

Personality and Work Success among Expatriate Educational Leaders in the United Arab Emirates

Lillette du Toit

University of Liverpool

Liz Jackson

University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Few studies have examined expatriate leadership in higher education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where expatriates make up the majority of higher education leaders. Such leaders need to be able to effectively interact with diverse colleagues despite possibly limited prior international experience and understanding of cultural differences. Such challenges can be seen to increase employee turnover, which challenges the success of Emirati higher education. This essay examines the impact of emotional intelligence, hardiness, and openness on self-reported probability of finishing contract and contract renewal of expatriate leaders in higher education in the UAE. The research can contribute to an improvement in the educational services in the UAE, and other Middle Eastern countries which feature high rates of employment of expatriate workers in higher education.

Key words

United Arab Emirates, higher education, expatriates, leadership, work performance, personality

Introduction

Although many studies have focused on the performance and work success behaviors of expatriate leaders in organizational contexts (Raduan et.al., 2010; Rothstein & Goffin, 2006), few have considered expatriate leadership in higher education in the Middle East. Being an expatriate in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is relatively unusual because in most cases, expatriates make up the vast majority of leaders in higher education. Such academic leaders particularly need to be able to effectively interact with diverse colleagues. However, some of these leaders have limited international experience and understanding for major differences of culture and expectations relevant to the workplace. Beyond professional experiences and practices from country of origin, some may not know what will be effective in the UAE. Such challenges can be seen to increase employee turnover, which in turn challenges the success of Emirati higher education (Magwood, 2011; Elenkov & Manef, 2009; Cassidy, 2005). To what extent personality traits influence ability to moderate cross-cultural issues and challenges is worthy of further research.

This essay aims to determine the potential impact of emotional intelligence, hardiness, and openness on self-reported probability of finishing contract and renewal of contract of expatriate leaders in a higher education institution in the UAE. *Emotional intelligence* (EI) is described as being in control of oneself, having zeal and persistence and the “ability to motivate oneself” (Goleman, 1995, p.xii). Elsewhere it is described as a way of perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions and “effectively dealing with one’s own and others’ emotions” (Moon & Hur, 2011; Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p.8). Bar-On (2000) and Goleman (2000) describe EI as a number of “dispositions, competencies, and perceptions related to the effective management of emotions such as self-awareness, empathy, positive mood, decision making, etc.” Leaders having a crucial role to skillfully manage not only their own emotions but those of their followers. Successful leaders in this regard can address concerns more effectively, resulting in more confidence, cooperation and trust (George, 2000). A number of studies have attempted to establish an association between emotional intelligence and the behavior of leaders. Some have found positive relations (Leban & Zulauf, 2004), whilst others reflect insignificant results (Weinberger, 2009). For the purpose of this study the focus will be on the broader concept of emotional intelligence rather than on each of its dimensions, such as the ability to recognize emotions, the use of emotions to facilitate performance, understanding and knowledge of emotions, and the ability to control emotions (Côte & Miners, 2006).

Hardiness is typically defined as a personality characteristic consisting of (a) commitment to success, (b) a belief in personal control over one’s life, and (c) an enjoyment of challenges (Sheard & Golby, 2010; Hystad, et. al., 2010). Social support and performance are positively correlated with hardiness, in addition to related traits such as optimism, openness, confidence, and extraversion (Eschleman, et. al., 2010). Hystad et. al. (2010) note that hardiness scales are not necessarily reliable cross-culturally, and that the concepts cannot be translated across populations or cultures without adaptations being made. Nonetheless it can be argued that hardiness potentially plays a vital role in

the success of expatriate leaders, as the ability to cope with stressors and stay resilient in the face of challenges is often required in expatriate work environments. Due to findings connecting professional success with hardiness among expatriate managers and college students, it has been recommended that those choosing candidates consider applicants' hardiness in making recommendations for placement (Hystad, et. al., 2009; White, et. al., 2011). In the White, et.al. (2011) study of expatriate managers, they argued that those who view themselves as confident in the face of challenges and have excellent coping skills were better equipped for sociocultural adaptation, whether in culturally similar environments or culturally different environments. People with high levels of hardiness believe they can control how they react to stressful events and choose the positive and constructive angle rather than the negative and stressful (Bartone, 2000; Bartone, 2006).

