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RUNNING HEAD: Civilian Volunteers in UN Hot Spots

**Civilian Volunteers in United Nations Hot Spots:  
What Makes them Intend to Apply for Yet Another Mission?**

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**Civilian Volunteers in United Nations Hot Spots:  
What Makes them Intend to Apply for Yet Another Mission?**

**Abstract**

This study focused on United Nations (UN) civilian volunteers serving in “hot spots”, and tested a model to predict their intentions to apply for a new UN assignment. These individuals have characteristics of both assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. In-Role Behaviours (IRB) and Organizational Citizenship Behaviours towards the Local Population (OCB-Locals) were related to sense of personal accomplishment, that in turn was related to intentions to apply for another UN assignment. Sense of personal accomplishment played a mediating role. Both the personality trait of agreeableness and the attitudinal factor of commitment towards the local population were predictive of IRB, but only agreeableness was predictive of OCB-Locals. Moderation effects were identified, but the direction of most of them was unexpected. For example, it was low openness to experience that strengthened the link between sense of personal accomplishment and intentions to re-apply. The study’s implications for expatriation research and for practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** expatriates; non-profit; volunteers; job performance; personality traits; behavioural intentions; personal accomplishment; inter-governmental organization

## **Civilian Volunteers in United Nations Hot Spots:**

### **What Makes them Intend to Apply for Yet Another Mission?**

Expatriation refers to pursuing and engaging in work experiences beyond one's native country and culture (McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Tharenou, 2015). Expatriation might be organization initiated/assigned or self-initiated (Andresen, Biemann & Pattie, 2015). Assigned expatriates (AEs) are sent to international locations by a home country organization (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld & Dickmann, 2014; Andresen et al., 2015). Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), on the other hand, move to the host country on their own initiative, and usually take full responsibility for the relocation (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Tharenou, 2015). The focus population of this study, United Nations (UN) civilian volunteers, possess features of both AEs and SIEs. Specifically, they are sent to an overseas mission on behalf of a particular organization (in our case the UN), which is feature of AEs, but they are not employees of that organization before taking up the mission, and they apply for the assignment and move to the location of service on their own initiative, which are features of SIEs. We label these expatriates "tethered SIEs" because of their constrained choices, they must interact with a specific organization during the whole experience (both in their home country and in the host country) with no latitude to change employers when in host country (something that SIEs typically have the option of doing).

Though knowledge on expatriation has advanced substantially in the past decades, authors point at the lack of context-specific research in both assigned and self-initiated expatriation (Andresen, Pattie & Hippler, 2020; Arseneault, 2020; Bjerregaard, 2014; Vaiman, Haslberger & Vance, 2015). Furthermore, despite the considerable rise on self-initiated expatriation research in the previous decade (Andersen, 2019), our knowledge about this very sizable population is far from exhaustive (Andresen et al., 2020; Bozionelos, 2020; Kumar & Chhokar, 2019). Finally, there is a noticeable scarcity of investigations on

expatriation in the non-profit sector; expatriation whether assigned or self-initiated has been predominantly studied within the confines of for-profit organizations, most typically the Multinational Corporation (MNC) (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; He, An & Zhang, 2019; McNulty, Vance & Fisher, 2017; Renshaw, Parry & Dickmann, 2018). The conditions and incentives in the non-profit sector, which often relies on volunteers to deliver its mission (Alfes, Antunes & Shantz, 2017; Fallon & Rice, 2015), are different from the for-profit sector; hence, the factors that determine motivation and outcomes are also likely different (e.g., Alfes et al., 2017; He et al., 2019; McCormick & Donohue, 2019). This study takes into account these points as it focusses on civilian volunteers who serve in UN “hot spots” (locations with a serious need for humanitarian aid). These individuals share characteristics of AEs and SIEs and work for a non-profit organization in extreme settings.

### **Expatriates in the Context of Volunteering for the UN**

UN civilian volunteers are not regular UN employees; instead, they register with the UN, thus becoming part of the talent pool. Then they may either be contacted by the organization when their profile matches available appointments and asked whether they are interested in accepting the appointment, or themselves apply directly for advertised appointments. In both cases they have to go through a selection process. If they are selected, the process of their deployment in the hot spot starts. Missions typically last from six to 12 months. Upon completion of the assignment, the volunteer is discharged (United Nations, 2020; United Nations Volunteers, 2020a). This may be likened to self-initiated expatriation, whereby individuals put into service their own initiative to take employment abroad (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014), with the clear intention of only a temporary stay (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Doherty, Richardson & Thorn, 2013) and usually on a temporary work contract (Andresen et al., 2015). On the other hand, in line with the criteria of AEs (Andresen et al., 2014; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014), UN civilian volunteers on hot spot assignments are sent (i.e., the selection

decision about their mission is made) and receive support from a parent organization (the UN in this case). Typically, the UN provides a settling grant, return airfares and living allowance for the duration of the mission along with other provisions such as health and life insurance (United Nations Volunteers, 2020a). Once the assignment on hand has been completed, volunteers are discharged. They have no obligation to undertake any further UN assignments. If they desire to undertake another UN mission, they have to make themselves available again. In other words, individuals who go on UN missions to hot spots engage in a significant proportion of self-initiated expatriation, but they also have characteristics of AEs, hence they are hybrid expatriates.

