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# Adjustment and work outcomes of self-initiated expatriates in the United Arab Emirates: Development and testing of a model

Sanjay Kumar Singh<sup>a,\*</sup>, Shlomo Y. Tarba<sup>b</sup>, Geoffrey Wood<sup>c</sup>, Nikos Bozionelos<sup>d</sup>, Manlio Del Giudice<sup>e,f</sup>, Vijay Pereira<sup>g</sup>, Hengky Latan<sup>h</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Business, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland

<sup>b</sup> Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK

<sup>c</sup> DAN Department of Management & Organizational Studies, Western University, Canada

<sup>d</sup> EM Lyon Business School, Ecully, France

<sup>e</sup> University of Rome "Link Campus", Italy

<sup>f</sup> Paris School of Business, Paris, France

<sup>g</sup> NEOMA Business School, REIMS, France

<sup>h</sup> Hengky Latan HLC Consulting, Jl. Kertanegara Selatan V No 5B, Semarang 50241, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing upon anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory and organization support theory (OST), we developed and tested a model on how globally mobile talent – in this instance, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) - stay and perform well in the organization. We collected data from 276 superior-subordinate dyads, which were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Our results suggest that role clarity mediates the influence of perceived organizational support and work adjustment. Furthermore, we found that work adjustment mediates the influence of role clarity on task performance and organizational citizenship behavior. We draw out the implications for advancing theory and practice in expatriate management.

## 1. Introduction

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) represent a critical source of talent for organizations globally that seek to meet their talent needs (Furusawa and Brewster, 2019; Singh et al., 2021b). However, the management of SIEs has historically attracted less academic attention than organizationally assigned expatriates (the OAE; Bozionelos and Singh, 2017; Hussain and Deery, 2018; Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b) in the international management (IM) literature (Pereira et al., 2017). We note that IM literature has grown in size and depth to address issues related to expatriate management, but comprehensive knowledge on the management of SIEs remains scarce (Cerdin and Semler, 2014; Doherty et al., 2013; Bozionelos and Singh, 2017; Hussain and Deery, 2018). The SIEs, as compared to the host country nationals (HCNs), experience and handle fundamentally different challenges they face at the workplace, and the resources they need to perform well in the host country context significantly shape SIEs' perceptions and attitudes towards the employing organization (Lapointe et al., 2020). SIEs fill in the organization's staffing needs and bring competitive knowledge critical for their employing firms to stay relevant in the markets. Despite all this, the extant IM literature suggests an apparent lack of a standard

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [sanjay.singh@mu.ie](mailto:sanjay.singh@mu.ie) (S.K. Singh), [s.tarba@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.tarba@bham.ac.uk) (S.Y. Tarba), [gwood23@uwo.ca](mailto:gwood23@uwo.ca) (G. Wood), [bozionelos@em-lyon.com](mailto:bozionelos@em-lyon.com) (N. Bozionelos), [m.delgiudice@unilink.it](mailto:m.delgiudice@unilink.it) (M. Del Giudice), [vijay.pereira@port.ac.uk](mailto:vijay.pereira@port.ac.uk) (V. Pereira), [hlatan@academicpublishing.com](mailto:hlatan@academicpublishing.com) (H. Latan).

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definition of SIEs (Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b; Vaiman et al., 2015). In this study, we define SIEs as the ones who are skilled/professionally qualified individuals taking initiatives on their own, relocates to another country for regular employment, with the clear intention to return to their home country (e.g., Andresen et al., 2014; Cerdin and Semler, 2014; Doherty et al., 2013).

Successful SIEs are more likely to possess professional cultural competencies and be better equipped in their dealings with host country nationals (AlMazrouei and Pech, 2014). At the same time, SIEs themselves are not homogenous collectives as they come from different countries with different beliefs, values, & skill sets (Al Ariss, 2014). SIEs in employing organization work side-by-side with host country nationals (Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b) and are critical for knowledge transfer between SIEs and organization (Shao and Ariss, 2020) as well as knowledge sharing amongst employees from different nationality (Papa et al., 2020). Furthermore, the role of support providers (Kubovcikova and van Bakel, 2021) is critical for the adjustment of SIEs and how knowledge transfer between SIEs and the employing organizations unfolds (Shao and Ariss, 2020) and results in innovation and excellence at the workplace (Arias-Pérez et al., 2021). Extant literature suggests that employee's tendency to share knowledge with coworkers predict prosocial knowledge effectiveness at the workplace (Chatterjee et al., 2022a; Papa et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2019) that, in turn, influences organization's strategic renewal to act decisively (Wikström et al., 2018; Shin and Pérez-Nordtvedt, 2020) especially when inter-organizational relationships as an essential precursor of knowledge identification capabilities (Bamel et al., 2021; Ortiz et al., 2018).

Only a handful of studies have studied SIEs in the GCC countries (Bozionelos and Singh, 2017; Guo et al., 2021; Hussain and Deery, 2018; Ridgway and Robson, 2018), especially on what makes them perform well. The highly segmented labor markets (not only between locals and foreigners but often on nationality lines) in the GCC member states make integration very challenging, problems compounded by uneven and at times seemingly capricious regulatory coverage (see Gray, 2018). The limited studies that have focused on SIEs in the GCC countries indicate that social support from host country nationals (Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b), job embeddedness (Hussain and Deery, 2018), quality of life (Ridgway and Robson, 2018), and the incentives provided by tax-free salaries (Baruch and Forstenlechner, 2017) all contribute to SIEs success. Given that SIEs compose the vast majority of the workforce in the GCC member states, their performance and the factors that contribute to it are critical, probably more critical than the performance of SIEs in any other place of the world. However, these emerging scientific areas in the extant literature remain largely unexplored, and our study attempts to scientifically investigate and fill in the gap in the body of knowledge (Lapointe et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b).