The personality trait of *openness* is generally understood as an attitude or tendency which manifests itself in goals and behavior that demonstrate curiosity, adventurousness, an interest in novel and new experiences, and progressive or untraditional values (George, et.al., 2011, p. 816; Schretlen, et.al., 2010, p. 1068). Openness thus seems particularly useful as a trait or tendency within an expatriate work environment, because one who is optimistic in the face of cultural difference will no doubt be more successful with cross-cultural adaptation than will someone who is incurious, or strongly committed to traditional values and behavioral norms. In this context openness should be more vital where cultural norms differ widely from those one is accustomed to, and less vital where cultural values and conditions are similar to those of one's home country. Openness has been theorized both as a latent trait, and as a quality people develop based on their life experiences. In a study of openness as a factor in women's work lives in the United States, it was found that openness led to earlier career starts and high-status employment (George, et.al., 2011). However these results were not predictive of women's employment or financial status by the age of 70, and were complicated by the relationship between openness and cultural norms. This studied also revealed that openness can be difficult to separate from related traits, such as extraversion, creativity, or verbal intelligence, and therefore that openness must be defined in research within particular cultural and historical contexts.

The adjustment of expatriates in a new culture and environment has been significantly researched (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Mol et al., 2005; Sinangil & Ones, 2001; Werner, 2002). However, scant research exists on personality traits predicting expatriate job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Mol et al., 2005). Additionally it is difficult to generalize research across contexts in this field, particularly given deficiencies identified in many studies associated with sample sizes and defining job performance criteria to draw conclusions about predicting expatriate job performance with personality traits. This research can contribute to an improvement in the educational services provided to students in the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries which feature high rates of employment of expatriate workers in higher education.

Methodology

This study considers the impact emotional intelligence, hardiness, and openness on self-reported probability of finishing contract and renewal of contract of expatriate leaders in a higher education institution in the UAE. As demographic characteristics of expatriate leaders may be connected with

personality traits and work success (self-reported probability to finish and renew work contracts), the study also seeks to elucidate the relationship between personality traits and demographic factors of expatriate educational leaders in the UAE.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

This study chiefly employed a 54-item questionnaire. Drawn from existing instruments, this instrument was designed to measure: Personality Hardiness, Emotional Intelligence and Openness. The questions addressing Personality Hardiness were adapted from Bartone (2006), Bartone (1998) and Bartone, et.al. (1989). Questions about Emotional Intelligence were drawn from Srivastava, (2011), Hystad, et. al. (2009) and White, et. al., 2011. Finally questions on Openness were based on Rothstein and Goffin (2006) and the Five Factor Model (Raduan, et. al., 2010).

An online survey through the institution's intranet was used (Appendix A). A web-link was sent to all participants via e-mail with an introductory paragraph explaining the reason for the research and how the results would be published. The survey was administered in November 2011 and respondents were given an initial two-week period to respond with an extension of another week in December 2011. Respondents were reminded with a follow up e-mail prior to the week's extension in December 2011. The participants were middle and top managers at Coordinator, Supervisor, Dean, Associate Provost, Assistant Provost, Vice-Provost and Provost levels at a multi-campus higher education institution. They consisted of academic and non-academic managers – some at campuses and others at the central system.

Observations, informal discussions and unstructured interviews with eleven senior managers took place over a period of six months – from October 2011 to March 2012.

During the data collection period, informal discussions and unstructured interviews were held with senior managers to ask about their perceptions, opinions and positions on the possible roles that emotional intelligence, personality hardiness and openness could play in higher education leadership. Their views on respondent honesty to the survey were also solicited.

The researchers were leaders at the same institution and therefore prior experience and research informed observations along with the information gathered from participants. The fact that the researchers interacted and worked with some respondents for one or more years contributed to building understanding and trust (Mertens, 2003). This allowed the researcher to gain more in-depth information and knowledge. On the other hand, interpersonal factors can also limit the findings to the viewpoints of that population which is not just willing, but interested in cooperating with the researchers. One may not want to participate due to relational or professional factors, or because they do not share an interest or similar viewpoint on the research questions. Though these factors were unavoidable in this study, this data can still be used with an understanding of the limitations to provide a richer analysis with concrete illustrations of supporting voices and corollary perspectives to the observed quantitative findings.