Expatriation in the for-profit sector (for example, in MNCs), both assigned and self-initiated, appears to be primarily motivated by the prospect of career advancement or at least career maintenance (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills & Brewster, 2008; Hippler, 2009; Kumar & Chhokar, 2019; Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari, 2008; Vance, 2005; Wechtler, 2018) - regardless of whether expectations are fulfilled. In fact, the motive of career development seems inter-twined with the endeavour of expatriation in the literature. In their purported comprehensive definition of the expatriate, McNulty and Brewster (2017) emphasize “the purpose to accomplish a career-related goal” (p. 46). However, expatriate missions in the non-profit sector do not always contain the (explicit or implicit) promise of career advancement, while at the same time they may involve the possibility of significant physical or psychological danger (e.g., Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Fee & McGrath-Champ, 2017; Van Emmerik & Euwema, 2009). Hence, the decision to engage in such a mission defies to some extent mainstream logic of motivation behind expatriation and implies motives of a different nature. Indeed, in a study with regular employees of religious and humanitarian organizations, Oberholster, Clarke, Bendixen & Dastoor (2013) investigated the motives behind accepting an international assignment. Altruistic motives, such as a sense of a calling

to help others, the desire to make a difference, and personal meaning emerged as by far the strongest, while career advancement and development came far below and were fairly unimportant (Oberholster et al., 2013). Similarly, Dickmann and Cerdin (2018) in their study with permanent UN civilian employees (i.e., individuals who had careers with the UN) in hot spot assignments found that the most frequently cited motive to accept it was the humanitarian nature of the mission and the personal meaning this had for them. Most of them confessed that they chose to accept the mission despite their belief that it was detrimental for their careers (which would benefit most from staying in the head office) (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018).

Notwithstanding that service as UN volunteer may enhance career-related prospects (e.g., facilitate obtaining preferred or long-term employment) because international experience - whether as volunteer or not - contributes to skill and confidence development (e.g., Fee & Gray, 2011; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry, 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003) that likely enhance employability back home, the UN volunteers programme is not linked to a career nor the promise of a career with the UN (“being a UN Volunteer is not a career”, United Nations, 2020). Hence, most of the typical extrinsic career rewards (e.g., promotion, status, financial attainment, or even some kind of job security, Dries, 2020) do not seem to apply in this case. Furthermore, the assignments are fraught with the potential danger of serious injury, loss of life, and repeat witnessing of extreme human misery and suffering. These elements make them quite distinct from typical expatriate missions that are expected to involve work and opportunities to discover without exposure to significantly greater physical or psychological dangers than those found in one’s home country. Therefore, and considering the prominent role of the UN in amelioration or prevention of humanitarian crises and its substantial reliance on volunteers (United Nations Volunteers, 2021), it becomes of

significance to identify the motivation mechanism that shapes these individuals' intentions to repeatedly apply for participation in UN hot spot assignments.

The model we construct and test contains factors that should theoretically shape the intentions of UN civilian volunteers to declare availability for another assignment upon the end of the current one. It draws upon person-environment (P-E) fit. P-E fit is a umbrella term for approaches (e.g., Chatman, 1989; French, Rodgers & Cobb, 1974; Holland, 1959; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987; Schneider, 1987) that share certain assumptions, including that people are attracted by work environments that are compatible with and allow them to express their attributes, and that the degree of fit with their environment determines outcomes (e.g., job performance, satisfaction, stay or leave intentions) (Van Vianen, 2018). P-E fit posits that, among others, individuals' personality, attitudes, values, and interests dictate the environments in which they will feel most comfortable and perform best (Edwards, 1991; 1996; French, Caplan & Harrison, 1982; Kristof, 1996). Studies integrated in meta-analytic reviews (e.g., Hoff, Song, Wee, Pha & Rounds, 2020; Kristof-Brow, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Oh, Guay, Kim, Harold, Lee, Heo & Shin, 2014) attest to the usefulness of P-E fit in explaining outcomes. PE-fit is an appropriate theoretical backdrop in the present study because volunteers in the non-profit sector place strong emphasis on the fit between their own personal beliefs, values and attitudes and the goals of their mission (Englert, Thaler & Helmig, 2020). Aligning with the logic of P-E fit, the present work proposes a model whereby specific personality traits of individual assignees, their propensity to commit to the local population, organizational citizenship behaviours towards the local population, in-role behaviours, and expatriate adjustment determine their sense of accomplishment, which in turn relates to their intentions to reapply for a UN assignment. Testing of the model showed support of most premises by the data with some notable exceptions that apparently underline

the importance of the context (which includes the sector) when processes and outcomes in expatriation are considered.

