

# The Impact of Workplace Environment on Expatriates' Adaptation to New Workplace

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**Abstract.** As industrialization advances around the world, companies are expanding their operations to other regions of the world, resulting in an increase in demand for expatriates who are required to work outside of their home countries. Expatriates are faced with a lot of changes in the host country (cultural differences, language barrier, etc.) and may also encounter some troubles adapting to the workplace environment (physical environment of the office and the occupational health & safety, relationship with coworkers, working hours, workplace culture, etc.). The workplace environment can affect expatriate adaptation negatively or positively. The research results showed that employees who receive cultural and diversity training from their companies tend to be more productive and are at ease in their new roles. Companies are encouraged to establish a diversified environment for their employees in order to lower the likelihood of early repatriation.

**Key words:** *workplace environment, expatriate adaptation, new workplace.*

## Introduction

**Relevance of the article.** As industrialization spreads throughout the world, organizations have also expanded their businesses to different parts of the world to increase profits, market share, customer base and to gain global recognition, hence the need for expatriates who are required to work away from their home countries. When expatriates leave their home country to work in an organization, they are faced with a lot of challenges in the host country (cultural differences, language barrier, weather conditions, etc.) and may also encounter some troubles adapting to the workplace environment. Experienced expatriates are used to moving and thus they have learned to recognize and understand the diversity of local market conditions in different territories, giving them a broader perspective when they are in a new workplace and making them high performers. The workplace environment can be the physical environment of the office and the occupational health & safety, relationship with coworkers, working hours, workplace culture and top management decisions. For people who have always wanted to live abroad, relocating to a new country is not a difficult decision. The transition from expatriate living to assimilating into a new country, culture, and bureaucracy may be the most difficult challenge. Therefore, it is important for expatriates to allow themselves, their co-workers, and their managers time to adjust to their new workplace.

**Level of problem investigation.** It is somewhat inadequately examined, as there are not many scientific articles written to show the relationship between workplace environment and expatriate adaptation to a new workplace. Authors have analyzed and focused on the following subjects: job satisfaction (Lane, Esser, Holte, & Anne, 2010), workplace environment as a reward for firms' productivity, increasing profits for organization (Buhai, Cottini, & Nielsen, 2008; Chandrasekar, 2011), workplace conditions and employees' psychological hazard (Jones, 2010), a decent working environment (Sedarmayanti, 2003), supervisor support as an important source of employees' adjustment (Bushiri, 2014), expatriate adjustment and job performance (Kraimer et al, 2003), relationship between local colleagues, seniors and subordinates and expatriate's work, (Koteswari, & Bhattacharya, 2007). Although there is some comprehensive research with respect to the impact of workplace environment and how it affects employees, research discussing the impact of the workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace is still not adequate.

**Scientific problem.** How does the workplace environment impact expatriates' adaptation to a new workplace?

**Object of the article.** The impact of the workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to a new workplace.

**Aim of the article.** To investigate the impact of the workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to a new workplace.

**Objectives of the article:**

1. To analyze the concept of the workplace environment and its factors.

2. To describe expatriate adaptation and the challenges expatriates face.
3. To examine links between the workplace environment and expatriates' adaptation to new workplace.
4. To analyze the empirical level of research regarding the impact of the workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace.

**Methods of the article.** Analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, and classification.

### 1. Theoretical aspects of impact of workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace

**Concept of the workplace environment.** The workplace environment is the most critical factor in keeping an employee satisfied in today's business world and employees tend to be more productive when the workplace environment is conducive for them to perform their tasks. There have been different definitions of the workplace environment given by several authors, some of which have been identified in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Workplace Environment Definitions

