Chapter 3. The Impact of Host Country Characteristics on Self-Initiated Expatriates' Career Success

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The objectives of this conceptual chapter are to examine the host country's institutional and cultural characteristics that have an impact on SIE's career success, and to propose a research model and agenda.

Scope/method: Since there is almost no research on the impact of host country characteristics on SIE's career success, we reviewed the general literature on expatriate career success and identified the specific factors that will affect SIEs career success.

Results. The major host country institutional characteristics that have an impact on SIEs' career success include compensation levels, quality of life, labor markets characteristics, employment regulations, and SIEs' skills utilisation level. The major host country cultural characteristics are cultural distance, language, diversity climate and preferred organisational culture. We add the concept of host country's reputation.

Conclusion. We propose a research model on the impact of host country institutional and cultural characteristics on SIE career success and satisfaction, adding the host country reputation and using a few moderating variables.

Key words: self-initiated-expatriates, SIE, host country, institutions, culture, reputation, compensation, quality of life, regulations, labour markets, language, diversity, model

Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of host country characteristics, the particularities of a location, on self-initiated expatriate (SIE)'s career success. Doherty, Dickmann and Mills (2011) and Suutari, Brewster and Dickmann (2018) compared assigned expatriates' (AEs) and SIEs' motivation to go abroad and found that location concerns and host country reputation were more important to SIEs, while AEs placed significantly more emphasis on career development motives. SIEs are more motivated to live abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Suutari & Taka, 2004), more likely to stay longer in any one location (Doherty et al., 2011; Furusawa & Brewster, 2018), to immerse themselves in the host country culture (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2011), to learn the language (Doherty et al., 2011; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009) and to interact with host country nationals (Furusawa & Brewster, 2018), and these factors all enhance their adjustment. SIEs have more freedom to choose the locations and so for them the country characteristics/ location criteria have more weight. They are more able to take their individual/ family considerations into account than AEs. Unlike AEs, who are sent to specific jobs with generous expatriate contracts and organisational support, SIEs have to source a job themselves, either by applying from their own country to another one or by finding a job when they arrive in the country (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). They have little external support in most cases and have to find out about the institutional, social and cultural characteristics of the host country by themselves. Unlike AEs, again, they will get little training about the host country provided by the employer and may have to navigate by themselves their work contract issues, and the specific local employment and immigration laws. They are likely to be working at lower hierarchical levels in organisations (Vance & McNulty, 2014), to be employed on local terms and conditions and may well not be working for a multinational corporation. For the SIE, therefore, the host country's institutional characteristics, culture, language, and reputation, may have considerably more salience than they would for assigned expatriates.

However, little is known about the impact of the host country's characteristics on SIEs' cross-border career success. Single location of studies of SIEs are based in a limited number of countries, with a specific cluster around the Persian Gulf, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia being most prominent (Andresen & Hippler, 2016). These are host societies in which foreigners are common. Between 2010 and 2016, foreigners represented 51% of the total Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) population, and within that, 91% of the UAE population-the Gulf country with the highest percentage of foreign residents, 47% in Saudi Arabia, and 30% of the Kuwait population-the Gulf country with the lowest percentage of foreign residents (The Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population Programme, 2017). As a result, the Gulf countries have a favourable legal framework for mobility, but also strict rules about nationality: It is easy for single men and women and married couples to go to the Gulf if they have a job offer from there, but almost impossible for them to become citizens, no matter how long they live there. Hence the bulk of the population is transient. Other much-studied regions include Asia (with studies on China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Macau, Singapore and Vietnam), India and Western Europe, where studies on France are most prominent (Andresen & Hippler, 2016).

The objectives of this chapter are, after a brief discussion of SIE career success/ satisfaction, to examine the host country's institutional and cultural characteristics that have an impact on SIE's career success, and to propose a research model and agenda. Since there is almost no research on the impact of host country characteristics on SIEs' career success, we reviewed the general literature on expatriate career success and pull out from that the specific factors that will affect SIEs' career success. To avoid constant generalisation of caveats, we concentrate on the evidence that is available from a few countries, making the wider point where appropriate.

SIE career success

A career is the sequence of "a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005, p. 179). Career success is defined as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's career (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). Career success consists of two dimensions (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005): Objective career success includes externally comparable or more tangible indicators of a person's career development, such as salary and promotions (Arthur et al., 2005); subjective career success refers to a person's internal reflection and evaluation and is often operationalised as career satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005). Since SIEs have strong intrinsic career motivations and personal goals to move and work abroad (Doherty et al., 2011), the concept of subjective career success is important to them.

