above discussion, we therefore hypothesise that burnout will have a higher correlation with work adjustment, a lower association with interaction adjustment and no significant relationship with general adjustment and hypothesise that:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Expatriate burnout is negatively related to work and interaction adjustments and has a stronger (negative) relationship with work adjustment.*

#### *The mediating role of expatriate burnout*

Drawing on our first hypothesis and specifically the strong relationship posited between burnout and the requirement for expatriates to adequately adjust to work related aspects, we consider burnout here as playing a crucial mediating role between work adjustment and the outcome variables of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions. The key mediating role of burnout is supported based on: a) the associated relationship posited in hypothesis 1, b) that there is overwhelming support, albeit in different contexts that both job satisfaction and intention to leave have strong relationships with burnout (Fogarty et al., 2000; Low et al., 2001; Pines and Keinan, 2005, 2006, 2007) and c) that such job responsibility demands and expectations associated with work adjustment may influence job dissatisfaction and intentions to withdraw.

We strongly believe that burnout plays a pivotal role through which these relationships are established and posit that burnout is the means by which work adjustment leads to job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions. Although, there is a relationship between work adjustment and work related outcomes, we posit that it is not a sufficient condition to drive expatriate managers to feel fully dissatisfied in their role and consider withdrawal from their post. We argue that it is burnout that tips expatriates over the edge leading them to feel dissatisfied and having the desire to withdraw (Fogarty et al., 2000; Low et al., 2001). Burnout

therefore serves to significantly mediate the work adjustment – outcome relationships suggested in our concept and we hypothesise that:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Burnout has a significant mediating effect between work adjustment and its outcomes i.e., job dissatisfaction and withdrawal cognitions.*

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Insert Figure 1 here  
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### Regulatory focus theory

Regulatory-focus (RF) theory (Higgins, 1997) suggests that there are two types of regulatory structures concerned with meeting rudimentary needs for nurturance and gain, and for security and safety. Nurturance-related needs involve a “promotion focus”, while security-related needs involve a “prevention focus”. The two self-regulation systems fulfil these needs through the pursuit of different types of goals (or desired end-states) and use different behavioural means. They are also characterised by different evaluations and emotional experiences. A promotion focus involves the pursuit of hope, wishes and aspiration (“ideals”) and reflects a concern with the presence or absence of gain. The goal here is positive outcomes or accomplishment, thus employing behavioural approach strategies. Individuals therefore show a tendency to pursue ideals, such as doing well in school by actively pursuing opportunities for advancement toward these goals (e.g., seeking time to study for exams; Higgins, 1997).

In contrast, prevention focus involves the pursuit of duties, obligations, or responsibilities and reflects a concern with the presence or absence of loss. There is emphasis here on avoiding negative outcomes, creating safety and employing behavioural avoidance strategies. Thus, if individuals view doing well at school as an obligation, they might consequently pursue that obligation by avoiding situations that would set them back (e.g., avoiding parties in the week of

an exam; Higgins, 1997). Individuals can differ in their chronic regulatory system, but regulatory-focus can be induced temporarily, for example by framing tasks as either gain/non-gain (inducing promotion) or loss/non-loss (inducing prevention). Promotion-focused individuals, being eager to match end-states pursue all means of advancement and are willing to take more risks (e.g., having a risky bias in a signal-detection situation; Higgins, 1997). Prevention-focused people tend to be sensitive to negative outcomes and carefully avoid making mistakes (e.g., having a conservative bias in a signal-detection situation; Higgins, 1997).

When setting up the foundations of RF theory, Higgins (1997, 1998) further highlighted several behavioural differences that are core to it. Here, promotion-focused individuals seek more alternative solutions to problems (Crowe and Higgins, 1997), and respond differently to difficulties (Crowe and Higgins, 1997). Thus “when a task becomes difficult, then one would expect promotion-focus individuals to persevere and prevention-focus individuals to quit more readily” (Higgins, 1997, p. 1286).