Author, year	Definition
Chapins (1995)	Workplace environment entails an environment in which the worker performs his work.
Spector (1997)	Identified the workplace environment to consist of safety to employees, job security, good relations with co-workers, recognition for good performance, motivation for performing well and participation in the decision-making process of the firm.
Sedarmayanti (2003)	Similarly describes the workplace as one which should be comfortable and safe for employees.
Bushiri (2014)	Viewed it as an entirety which comprises the totality of forces, actions and other influential factors that are currently and, or potentially contending with the employee's activities and performance at the workplace.
Ruchi, & Surinder (2014)	Described workplace environment as consisting of physical scenery (e.g., noise, equipment); fundamentals of the job itself (e.g., workload, task); extensive institutional features (e.g., culture, history); and even extra-institutional background (e.g., work setting, employee relation).
Oludeyi (2015)	The workplace environment consists of three components which include the technical, the human and the organizational environment.
Mattson, Melder, & Horowitz (2016)	Environment of the workplace had enhanced consequences by motivating employees.
Useche et al. (2018)	Working environment is the totality of the systems, conditions, and situations in which an employee performs his/her tasks.

Source: created by the authors.

*Based on the definitions given above, it can be said that a workplace environment is one that is enabling for growth, values employee contribution, gives a sense of belonging, encourages diversity and work-life balance.*

**The factors of the workplace environment.** *Physical workplace factors* involve aesthetics, chemical and particle exposure, noise and vibration exposure, temperature, lighting, and safety. (1) Physical environment. Heath (2006) describes the physical environment, the immediate surroundings, behavioral procedures, policies, rules, culture, resources, working relationships, work location, all of which influence the ways employees perform their work. Physical workplace environment also constitutes things such as furniture (tables, chairs etc.), machine layout, ventilation, and lighting. Others are noise level, protective equipment, workstations, office gadgets, computers, and office space. According to Temessek (2009) the aesthetic, decoration, and design characteristics of the workplace environment, which eventually aid in improving an employee's work experience and induce improved job results (Gitahi, Waiganjo, & Koima, 2015; Kasule, 2015). (2) Occupational health and safety. Chandrasekar (2011) posited that people working in such an environment are prone to occupational disease and its impact on their performance. Some authors tried to understand the relationship between the physical location and conditions of the workplace and the performance of employees. This is very important because places like factories and warehouses need to be built in such a way that they are conducive for employees to be productive. A physical work environment might include the lighting, ventilation, and the temperature (Stup, 2003). *Psychosocial workplace factors* are concerned with how an employee perceives, experiences, and responds to his or her working environment. (1) Relationship with co-workers is a key to cultivation of success and professionalism as it makes the workplace more

