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Host Country Nationals' Attitudes, Social Support and Willingness to Work with Expatriates

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Evans Sokro[1] and Soma Pillay[2]

Abstract

This study investigates host country nationals' (HCNs) attitudes towards expatriates and their implications for willingness to co-work and offer social support. Survey data from 211 HCNs indicate that attitudes of HCNs directly influence their willingness to provide social support to expatriate employees in host subsidiaries. The results of the study also reveal that HCNs' attitudes are positively related to the willingness of host employees to co-work with expatriates. Implications of our findings for research and practice are presented.

Keywords

Host country nationals, attitudes, social support, expatriates, Ghana

Introduction

Both multinational companies (MNCs) and expatriate management researchers are increasingly recognizing the strategic role of host country nationals (HCNs) in successful expatriation, as companies have spent considerable amount of time and resources to assist expatriates and their families adjust to new overseas assignment (Tahir & Azhar, 2013). In recent years, there is increasing agreement that HCNs' relationships with expatriates and the social support they provide are powerful in enhancing successful adjustment of expatriates to the host company (Caligiuri, 2000; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001; Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi, 2010; Toh & Srinivas, 2012). In this study, we refer to social support as support from local employees who are either subordinates or colleagues of expatriates in day-to-day interactions.

[1] Central Business School, Central University, Tema, Ghana.
[2] Federation Business School, Federation University Australia, Berwick, Australia.

Corresponding author:
Evans Sokro, Central Business School, Central University P. O. Box 2305, Tema, Ghana.
E-mail: evanssokro@gmail.com

The in-depth knowledge of HCNs regarding the host country culture and company can be of great help in facilitating expatriates' adjustment. This will enhance their effectiveness in performing their assigned roles. For example, Florkowski and Fogel (1999) argue that a lack of support from HCNs is likely to heighten the likelihood of early return of expatriates. Other researchers also suggest that HCNs' support is critical for expatriates' job performance, and it helps overcome initial stress associated with foreign assignments, and eases the overall adjustment of expatriates to the host country's culture (Aycan, 1997; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Black, 1992). Without doubt, the success of expatriates and their ability to deliver superior performance in their new work environment cannot materialize without the support and cooperation of HCNs, since the latter can provide the former with valued information about the host culture and norms (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Toh & DeNisi, 2005; Toh & Srinivas, 2012).

The focus of this study is on Ghana, one of sub-Saharan Africa countries' emerging economies, for the following reasons. First, Africa's rapidly growing economies have attracted $87 bn in foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2014 and Ghana is among the top 10 host countries that have benefited from the bulk of the FDI inflows (The Africa Investment Report, 2015). As a result of a continuous surge in FDI influxes, it is likely additional foreign companies will choose Ghana as an investment destination. Second, Ghana is described as one of the most peaceful and politically stable countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and for that matter a potential destination for MNCs. The implication is that more and more expatriates would be posted to this country to serve, protect and advance the interests of their parent companies. Finally, evidence regarding perceptions of HCNs about their expatriate counterparts and how they are supported in Ghanaian host subsidiaries remains scarce in the expatriate management literature. Therefore, this study provides insights in relation to expatriate–HCN interactions within the context of sub-Saharan Africa.

Review of Literature

The definition of attitude has received mixed responses by scholars. However, one of the conventionally accepted definitions is by Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1) as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour'. The basic assumption is that attitudes are based on the assessment of an attitudinal object including anything a person discriminates or holds in mind (Albarracin, Johnson, Zanna, & Kumkale, 2014). Attitudes dominate human individuality and play a significant role in our perceptions of the world around us (Albarracin et al., 2014; Fazio, 1995). Usually, attitudes are measured based on positive or negative evaluations of the attitude object, which reflects individuals' beliefs, perceptions and affects (Ajzen, 2005; Manstead, 1996).