#### *The role of regulatory focus theory in adjustment-consequence relationships*

Building on hypothesis two and specifically the connection between burnout and job dissatisfaction (Fogarty et al., 2000; Low et al., 2001; Pines and Keinan, 2005, 2006, 2007), we integrate RF theory into the model and argue that it is a useful construct that can further clarify relationships between expatriate adjustment and the work-related outcome of satisfaction. According to RF theory, promotion-focused expatriates’ inability to achieve such outcomes will result in the feeling of dejection (Higgins, 1998), or dissatisfaction. Burnout and job dissatisfaction therefore stem from the same source i.e., the inability to achieve and fulfil aspirations. We can therefore expect that for promotion-focused expatriates, the relationship between burnout and job dissatisfaction will be strong.



In contrast, for prevention-focused expatriates, burnout and job satisfaction are the result of different sources. Whilst the former is caused by the inability to fulfil aspirations, the latter occurs due to the inability to accomplish safety values. Such expatriates pursue goals that ensure safety and these are seen as a basic requirement (Freitas et al., 2002). Due to their safety concerns, prevention-focused individuals' work values are associated with job security and such individuals are more likely to feel dissatisfied when safety values are not achieved. Burnout and job dissatisfaction are the result of different sources i.e., the inability to achieve and fulfil aspirations (for burnout) vs. the inability to fulfil safety values (for job dissatisfaction). We therefore expect that for prevention-focused expatriates, the relationship between burnout and job dissatisfaction will be weaker. As such, we hypothesise that:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Regulatory focus has a positive moderating effect on the burnout and job dissatisfaction relationship. For promotion-focused expatriates, this relationship is stronger than for prevention-focused ones.*

## **Methodology**

### Sample

Forty Israeli organisations were approached to take part in the study. From these, fifteen organisations agreed by asking their expatriate managers to participate in it. This led to a grand total of 233 participants, of which 74% were male and 26% female. Our sample of Israeli-origin expatriate managers resided across 32 countries, with around half of them based in regions of Anglo-Saxon origin i.e., the United Kingdom, U.S., Canada and Australia. A relatively smaller number of respondents were located in other countries throughout Asia and across Europe. These individuals had been located in a foreign market for between six months and five years. Their

mean age was 38.7 years, and each respondent was professionally qualified and / or university educated.

### **Procedure**

Most participants (87%) were approached via email through their HR department, while the remaining thirteen per cent came via referrals from existing respondents. This was done primarily to bolster the response rate and increase our sample size. They were all asked to participate in an online survey. Each expatriate was provided with a brief explanation of the rationale and purpose of the study and was requested to complete the survey questionnaire within three weeks. A reminder was sent to them two weeks after the first email. The final, usable number of responses was 233, yielding a reasonable response rate of 56% (Baruch and Holtom, 2008). In testing for potential non-response bias, we followed those guidelines of Armstrong and Overton (1977) whereby we compared early and late respondents and found no significant differences. We also adopted a more stringent approach using the test suggested by Mentzer and Flint (1997). Here we randomly selected seven items relating to each of the key constructs covered in the questionnaire and approached a further 30 randomly identified expatriates that had not participated in our initial fieldwork. We compared both groups and found no statistically significant differences. Overall the findings suggest that non-respondent bias does not seem to be an issue associated with our data.

### **Measures**

All measures used in the study had been widely adopted in previous studies. The questionnaire was later back translated by native professors using established procedures (see Brislin, 1970) revealing a good match with the original version. The research instrument consisted of the following parts:

1. *Demographics and control variables*: age, gender, education, organisation, host language fluency, country of residence and time residing there.

2. *Regulatory Focus*: The SPQ (Schwartz Portrait Questionnaire) was taken from Schwartz, Lehmann, and Roccas (1999), with the Hebrew version taken from Van-Dijk and Kluger (2004), and consisting of 15 items - 7 for promotion (e.g. "I like to enjoy life. It is very important for me to have fun") and 8 for prevention (e.g. "Security of my family is very important to me. I will do everything to make sure my family is secure"). Participants were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree. An advantage of this measure is that it has a procedure for classifying respondents as either promotion or prevention- focused. Raw data from the questionnaire were processed according to the SPQ procedure, resulting in two dichotomous variables: "Promotion" and "Prevention". Participants were classified as being either promotion (49%) or prevention (51%) oriented.