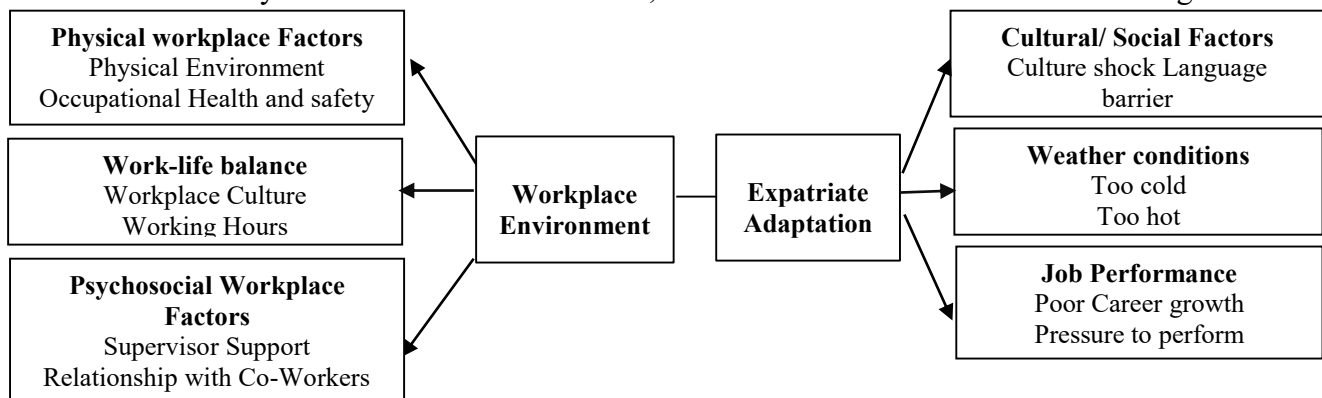
enjoyable. Less anxiety among co-workers in turn means positive attitude towards work and increased productivity (Makin, 2006; Tayler, 2012). When employees communicate effectively with each other, productivity will increase because effective communication means less complaints and more work getting done (Quilan, 2001). It is difficult to meet the organization's goals if there is a conflict among coworkers. Researchers have highlighted the concept of relating with co-workers and explain that this helps expatriates gain social support from host and home country nationals, and this support helps them to adjust in the host country and improve their job performance. Peer relationships contribute to cross-cultural adaptation and productivity of foreigners (Harrison et al., 2005; Liu, & Shaffer, 2005; Claus et al., 2011). (2) Supervisor Support - could lead to the employees' performance but there is a case that the supervisor had failed in supporting their employees (Bushiri, 2014). Immediate supervisors act as advocates for employees, gathering and distributing the resources needed by the employees for them to be able to do a good job and providing positive encouragement for a job well done (Chandrasekar, 2011). **Work-life balance** may be defined as maintaining a balance between working environmental elements and an employee's personal problems (for example, family issues) and its indicators are workplace culture and working hours. (1) Workplace culture - can mean how an organization is being run, from the leadership style to method of operation (hybrid or online), corporate social responsibility, benefits (free food) and dress code. Gherardi (1994) defined workplace culture as the shared set of beliefs about the norms, values, and goals of an organization comprising workplace culture and its informal structure. The leadership style of an organization also influences the quality of the interaction between superiors and subordinates (Koteswari, & Bhattacharya, 2007), for example a company where managers really listen and take care of their staff. (2) Working hours - it is the period when an employee starts and ends work. Work hours vary substantially between countries, but also within countries, e.g., due to the prevalence of part-time work and working hours regulations or agreements (Bick et al., 2016; OECD, 2016). Working hours can be clearly set or unset. At times the working hours are not specified by the employer, nor are they agreed upon by the employee (Rubery et al., 2006). Many contemporary workplaces are characterized by persistent working time patterns with more than 60 working hours per week, constant availability, and an ever-increasing pace of work (Crary, 2013; Michel, 2011; Perlow, 2012; Wajcman, 2014). Despite the negative effects of lengthy work hours, extended working hours are reported to increase the number of sickness absences too (Ala-Mursula et al., 2006). Literature reveals that there is an established workplace culture in which working long hours is seen as a sign of organizational commitment. Kodz et al. (2003, p. 81) defined this culture as "being characterized by long work hours being valued within an organization and interpreted as a sign of commitment". Employees may work longer hours to avoid negative performance appraisals or job loss when a business is facing imminent downsizing. Economic factors faced by the organization like declining profitability, downsizing and job insecurity may also adversely affect working time (Natti et al., 2006). **Expatriate adaptation.** The word *adaptation* can be used interchangeably with the word adjustment. Expatriates' ability to positively perceive the cultural differences might help them to adjust in the host country and improve their performance. Hannigan (1990) regarded adaptation as the change in the cognition, attitude, behavior, and psychology of people who live in a foreign culture. Berry (1997, 2005) stated that adaptation is defined as the changes that occur in individuals and groups in response to their contextual demands.

Past researchers have highlighted the concept of expatriate adjustment and explained that expatriate adjustment is a multi-dimensional construct (work, general and interaction) (Bhaskar et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2005). Kraimer et al, (2003) found that expatriate adjustment is positively related to job performance and when expatriates properly adjust to the host country's general environment, their job performance will be like such performance in the home country. Therefore it can be said that expatriate adaptation is characterized as the way in which expatriates are mentally at ease across three adjustment dimensions: workplace, relationships, and culture at large.