Host country's institutional characteristics

Compensation level

Many expatriates move for the money or, in some cases, for the lifestyle. Baruch and Forstenlechner (2017), examining the motives and outcomes of high status SIEs to the Gulf, found that remuneration was the main motivator. Compensation systems vary a lot between host countries, not only in average pay levels, but also in reward structures and pay arrangements (Waxin, 2008a), fiscal rules and taxation that are common and accepted (Egner, 2012). While many statistics on pay arrangements are available, few are both comparable across nations and available for a large number of nations (Waxin, 2008a). Further, the salience of benefits differs between countries. In most of northern Europe, where state benefits are relatively good, people prefer to get most of their packages in cash. Where certain benefits are untaxed and where they fill 'holes' in national provision, as is the case in China, Japan, Korea, they can become important human resource management tools. For example, in China, benefits like housing, food and childcare are often provided for employees. The situation is similar in the USA, where the state provides very limited benefits, so elements of the remuneration package like healthcare cover are widely sought. There are also substantial differences in social security (Waxin, 2008a). One result is that comparing pay rates across countries is extremely complex. An issue for SIEs considering moving to a country is the extent to which they understand and can predict these compensation and fiscal issues. For low-status SIEs, by contrast, money is more or less the only driver. They come to richer countries to work as maids, construction workers, retail sellers and security guards, knowing that they will earn much less than other people in the host society, and that they will not live well, but knowing too that they

will earn much more than they ever could at home and being prepared to put up with the life for the sake of the money they can remit home (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017).

Quality of life

High-status SIEs expect the host country to provide them with lifestyle instrumentality and associated benefits (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) that they may struggle to afford at home. Chen (2012) found that SIEs who perceive greater host country career and life instrumentality feel more comfortable, have more confidence, thus increasing their likelihood of staying abroad and prolonging their SIE experience. Mercer's Quality of Life Rankings (2018) ranks cities. Factors such as hygiene, security, natural and cultural attractions, alongside labour market opportunities, are attractors of international mobility (Dickmann, Parry, & Keshavjee, 2019; Doherty et al., 2011). According to Mercer's Quality of Living Ranking (2018), globally, Vienna maintained its top ranking for the ninth consecutive year, followed by Zurich, Auckland, Munich, Vancouver, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Geneva, Copenhagen and Basel. In the Gulf region, the quality of life is high: Safety, domestic help, world-class schools, healthcare and proximity for global travel are all big advantages (Khaleejtimes, 2018). Quality of life in the host country can include the quality of the educational system. SIEs could be attracted by the quality of the host country educational system for their children. Countries compete for talent via the quality and accessibility of their schooling, secondary and tertiary educational systems (Geddie, 2015).

There are different ways to measure host country attractiveness (Dickmann & Parry, 2018). FutureBrand (2019) publishes a country brand index ranking the World Bank Top 75 countries by GDP according to how they are perceived on six dimensions: Value system, quality of life, business potential, heritage and culture, brand image of goods and services produced in the country, and tourism. According to FutureBrand (2019), Japan, Switzerland and Germany have the best brand profile. The Global Competitiveness Index (Schwab, 2017) is more economically oriented and focuses on institutions, policies and factors of competitiveness.

Labour market characteristics

Employment prospects for SIEs depend to a considerable extent on the labour market characteristics of the host country. For example, as the Arab Gulf Countries began their rapid development, the existing numbers, skills and education levels of the local population were no match for the needs of a rapidly expanding economy. Hence, there was a high demand for imported labour (Waxin & Bateman, 2016a). In the Gulf countries, the labour markets are often segmented by national origin, and there are significant pay gaps for Western, Asians and Arabs working the same professional jobs, as many companies have different pay scales for the same jobs, based on nationality (Advani, 2019). According to the 2017 Gulf Business Salary Survey, the average monthly salary earned by a Western expatriate across the GCC was $12,377 in 2017. Western expatriates earned the highest salaries among all our three racial groups, on average 32% more than their Asian peers and 5% more than their Arab peers (Gulf Business, 2017). Western expatriates from Europe, North America and Australasia are hired for their

management skills and technical expertise, and tend to operate in more senior, well-remunerated positions. Gulf ruling elites consider them to have the necessary expertise required to achieve global competitiveness. Workers from low-wage countries where there were large numbers of educated people (India, Malaysia, China) take many of the mid-range administrative posts and have jobs in, for example, administration, education and nursing. Workers from poor countries with weaker education systems (Indonesia, the Philippines and some African countries) are eager to fill jobs as construction workers, security guards, personal servants and other low-status positions (Haak-Saheem & Brewster, 2017).