3. *Adjustment*<sup>1</sup>: This measure consisted of 14 items taken from the Black and Stephens (1989) adjustment questionnaire. Here, participants were requested to indicate on this 7-point scale, how adjusted they felt (1 = not adjusted at all, 7 = completely adjusted), with 3 items referring to work adjustment (e.g. "Specific job responsibilities"), 4 to interaction adjustment (e.g. "Socialising with host nationals"), and 7 to general adjustment (e.g., "Healthcare facilities").

4. *Burnout*: The Burnout Measure Short (BMS) (Pines, 2005) was developed for use across a range of occupational groups i.e., not purely human service professionals, and has been widely adopted (e.g. Kaiser, 1960; Pines and Keinan, 2005, 2006). It captures burnout as physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. We used their scale as a 10-item measure, where respondents indicate on a 7-point scale (1 = never, 7 = always) the regularity with which they experience

indicators of work related exhaustion: physical (e.g., "tired"), emotional (e.g. "hopeless") and mental (e.g. "disappointed with people").

5. *Withdrawal cognitions*: This measure consists of four items taken from Black and Stephens (1989), and Takeuchi et al. (2002). Participants were requested to indicate their degree of agreement with items on it along a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree. An example is "I often think about going home before the assignment is over".

6. *Job Satisfaction* is defined as 'the degree to which employees have a positive affective orientation towards employment by the organisation', and includes items such as work, supervision, pay, promotion and co-workers (Price, 1997, p.470). Participants were requested to indicate their level of agreement with statements concerning their feelings toward their work on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree.

## **Results**

### *Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing for common methods bias*

CFA was performed for the measurement model revealing good fit indices:  $\chi^2(71)=138$ ,  $p=.000$ , NFI=.901, CFI=.949, TLI=.934, RMSEA=.064. This implies that the measures hold within the context of our sample. The fact that data was from a single source may raise a concern regarding common method variance (CMV) and bias (CMB)<sup>2</sup>. To address such concerns, CFA was performed testing whether CMV and more importantly – CMB were present (Meade, Watson, and Kroustalis, 2007). Using both Harman's single factor test and the correlated uniqueness factor methods (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003), results revealed that the measures did not suffer from CMV or CMB. The CFA for all the measures revealed a good fit and each factor was distinct from one another. In addition, as suggested by Davidson and MacKinnon (1993), we performed augmented Durbin-Wu-Hausman regression tests which came

out insignificant, implying that the null hypothesis that the measured variables were exogenous cannot be rejected. Moreover, as shown, the structural models used have a good fit without having to covariate residual errors, another indication that CMV is not likely to be an issue of concern with this data.

### Hypotheses testing<sup>3</sup>

Before testing the structural model we controlled for the background variables<sup>4</sup> as predictors of the main variables. Our findings suggest that time abroad was a significant predictor of work adjustment and general adjustment ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\beta=.13$ ,  $p<.05$  respectively), while local language fluency and age were significant predictors of interaction adjustment ( $\beta=.36$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.05$  respectively). Age also served as a predictor of job satisfaction ( $\beta=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The residuals of the regression were then used as variables in the structural model.

As can be seen in Table 1, burnout is negatively correlated with work and interaction adjustments (-.45, -.24 respectively,  $p<.001$ ). As predicted, the correlation with work adjustment is higher (in absolute value) than with the interaction adjustment, supporting hypothesis 1, and is further supported by the structural model testing discussed below. In a first step, starting from a saturated model, nested models were tested as paths were constrained to have zero weights, reaching the hypothesised model depicted in Figure 2. This model demonstrates a good overall fit ( $\chi^2(5)=2.53$ ,  $p=.78$ ,  $NFI=.992$ ,  $CFI=1.00$ ,  $TLI=1.02$ ,  $RMSEA=.000$ ). As illustrated (Figure 2), work adjustment served as a full mediator between interaction and general adjustment and the outcomes of adjustment. This is evident from the fact that the path between interaction adjustment and the outcome (burnout) is non-significant ( $\beta=-.05$ ,  $p=.59$ ). Sobel's test (1982) revealed that the mediation of work adjustment was indeed significant ( $p<.001$ ). It can also be seen that burnout was a full mediator between work adjustment and withdrawal cognitions, and a

partial mediator between work adjustment and job satisfaction. Sobel's test (1982) revealed that all mediations were significant ( $p < .001$ ), supporting hypothesis 2.