Therefore, to adequately learn about the causes and consequences of SIEs' work adjustment in the context of the GCC countries, we intend to examine and answer the following research question: "*How do perceived organizational support and role clarity act on SIEs' work adjustment for them to perform well?*" In this study, we used anxiety/uncertainty management theory (AUM: Gudykunst, 2005) and organizational support theory (OST: Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 1986) as theoretical lenses to understand and explain how perceived organizational support predict management of experienced anxiety and uncertainty in the organization for SIEs to perform well. Our study can advance the theory and practice of expatriate management in three distinct ways by answering the research question mentioned above. First, it contributes to advancing the SIEs literature in general, as it develops a comprehensive model of antecedents of SIEs' performance and a mechanism of how these antecedents exert their effects. Second, this study attempts to answer several calls in the international management (IM) knowledge domain on how SIEs, unlike organizationally assigned expatriates, can handle their problems themselves throughout their adjustment to colleagues from a different culture (Howe-Walsh et al., 2020; Luring and Selmer, 2018; Shay and Tracey, 2009; Pereira et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b; Suutari et al., 2018). Third, it advances the limited IM literature on what makes SIEs perform well in the GCC region (Singh et al., 2021a), wherein the host-country socio-cultural context is distinctive as it combines steeped in age-old traditions, norms, beliefs & values, customs, rituals, and religious practices. The findings of our study advance the theory and practice of IM, especial in the domain of the management of globally mobile talents (e.g., Chatterjee et al., 2022b; Furusawa and Brewster, 2019; Fan et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b), through illustrating how role clarity mediates the influence of perceived organizational support and work adjustment, and in turn, how the latter affects the relative influence of role clarity on task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.

The remainder of the paper discusses the theoretical framework followed by the hypotheses development section. After that, we present the methods and results sections and conclude this paper with a discussion & conclusion section.

## 2. Theoretical framework

We draw upon anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM; Gudykunst, 2005) theory and organization support theory (OST; Eisenberger et al., 1986) to find answers to what makes SIEs perform well in the workplace. Drawing upon AUM theory, we posit that reducing anxiety/uncertainty facilitates cross-cultural adjustment by helping intercultural communication of the SIEs (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005). SIEs, unlike organizationally assigned expatriates, are required to handle themselves issues that arise in the process of adjustment to the host country workplace, much of that adjustment involving getting along with colleagues from different cultures (Andresen et al., 2015). As a result, SIEs in host countries confront varied behavioral expectations dissimilar from their home country's social norms, which aggravates their uncertainties, though the responses to uncertainty differ amongst SIEs (Kumar et al., 2019). Borrowing from the principles of AUM theory, the more SIEs can balance their anxiety and uncertainty in the host country, and the better SIEs should communicate with others in an organization (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005). Hence, AUM theory leads us to argue that intercultural competence enables SIEs to reduce their anxiety and uncertainty in the workplace through successful adaptation and socialization with colleagues from different cultures (Fang et al., 2011).

As SIEs happen to be strangers in the host country, they experience both anxiety and uncertainty, and the reason could be that they feel neither secure nor very sure of how to relate with others at the workplace and the social settings (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005). Anxiety and uncertainty become accentuated in interactions, especially between individuals of different cultures (e.g., Malek and Budhwar, 2013). The host country's cultural context demands act on SIEs to leverage their intercultural competence to reduce the experience of

anxiety and uncertainty, as they happen to be strangers in intercultural encounters in the host country. Furthermore, intercultural competence positively influences expatriate adjustment (Shu et al., 2017), and culturally adjusted expatriates perform better on the assigned tasks in the organization (Salgado and Bastida, 2017; Davies et al., 2015; Malek et al., 2015).

Utilizing OST (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 1986), we argue that, as SIEs develop perceptions regarding the degree to which their employer values their efforts towards achievement of organizational goals and take care of their socio-emotional needs (i.e., perceived organizational support - POS), they experience less anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural contexts. OST helps explain the relationship of SIEs with the organization from the SIEs' viewpoint and predicts a strong association of perceived organizational support with SIEs' attitudes towards the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Extant literature suggests that POS encourages employees to participate in helping coworkers in the successful attainment of assigned tasks (Kurtessis et al., 2017). We contemplate that POS helps SIEs to realize their socioemotional needs and that, in turn, increases SIEs' commitment to putting in extra effort in helping their organization to achieve its desired goals (Kurtessis et al., 2017) in the absence of the standard integrated support that generally given to the organizationally assigned expatriates.

This study seeks to remedy the scant attention paid to self-initiated expatriation management literature to develop and empirically examine a theoretical framework to explain what makes SIEs stay and perform in the host country context. We note that SIEs are likely to be more tolerant of cultural differences and acclimatization challenges, facilitating fit within the organizational environment. Again, the costs of returning home are more likely to be borne by the individual, increasing pressures to make things work. Thus, drawing upon anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM; Gudykunst, 2005) theory and organization support theory (OST; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Fig. 1 displays the overarching theoretical framework that we developed to explain and examine factors that makes SIEs perform well in the host country.