**Challenges that expatriates face.** Expatriates experience various challenges in social and cultural context between the parent and host countries some of which have been identified below. **Cultural/Social Factors:** (1) Cultural shock - is one of the changes and it is a psychological and cultural problem based on uncertainty. It has four stages, the first is the honeymoon stage, when foreigners are fascinated and passionate about a new culture and excited about being in a new environment. On short-

term missions, foreigners can stay in this stage and only be positively involved in their experience. After the honeymoon phase, expatriates can get tired and start to miss their acquaintances. Frustration can be exacerbated when combined with extreme stress in an unfamiliar place, often associated with language barriers, traffic problems, or minor annoyances. This is the stage of frustration. The adaptation phase is the third phase, and it can make the locals more open and understanding when they simply want to communicate in the local language or learn more about the culture. The stage of acceptance does not necessarily imply full understanding or complete assimilation of the local culture. However, the level of familiarity allows expats to feel comfortable in their new environment. It is normal for foreigners to experience all kinds of strong emotions. However, this can lead to a depressed mood. This is the so-called "culture shock," which usually begins sometime after a person arrives in the host country and can last up to a year or two, depending on the person. Culture shock is difficult to avoid when exploring the culture of a host country. (2) Language barrier - Language is a very important issue in managing expatriates (Rubin, & Rubin, 2011). What native speakers often do not realize is that frequently it is not the other person's accent but their own way of speaking that creates the greatest barriers to effective communication (Berardo, & Deardorff, 2012; Javadpour, & Samiei, 2017). Language barriers often go hand-in-hand with cultural differences, posing additional problems and misunderstandings in the workplace (Morrison, 2002). **Weather conditions.** (1) Too cold - winters can extend up to five months in some regions, including Estonia, Canada, Iceland, and Russia, with temperatures as low as -40 degrees Celsius. Lingjaerde et al. (1986) found that residents of more northern regions, including Norway and countries north of the polar circle, experience more depression with hypersomnia than depression with insomnia during the winter. Also, a population survey in Japan suggested greater winter-related changes in sleep duration in more northern cities compared to more southern cities Okawa et al. (1996). (2) Too Hot - temperatures from 30 degrees and above are related to an abundance of vitamin D intake, outdoor activities and sports, lengthy days, and an energetic temperament. **Job Performance.** (1) Poor career growth - loss of career direction, and underestimation of current jobs in their home countries are some of the frequently cited career changes expatriates experience (Minter 2008; Koteswari, & Bhattacharya, 2007) and are sometimes the main reasons for being denied employment opportunities. Another challenge for expatriates interested in their careers is the inability to acquire skills that can be transferred to their future job in their home country. (2) Pressure to perform - expatriate adjustment in a foreign country has a direct psychological impact on personal self-esteem and may also impair personal relationships (Templer et al., 2006). Understanding of expatriate psychographics is an important area in expatriate adjustment because personal psychological factors such as motivation, relational skills, flexibility/adaptability, and extra-cultural openness have a direct impact on expatriate adjustment (Mol et al., 2005). Personality, emotional maturity, and adaptability assist expatriates' ability to cope with job and performance-related demands in a new country, while extra-cultural openness promotes an expatriate's social and cultural adjustment.

Based on the analysis of the theoretical research, the theoretical model is introduced in Fig. 1.



Source: created by the authors.

**Fig 1. Theoretical model of impact of workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace**

*In summary, it can be stated that there are possible links between the components that make up the workplace environment and expatriates' adaptation to a new workplace. The physical environment of*

*the office and occupational health & safety, relationship with co-workers', supervisor support, working hours, work culture and culture shock, language barrier, weather conditions, work-life balance and poor career growth are some of the challenges expatriates face in a host country.*

## **2. Empirical research level of impact of workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace**

This part examines empirical research and its results (Table 2) in relation to the workplace environment component and expatriate adaptation definition and the challenges employees experience as an expatriate, and the links between workplace environment and expatriates' adaptation to new workplace and the research model is presented.