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Insert Table 1 here  
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Insert Figure 2 here  
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The moderation effect of RF was tested using multi-group Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for the model in Figure 2 (Byrne, 2001). The results reveal in Figure 3 that certain paths were significantly different for promotion versus prevention RF. The path weight between burnout and job satisfaction was significantly higher for promotion-focused expatriates than for prevention-focused ones, supporting hypothesis 3.

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Insert Figure 3 here  
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## **Discussion**

### Summary of findings

Our study proposed three hypotheses. The first two hypotheses concerned the role of burnout and its relationship with expatriate adjustment and work-related outcomes. Burnout was found to be negatively correlated with adjustment, and it also served as a full mediator between adjustment and withdrawal cognitions, and a partial mediator between adjustment and job satisfaction. The third hypothesis focused on the moderating role of RF on the relationships between expatriate adjustment outcomes, where the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction was stronger

for promotion-focused expatriates. The predictions posited by the three hypotheses were integrated into a single structural model revealing a good fit.

The study confirms and extends connections made in the prior literature, specifically in terms of the relationships between the antecedents of burnout and the adjustment outcomes of job satisfaction (Chong and Monroe, 2015; Low et al., 2001) and intention to quit (Fogarty et al., 2000; Pines and Keinan, 2005). Our findings also add to the debate by confirming the central role of burnout as a mediating attribute in contributing to the adjustment-outcome relationships. We also make an incremental contribution to RF theory through further differentiating between prevention and promotion-focused expatriates (Higgins, 1997). As such, we extend knowledge by demonstrating a moderating effect relating to the regulatory focus on the burnout-job satisfaction relationship of Israeli expatriate managers. The context of our study thus responds to the call by Dick et al., (2016) for greater research to be undertaken in an Eastern context.

Moreover, as opposed to a plethora of work that has previously studied different professions (Aydogan, Dogan and Bayram, 2009; Eriksson et al., 2009; Al-Turki et al., 2010), this study generates new knowledge in the relatively under-researched domain surrounding the causes and outcomes of 'burnout' among expatriate managers (Selmer and Fenner, 2009; Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006). The study therefore reveals several interesting findings with regards to expatriate research which has implications for practitioners, academics and the general population at large (Berry, 2008; Berry and Sam, 2013).

This study has focused on the mechanisms involved in the relationships between expatriate adjustment and its consequences. The fact that burnout served as a mediator in such relationships contributes to theory in several ways. First, the study advances expatriation research by strengthening our understanding of the processes taking place for maladjusted expatriates. While

most expatriation research to-date was based on a stressor-stress-strain perspective, burnout has been somewhat excluded from prior studies (Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006). This study reveals that burnout is a central and critical variable in the expatriation experience.

The structural model proposed in the current study illustrates two main differences from what has been tested so far (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). First, burnout was introduced as a mediating variable, and second, the relationships between adjustment and its work-related outcomes were all fully mediated by work adjustment. We believe that such proof of mediation conceptually advances our knowledge and provides for further understanding of the subject due to the evident direct linkage between such work-related variables. It contributes to our understanding of the actual “means” through which adjustment affects its work-related outcomes.

These findings also contribute to research surrounding burnout by illustrating relevance to non-service workers and specifically expatriate employees. So far, most models describing adjustment-outcome relationships are direct (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), which arguably are over-simplistic. The proposed framework in this study therefore advances our understanding of the conscious and subconscious processes that take place during expatriation. In brief, the findings relating to the role of RF demonstrate that this theory is applicable in additional research contexts beyond those shown to-date.

### *Practical implications*

The findings that burnout plays a mediating role between adjustment and its consequences have practical implications for expatriate management. Cross-cultural training programmes are recommended before the assignment (e.g. Black and Mendenhall, 1990) and a home or host country mentor (Carraher, Sullivan, and Crocitto, 2008) may help contribute to expatriate



adjustment. Organisations wishing to successfully manage maladjusted expatriates are therefore recommended to focus on easing their burnout. A well-accepted method for burnout treatment is workshops that identify pre-assignment expectations against reality. Such events seem an essential first step for expats. Maladjusted expatriates should be encouraged to expose their difficulties in achieving both their work-related and personal goals during assignments. Eventually, burnt-out expatriates need to recognise ways for removing such difficulties. This is an approach which has been proven to be very effective (Pines and Aronson, 1988). Relieving expatriates from their burnout is likely to result in lower withdrawal cognitions and higher job satisfaction despite maladjustment. Such information will also prove useful for human resource managers responsible for managing these assignments.