### 3. Hypotheses development

#### 3.1. Perceived organizational support and role clarity

Perceived organizational support (POS) reflects employees' perceptions regarding organizational readiness to take care of their socioemotional needs and to reward the efforts made by employees on the organization's behalf (Kurtessis et al., 2017) and that in turn enhance employee engagement, reduces their turnover intention and deviant work behaviors (Shantz et al., 2016). POS may motivate SIEs to more fully engage and commit to the goals of their organizations (Chen and Shaffer, 2017), and employees who perceive their organization to take care of their well-being are likely to reciprocate by raising their job performance and contributing to organizational goals (DeConinck, 2010; Du et al., 2018). POS is founded on the norms of reciprocity (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and is derived from OST, which is an application of social exchange theory (Baran et al., 2012). POS acts as possible means that organizations could use to influence employee job attitudes, and the meta-analytic study suggests for weak to moderate positive relationship of POS on task and contextual performance (Paillé and Raineri, 2015; Riggie et al., 2009).

Drawing upon AUM theory, we posit that reducing anxiety/uncertainty facilitates cross-cultural adjustment by facilitating intercultural communication of the SIEs (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005). As noted above, SIEs, unlike organizationally assigned expatriates, are less likely to enjoy proactive organizational support to fit into the host country workplace, much of that adjustment involving getting along with colleagues from different cultures (Andresen et al., 2015; Shay and Tracey, 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2020). As a result, SIEs in host countries are confronted with behavioral expectations dissimilar from their home country's social norms and worsening any uncertainties (Kumar et al., 2019). Borrowing from the principles of AUM theory, we argue that the more SIEs can balance their anxiety and uncertainty in the host country, the better SIEs should communicate with others in an organization (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005). Hence, AUM theory leads us to suggest that intercultural competence enables SIEs to reduce their anxiety and uncertainty in the workplace through successful adaptation and socialization with colleagues from different cultures (Fang et al., 2011). We argue that anxiety and uncertainty become accentuated in interactions between individuals of different cultures (e.g., Malek and Budhwar, 2013). SIEs may leverage their intercultural competence to mitigate this (Davies et al., 2015; Salgado and Bastida, 2017; Shu et al., 2017).

We posit that POS may be negatively associated with both role ambiguity and shield against undesirable effects of role stress, if any (Stamper and Johlke, 2003). Furthermore, ambiguous roles in an organization act as a hindrance stressor that negatively influences employees' work adjustment and satisfaction with jobs, whereas role novelty, a kind of challenge stressor, positively influences task

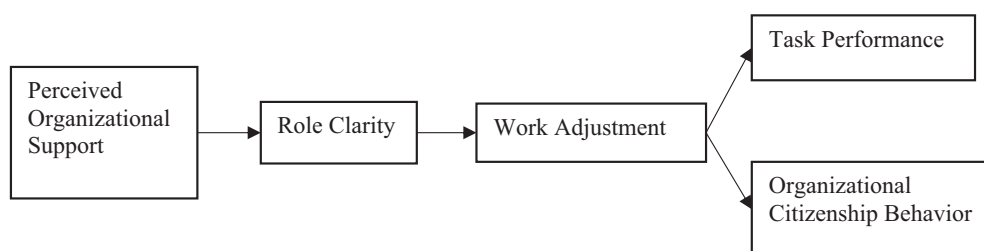


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework.

performance and work adjustment in the host country (Kawai and Mohr, 2015). Therefore, we predict that organizations that care about the well-being of their employees are likely to stipulate and elucidate norms and job expectations for their employees (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2001; Shay and Tracey, 2009; Stamper and Johlke, 2003) to better aid and assist them to perform well on their jobs. Hence, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1.** Perceived organizational support positively influences role clarity.

### 3.2. Role clarity and work adjustment

Work adjustment refers to the degree to which the expatriate employee feels about the job in general and especially to the critical responsibilities attached with the jobs (Lueke and Svyantek, 2000), and that helps increase his/her intention to stay in the job in the foreign country (Black, 1990; Gregersen & Black, 1990). Recent work suggests that expatriate adjustment predicts job satisfaction, interactional & general adjustment (Silbiger et al., 2017), task and contextual performance (Kawai and Strange, 2014; Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Malek et al., 2015).

Role clarity (RC) denotes the clarity (or, vice versa, ambiguity) about the set of tasks and or position responsibilities attached to every role in an organizational structure (Rizzo et al., 1970). We argue that greater role clarity helps SIEs feel empowered to express their voice in the host country (Wang et al., 2016) and engage with their assigned tasks (Venz et al., 2018). Furthermore, role clarity should help SIEs understand the expectations and requirements of their roles and commitment to the assigned tasks (Choo, 2017; Nifadkar et al., 2012; Venz et al., 2018). That understanding should positively contribute towards their adjustment in the host-country workplace (Ellis et al., 2017), OCB (Yadav and Rangnekar, 2016), and performance on assigned tasks and duties (Eatough et al., 2011; Lapointe et al., 2014). On the other hand, we posit that when SIEs experience high role ambiguity, they are unclear of what is expected of them, and as a result, they are unable to prioritize their job responsibilities well and find it hard to leverage their resources to perform the assigned tasks (Zhou et al., 2016) in the organization in the host country. Several other studies suggest that role clarity helps employees understand the expectations and requirements of their roles accurately and increases their dedication to assigned tasks (Choo, 2017; Venz et al., 2018). Therefore, we posit that role clarity increases SIEs' adjustment in the host-country workplace (Kawai and Mohr, 2015). Using AUM theory, we argue that role clarity reduces uncertainty and anxiety in the job that SIEs are assigned to perform and that, in turn, positively influences their work adjustment in the organization in the host country. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2.** Role clarity positively influences work adjustment.