Gulf citizens make up the other, smaller segment of the labour market. In Dubai, in 2016, native citizens made up only 4% of all working residents, and 78.5% of them work in the federal and local government bodies (De Bel-Air, 2018), as they prefer the higher wage levels, shorter working hours and better fringe benefits that go with government employment. Middle- and low-status jobs are not socially acceptable for Emiratis. Local employees who do work in the private sector are privileged by rules that increase their pay and provide them with guarantees of job security. In most cases, Emirati workers and expatriate workers are not substitutes for each other, so the two market segments operate side by side but separately (Waxin & Bateman, 2016a; Waxin, Lindsay, Belkhodja, & Zhao, 2018). The UAE's extensive reliance on expatriates from all over the world requires their HRM specialists to provide efficient administration processes and, for the top tier of expatriates, efficient SIEs management policies and practices (Waxin & Bateman, 2016b). Demand outweighs supply for specialist occupations in the Gulf in general. (Robert Half Salary Guide, 2018). The opposite situation applies to low-status SIEs where demand outstrips supply and workers who upset their masters or mistresses can easily be sent home and replaced.

Employment regulation

Employment regulation is also important to SIEs, who do not, initially at least, have the organisational power to 'get round' difficult legislation. Employment regulations cover access to a country's labour market, labour legislation and enforcement and how long people can work there. 'Friendly' policies toward foreign workforces facilitate the establishment and embeddedness stages of an SIE's career (Chen, 2012). Policies influence, for example, the choice of the company SIEs can work for and where they can reside, their perceived autonomy in establishing global work experiences, and their career satisfaction (Chen, 2012). Canada has lots of international students and makes a big point of facilitating their transfer after graduation into the local labour market: The local business paper, *The Globe and Mail,* drew a direct connection between that policy and the significant increase in Foreign Direct Investment into Canada in 2018 (McKay, 2019). Immigroup (2019) created a list of the top 10 immigration-friendly countries, based on the criteria such as progressive immigration policies, immigration support services, and economic prosperity. In 2019, the top 10 most welcoming countries for immigrants were United States of America, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Canada and France, Australia, Spain and Italy, India.

Employment law is idiosyncratic: Every country has its own rules (Waxin, 2008a). SIEs usually face more structural barriers and career constraints, such as difficulties in obtaining visas and work permits in the host country, than assigned expatriates (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010). In the Gulf, most foreign workers are contracted for a fixed period only, and sponsored for a work visa by their employer through the '*kafala* system', in which the sponsor-employer (*kafeel*) assumes full economic and social responsibility for the employee during the stated contract period (Advani, 2019). To take a very different example, in France, borders are more open. EU citizens from the 27 (as we write) other EU states have a complete right to work, settle and reside there. Skilled SIEs from other non-EU developed countries find it relatively easy to get expatriate or migrant approval, but even highly qualified SIEs from developing countries face significant barriers in the form of supposedly objective policies and certification processes, which, in fact, render their mobility and labour market integration difficult, and in some cases impossible. Governmental procedures remain selective and complex when it comes to hiring non-EU workers (with few exceptions) willing to stay in France for work purposes, as they have to find permanent, or at least one-year, employment contracts (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010). Prospective employers have to prove that there are no EU citizens in France who can fill the vacancy in question, which involves a long procedure that is discouraging to both prospective employers and employees.

These are not the only examples of the importance of local legislation related to work. Such legislation is different in each country, even where there are commonalities. For example, looking at the issue of diversity, generally legislation in the west requires equal treatment for employees. Legislation on equality is clearly laid down and enforced in the USA and Canada, and is similarly important, though variable, in Europe. It has, however, different implications for employment practices in each of these examples. On the other hand, equality and diversity is not seen as a key issue in the Arabian Gulf or the Asia-Pacific countries. In the Gulf States, for example, salaries and employment contracts depend to a considerable extent on nationality: Even in the rare cases where a local Emirati and an Indian might be doing the same job, their salaries, terms and conditions and social status will be very different. Some of these legal forms of discrimination are seen as 'positive', that is, they aim to support disadvantaged groups within the society: Legislation giving preference to visible minorities in the USA, quotas for lower caste workers in India, preference to Bumiputras (ethnic Malays or other indigenous groups) in Malaysia and so on. However, these then generally discriminate against new entrants into the country and would be illegal in other states.