Our finding that RF plays a role in expatriate adjustment is useful for managing expatriates' withdrawal cognitions. Although burnout may play a detrimental role in the outcomes of adjustment, the results reveal that the effect of job satisfaction on withdrawal cognitions is different between the two regulatory foci, with the indirect effect from work adjustment to withdrawal cognitions being much stronger for prevention, than promotion focused expatriates. These findings imply that managers need to pay more attention to job satisfaction surrounding prevention-focused assignees, as for them, improving job satisfaction can dramatically change their thoughts on quitting assignments. Here, the effect can be expected to be less dramatic for promotion-focused expatriates, where withdrawal cognitions are mainly a direct outcome of their burnout.

Additional implications for practitioners as a response to this study include expatriates and organisations being better able to formulate and enact useful international HRM programmes. There may also be wider benefits relating to public policy at large including their ability to

comprehend, manage and reduce migrant-related issues. Society can also benefit from enhanced cultural exchange, which enterprises may view as mutually beneficial for expanding their international markets (Dabic et al., 2015).

### Limitations and future studies

An obvious limitation of this study is its inherent cross-sectional single-source design, which may raise a concern for CMV and CMB, but one that we feel has been partially addressed. Self-reported measures may introduce bias due to such social desirability among individuals and future studies should therefore consider using multiple sources. Longitudinal designs and qualitative methods can further validate our proposed model and overcome this bias. Research that examines such variables over time will prove fruitful for identifying issues early and may generate interesting data relating to critical incidents that can occur at specific times. Undertaking studies with managers prior to their expatriation, as well as regularly during their expedition and finally following their exit or withdrawal is also likely to have interesting implications for theory and practice. However, administering such research has certain drawbacks, as it is likely to be both expensive and timely.

While the study was concerned with adjustment outcomes, it did not involve performance. It can be difficult in practice to collect reliable performance information from organisations because of a lack of cooperation and inconsistent measures that exist. Hence, the current study used withdrawal cognition and job satisfaction as expatriation success measures. Future studies should examine other performance indicators as further measures of success. Another limitation is the fact that all participants came from one single country i.e., Israel. While this may limit generalisation to other cultures, it has a positive side since effects resulting from cultural

differences are reduced. Future studies should however look to incorporate samples from nationals of other countries.

The foundation for the current study came from the model proposed by Black et al. (1991). A more comprehensive model was suggested by Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer, (2010) that reveals more complex relationships between personal, work and family related demands and resources. While a mismatch between demands and resources result in maladjustment, the full scope of their model was not dealt with in the current study and is recommended in future studies.

Finally, as path analysis does not prove causality and only implies it, we can only cautiously talk about antecedents and consequences based on our knowledge that maladjustment precedes burnout, job dissatisfaction and withdrawal cognitions. Yet the good fit indices of our path analyses indicate that the theoretical model underlying it is appropriate. Future studies could focus on using longitudinal designs in order to validate such causality. Finally, while our study focused on expatriates, with some necessary modifications, many of the arguments leading to the hypotheses can be generalised to capture not only expatriates, but domestic role transitions as well. Research in this area is likely to add a further dimension to the current debate surrounding the subject at large, and therefore make a useful contribution to the literature. Future studies could also conceptually link stress to work adjustment, general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment, and empirically investigate if results vary by geographical focus and cultural differences.

#### *Further research on expatriation and acculturation*

Further research is specifically needed to apply expatriate research to other phenomena in different contexts, and could benefit multinationals by providing an opportunity to expand

empirical findings on managing expatriates overall. Here, wider geographical perspectives could empirically test the global validity of theories used in expatriate research and understand context dependency in HRM. A requirement for further empirical and theoretical work exists regarding international new ventures, born global, international SMEs, as well as not-for-profit organisations. Indeed, the literature may benefit further from deeper empirical work on the expatriation process, particularly in transitional economies to reinforce the findings of prior studies.