### 3.3. Work adjustment and task performance

Task performance refers to the company's technical core through implementation, maintenance, and service of functional requirements (Becton et al., 2017; Singh, 2019). Expatriates who adjust to the work in the organization in host country culture are the ones who can achieve job performance similar to their job performance in their home country (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). It happens because the higher the level of work adjustment, the lower the experienced work-related stress in the host country workplace, which, in turn, shows on performance on the assigned tasks. Wu and Ang (2011) found that organizationally assigned expatriates (OAEs) work adjustment relates positively to their task performance in the organizations and other colleagues in their studies (Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Malek et al., 2015), have replicated the same kind of findings. Though these studies were conducted on OAEs, we believe it to hold the same for SIEs, though yet to be empirically tested. While drawing upon OST (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011) and AUM theory (Gudykunst, 2005), we predict that SIEs in the GCC region who are well adjusted perform prescribed tasks better.

**Hypothesis 3.** Work adjustment positively influences task performance.

### 3.4. Work adjustment and organizational citizenship behavior

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is the type of behavior that goes beyond approved job duties influenced by enterprise policies and job descriptions (Wong et al., 2006) and that are not formally rewarded in the organization (Organ et al., 2006). To sum it up, OCB is neither formally prescribed nor recognized by formal reward systems of organizations, but are essential for the effective running of the organizations (Organ et al., 2006) and are categorized into interpersonally directed and organizationally directed OCB, sometimes referred to as contextual performance (Bing et al., 2011; Chun et al., 2013).

Previous studies suggest a positive relationship between the OAEs' work adjustment and organizational citizenship behavior at the workplace in the host country (Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Malek et al., 2015; Wu and Ang, 2011). Malek and Budhwar (2013) found that OAEs' work adjustment positively affects their OCBs in the workplace. Therefore, we argue that well-adjusted expatriate employees invest their time and resources in relationships-oriented behavior that enhances their overall job performance. Therefore, we assume that once SIEs find themselves adjusted with the assigned tasks, responsibilities, and accountabilities in the jobs, they are more likely to engage in quality extra-role behaviors at the workplace that are not formally given recognition in the reward systems of the organization (e.g., Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Malek et al., 2015; Wu and Ang, 2011). Alternatively, utilizing AUM theory, we posit that SIEs' work adjustment reduces the anxiety and uncertainty associated with working with colleagues from different cultures in the host country context, which predisposes them to exhibit the OCB. Therefore, we advance our hypothesis that:

**Hypothesis 4.** Work adjustment positively influences organizational citizenship behavior.

### 3.5. The role clarity as a mediator

Role clarity enables expatriate employees to understand the expectations and requirements of their roles and commitment to the assigned tasks (Choo, 2017; Nifadkar et al., 2012; Venz et al., 2018). Several colleagues suggest that role clarity is a critical enabler that helps expatriate employees to form and sustain collaborative practices at the workplace (Curnin et al., 2015). In contrast, lack of role clarity pushes expatriates to engage in coping behaviors necessary to take care of job-related stress (Katz and Kahn, 1978), negatively affecting their work adjustment. Furthermore, ambiguous roles in an organization are a hindrance stressor, negatively influencing employees' work adjustment and job satisfaction. In contrast, role novelty is a challenge stressor that positively influences task performance and work adjustment in the host country (Kawai and Mohr, 2015). On the other hand, POS plays a significant role in bonding employees and organization together, and that in a way enhances and sustains employees' well-being for developing favorable orientations towards the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

POS is negatively associated with both role ambiguity and shield against undesirable effects of role stress, if any (Stamper and Johlke, 2003). Therefore, we believe that resilience comes in handy to the expatriate employees, as the resilient expatriates adjust with work well, especially when they perceive an inclusive organizational climate at their workplace (Davies et al., 2019). However, drawing upon the past research (e.g., Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009; Suutari and Brewster, 2000), we note that SIEs are motivated and comfortable interacting with host country nationals but low on work and general adjustment while working abroad due to lower organizational support as reported by them in the organization. At the same time, while drawing upon both the OST and the AUM theory, we predict that POS has characteristic features of enhancing role clarity so that SIEs will have more explicit tasks and responsibilities to perform (e.g., Rizzo et al., 1970) and that in turn to increase their work adjustment in the host country. Furthermore, we argue that POS is shaped by how SIEs attribute receipt of favorable or unfavorable treatment to the intentions of their organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017), which, in turn, influences SIEs' work adjustment in the organization in the host country. As a result, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5.** Role clarity mediates the influence of perceived organizational support on work adjustment.

### 3.6. The work adjustment as a mediator

Role clarity helps SIEs' OCB (Yadav and Rangnekar, 2016), and that calls upon organizations to provide SIEs with a clearer understanding of their assigned roles. Presumably, being clear about their roles should save SIEs time and effort from roaming around the pillar to post to learn about requirements of the roles; and hence, the role clarity increases SIEs adjustment (Ellis et al., 2017), OCB (Yadav and Rangnekar, 2016) and performance on assigned tasks and duties (Eatough et al., 2011; Lapointe et al., 2014). At the same time, past studies suggest that work adjustment positively relates to task and contextual performance (Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Malek et al., 2015; Salgado and Bastida, 2017). Furthermore, several researchers also found that expatriate work adjustment positively influences their task performance (Kim and Slocum, 2008) and completes the work assignments (Richardson et al., 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2002). On the other hand, the expatriates who fail to adjust at work report experience and feelings of negative emotions (Haslberger, 2008), and we believe that these negative emotions might interfere with their task performance (Meinhardt and Pekrun, 2003) and extending these findings we assume that lack of work adjustment to interfere with OCB of the SIE employees too. As a result, we posit that role clarity reduces anxiety & uncertainty associated with work. Role clarity to increase SIEs' work adjustment in the host country context and that, in turn, enhances their task performance and the display of organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace. Hence, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 6.** Work adjustment mediates the relationship between role clarity and task performance.