Data Analysis

Several analyses were undertaken. In the first stage, descriptive statistics (histograms with normal curve superimposed as well as kurtosis and skewness analyses) were performed to test for normal distribution. T-tests were performed on continuous variables, while Fishers exact chi square tests were performed on categorical variables. Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to outline initial relationships amongst variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression

analysis were carried out on independent variables to determine which, if any, had a significant effect on emotional intelligence, personality hardiness or openness. Regression was used to determine the effects of each independent variable on the dependent variables. Further, several assumptions to consider when employing multiple regression were generally met: (a) interactions were not observed between variables, (b) linear relationships between variables generally exist, and (c) multi-collinearity was not considered a factor as the highest correlation between variables does not exceed .90. The level of significance chosen for this research was $p < .05$.

To determine how well survey respondents represent the organization as a whole, responses were analyzed to compare the demographic characteristics of those who responded with the corresponding distributions of all employees. Chi square analyses were performed to determine whether observed proportions of respondents (based on independent variable) were similar to expected (i.e. known) proportions of the organization's population. Where observed proportions were found to be significantly different than expected, weightings based on respondent characteristics divided by population characteristics were applied to responses. Information gathered from the observations, informal discussions and unstructured interviews informed the researcher perspective on the analyses.

Less than 5% of the proportional percentage population and less than 2.5% of the proportional percentage respondents were in the age group 25–29. The highest proportional percentage for population and respondents were recorded for the age groups 40–49 (about 37%) and 50–59 (27% and 37%, respectively). While 23% of the population were aged 30–39, this age group made up 15% of total respondents, while those 60 and above were less than 10% of both the total population and among respondents. The proportional percentage response was the highest for those coming from the United Kingdom, followed by Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The total population consisted of 201 females and 261 males, or 44% female and 56% males. However of the respondents, there were 60 (54%) females and 52 (46%) males.

Findings

Correlations between variables and demographical characteristics are illustrated in Table 1. None of the correlations were high and therefore there was little concern about multi-collinearity (two variables measuring the same thing).

Table 2 demonstrates correlations between personality traits, age, experience at the institution, experience as expatriate, and total experience.

Table 2: Pearson correlations between personality traits and other variables

		A. Age	B. Institutional Exp.	C. Expat Exp.	D. Total Exp.	E. Emotional Intelligence	F. Personality Hardiness	G. Openness
A.	Pearson Correlation		-.075	0.255**	0.206*	-0.302**	.019	0.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.430	.007	.030	.001	.846	.001
B.	Pearson Correlation			.167	.246**	-.061	-.107	.059
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.079	.009	.525	.261	.536
C.	Pearson Correlation				.168	-.157	.058	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.078	.098	.542	.580
D.	Pearson Correlation					-.009	-.182	-.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.925	.055	.501
E.	Pearson Correlation						-.562**	-.288**
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.000	.002
F.	Pearson Correlation							.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)							.052
G.	Pearson Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).								

Significant and moderately strong (.3 to .6) correlations were found between some of the variables of the personality traits, age, experience at the institution, experience as expatriate and total experience.

In adjusting weighting, age became significant in relation to personality hardiness. In Table 3 it is demonstrated EI went down with age whereas hardiness and openness increased.