Retirement age in the host country also plays a role in SIE's employment prospects. In the UAE, for example, the retirement age in the private sector is 65 years, but this age limit may be increased depending on the individuals' nature of work, credentials, and whether their expertise is important for the entity they are working for (Khaleejtimes, 2019). The government, however, does not provide any form of pension/ retirement scheme for foreigners.

Employment / skills utilisation level

SIEs' employment levels, or SIEs' skills utilisation level is another measure to consider when examining their career success. SIEs expect that a host country job will produce career benefits (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). However, this is not universal even amongst high-status expatriates. Depending on context, host country organisations and institutions either (for developed 'western' countries) over-estimate or (for developing countries) often discredit SIEs' previous education, skills and professional experiences acquired in their home countries (Almeida, Waxin, & Paradies, 2019; Waxin, 2008b; Waxin & Panaccio, 2004). Contrary to the experience of SIEs from developed countries, studies of SIEs from developing countries tend to suggest that they experience structural barriers to career development. Lebanese and Malagasy SIEs in France, for example, struggled to secure recognition of their professional qualifications and professional worth, and suffered gender discrimination (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Ramboarison-Lalao, Al Ariss, & Barth, 2012). This is in line with more general findings that internationally mobile workers often fail to get, or even to seek, jobs that match their skills (Nowotny, 2016) and that SIEs' skills are frequently under-utilised (Lee, 2005). Local organisations would benefit from a direct evaluation of SIEs' skills, whether it be competency, behaviour-based interviews or tests, such as job samples, performance, simulation tests (Panaccio & Waxin, 2010; Waxin, 2008b; Waxin & Panaccio, 2004).

On the other hand, many SIEs in countries such as the Gulf States hold positions that would not have been available for them in their countries of origin, given their level of experience, and have the opportunity to gain broader managerial experience (Baruch & Forstenlechner, 2017). However, employers in the GCC are on the 'buy' rather than 'make' side of the skills debate: They generally feel that they are paying (well) for the skills they import and do not expect to have to develop their foreign talent (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), so training and development is generally rare.

Reputation of the host country

Lying somewhere between institutional and cultural differences is the reputation of the country in the mind of potential SIEs and in the opinions of their future employers. Most, though not all, SIEs would prefer to work in countries that have familiar and trustworthy institutions and cultures, are safe and non-corrupt, offer them a decent standard of living, and welcome foreigners. Some countries are further from that ideal than others. In many cases, foreigners have very little concept of particular countries. In other cases, foreigners have only heard negative things about them. Obviously, these variations will have an impact on whether SIEs apply for jobs on those countries – and an impact on the future marketability of SIEs once they have worked there. Of course, some SIEs with a strong 'doing good' career anchor, working in sectors such as the United Nations aid agencies, Médecins Sans Frontières, or the Red Cross, actively seek out work in countries with terrible reputations. Andresen (2018) found that SIEs' employability upon repatriation varied for managers with national and international career paths and was moderated by expatriation mode (assigned versus self-initiated), length of stay, destination country, corporate size, and career phase. She found that recruiters seemed unfamiliar with SEI's international work experiences, and had difficulty to appraise their value, in part because of verification issues. Skills and knowledge acquired in Africa were not

regarded highly: French employers perceived stays in African countries more as tourism than as work. We have far too little research on these SIEs.

Host country's cultural characteristics

Cultural distance

Cultural distance and expatriate adjustment has been the subject of some research, and can be extended to SIE career success. Generally, there is confirmation of the intuitive assumption that the more different the host culture is from the home country culture, the more demanding the adjustment will be (Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005; Waxin, 2004; Waxin, Brewster, Ashill, & Chandon, 2016). However, results are not entirely consistent. Some researchers have argued that as problems in culturally close countries are often not recognised or are attributed to the individual rather than generalised to the culture, it can be just as difficult to adjust to a similar as a dissimilar culture (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). Other researchers find no relationship between culture novelty and work adjustment (Selmer, 2006). Some of this, of course, is because our measures of culture are simplistic compared to the complexity of the topic, and inconsistent (Avloniti & Filippaios, 2014). Overall, however, the balance of the literature suggests that cultural distance makes adjustment harder (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005).