**Hypothesis 7.** Work adjustment mediates the relationship between role clarity and organizational citizenship behavior.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Participants and procedure

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) market is an excellent representative of the Gulf market. Amongst all different industry sectors, the oil & gas sector roughly contributes to 30% of UAE's gross domestic product and is a high priority sector for the government. The dyadic sample in this study consisted of the subordinates (who all were the SIEs) and their immediate supervisors (who all were UAE nationals) from the oil & gas sector organizations in the UAE. One of the co-authors used his personal and professional networks to approach and hand over survey questionnaires to 362 subordinate-supervisor dyads in person who volunteered to participate in this study. This method of approaching a sample to participate in the study was reported in the previous studies (e.g., Butts et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2019; Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2012). The participating dyadic sample was requested to fill in the survey questionnaire and keep it with her/himself, and the co-author will visit them after two weeks to collect it back. This way, we received 162 dyadic survey responses. However, those who did not return the survey questionnaire were asked to complete it and give it back in another two weeks. The second time, only 122 of the dyadic sample return it. At this stage, we stopped data collection and skimmed through dyadic sample responses and found that eight dyadic sample responses had few unanswered items that were not included, and only 276 usable dyadic sample responses were used to examine the hypotheses of this study. The subordinates, who were all SIEs, completed questionnaires on the measures of role clarity (RC) and perceived organizational support (POS), and work adjustment (WA). In contrast,

their supervisors, UAE nationals, completed questionnaires for measures on task performance (TP) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) of their immediate SIEs subordinate.

Before analyzing the data, we considered testing some of the biases associated with the sampling characteristics. First, we examined non-response bias using an independent sample *t*-test to ensure that our sample had the same characteristics with the sampling frame by comparing responses of early respondents with those of late respondents who responded to the cut-off date. Our results suggest no significant differences in the responses of the early and the late respondents. In Table 1, we obtained Levene's test, which was not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), meaning that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was fulfilled. Therefore, this bias was not a risk to the soundness of the results of our study, given the same sampling weight (Becker and Ismail, 2016). A non-significant *p*-value of Levene's test suggests that variances are undeniably equal, and there is no difference in variances of both the groups. Second, we used average Full Collinearity VIF to assess common method bias to avoid measurement errors due to correlations of items that measure constructs similarly (Kock, 2017). Our analysis results obtained an AFVIF value of  $1.308 < 3.3$ , which means the common method bias could not intervene in our measurement results. Furthermore, to take care of response bias, we ensured that the cover letter attached with the questionnaire specified the purpose of our study and protection for anonymity and confidentiality of responses of the participating sample (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Randall and Fernandes, 1991). Next, we followed Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Richman et al. (1999) to ensure that there is clarity of wordings and simple language of the individual items, kept question(s) short & clear, and special attention to avoid asking leading or hypothetical questions in the questionnaire to measure the constructs of this study. Lastly, we note that we theorized the research model based on AUM and OST and examined the multiple mediators hypothesized relationships using the covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM).

SIEs in this study had the following sociodemographic background: their average age was 36.7 years, about 70% of them were male, and the majority of SIEs were Asian (52.2%), followed by Middle Eastern (39.5%) and European (8.3%) and they were working under their current supervisors on an average 2.4 years at the time of data collection. Last but not least, most SIEs (74.3%) had master's level and above educational degrees in management, technology, and social science disciplines. On the other hand, the supervisors had the following sociodemographic details: all of them were UAE nationals, with an average age of 43.76 years, the majority of supervisors were male (65.2%), and 71.4% had bachelor-level degrees, and the remainder had masters and doctoral level degrees in management, science & technology, and social science disciplines. Table 2 depicts the sociodemographic background of the 276 SIEs and their immediate supervisors (i.e., 276).

## 4.2. Measures

The respondents rated the items in the survey questionnaire on a seven-point Likert scale (Wherein, 1 = Low, and 7 = High).

### 4.2.1. Perceived organizational support (POS)

We used the 11-item scale of Hinkin (1995) to measure *perceived organizational support* (POS). The sample item of the POS scale includes 'organization taking care of the well-being of employee's members'. The Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.969 and the goodness-of-fit indices after confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of POS measuring instrument ( $\chi^2/df = 1.967$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ; CFI = 0.989; TLI = 0.984; SRMR = 0.017; RMSEA = 0.059) were in acceptable zone.

### 4.2.2. Role clarity (RC)

We used five items from Rizzo et al. (1970) to measure RC. The sample item for RC includes 'employees know their job responsibilities'. The Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.920 and the goodness-of-fit indices after CFA of role clarity measuring instrument ( $\chi^2/df = 0.731$ ,  $p < 0.481$ ; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; SRMR = 0.007; RMSEA = 0.000) were in acceptable zone.

### 4.2.3. Work adjustment (WA)

We used three items work adjustment scale of Black and Stephens (1989) and the sample items include 'specific job responsibilities', 'supervisory responsibilities'. The Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.884. The goodness-of-fit indices after CFA were ( $\chi^2/df = 0.002$ ,  $p < 0.989$ ; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; SRMR = 0.000; RMSEA = 0.000) in the satisfactory zone.

### 4.2.4. Task performance (TP)

It consisted of five items adopted from Kraimer and Wayne (2004) and the sample items include, 'meeting the job objectives', 'satisfaction with technical competences', etc. The Cronbach alpha was 0.943. The goodness-of-fit indices after CFA of the task performance scale ( $\chi^2/df = 1.186$ ,  $p < 0.313$ ; CFI = 0.999; TLI = 0.998; SRMR = 0.010; RMSEA = 0.026) were in acceptable zone.