Table 2

### **Empirical investigation level of impact of workplace environment on expatriates' adaptation to new workplace**

Authors (year)	Aim of research	Research results
Al-Omari, & Okasheh (2017)	To study the impact of the work environment on job performance.	Workplace environmental elements such as ventilation and light, as well as noise, are among the primary circumstances that have a detrimental impact on employee job performance.
Lankeshwara (2016)	To investigate the influence of the working environment on employee performance in the garment and textile business, utilizing the Brandix Intimate Apparel – Awissawella.	The findings of the multiple regression revealed that the physical work environment, job aids, and supervisory support were all positive influences on employees' performance, with job aid being the most important.
Gitahi, Waiganjo, & Koima (2015)	To focus on the effect of the workplace environment on bank employees' performance in Nakuru Town, Kenya.	Findings from the analysis revealed that physical features of the workplace environment have no significant impact on the performance of the employee.
Naharuddin, & Sadegi (2013)	To investigate the links between job performance, job aids, physical working conditions, and supervisor support	A negative link between supervisor support and employee performance was discovered, indicating that the supervisor had little substantial influence on employees.
Leblebici (2012)	To perform their research on a foreign bank in Turkey, analyzing the working environment circumstances in connection to employee productivity.	Healthy behavioral working settings have a positive effect on employees even when physical environmental factors are unfavorable.

Source: created by the authors.

It can be said that elements relating to the physical environment and occupational health & safety of the office such as air, noise, temperature, space, light and color if not properly managed can have a negative effect on an employee's job performance. Adopting beautiful aesthetics can boost employee productivity. Psychosocial factors like supervisors' support can have a positive influence on employees. This means that creating a positive psychosocial office environment would considerably improve employee performance. If the employees are to be happy, they must work in a pleasant setting and are expected to have positive and dynamic attitudes regarding their job activities, which will result in them advancing in the organization because they would be encouraged to work. Factors affecting work-life balance have a substantial impact on employee performance. This means that an increase in the practice of work-life balance among employees will result in a proportional rise in their performance. Additionally, a balance in the work-life of employees will assist them in feeling fulfilled both in their employment and in their personal lives.

Having discussed the empirical studies on Workplace Environment and expatriate adaptation to the new workplace, the Table 3 presents the influence of Workplace Environment.

Table 3

**Influence of Workplace Environment Factors on Expatriate Adaptation to new workplace**

Author, year	Location of the study	Workplace Environment Factors				
		Physical environment and occupational health & safety of the office	Supervisor Support	Work-life balance	Working hours	Workplace culture
Al-Omari, & Okasheh (2017)	Jordan	Influence				
Leblebici (2012)	Turkey	Greater influence				
Naharuddin, & Sadegi (2013)	Malaysia		No influence			
Lankeshwara (2016)	Sri Lanka		Influence			
Leblebici (2012)	Turkey		Greater influence			
Gitahi, Waiganjo, & Koima (2015)	Kenya	No influence	Greater influence	Greater influence		
Duru, & Shimawua (2017)	Nigeria				Greater influence	
Shahzad, Iqbal, & Gulzar (2013)	Pakistan					Greater influence

Source: created by the authors.

*In summary, it can be said that there is no influence on physical environment and occupational health & safety of the office for employees in Kenya. Also, there is a greater influence of supervisor support in Turkey and Kenya. Work-life balance, working hours, workplace culture all have a greater influence in Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan respectively.*

### Conclusions

1. The analysis of the concept of workplace environment shows that there are different definitions of the workplace depending on the context to which it is presented: (a) Physical environment of the office and occupational health & safety make the expatriate feel comfortable and healthy. (b) Relationships with co-workers' allows the expatriate to understand why other colleagues act differently. (c) Workplace culture creates an environment where the expatriate feels at home.
2. Evaluating the challenges expatriates face, it can be said that expatriates experience culture shock, language barrier, weather conditions, pressure to perform and poor career growth.
3. Examining links between workplace environment and expatriates' adaptation to new workplace. It can be said that employees need to be familiar with their environment to be productive.
4. Analyzing the empirical level of research, it can be said that unhappy employees due to the environment of work, have not better remarkable satisfactory results, organization culture affects job performance.

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