Awareness of the importance of context in research on expatriates' cross-cultural effectiveness and management is growing. Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) and Peltokorpi and Froese (2014) demonstrate that host country context affects expatriate job satisfaction and adjustment, so we can infer that the host country context has an impact on SIE career success. Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) found that national cultural distance, homogeneity in terms of supervisor nationality, and expatriate type (AE or SIE) all have effects on expatriate job satisfaction. SIEs were less satisfied with their jobs than AEs. SIE might be more affected by cultural distance than assigned expatriates because: 1) They have less opportunity to avoid or 'buffer' their contact with the local culture; and 2) they are more dependent on social integration into local units and, 3) in most cases, have little or no support from headquarters where necessary. Froese and Peltokorpi (2013) argue that SIEs have lower job satisfaction since they work more often under local supervisors. However, they typically stay longer in the country and have better language skills, so they feel more adjusted. Speculatively, we might suggest that national cultural distance and supervisor nationality also impact SIEs' career satisfaction.

Language

Language is an important aspect of culture. For engineers, language proficiency and cultural attraction were important factors explaining their decisions to work in emerging economies (De Eccher & Duarte, 2016). Kim and Froese (2012) examined the direct and moderating effects of host-country characteristics (economic level and language) and employees' role commitments (work and family) on expatriate motivation and found that working in advanced or English-speaking countries was more attractive to working elsewhere.

Diversity climate

The host country's diversity climate may also be a factor. SIEs' perceptions of how they are treated by the host country community influence their career satisfaction in the host country. A specific aspect of this is the host country's diversity climate, defined as an "individual's perception of the importance or value their community places on diversity, and the degree to which they experience inclusion, fairness, and lack of discrimination in their community" (Ragins, Gonzalez, Ehrhardt, & Singh, 2012, pp.). A positive diversity climate refers to an understanding that each individual is unique and individual differences, whatever the dimensions of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and cultural differences, are valued as opposed to condemned (McKay, Avery, Tonidandel, Morris, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2007). Living in a community that has a positive diversity climate encourages SIEs to present their true selves and boosts their confidence (Singh, 2011). Thus, for example, in some countries homosexual acts are an offence punishable by law, other countries are more welcoming – for homosexuals this may be crucial to their views of where they might like to live. Chen (2012) found that a host country community's diversity climate was significantly related to SIEs' perceived autonomy, and perceived relatedness in establishing global work experience.

Management style

Finally, countries differ in terms of their preferred organisational culture and management style that may attract SIEs or the expatriates may have to adjust to them. Klein, Waxin and Radnell (2009) studied the ideal organisational culture profile in the UAE and found that managers and leaders in their sample preferred both constructive and 'defensive' styles, with extensions along the 'passive-defensive' and 'aggressive-defensive' dimensions. On one hand, the constructive style encourages members' sense of accomplishment, growth and development, realistic risk-taking, and encourage creativity at work. On the other hand, defensive style esteems power and prestige, and doing what you are told, or following orders. These kinds of inconsistent signals can create stress in the workplace. According to Sidani and Al Ariss (2014), traditional management styles, nepotism and "wasta" (personal connections) all pose an impediment to the development of a strategic talent management process. This can be difficult for foreign workers to adapt to.

Conclusion: Proposed research model and agenda

Based on this brief literature review, we identify several research gaps. First, we could not find any research examining specifically how host country factors contribute to SIEs' career success. More work is needed here.

In the literature around the topic, much of the SIE-research is very context specific and analyses the experiences of certain specific types of SIEs in a certain context. The evidence is often qualitative, and samples are thus small scale 'convenience samples'. This is valuable work and

helps us to understand SIEs' careers in different contexts but there is a clear need for wider scope research involving evidence across different contexts.

Future research should consider the relationship between individuals (and their families), organisational and contextual perspectives. All are important and they interact.