Table 3: Weighted adjustment between age and the personality traits

(Q3) AGE. Age:		EI	PH	Openness
20-29 years	Mean	2.9000	2.4737	3.6111
	N	4	4	4
	Std. Deviation	.34174	.29977	.31643
30-39 years	Mean	2.4176	3.1610	3.8824
	N	26	26	26
	Std. Deviation	.28689	.28910	.49552
40-49 years	Mean	2.2558	3.1689	3.9716
	N	43	43	43
	Std. Deviation	.37436	.30594	.53347
50-59 years	Mean	2.1310	3.0965	4.2328
	N	30	30	30
	Std. Deviation	.42280	.39313	.50762
60-70 years	Mean	2.1375	3.1118	4.3194
	N	9	9	9
	Std. Deviation	.34104	.18853	.45136
Total	Mean	2.2751	3.1160	4.0347
	N	112	112	112
	Std. Deviation	.39671	.34318	.52762

In one of the unstructured interviews, a male participant commented he was not surprised EI went down with age because male leaders, according to his perception, refrain from showing or dealing with others' emotions in the workplace to avoid being seen as 'weak'. He also pointed out that leadership of the institution places more value on intellectual capacity than EI.

A weighted grade was run for gender and marital status, but there were no changes in significance visible (Appendices B and C). Contrary to this finding, another participant did not feel this result was an accurate reflection of the reality in the institution. He felt that because the institution does not support the spouses of leaders when dealing with adjustment to the new environment, cultural challenges, schools for children and where to find basic household 'things', many leave the institution to return to their home countries. His colleagues confided in him that because their spouses did not adjust well, they could not complete their contract periods.

In Table 4 a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of age on the three dependent variables.

Table 4: ANOVA for Age, Emotional Intelligence, Personality Hardiness and Openness

AGE		EI	PH	Openness
25-29 years	Mean	2.9000	2.4737	3.6111
	N	4	4	4
	Std. Deviation	.34174	.29977	.31643
30-39 years	Mean	2.4176	3.1610	3.8824
	N	51	51	51
	Std. Deviation	.28403	.28621	.49058
40-49 years	Mean	2.2558	3.1689	3.9716
	N	129	129	129
	Std. Deviation	.37142	.30354	.52929
50-59 years	Mean	2.1310	3.0965	4.2328
	N	121	121	121
	Std. Deviation	.41748	.38818	.50123
60-70 years	Mean	2.1375	3.1118	4.3194
	N	44	44	44
	Std. Deviation	.32463	.17946	.42965
Total	Mean	2.2296	3.1269	4.0879
	N	349	349	349
	Std. Deviation	.38981	.33005	.52529

When weighted to adjust for population representativeness, significant relationships between age and each personality variable was observed as follows: Emotional Intelligence $p < .05$ [$F(4, 344) = 9.794, p = 0.000$], Personality Hardness $p < .05$ [$F(4, 344) = 5.572, p = 0.000$] and Openness $p < .05$ [$F(4, 344) = 9.748, p = 0.000$].

The following table presents the result on the variables probability of serving out present contract and seeking renewal at the end of the present contract as well as the age groups.

Table 5: Age and probability of serving out present contract or contract renewal

AGE:		(Q9) PRBLTY. Probability of your serving out present contract?	(Q10) PRBLTYRNWL. Probability of you seeking a contract renewal at the end of your present contract?
25-29 years	Mean	5.00	4.50
	N	4	4
	Std. Deviation	.000	.570
30-39 years	Mean	2.35	2.59
	N	51	51
	Std. Deviation	1.092	1.512
40-49 years	Mean	2.56	3.23
	N	129	129
	Std. Deviation	1.110	1.417
50-59 years	Mean	2.36	2.64
	N	121	121
	Std. Deviation	1.024	1.383
60-70 years	Mean	2.00	2.63
	N	44	44
	Std. Deviation	.506	1.595
Total	Mean	2.42	2.87
	N	349	349
	Std. Deviation	1.064	1.470

The responses to probability of serving out present contract was statistically significant for hardiness [$p < .05$ [$F(28, 111) = 2.467, p = 0.001$] (but non-significant for EI or openness). The higher the probability of finishing contract, the lower hardiness. In response to this result one participant categorized leaders as *missionaries* (trying to persuade the institution to go in another direction or to 'convert' other senior managers), or *mercenaries* (those who only work at the institution for personal gain and who have their own agendas). He pointed out that *mercenaries* normally 'last' longer in the institution than *missionaries*.

Regression models were not insightful (Appendices B and C). HEI experience weighting adjustments didn't change results (no significant difference) nor did location.