Empirical research could also explore whether or not expatriates possess entrepreneurial attitudes and an entrepreneurial orientation i.e., if expatriates are entrepreneurial and gain more success in pre-start up phases than non-expatriates. As such, work in this area has the potential to make a significant impact on the field and broaden the topic overall (Dabic et al. 2015). Moreover, as expatriate research has tended to focus on US and multinational perspectives, further research needs to examine divergence across different organisational models, cultures, and currently marginal issues in expatriation research such as equal opportunities and gender, sociological and psychological approaches, citizenship, identity or family concerns, and the supporting role of expatriate spouses to identify criteria exclusive to expatriates.

Finally, in terms of acculturation, more work could be done that focuses on trading blocs or regions of interest to global organisations, as well as empirical work that takes a longitudinal perspective to acculturation, and an expansion of the acculturation focus regarding family members of expatriates (Gonzales-Loureiro et al., 2015). Due to a growing number of non-traditional forms of international assignments, further research in this area is also likely to make an on-going, valuable contribution to both theory and practice (Harvey and Moeller, 2015).

**End Notes:**

1. The notion of adjustment differs from the concept of stress, the latter being incumbent when an employee is not able to complete their job demands (see Kim et al., 1996; Price, 1997).
2. In terms of particular ex-ante measures to combat CMB, we carefully designed and administered our research instrument to make sure respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the investigation. As a result, there were no wrong or right answers, and they were encouraged to answer as honestly as they could. We included factor-based items to reduce respondent apprehension and carefully, systematically and concisely formulated questionnaire constructs (as detailed earlier), to avoid vague terms being included, resulting in a reduction of problems in the comprehension stage of the research process. As is evident, we also used different types of measurement scale end-points to capture different constructs, i.e. predictor and criterion measures which according to Podsakoff et al., (2003) are highly effective for diminishing CMV. We also modified the order of questions in the instrument (and between different respondents) so as to make it difficult for respondents to cognitively construct potential associations between the variables in question (Chang et al., 2010).
3. For our analysis we used SPSS and AMOS.
4. All control variables were included in the final SEM analysis presented in Figure 2.

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	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-											
2 Age	38.7	8.8	-.14*	-										
3 Education	15.8	1.4	.04	.22**	-									
4 Lang. Fluency	3.9	1.2	.08	-.10	.05	-								
5 Time Abroad	1.7	1.3	-.09	.27**	-.10	.00	-							
6 RF <sup>b</sup>	-	-	.07	.00	-.12	-.01	.00	-						
7 Work Adj.	6.2	0.8	-.04	.16*	-.12	-.19	.21**	.01	(.76)					
8 Interaction Adj.	5.2	1.3	.07	.10	-.06	.35***	.06	.15*	.40***	(.87)				
9 General Adj.	5.6	0.9	.05	-.05	.04	.09	.13	.08	.19**	.24***	(.79)			
10 Burnout	2.6	0.9	.13*	-.16*	.03	.00	-.10	.08	-.45***	-.24***	-.08	(.87)		
11 Job Satis.	6.1	1.1	-.06	.14*	-.05	.07	.19**	-.03	.65***	.35***	.14*	-.52***	(.87)	
12 Withdrawal Cognitions	2.4	0.9	.06	-.01	.14	-.06	-.10	-.05	-.26***	-.20**	-.05	.44***	-.42***	(.70)

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations (N = 233)

Notes. Reliability estimates are in parentheses.

All scales are 1-7.

Lang.: Language; Adj.: Adjustment; Satis.: Satisfaction

<sup>a</sup>Gender: 0=male, 1=female. <sup>b</sup>RF: 0=Prevention, 1=Promotion.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two tailed)