Studies suggest that attitudes of HCNs towards expatriates will considerably impact on their adjustment. For example, expatriates who perceived the HCNs as ethnocentric experienced difficulties in adjusting to the host culture and environment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Sinangil & Ones, 1997). In addition, Arman and Aycan (2013) propose that HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates will greatly shape the way expatriates are treated. These scholars again reason that the attitudes of HCNs may either enhance or hinder how expatriates easily adapt to the host culture as well as having a significant impact on their performance evaluation. For example, local employees' positive attitudes towards expatriates may lead to positive perceptions and willingness of the HCNs to provide important support needed for prompt adjustment. On the other hand, positive attitudes may result in good evaluation of expatriates' performance irrespective of the expatriates' actual performance on the job.

It has also been argued that perceived differences such as working conditions, ethnocentric attitudes, variations in values and pay discrepancy between expatriates and HCNs hinder good working relationships between the two workforces (Oltra, Bonache, & Brewster, 2012). This then leads to outgroup classification with 'Expatriates vs HCNs' having a negative impact on the preparedness of HCNs to extend a helping hand to expatriates, thereby affecting the latter's overall adjustment and performance (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Toh & DeNisi, 2003, 2007; Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006; Varma, Pichler, & Budhwar, 2011). For example, Varma et al. (2011) established that HCNs from the UK may conceivably categorize expatriates as in-group or out-group members in relation to perceptions of resemblance, ethnocentrism and collectivism. They maintain that HCNs in the UK are more likely to feel that they have similar shared values with US expatriates. Accordingly, HCNs will be willing to provide social support and useful information to expatriates whose values are in congruence with their values so as to ease the adjustment process of the newcomer. On the contrary, Leonardelli and Toh (2011) argue that social categorization can lead to greater intergroup cooperation, particularly cooperation involving a transfer of resources, because relevant social classifications can differentiate the group(s) of people in need of help and the group(s) of people who can provide the help. Consequently, HCNs will be willing to make information available and provide social support to expatriates if they perceived that these expatriates need their support in order to adapt and function effectively in the host culture. Also, social categories are useful ways of making sense of the social environment, people and situations, as well as providing direction as to how individuals might act in different social settings (Tajfel, 1978; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

It has also been argued that in circumstances where HCNs feel they were not treated fairly compared to expatriates, they may become uncooperative and even act antagonistically towards them, which may sooner or later affect expatriates' overall effectiveness (Toh & DeNisi, 2003, 2005). Unfair treatment could result in low commitment and poor work performance among local employees. Undoubtedly, the less privileged position occupied by HCNs as opposed to expatriates could distort their perceptions of the procedural and distributive justice system of the company (Chen, Choi, & Chi, 2002; Toh & DeNisi, 2003). To address the perceived differences in employment conditions, Oltra et al. (2012, p. 300) argue that

> to foster systemic fairness of employment conditions in MNCs, HCNs must not be discriminated against in relation to expatriates in matters of pay, overall working conditions and opportunities enjoyed by HCNs must meet the requirement of absence of both personal bias and organisational bias, whether implicit or explicit, in comparison with the pay, overall working conditions and opportunities enjoyed by expatriates.

Consistent with Oltra and colleagues' argument, Leonardelli and Toh (2011) maintain that procedural justice can improve intergroup relations, when group members come together to pursue a common agenda. They further suggest that the combination of fair treatment from the MNCs' authorities and social categorization together would most positively increase the extent to which HCNs gave useful information. Fair treatment inspires HCNs to be cooperative and social categorization assists them to gain insight into the expatriate co-workers' needs. Toh, DeNisi, and Leonardelli (2012) propose that HCNs would be more predisposed to make available valuable information needed in facilitating expatriates' adjustment to the host culture only when fair treatment and social categorization are highly acknowledged. Besides, HCNs were also found to have unreservedly shared information with expatriate co-workers because they perceived their companies' authorities as fair (Leonardelli & Toh, 2011).