No statistically significant relationships or predictive models were found between *index scores* for the demographic characteristics and the personality traits of EI, hardiness, and openness; and no statistically significant relationships or predictive models could be found among *any survey items* for the demographic characteristics, and the personality traits.

However the results revealed a significant relationship in the *non-weighted* analysis between *age* and emotional intelligence and openness. In the *weighted* analysis, responses by *age* had a significant relationship with all three. Emotional intelligence scores went down with increase of age but hardiness and openness scores went up with age. The mean emotional intelligence appears to decline with the increase of age among leaders. This indicates that the older leaders are the less emotional intelligence they have. This is similar to findings in similar studies in terms of the Five Factor Model (Walter, et.al., 2011; Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 2000; Moon & Hur, 2011).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand the relationships among emotional intelligence, hardiness, and openness on self-reported probability of finishing contract and renewal of contract of expatriate leaders in a higher education institution in the UAE. Demographic factors have also been taken into account as they can be seen to relate to the development of some of these personality traits. The study found no significant relationship between emotional intelligence or openness and reported probability to complete work contracts, but did observe a relationship between probability to complete work contracts and the personality dimension of hardiness. These findings indicate that more nuanced and contextualized discussions of personality and expatriate higher education leadership is required in order to enable better selection of expatriate managers to ensure stability of higher education institutions in the UAE.

Barrick and Mount (2003) suggest the conditions under which traits such as emotional intelligence are measured are more favorable toward measuring a few rather than the whole scope of personality traits at a time. Rothstein and Goffin (2006) support this view and add that clarity on the correlation between emotional intelligence as a personality trait and the job performance criteria of leaders may benefit research in this field. In discussions with senior leaders, it was observed that when in a culturally conservative and sensitive environment, it is not always feasible to show emotions or take others' emotions into account in job performance. It could be perceived as a 'weakness' rather than a strength in the particular culture of the institution under examination. Three participants on different occasions mentioned that negatively evaluations are perceived as insults rather than opportunities for improvement. Therefore, it appears as a leader it is difficult to give objective feedback in this organizational culture that could benefit an employee in another cultural setting. These leaders also felt the institution places a higher value on intellectual capacity, experience and social intelligence than on emotional intelligence. The participants who were in the system longer added that it is better to be emotionally neutral rather than show any emotion in the workplace.

Mean openness appears to increase with the age of leaders. The mean openness score increased from 3.6 in the 20–29 age groups up to 4.3 in the age group 60 and more years.

This statistically significant finding echoes research which describes openness as a hidden trait that people develop over time (Schretlen, et. al., 2010). The views of senior leaders at this HEI are that older leaders become more outspoken and open to new experience because they realize that time is a precious commodity and they must get the most out of the institution in terms of experience and new ideas.

There is an inverse relationship between hardiness and the reported probability of leaders serving out their contracts. The $P < .05$ suggests that this difference is due to non-chance factors and represents a significant difference. However, this is not suggesting a cause-effect relationship. The researchers, as HEI leaders, observed that leaders who did not continue with a second contract or left prior to completing their contracts displayed enjoyment of challenges, a commitment to success, and a cross-cultural tolerance. Relatedly, the organizational culture at the HEI is conservative and individuals that display characteristics of hardiness such as being outspoken and visibly enjoying challenges may find it difficult to thrive within perceived constraints of the system (Sheard & Golby, 2010).

There was no significant relationship between EI, openness, and reported probability of serving out contracts or renewal of contracts. The literature on completion of overseas assignments by expatriate leaders is limited (Downes, et. al., 2010; Dalton & Wilson, 2000). However it is important to note that the expatriates leaders referred to in most literature are defined differently from those in UAE context. It is a difference that was emphasized in unstructured interviews. Many pointed out that an unusual number of expatriates in this study either retired or resigned from their previous jobs to take up their current contracts. According to those interviewed, this had a significant impact on the way they made decisions and displayed personality traits such as emotional intelligence and hardiness. For some it might be a vehicle to maintain their lifestyles after the economic downturn in Europe and the United States. For others, it might be an opportunity to pay for their children's university education and other financial responsibilities. In either case, as one participant commented, the professionalism managers may have relied upon in the past may be lacking in the current context; the term "sunset cruise" was used by several to describe the ambivalent, less careful or thoughtful attitude they ascribed to some leaders.