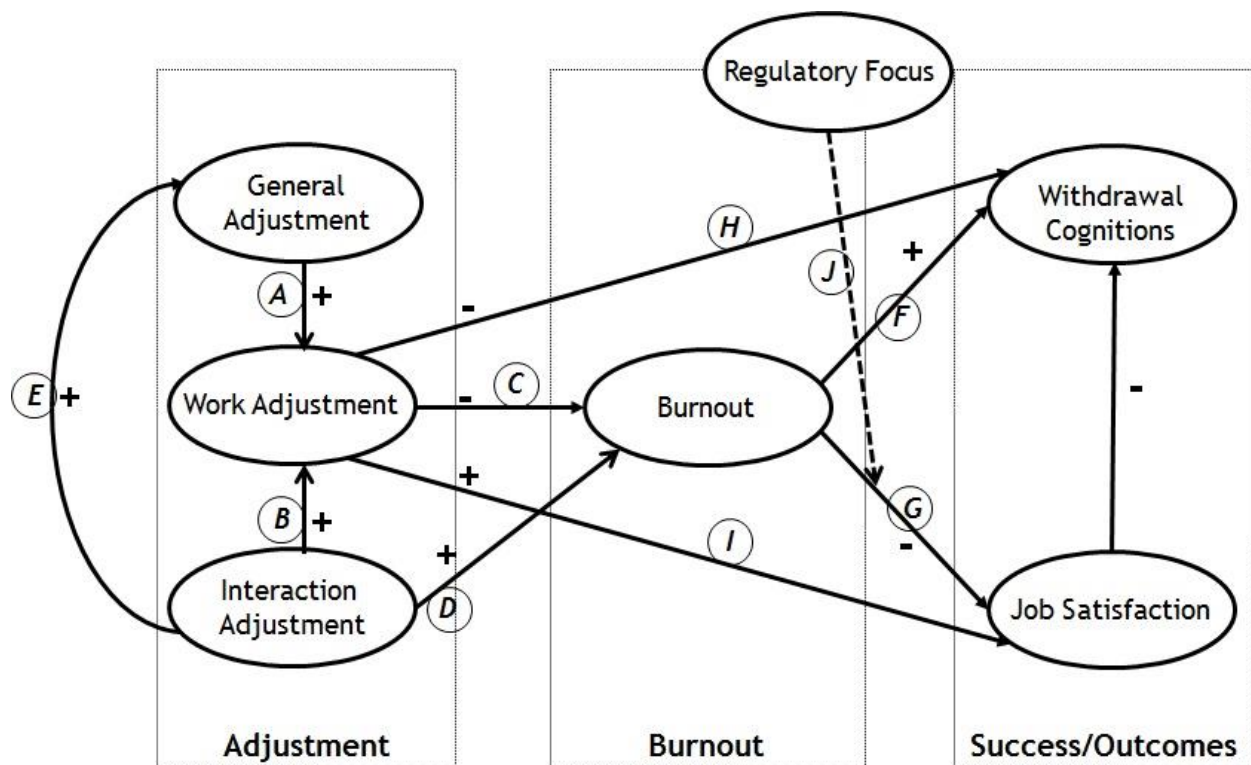


Figure 1: Hypothesised structural model

Notes. Path numbers are indicated by circled letters.  
A dashed line indicates moderation.

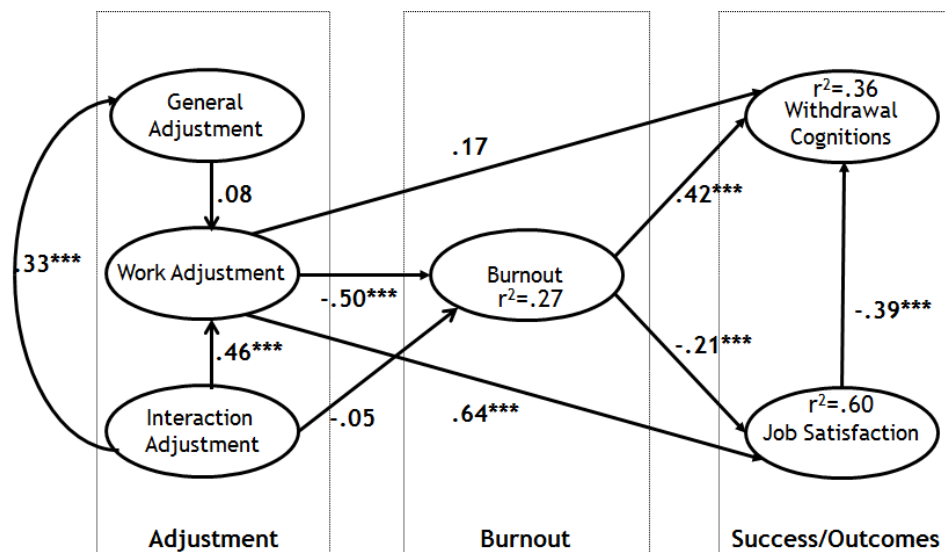


Figure 2: SEM results.