**Table 1**  
Non-response bias test.

Construct	Sig. Levene's Test	Sig. t-test for Equality of Means
Perceived organizational support (POS)	0.078	0.057
Role clarity (RC)	0.301	0.081
Work adjustment (WA)	0.198	0.147
Task performance (TP)	0.976	0.699
Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)	0.330	0.996

**Table 2**  
Sample details.

Subordinates (i.e., the SIEs)	(n = 276)	Supervisors (i.e., the UAE Nationals)	(n = 276)
Age (in years)	36.75	Age (in Years)	43.76
Gender		Gender	
Male	192 (69.6%)	Male	180 (65.2%)
Female	84 (30.4%)	Female	96 (34.8%)
Nationality		Nationality	
Middle Eastern	109 (39.5%)	UAE Nationals	276 (100%)
South Asian	144 (52.2%)		
European	23 (8.3%)		
Educational qualification		Educational qualification	
Bachelor degree	71 (25.7%)	Bachelor degree	197 (71.4%)
Master degree	168 (60.9%)	Master degree	71 (25.7%)
Ph.D./D.B.A.	37 (13.4%)	Ph.D./D.B.A.	8 (2.9%)

#### 4.2.5. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

It consisted of twenty-three items from Podsakoff et al. (1990). The sample item includes, 'my subordinate does not take extra breaks'. The Cronbach alpha was 0.936 and the goodness-of-fit indices after CFA ( $\chi^2/df = 1.700$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ; CFI = 0.968; TLI = 0.963; SRMR = 0.045; RMSEA = 0.050) were in acceptable range.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. The measurement validation

Before examining the direct and the indirect hypotheses in this study, we tested for the convergent and discriminant validity. As per the recommendation of Hair et al. (1998), we used Cronbach alpha to assess the reliability coefficient of the measuring instruments, namely, perceived organizational support, role clarity, work adjustment, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior, and they ranged from 0.920 to 0.969 (Tables 3 and 4). To assess for the convergent validity, we followed recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981), wherein they suggest that every item loading on its respective construct should have standard loading  $>0.5$  to  $\geq 0.7$ , the scale composite reliability (SCR) to be  $>0.7$ , and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be  $>0.5$ . Tables 3 and 4 illustrate that standardized loading of items on their intended constructs ranged from 0.680 to 0.943. Furthermore, SCR ranged from

**Table 3**  
Testing for convergent validity of perceived organizational support, role clarity, work adjustment, and task performance.

Constructs	Dimensions/Items	Code	Factor loading	AVE	SCR	$\alpha$	
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	<i>Financial POS</i>			0.843	0.941	0.907	
	Incentives and allowances	FPOS1	0.919				
	Generous financial support	FPOS2	0.921				
		Financial benefits	FPOS3	0.914	0.861	0.961	0.946
	<i>Adjustment POS</i>						
	Interest in the well-being of family members	APOS1	0.906				
	Adjustment support to family members	APOS2	0.943				
		Help to ease the transition to a new culture	APOS3	0.939	0.828	0.951	0.931
		Adjustment help while living in this country	APOS4	0.924			
	<i>Career POS</i>						
	Interest in employee's career	CPOS1	0.902				
		Aligning employee's goal with his/her career	CPOS2	0.926	0.758	0.939	0.920
	Information about available career prospects	CPOS3	0.903				
	Showing care for career growth	CPOS4	0.908				
Role clarity (RC)	Authority in the job	RC1	0.883	0.812			
	Dividing time properly in the job	RC2	0.887				
	Awareness about responsibilities in the job	RC3	0.886				
	Awareness about expectations of the job	RC4	0.886				
	Clear, planned, & objective job descriptions	RC5	0.809				
Work adjustment (WA)	Specific job responsibilities	WA1	0.895	0.815	0.956	0.943	
	Performance standards and expectations	WA2	0.90				
	Supervisory responsibilities	WA3	0.909				
Task performance (TP)	Job objectives	TP1	0.913	0.815	0.956	0.943	
	Overall job performance	TP2	0.896				
	Performance standards	TP3	0.908				
	Technical competencies	TP4	0.900				
	Job responsibilities	TP5	0.896				



0.902 to 0.961, and the AVE ranged from 0.699 to 0.861 (see Tables 3 and 4). Therefore, our study's construct of perceived organizational support, role clarity, work adjustment, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior have convergent validity (e.g., Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, we examined for discriminant validity and found that all the constructs used in this study have discriminant validity as per Fawcett et al.'s (2009) recommendations. We found that standardized loading of the items of the measuring instruments ranged from 0.680 to 0.943 (please see Table 3 and Table 4), and the square root of average variance extracted for each of the constructs was more significant than obtained correlation coefficients between them (please see Table 5). Therefore, we mention that the measuring instruments, namely perceived organizational support, role clarity, work adjustment, task performance, and organizational citizenship behavior in this study, had discriminant validity for the reason that these measurement instruments that are not supposed to be related are unrelated (e.g., Campbell and Fiske, 1959).

## 5.2. The structural model

We used the covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) technique to examine the study's hypotheses. Tables 7 and 8 depict 'direct effect' and 'indirect effect,' respectively.

### 5.2.1. Testing for direct effect

Table 6 depicts that H1 [Role Clarity←Perceived Organizational Support]; H2 [Work Adjustment←Role Clarity]; H3 [Task Performance←Work Adjustment]; and H4 [Organizational Citizenship Behavior←Work Adjustment] are supported ( $\beta = 0.581$ ;  $t = 11.839$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); ( $\beta = 0.493$ ;  $t = 9.392$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); ( $\beta = 0.292$ ,  $t = 5.06$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); and ( $\beta = 0.340$ ;  $t = 6.001$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), respectively. Therefore, this study confirms that perceived organizational support predicts role clarity (H1), role clarity influences work adjustment (H2), work adjustment influences both task performance (H3) and organizational citizenship behavior (H4).