To test whether HCN subordinates' ethnocentrism is positively associated with work adjustment of expatriates, Templer (2010) found that, in situations where HCNs who are subordinates held ethnocentric

attitudes, expatriate managers will experience difficulties in adjustment. Likewise, the perceptions of HCNs regarding the quality of their relationship with expatriate colleagues are likely to influence their willingness to show supportive behaviours towards the expatriates (Arman & Aycan, 2013; Verma, Pichler, Budhwar, & Biswas, 2009). Affirming the position of these scholars, Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin, and Suutari (2014, p. 1928) note that

> local employees represent a useful perspective for determining the degree of among-group consistencies. What do or did the local employees think about expatriate in their midst? Did they see her or him as a great benefit, allowing them to develop their own learning and representing them back to headquarters? Or did they resent this ludicrously highly paid, short-term, interloper who tried to force them to do their jobs one way, even though the expatriate had very little understanding of the local ways of doing business?

Certainly, the perceptions of local employees regarding expatriates will shape their attitudes towards their expatriate co-workers. Scholars concede that HCNs represent a stakeholder that is often ignored in expatriate adjustment research and as such, there are few studies that have focused on HCNs' perspectives and the consequence of their attitudes on the expatriation process, even though they play a significant role as socializing agents for expatriates (Arman & Aycan, 2013; Takeuchi, 2010; Toh & DeNisi, 2003, 2005, 2007; Toh et al., 2012). The expatriate management literature does not sufficiently take into account the opinions of host country managers who work with expatriates in developing countries' context (Al Ariss, 2014). Examining HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates in Ghanaian host subsidiaries is expected to advance existing knowledge in the expatriation literature and add to research on the influence of HCNs' attitudes in relation to successful expatriate adjustment in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. The attitudes of HCNs are measured using five proxies, including adaptation, transformational capacity, openness, professionalism and perceived justice of expatriate privileges (Arman & Aycan, 2013).

Early researchers, who proposed that the support expatriates receive from HCNs significantly influences the success of expatriates, hypothesized that without the cooperation of HCNs, expatriates may perform unsatisfactorily in relation to their assignments (Black, 1988; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Gregersen & Black, 1992). Consistent with national socialization research, Toh and DeNisi (2007) maintain that supportive HCN interactions, including companionship that provides emotional reassurance, information, encouragement or assistance in overcoming stressful situations can help new employees cope with unforeseen or terrifying experiences and feel well adjusted to the new work culture after being socialized by host employees (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas, Van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004; Fisher, 1985; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Nelson & Quick, 1999). Scholars also argue that HCNs play a perfect role of good intermediaries and as such, the unique information and resources they possess can be a source of countless support, insight and assistance to new assignees, more so than relying on information from supplementary sources (Morrison, 2000; Toh & DeNisi, 2005, 2007). Certainly, access to support from insiders can facilitate learning as well as lessen the time period needed to attain expertise in performing one's assigned duties (Pinder & Schroeder, 1987). In relation to the outlined arguments, it is evident that when expatriates are sufficiently supported, their integration into the host culture can be enhanced.

Toh and Srinivas (2012) also argue that an important process that has a potential impact on both the success of expatriates and MNCs is the extent to which HCNs are willing to share information with expatriates. This is because, HCNs may choose not to share information with expatriates and may in some instances act as saboteurs of expatriates when they deliberately hold back crucial information and compromise their effectiveness on the job (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Therefore, the willingness of HCNs to offer vital information and support to expatriates can increase the expatriates'

understanding of their new job roles and general effectiveness. Indeed, HCNs not only play an influential role in expatriates' adjustment process, but also lessen the impact of negative factors that may affect expatriates' adjustment, resulting in improved performance (Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012; Hailey, 1996; Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Takeuchi, 2010; Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006). Harvey, Novicevic, and Speier (2000) add that HCNs play a strategic role in the expatriation process. Thus, MNCs could derive maximum benefit, only if they ensure that HCNs are satisfied with their jobs as well as committed and identified with the organization (Harvey et al., 2000; Leung, Smith, Wang, & Sun, 1996; Toh & DeNisi, 2007).