P-E fit posits that the match between the individual and the environment where the individual functions determines individual and, by extension, group and organizational outcomes (Edwards, 1996; French et al., 1982; Kristof, 1996; Van Vianen, 2018). Such outcomes include job performance and key work attitudes and intentions including satisfaction and intentions to stay/quit (Chatman, 1991; Edwards & Billsberry, 2010; Hoff et al., 2020; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Oh et al., 2014). The individual's side of the equation may embody internal individual factors such as personality, values, skills, aspirations and expectations; and the environmental side may encompass the nature and demands of the job or the occupation, the collegial environment, and the physical and cultural environment of the organization or the location (Chatman, 1991; French et al., 1982; Edwards & Billsberry, 2010; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Makkonen, 2015; Solnet, Ford, Robinson, Ritchie & Olsen, 2014). The extent of fit between individual and corresponding environmental factors (e.g., whether the individual's personality is compatible with the values of the environment or the nature of the job) determine the outcome.

The present study, therefore, sits firmly within the scope of P-E fit. Civilian volunteers who are deployed in UN hot spots are contributing to humanitarian missions. Assuming that the strongest motive for participating in such missions revolves around dedication to their humanitarian causes – which is what relevant studies suggest (Cerdin & Dickmann, 2011; Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Oberholster et al., 2013) – it follows that the extent to which they perform well and feel accomplished within the context of their assignment should ultimately shape their desire to go to a new mission. In turn, their performance and their feelings of accomplishment should depend on factors that determine

their fit with the nature of the mission and of the location; hence, these should include whether they are altruistic and empathic (encompassed by the personality trait of agreeableness, McCrae, Costa & Martin, 2005; Goldberg, 1999), committed to the local population who are typically under strain, and adjusted to the life in the hot spot itself.

### **Hypotheses Development**

The main focus of UN missions in hot spots is the welfare of the local population, and it is argued that the performance of assignees in such missions depends on whether they have an altruistic disposition along with commitment to the cause (Oberholster et al., 2013; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). It would be expected, therefore, that commitment towards the local population and personality traits that encompass altruism are antecedents of civilian UN volunteers' job performance.

Job performance is multi-dimensional; two key dimensions are in-role behaviours (IRB) and extra-role or organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). IRB pertain to formally stipulated job duties and responsibilities – prescribed behaviours - while OCB are manifested in whether employees go beyond formal job requirements (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Organ, 1997). In the context of this study, we consider it appropriate to view OCB in terms of OCB towards the local population (OCB-Locals), that is to say, what UN civilian personnel in hot spots do over and above their formally prescribed duties to contribute to the welfare of the local population. This may be likened to customer-oriented OCB (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997), whereby staff invest extra efforts going beyond the call of their duty to help clients (Kutaula, Gillani, Leonidou & Dayananda, 2020).

Commitment is the manifestation of affective processes (Li, Ahlstrom & Ashkanasy, 2010) and entails an affinity or strong emotional attachment towards a particular target that propels the individual to follow a particular course of action (e.g., Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner

& Clarke, 2006). Though commitment can have a non-affective form, it is the affect-based form that is consistently associated with outcomes and typifies the construct (e.g., Mercurio, 2015; Solinger, Van Olffen & Roe, 2008). Commitment in the work context has many foci (Becker, 2017), but regardless of the focus high commitment propels individuals to engage themselves in pursuing the welfare of others beyond formal organizational requirements (Solinger et al., 2008). Naturally, commitment is associated with key outcomes including IRB, OCB, and intentions to stay or quit (Riketta, 2002; Voigt & Hirst, 2015). In line with P-E fit, we believe that it is commitment that focuses on the local population that should be most relevant for outcomes of UN civilian volunteers in hot spot settings. Indeed, many participants in Dickmann and Cerdin's (2018) interview-based study with permanent UN civilian personnel in hot spots stressed their commitment to the local population, some explicitly rating it stronger than their commitment to the UN itself. In line with the above discussion, therefore, commitment to the local population should be associated with stronger IRB, but also with stronger OCB-Locals. This last is because those UN civilian volunteers who are more committed towards the local population would likely be inclined to go beyond their contractual call of duty and invest extra effort in ensuring the welfare and needs of the locals in the afflicted spot.