Not one non-Western expatriate leader responded to the survey even after the second reminder e-mail and the extension of the response period by one week. The quantitative study therefore had no non-Western representation out of the population of expatriate leaders in the HEI. Some non-Western expatriate managers who participated in informal discussions with the researcher commented this could be coincidence, or could be related to cultural differences. Among Western expats it was suggested by many that non-Western expats had a higher level of skepticism due to their national contexts toward anonymity and the sincere interest of the organization in truly wanting to know their perspectives. Western cultures were also associated with assertiveness and egalitarianism more than some non-Western cultures.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This project was designed to investigate whether significant relationships exist between characteristics of expatriate leaders and their self-reported emotional intelligence, openness, and hardiness. The research next investigated whether significant relationships exist between leaders' probability of serving out contracts and emotional intelligence, openness and hardiness. Informed by these analyses, the final stage employed observations and interviews to contextualize findings and better understand relationships amongst personality factors and leadership in terms of probability to serve out contract and probability of renewing contract.

Although no statistically significant relationships or predictive models were found between demographic characteristics and the personality traits, *age* proved significant for all three personality traits when responses were weighted. The responses to probability of serving out present contract were statistically significant only for personality hardiness. In both these occurrences it is important to note that correlation does not mean causation. It must also be borne in mind that there might be other intervening variables that affect both of these results that was not measured in this study.

Regression models again only showed *age* as a predictor – not particularly strong –for some variance in hardiness, openness and emotional intelligence, and probability of finishing contract. These

findings were not unexpected given the homogeneity of the respondents (no non-western expatriate managers responded to the survey). This implicates that results cannot be generalized to the entire population of the institution's leadership.

Knowledge was gained about how some aspects of personality such as emotional intelligence, hardiness, and openness influence characteristics and probability of managers' completion of contracts. Findings contribute to the scholarly literature and can be used to inform more targeted recruitment of expatriate leaders to a HEI in the UAE. Findings yield valuable insights into how human resource screening and recruitment can be improved. Knowing there is a relationship between these personality traits and age can inform management practices and strategies to improve support for expatriate leadership adjustment (Hayes, 2007; Deller, 1997).

Quality in the institution starts with the appointment of the right person for the right job and therefore it is helpful to know what personality traits leaders have, who are successful in the UAE as expatriates. Many organizations are considering professional development in the areas of social and emotional intelligence because of the benefits of employing leaders that understand the emotions and social contexts (Crowne, et. al., 2011; Salami, 2011). The fact that in this study, emotional intelligence of leaders decrease as the age of leaders increase might indicate that leaders of a slightly younger age should be recruited rather than older (60+) leaders. On the other hand the older the leaders are, the more open they are to new experiences and situations. This could also be advantageous for the institution's growth.

One of the limitations of this study is that few generalizations can be made from the results. The fact that there is a significance of the age of respondents and the three personality traits: emotional intelligence (where scores went down with the increase of the age) and with personality hardiness and openness (where the scores went up with age) is an occurrence in this particular group of respondents in this institution in the UAE and is not necessarily the case at other institutions even within the UAE. Also, although responses to the probability of serving out the present contract were statistically significant for hardiness, there may be other variables that affect both variables, which have not been measured here.

In literature on expatriates there is often reference to the ability of expatriates to be able to adapt and interact meaningfully with different cultures. In the UAE where expatriates make up the majority of the population coming from all over the world, research on the impact of various cultures including the Islamic culture of the UAE on the work performance and success of the expatriates completing their assignments will be interesting (Judge & Ilies, 2002). It would also be worthwhile to investigate how personality traits and characteristics such as effort, persistence and self-regulation play a role in perseverance and success of expatriate leaders in the UAE context. Though literature exist on predictors of turnover of expatriate leaders, it would be beneficial to investigate turnover particularly in the context of expatriate leaders in the UAE and whether factors such as repatriation concerns, satisfaction with institution support and perceived career advancement opportunities play a significant role (Stahl, et. al., 2009).

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