It is perhaps not surprising then, that some scholars maintain that expatriates' social needs are more likely to be satisfied when they are strongly embedded in their host communities (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). The expatriates are also more likely to incorporate their international assignment role into their self-concept and be happy to stay and work in the host culture (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Mahajan and Toh (2014) surveyed 350 expatriates on assignments in the USA and established that expatriates are more likely to receive support in the form of advice from local employees that are perceived to be credible and likable. Conversely, Wills (1991) reported that being mindful that support is easily accessible to expatriates can be sufficient enough in lessening the expatriates' stress in the new work environment. Since expatriates work in a new social environment which is separated from their networks of friendship, developing and having alternative sources of social support, which is readily available, can be of great benefit to their adjustment. For this reason, Toh and Srinivas (2012) contend that the socializing role played by HCNs in the expatriate adjustment process is more probably recognized when the organization itself is seen to be supportive.

Also, a growing body of research indicates that HCNs can aid in the socialization process by providing social support or friendship and unique knowledge (Jackson, Hitt, & DeNesi, 2003; Toh & DeNisi, 2005, 2007; Toh et al., 2012; Vance, Vaiman, & Andersen, 2009). The support that HCNs offer to their expatriate colleagues can assist expatriates overcome the most challenging and demanding moments of the adjustment process (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Bjorkman & Schaap, 1994; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Suutari & Brewster, 1998). On the contrary, poor relations with HCNs have been found to have a negative impact on the work adjustment and commitment of expatriates to the host subsidiary (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). Additionally, previous studies have established that HCN support is positively related to all aspects of expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). Arman and Aycan (2013) further reiterate that social support offered to expatriates by HCNs can be indispensable as the expatriates' efforts on its own are not adequate for an effective adjustment process. Similarly, Toh and Srinivas (2012, p. 695) note that 'the unique information that HCNs have about the host unit organization and culture can distinctively aid expatriates in their understanding of their new role, and help them become adjusted more quickly'. Indeed, sharing of useful information and effective cooperation of HCNs can be vital for expatriate assignment success in the host subsidiary. As such, people who scored high in ATEX (Attitudes towards expatriates) were more likely to be a good source of support to expatriates during expatriate socialization and also have a preference of working with expatriates (Arman & Aycan, 2013).

Even though HCNs have a crucial role to play in the socialization process and overall effectiveness of expatriates, indication of how this role may be facilitated is under-developed in expatriate management research within developing country contexts (Toh & Srinivas, 2012). Again, evidence suggests that extensive expatriate management research over the past years has mainly focused on expatriates to the neglect of other stakeholders who are part of the expatriation process, including HCNs (Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Malek, Budhwar, & Reiche, 2015; Takeuchi, 2010; Toh & Srinivas, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

The current study draws on the attitudes towards expatriate proposition (Arman & Aycan, 2013), in an attempt to increase our understanding regarding expatriate–host country employee interaction dynamics.

The study examines:

1. HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates;
2. how inclined HCNs are to provide social support;
3. their willingness to co-work with expatriates.

This study contributes to the expatriate management literature in two ways. First, our study seeks to understand how HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates affect the willingness of host employees to co-work with expatriates and also offer the needed support that is essential for effective expatriate adjustment. Second, this study extends the ATEX theory which has been tested in the Western context to the sub-Saharan Africa context—a context that receives little attention in expatriation research.

Methodology

The sample for the present study consisted of Ghanaian HCNs currently working with expatriate co-worker(s) at the time of data collection. These HCNs work with expatriates in Ghanaian MNCs across different sectors. Consistent with previous expatriate studies (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014; Richardson & Mallon, 2005), HCNs were contacted with assistance from HR managers and local contact persons. It was explicitly stated on the cover letter of the survey that the study was solely for research purposes and as such responses from each participant would be kept strictly confidential. A total of 550 surveys were distributed via our contact persons. We received a total number of 211 usable questionnaires, which represent a response rate of 38.4 per cent.