Notes. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two tailed)

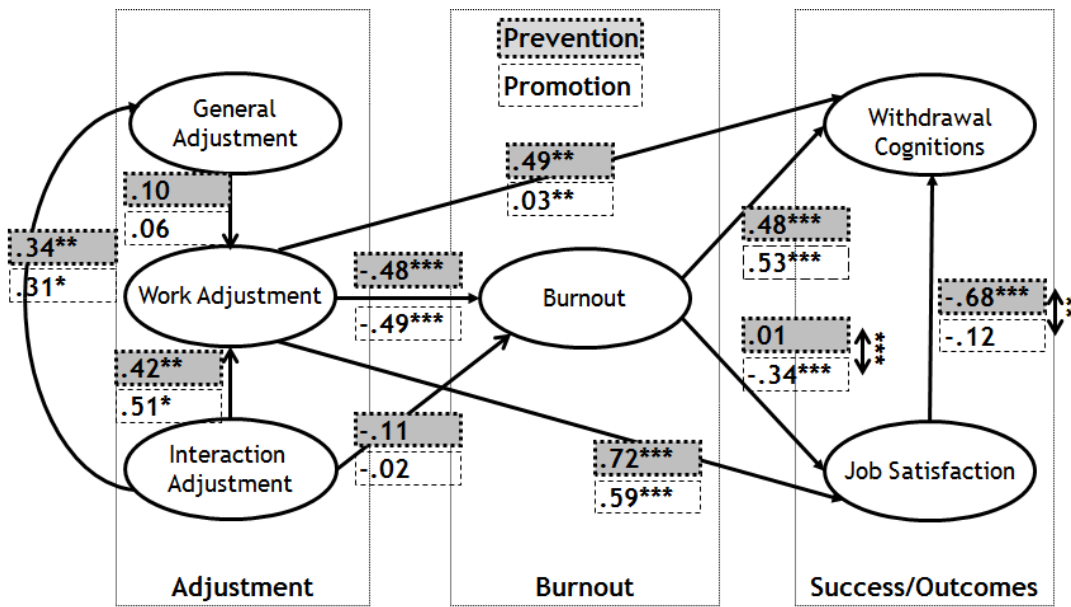


Figure 3: Multiple group SEM results: Promotion vs. prevention focus

Notes. A double-headed arrow indicates the significance of the difference between the two regulatory foci.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two tailed)

**Appendix: Questionnaire Items**

Note: All scales were 1-7.

**Withdrawal Cognitions**

1	I often think about returning home before the assignment is over
2	I initiate discussions about the possibility of returning home early with my spouse
3	Knowing what I know today about the assignment my decision would be the same
4	When I received this assignment I did it willingly

**Adjustment**

Please indicate how unadjusted or adjusted you are to the following items.

**Adjustment** refers to how comfortable you feel with the specified item or how well you know what needs to be done in order to carry out the item.

1	General living conditions in the host-country
2	Housing conditions in general
3	Food in the host-country
4	Shopping in the host-country
5	Cost of living in the host-country
6	Entertainment/recreation in the host-country
7	Healthcare facilities in the host-country
8	Socialising with host nationals
9	Interacting with host nationals on a day-to-day basis
10	Interacting with host nationals outside of work
11	Speaking with host nationals
12	Specific job responsibilities
13	Supervising host-nationals
14	Performance standards and expectations in the foreign facility

**Job Satisfaction**

1	I have a sense of success in my work
2	My efforts are appreciated
3	I have a fair amount of autonomy
4	I love my job

**Burnout**

How many times in the last months did you feel the following in relation to your work?

1	Weariness
2	Disappointment from people
3	Hopelessness
4	Trapped
5	Helplessness
6	Depression
7	Weakness / tendency to illness
8	A feeling of failure / feeling worthless
9	Sleeping problems
10	Feeling that "I am fed up"