### 5.2.2. Testing for the indirect effect

To examine the mediation hypotheses, we used the recommendation of Zhao, Lynch, and Chen et al. (2010) and performed bootstrapping statistics during the SEM in this study. Table 7 suggests that H5 [Work Adjustment←Role Clarity←Perceived Organizational Support], H6 [Task Performance←Work Adjustment←Role Clarity], and H7 [Organizational Citizenship Behavior←Work Adjustment←Role Clarity] are supported ( $\beta = 0.286$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), ( $\beta = 0.144$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) are supported, respectively. Therefore, our study confirms that role clarity mediates the relationships of perceived organizational support and work adjustment (H5), and work adjustment mediates the influence of role clarity on task performance (H6) and organizational citizenship behavior (H7).

**Table 4**  
Testing for convergent validity of organizational citizenship behavior.

Constructs	Dimensions/Items	Code	Factor Loading	AVE	SCR	$\alpha$
Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)	<i>Conscientiousness</i>			0.79	0.949	0.933
	Attendance	CONS1	0.916			
	Taking extra breaks	CONS2	0.884			
	Company rules & regulations	CONS3	0.884			
	Conscientious person	CONS4	0.895			
	Honest day's work for an honest day's pay	CONS5	0.864	0.758	0.940	0.92
	<i>Sportsmanship</i>					
	Consumption of time on trivial matters	SM1	0.846			
	Focus on the positive side	SM2	0.895			
	Making mountains out of molehills	SM3	0.867			
	Belief in what organization does	SM4	0.871	0.735	0.917	0.88
	Classic 'squeaky wheel' that always needs greasing	SM5	0.874			
	<i>Civic virtue</i>					
	Attends important meetings	CV1	0.837			
	Attending functions to enhance an organization's image	CV2	0.858			
	Keeps up-to-date on any ups and downs in the organization	CV3	0.883	0.749	0.937	0.916
	Reads and keeps up with company publications, messages, etc.	CV4	0.851			
	<i>Courtesy</i>					
	Prevent problems while working with coworkers	CSY1	0.847			
	Mindful of his/her actions on other colleagues	CSY2	0.849			
Does not abuse the rights of others	CSY3	0.888	0.699	0.902	0.852	
Avoids creating problems for the coworkers	CSY4	0.891				
Considers the influence of his/her actions on others	CSY5	0.851				
<i>Altruism</i>						
Helping others who have been absent	ALTRU1	0.872				
Helping others who have heavy workloads	ALTRU2	0.68				
Keep orienting new colleagues even though it is not required	ALTRU3	0.895				
Lending helping hand to those around him/her	ALTRU4	0.88				

**Table 5**  
The discriminant validity test.

S.N.		Mean	Std. Dev	1	2	3	4	5
1	Perceived organizational support	5.56	0.86	<b><i>0.918*</i></b>				
2	Role clarity	5.85	0.87	0.581**	<b><i>0.871</i></b>			
3	Work adjustment	5.75	0.83	0.354**	0.493**	<b><i>0.901</i></b>		
4	Task performance	5.82	0.93	0.220**	0.309**	0.292**	<b><i>0.903</i></b>	
5	Organizational citizenship behavior	5.6	0.64	0.263**	0.389**	0.340**	0.582**	<b><i>0.864</i></b>

The diagonal italic bold value denotes square root of average variance extracted.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 6**  
Testing for the direct effect.

	Std. direct effect	Std. Error	t value	Sig. level	Hypothesis testing
Role clarity←Perceived organizational support	0.581	0.023	11.839	$p < 0.001$	H1 Accepted
Work adjustment←Role clarity	0.493	0.030	9.392	$p < 0.001$	H2 Accepted
Task performance←Work adjustment	0.292	0.107	5.060	$p < 0.001$	H3 Accepted
Organizational citizenship behavior←Work adjustment	0.340	0.336	6.001	$p < 0.001$	H4 Accepted

**Table 7**  
Testing for the indirect effect.

Indirect effect	Std. indirect effect	Sig. level	Hypothesis testing
Work adjustment←Role clarity←Perceived organizational support	0.286	$p < 0.001$	H5 Accepted
Task performance←Work adjustment←Role clarity	0.144	$p < 0.001$	H6 Accepted
Organizational citizenship behavior←Work adjustment←Role clarity	0.168	$p < 0.001$	H7 Accepted

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to provide insights into what enables SIEs in the GCC region to perform well. The findings of our study suggest that perceived organizational support and role clarity positively influence SIEs' work adjustment. We also found that SIEs' work adjustment positively influences their task performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, our findings suggest that role clarity mediates the influence of POS on work adjustment, whereas work adjustment mediates the influence of role clarity on task performance and OCB of the SIEs. That said, the findings of our study have implications for international human resource management theory and practice for managing SIEs.

### 6.1. Theoretical contributions

Our study makes vital contributions to advance theory in expatriation management research. Our study contributes to bringing together OST (Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Eisenberger et al., 1986) and role theory (Rizzo et al., 1970) as a theoretical lens for use in understanding, controlling, and predicting SIEs' work adjustment, especially in the host country context wherein expatriate workforce outnumbers locally available talent. We conclude that organizational support and specific roles as provided to SIEs help increase their work adjustment. Our study suggests that POS positively affects role clarity and positively influences SIEs' work adjustment in the host country context. Therefore, the findings of our study are the first of its kind to empirically confirm that POS plays a critical role in reducing role ambiguity of SIEs, if any, and enhances work adjustment. We note that these findings of our study enrich the theoretical discourse and advance IM literature on how to leverage the best of SIEs in the assigned roles in the organization.