Statistical analysis of the quantitative results was conducted using social science software 22.1 (SPSS), including descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis. The following multiple regression model equations examined the association between HCNs' attitudes, social support (SS) and willingness to work with expatriates (WWE).

$$SS = \beta_o + \beta_1 ADP + \beta_2 TC + \beta_3 OP + \beta_4 PF + \beta_5 PJ + \beta_6 LE + \beta_7 PWE + \beta_8 PO + \beta_9 GD + \beta_{10} AGE + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

$$WWE = \alpha_o + \alpha_1 ADP + \alpha_2 TC + \alpha_3 OP + \alpha_4 PE + \alpha_5 PJ + \alpha_6 LE + \alpha_7 PEW + \alpha_8 PO + \alpha_9 GD + \alpha_{10} AGE + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where

β_0, α_0 = constant terms
β_{1-10}, α_{1-10} = regression coefficients
ADP = adaptation
TC = transformational capacity
OP = openness
PF = professionalism
PJ = perceived justice of expatriate privileges

LE = length of experience
PWE = previous work experience
PO = position
GD = gender
AGE = age of HCNs.

Respondents mostly occupied lower positions (64.9%) in the organizational hierarchy, compared to the positions held by expatriate co-workers. Approximately 23 per cent of the study participants are reported to have previous work experience with expatriates. A substantial percentage of respondents (83.4%) had up to 5 years working relationship with expatriates and 16.6 per cent of them had worked with expatriates for more than 5 years. The majority of respondents (93.8%) were below the age of 41, and 57.8 per cent of the sample who participated in the study were males (see Table 1).

Measures

HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates – The attitudes of HCNs towards expatriates were measured using the ATEX scale developed by Arman and Aycan (2013) to examine HCNs' perceptions of attitudes towards expatriate co-workers whom they work with. The scale measures adaptation, transformational capacity, openness, professionalism and perceived justice of expatriate privileges. HCNs indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) their agreement or disagreement to various statements. Sample items included, 'They are not interested in learning our culture' (reverse coded; adaptation), 'They are good role models for their subordinates' (transformational capacity), 'They are open to different opinions' (openness), 'They are successful in differentiating personal and business relationships' (professionalism) and 'Their salaries are higher than what they deserve' (perceived justice of expatriate privileges).

Social support – was measured by having respondents rate the extent to which they agree or disagree (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) to statements such as 'I provide useful information to expatriate co-workers in assisting them adjust to the Ghanaian culture', 'Expatriate employees need my cooperation, assistant and support in order to function effectively' and 'I play a critical role in expatriate assignment success'. HCNs' support has been acknowledged in previous studies to influence expatriate adjustment and assignment outcomes (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Toh & DeNisi, 2005; Toh & Srinivas, 2012).

Willingness of HCNs to work with expatriates – was measured using a 3-item measure adopted from Arman and Aycan (2013). Respondents rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) their agreement or disagreement to statements including 'I enjoy working with expatriate co-workers', 'I prefer working with expatriates to Ghanaian managers' and 'I'm willing to work with expatriates in future'.

Control variables – Consistent with previous research, five control variables were included to rule out possible alternative explanations for the influence of HCNs' attitudes on social support and willingness to work with expatriates in the future. First, *length of relationship* was measured by asking respondents how long (in years) they worked with their expatriate co-workers (Levin, Whitener, & Cross, 2006; Toh & Srinivas, 2012). Second, *gender* (1 = male; 2 = female), as women were reported to be relationship-centred and their affiliating personality traits appear to be higher than that of men (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). Third, we controlled for *previous work experience with expatriates*. Study participants provided answer to the question 'Do you have previous work experience with expatriates?' (Yes = 1; No = 2). Fourth, *job level of HCNs* was measured by asking participants to indicate their positions in the company relative to the position of the expatriate co-worker (1 = lower; 2 = same; 3 = higher). Finally, *age* was measured in years.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Experience with Expatriates		
Less than 1 year	69	32.7
–1–5 years	107	50.7
–6–10 years	28	13.3
>10 years	7	3.3
Previous Working Experience with Expatriates		
Yes	48	22.7
No	163	77.3
Position		
Lower	137	64.9
Same	54	25.6
Higher	20	9.5
Gender		
Male	122	57.8
Female	89	42.2
Age		
<30 years old	96	45.5
31–40 years old	102	48.3
41–50 years old	7	3.3
51–60 years old	6	2.8