We argue that between the host countries institutional and cultural characteristics and the SIEs' career success lies the 'reputational relevance' of the host country. In other words, whether SIEs even consider travelling to work in a specific country is dependent to some extent on the reputation of that country in the potential expatriate's home country, and in their mind. In this instance, whether the reputation of that country is fair or unfair, accurate or distorted, is irrelevant. Further, the value of any foreign sojourn for SIEs will depend to some extent on how the host country context helps them to develop their career capital (Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen, & Tornikoski, 2018; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008). Thus, people who have worked in the United States of America, or indeed most other developed, western countries are likely to find that their international experience there makes them marketable in the future (Mäkelä, Suutari, Brewster, Dickmann, & Tornikoski, 2016) and thus helps their future career. SIEs whose experience is elsewhere in the world may find that the results are different. For example, a University post in the USA may make it easier to get a job in a University in most other countries; a University job in a poor African state may not have the same effect, indeed it may in some cases have a negative effect on future career opportunities. Again, the accuracy of these reputational issue is less important for our purposes here than the effect on SIE careers.

Though the literature on SIEs has noted the relevance of gender, there has been a tendency to ignore the significance of gender differences when studying the experiences of SIEs and their outcomes, such as career satisfaction and success. More research is needed here too.

Finally, country effects may vary with sector and occupation. Thus, having worked in a war zone in the Middle East may be a negative factor on the CV of someone in marketing or of a government policy specialist; but may have a powerfully positive effect for someone working in the security sector or as an accident and emergency doctor or nurse. We have not, however, been able to discover any research at all on the differential effect on future careers of international experience in different countries. This is another area ripe for empirical research.

FIGURE 1: Proposed research model: The impact of host country institutional and cultural characteristics on SIEs' career success.
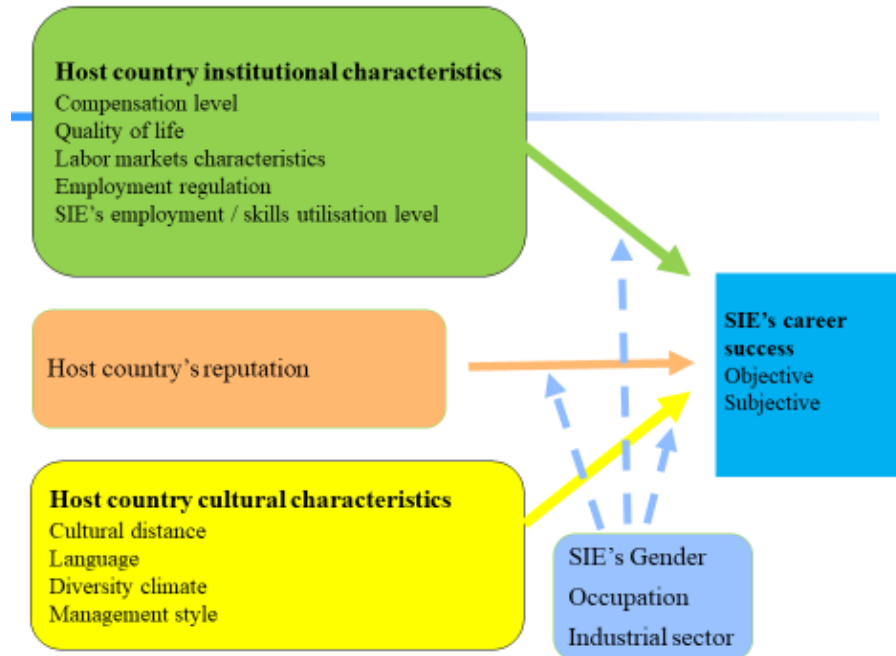

Figure 1 outlines a potential research model. It would be interesting to test variations of this model at different levels of analysis. At the individual level, one could examine the impact of the perceived host country institutional and cultural characteristics on SIEs' career satisfaction. At the macro level, it would be interesting to test the impact of the host country institutional and cultural characteristics on SIEs' career satisfaction in the country. At the organisational level, it would be interesting to examine how organisations react and actively manage the SIEs' careers, in different cases: When SIE find the HC especially attractive, or not.

This model presents several interesting theoretical and practical implications. First, it highlights the different variables that HC governments can play with, in order to facilitate better career outcomes for SIEs and global talents, and so their length of stay in their country. Second, a better understanding of the specific HC factors that impact SIEs' career success would allow companies to refine and adapt their HRM practices, towards both their SIEs and local employees. Third, our model will allow SIEs to more effectively select the particular HC where they aim to work and live, and to make better informed choices, which should lead to enhanced career success.

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