Next, our study highlights that role clarity positively mediated the influence of perceived organizational support on workforce adjustment. It may be particularly salient in the GCC member states where pressures to indigenization may have contributed to the employment of host country nationals as "window dressing" given shortages in local formal and informal skills bases (La'Aleh and Rees, 2016), making it hard for organizations to codify as to who does what. Thus, it underscores the extent to which organizations may make operational compromises that depart from formally specified structures and roles. It may be hard for organizations to articulate or admit to such departures, making it challenging for staff to navigate; in seeking to navigate contextual complexity, managers may, through their expediency, impart a further layer of internal complexity, potentially leaving the organization even worse off (Hussain and Deery, 2018; Singh et al., 2021a, 2021b).

Last but not least, our study suggests that role clarity enhances expatriate adjustment and, in turn, influences task performance and organizational citizenship behavior. In other words, our study contributes to advancing both AUM theory (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005) and OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017), as role clarity helps reduce anxiety/uncertainty in the host country context, and promotes positive feelings amongst SIEs that their organization cares for their well-being and performance. Hence, our study suggests

that organizations should provide role clarity to SIEs for them to be well adjusted in the workplace; in turn, the latter may enhance task performance, and help motivate them to display discretionary job behaviors, namely, providing help and support to coworkers as and when the need arise for them to perform well in the organization.

## 6.2. Managerial implications

Our study has three critical implications for practice. Firstly, it asks organizations to be clear on “do the SIEs know what is expected of them?” Organizations hire SIEs for their talent and attitudes, but the majority of these hired SIE employees lack role clarity – they are clueless about where their role(s) start(s) or end(s) or fit(s) within their department or organization. In other words, lack of role clarity results in lower employee effectiveness, productivity, satisfaction, and workplace adjustment. In such a scenario, our study suggests that organizations in the host country should take care to design each job in such a manner that SIEs have goal clarity to feel confident and capable in undertaking their assigned task(s). However, organizations may conspire with local hires in creating window dressing posts, creating sinecures for the latter as adverse to more comprehensive systems to secure and develop host country nationals. While expatriates may fill gaps in skills and capabilities, this brings new challenges. SIEs may, on the surface, be cheaper (as the individual partially bears expatriation costs); however, the latter is likely to have more limited insights into how the organization operates on board, and hence, less equipped to navigate informal departures from the spirit of host country regulations. Seeking to cut costs in one area (through hiring SIEs) may exacerbate the negative fallout of cost-cutting in another area (using window dressing as adverse to comprehensive HRD geared to local staff) and vice versa.

Secondly, our study suggests that supervisors or higher-level executives should relate with SIEs so that the latter perceive appreciation for work done and that the organization cares about their socioemotional needs and overall well-being. Such interventions may be much simpler than explaining informal role definitions that do not bring further problems. Perceived organizational support, with roots in the norms of reciprocity, positively influences work adjustment. It generates a sense of obligation within the SIEs to repay their organization by displaying positive work attitudes and behaviors - the task performance and the organizational citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, our study suggests that perceived organizational support increases SIE employees' role clarity and work adjustment. In other words, higher perceived organizational support lets SIE employees know what they need to do and what they expect in the assigned role in the organization and increase their workplace adjustment. Therefore, our study suggests that organizations in the GCC region that rely heavily on SIE employees need to know that perceived organizational support results in an exchange process between the employees and the employer wherein the more the organization is perceived to engage in increased welfare activities towards the SIE employees, the later to the former with higher task performance and organizational citizenship behavior.

As the work adjustment is the function of an employee's interaction with the internal organizational environment, our study illustrates how both SIE employees and their work environment interact. Each of them has its requirements that others help fill in, and each possesses capabilities that satisfy the requirements of others. Therefore, based on the findings of our study, we suggest that human resource policies and practices of the organization should work to create and sustain the kind of work climate wherein SIEs feel at home and adjust well with the job demands, and that in turn predicts their enhanced task performance and relationships with colleagues. Understanding how OCB works in the host country context is crucial to finding relevant solutions to increasing expatriate management issues and challenges. Our study suggests that as the SIEs experience higher work adjustment, they perform more extra-role behaviors though not directly recognized by the organizational rewards system. Therefore, managers and leaders ensure that their SIEs subordinates are well-adjusted to perform well in their assigned tasks and display superior organizational citizenship behaviors.

## 6.3. Limitations and direction for future research

Our study is not without limitations, and we present these, and suggestions for future research. First, our study focused on empirically examining antecedents and consequences of the SIEs' work adjustment in the UAE only. We propose that future research inquiries extend our research framework by including SIEs working in other GCC countries, and conducting comparative studies of the self-initiated and organizationally assigned expatriates in the GCC. Such an endeavor will help advance the theory and practice of effective management of self-initiated and organizationally assigned expatriates in the organization. Second, this study empirically examined the causes and consequences of work adjustment of white-collar SIEs, when most SIEs in the Gulf are blue collar workers. Accordingly, we suggest that future research inquiry should extend our research framework to examine the causes and consequences of work adjustment amongst the latter. Lastly, we note that our study was purely a quantitative inquiry, aimed at examining what makes SIEs stay and perform well in the host country. We suggest that future research use a mixed-study method to provide additional insights on SIEs' work adjustment and performance in the organization in the host country.

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