Source: The authors.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among the Variables

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Adaptation	3.88	1.36	1						
2. Transformational capacity	4.17	1.25	−0.217**	1					
3. Openness	4.18	1.05	−0.182**	0.523**	1				
4. Professionalism	4.71	1.23	−0.151*	0.521**	0.563**	1			
5. Perceived justice	2.79	1.50	0.329**	−0.188**	−0.048	−0.014	1		
6. Social support	4.27	1.30	0.033	0.239**	0.269**	0.323**	0.018	1	
7. Willingness to work with expatriates	4.95	1.34	−0.149*	0.357**	0.381**	0.478**	−0.090	0.437**	1

Source: The authors.

Note: ** and * Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (i.e., $p \leq 0.01$) and 0.05 level (i.e., $p \leq 0.05$), respectively.

Analysis

Table 2 displays the mean values, standard deviations (SD) and correlation between the variables (HCNs' attitude, social support and willingness to work with expatriates) for the whole sample. The bivariate correlations between HCNs' attitude variables and social support are significant and positive, except perceived justice of expatriate privileges. For example, transformational capacity and social support ($r = 0.239, p \leq 0.01$), openness and social support ($r = 0.269, p < 0.01$) and professionalism and social support ($r = 0.323, p \leq 0.01$). These results support the general notion that HCNs' positive attitudes towards expatriate co-workers are positively associated with social support. Also, the results indicate positive and significant relationships between professionalism ($r = 0.478, p \leq 0.01$); transformational capacity ($r = 0.357, p \leq 0.01$); openness ($r = 0.381, p \leq 0.01$) and intentions of HCNs to work with expatriates in future.

Table 3. Results of Regression Analysis for the Effects of HCNs' Attitudes on Social Support and Willingness to Work with Expatriates

Variable		Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	*p*-Value
Social support	Adaptation	0.069	0.327
	Transformational capacity	0.091	0.266
	Openness	0.087	0.297
	Professionalism	0.227	0.007**
	Perceived justice	0.017	0.811
	Length of experience	0.117	0.078
	Previous work experience	−0.131	0.055
	Position	0.018	0.787
	Gender	0.005	0.943
	Age	0.078	0.234
$R^2 = 0.174$; $F = 4.212$			
Willingness to work expatriates	Adaptation	−0.045	0.498
	Transformational capacity	0.084	0.275
	Openness	0.129	0.102
	Professionalism	0.35	0.000**
	Perceived justice	−0.043	0.513
	Length of experience	0.018	0.776
	Previous work experience	0.012	0.85
	Position	0.041	0.506
	Gender	−0.025	0.682
	Age	0.072	0.245
$R^2 = 0.268$; $F = 7.304$			

Source: The authors.

As shown in Table 3, HCNs' positive attitudes towards expatriates account for about 17 per cent (R^2 = 0.174; $p < 0.001$) of their willingness to socially support expatriate employees on international assignments. This indicates that 17 per cent of the variance in HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates could be accounted for by provision of social support. Specifically, the results indicate that all variables do not have significant impact on social support except professionalism ($\beta = 0.227$; $p \leq 0.01$). All the variables indicate positive relationships except previous work experience. Furthermore, the results in Table 3 also show that HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates are positively associated with the willingness of HCNs to work with expatriates ($R^2 = 0.268$; $p \leq 0.01$). Again, professionalism ($\beta = 0.350$; $p \leq 0.01$) effectively mediate the relationship between HCNs' attitude and their willingness to work with expatriates. All the variables indicate positive relationships, except adaptation, perceived justice of expatriate privileges and gender.

Discussion

The key objectives of the study were to examine (a) HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates; (b) how inclined HCNs are to provide social support; and (c) their willingness to co-work with expatriates. The study found that positive attitudes of HCNs significantly and positively relate to the provision of social support. In a similar vein, HCNs' attitudes were also associated directly with intentions of HCNs to work with expatriates. These findings provide clear evidence supporting the notion that HCNs' positive attitudes are positively associated with willingness to provide social support to expatriates and their inclination to work with expatriate managers over host country managers (Arman & Aycan, 2013). In addition, Toh and Srinivas (2012) note that the willingness of HCNs to effectively play the role of socializing agents depends greatly on the actions and behaviours of both the MNC and the expatriates—or how these HCNs perceive their expatriate colleagues. The perception that they are not competent enough to be considered for the position that the expatriate is occupying or because the expatriate employees usually occupy top management positions compared to local managers may lead to resentment from HCNs in the host subsidiaries (Reiche, 2007). Conversely, a healthy and positive relationship among HCNs and expatriates could play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of HCNs towards expatriate employees in host subsidiaries.

An interesting result that is worth noting is that professionalism is positively linked to intentions of HCNs to provide social support and their willingness to work with expatriates. This perhaps implies that when an expatriate is able to interact professionally with host employees, the expatriate is likely to gain respect and win the confidence of HCNs, thereby strengthening the expatriate–host country employee relationships. This would make it easier for host country employees to continue to work with that expatriate. The study's results suggest that HCNs' perceptions of how effective and efficient expatriate co-workers are, and how they act and address issues professionally in the work environment is an important determinant of HCNs' readiness to provide social support and also work with expatriates. This adds to earlier studies suggesting that perceptions of HCNs regarding the quality of their relationship with expatriate colleagues are likely to influence their willingness to show supportive behaviours towards the expatriates (Arman & Aycan, 2013; Verma et al., 2009). This is because expatriates could be assisted to become well-adjusted in the host subsidiary, if HCNs make available useful information in relation to the host organization and its culture (Toh & Srinivas, 2012). In addition, these findings provide more compelling evidence that HCNs' social interactions with expatriates have a positive effect on how expatriates generally adjust and interact with others in their new culture (Froese et al., 2012). For expatriate employees to share knowledge and promote learning within host subsidiaries, it is critical

multinationals adopt flexible organizational structure, a strong technological network and a dedicated leadership in an atmosphere of trust (Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009). In sum, our study underscores the importance of HCNs' general attitudes and perceptions about their expatriate co-workers and their related impact on social support and willingness to work with expatriate employees.

The present study contributes to expatriate management research in the following ways. First we contribute to a deeper understanding of HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates by examining how these attitudes influence the willingness of HCNs to provide their expatriate colleagues with social support that is essential to facilitate the adjustment of the expatriates in their new work roles and culture. Our study demonstrates that HCNs' perceptions of their expatriate co-workers play a significant role in the expatriate–host employee interaction process. In the present investigation, Ghanaian employees who espoused positive attitudes towards expatiates were more inclined to provide support and work with expatriates. As such, this finding lends credence to the notion that how expatriates are perceived influences the willingness of HCNs to provide social support to expatriates, and this also affects the decision of the host country employees to continue working with the expatriates. In general, the findings of this study enhance our understanding of the crucial role of HCNs in the expatriate adjustment and interaction process (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012; Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Toh & DeNisi, 2005; Toh & Srinivas, 2012).

Second, research focusing on host country context regarding the expatriation process is relatively scarce in the expatriate management literature (Arman & Aycan, 2013; Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Malek et al., 2015; Takeuchi, 2010). The findings of our study highlight the significance of HCNs' perceptions regarding expatriate co-workers and their influence on the provision of social support and the willingness of host employees to work with expatriates. In particular, it adds to the HCN–expatriate socialization literature, which is understudied within the sub-Saharan Africa context. In this vein, our research is among only a few studies that have investigated expatriate–host country employee interactions from an African host nation's perspective, allowing for better understanding of the impact of HCNs' perceptions on expatriate adjustment to the host subsidiary.

Finally, extant literature on HCNs' perceptions of expatriates reveals that there is a dearth of research examining the consequences of these perceptions on the socialization process of new international assignees. Despite its relevance regarding HCN–expatriate relations, HCNs' perceptions and how this influences their readiness to provide social support and the willingness of the host employees to work with the newcomers have been relatively neglected in the expatriate management literature. As such, the current study contributes to a growing body of research focused on highlighting HCNs' perceptions and their consequences on HCN–expatriate interaction process.

Conclusion

This study examined the attitudes of HCNs towards expatriates as well as the influence of these attitudes on the provision of social support and the willingness of HCNs to work with expatriates in future. The findings indicate that HCNs' attitudes towards expatriates were significantly and positively associated with the provision of social support and willingness to work with expatriates. Furthermore, the willingness to provide social support is influenced by two key variables—transformational capacity and perceived justice of expatriate privileges. Similarly, willingness to work with expatriates is influenced by the ability of the expatriate to act professionally in networking with host employees. It is likely that MNCs will endeavour to pay more attention to HCNs, since they remain a significant stakeholder in the expatriation process.

Managerial Implications

A practical implication that can be drawn from our study is that MNCs should thoughtfully evaluate how expatriates are perceived by host country employees, and how this impacts on the HCN–expatriate relationships. Conscious effort is needed to constantly evaluate and monitor individual engagements and interactions between HCNs and their expatriate counterparts, since the attitudes of HCNs play a significant role in facilitating expatriate adjustment to the new work environment. Thus, no matter how experienced, skilful and competent an expatriate may be, adjusting to a new work environment is often a challenging task and the support from HCNs could be beneficial in reducing adjustment-related problems. Based on our study's findings, we suggest that HCNs themselves need to be realistic in their expectations of expatriate employees. They should also exercise maximum patience in their interactions, since both parties are from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, and differences are bound to exist. Companies should therefore educate, encourage and coach HCNs in order to shape their perceptions and expectations, even as they interact and relate with expatriate co-workers, since they contribute significantly to expatriate adjustment and assignment success.

Limitations/Future Research

Despite its various contributions, this study has several limitations that can be taken into account in future research. The most significant is the sample size of 211 HCNs. This sample size is relatively small and limits our ability to analyze the data using techniques that require larger samples, such as structural equation modelling. Second, all measures were collected through self-reports at one point in time, which may increase the possibility of common method variance. In order to minimize the potential for common method variance, we positioned the independent variables separately from the dependent variables on the survey instrument (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). All the approaches recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003) should be thoroughly followed by future researchers in addressing the shortcomings of common method variance related issues. Finally, our findings may have limited generalizability to HCN–expatriate interactions in other countries except sub-Saharan African countries with similar cultural background as Ghana. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to find out if the same model could produce different results in different cultural settings. Moreover, the model could be further developed and perhaps more variables included, since this study's model only tested five HCNs' attitudinal constructs. It is also acknowledged that this study only investigates social support from the perspective of HCNs who are presently co-working with expatriates or had worked with expatriates in the past. It would be beneficial for future research to also include support from other parties, especially the expatriate community in the host country as well as expatriate-related institutions.

In the face of these limitations, our study contributes significantly to enhancing our understanding of expatriates' socialization process from host country employees' perspective. In particular, it highlights the important role HCNs may play in facilitating effective social interactions and cooperation among the expatriates and host country employees in the host subsidiary. In addition, this study contributes to expatriate socialization literature on the significance of HCNs' perceptions of expatriates in general, and their impact on the provision of social support and their intentions to work with expatriates on assignments in Ghana in particular.

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