*Hypothesis 1:* Commitment to local population will be positively related to IRB (H1a) and to OCB-Locals (H1b).

Adopting the principles of P-E fit, we can assume that those UN volunteers who are most concerned and inclined to expend effort towards helping the hot spot population are those who are empathic and altruistic in nature. Volunteering is a prosocial act (Penner, 2002), which is primarily linked to altruistic and empathic motives (McCormick & Donohue, 2019; Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown & Aisbett, 2016). In the context of expatriation, Oberholster et al. (2013) found that the strongest motive of expatriates who had joined

humanitarian or religious non-profit organizations was altruism, the devotion to the welfare of others even if this brings personal inconvenience. Altruism and empathy are core elements of the personality trait of agreeableness (McCrae et al., 2005; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1999), one of the five fundamental personality traits or “big five” (DeYoung, 2015; John, Naumann & Soto, 2008). Therefore, UN civilian volunteers who score high on agreeableness should fit better into their assignment than their lower-agreeableness counterparts because they have an inherent predisposition towards the humanitarian and altruistic nature of the UN mission. Hence, they should perform their prescribed tasks better, IRB, but they should also be more inclined to go beyond their formal work duties to help the local population, considering that altruistic behaviour is a core component of OCB (Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). In support to the above reasoning empirical research has found that people who are high on agreeableness prefer super-ordinate goals instead of goals that are linked with monetary-only rewards (Sato, Fukuda, Kameyama, Suda, Uehara & Mikuni, 2012). Furthermore, short-term volunteers in disaster areas who score high on agreeableness demonstrate stronger performance in their mission than their counterparts with low scores on agreeableness (Istiani & Muetia, 2016).

*Hypothesis 2:* Agreeableness will be positively related to IRB (H2a) and to OCB-Locals (H2b).

Sense of personal accomplishment refers to one’s level of satisfaction with one’s own competence and achievement in relation to the work they carry out (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). UN operations have a clear mission, hence, the extent to which volunteers believe they are accomplishing their part of the mission, that is whether they are performing well, should serve as source of satisfaction for them. Indeed, work with volunteers in non-profit international aid and development organizations indicated that it was important to them to know whether they were performing well (Barrett, Cox &

Woodward, 2017). Hence, the level of performance, that is IRB and OCB-Locals, of UN volunteers should relate to their sense of personal accomplishment. In indirect support of this view, feelings of personal accomplishment are stronger when people perceive that their goal-related needs are met (Silva et al., 2017), and when they perceive that their efforts are appreciated by their line managers (Lai, Chow & Loi, 2018).

*Hypothesis 3:* IRB (H3a) and OCB-Locals (H3b) will be positively related to sense of personal accomplishment.

In line with P-E fit, it is reasonable to expect that a positive sense of personal accomplishment following good performance with respect to the mission will be related to high intentions of UN volunteers to apply for yet another UN assignment upon completion of the current one. Concurring with this assumption, recent research in a setting that bears some resemblance to UN hot spots, nurses in acute care hospitals, found that sense of personal accomplishment was associated with stronger intentions to stay in nursing (Van Bogaert et al., 2017), and comparable results were reported in a study with volunteers in hospital settings (Ferreira, Proenca & Proenca, 2015).

*Hypothesis 4:* Sense of personal accomplishment will be positively related to intentions to apply for another UN assignment.

#### **Mediation effects.**

We have argued that commitment to the local population will be related to greater IRB and OCB-Locals, which in turn will be associated with a higher sense of personal accomplishment. It follows that IRB and OCB-Locals should serve as mediators in the relationship (e.g., Aguinis, Edwards & Bradley, 2016; Rungtusanatham, Miller & Boyer, 2014).

*Hypothesis 5:* IRB (H5a) and OCB-Locals (H5b) will mediate the relationship between commitment to the local population and sense of personal accomplishment.

In a similar vein, we have argued that agreeableness will relate to IRB and OCB-Locals, and these performance-related factors will in turn relate to sense of personal accomplishment. This sequence of relationships also invites us to hypothesize that IRB and OCB-locals play a mediating role.

*Hypothesis 6:* IRB (H6a) and OCB-Locals (H6b) will mediate the relationship between agreeableness and sense of personal accomplishment.

Finally, we have also hypothesized that performance in the UN assignment, manifested as IRB and OCB-Locals, will enhance feelings of personal accomplishment which, in turn, will strengthen intentions to apply for a new mission. These hypotheses also direct towards a mediating effect for sense of personal accomplishment.

*Hypothesis 7:* Sense of personal accomplishment will mediate the relationship of IRB (H7a) and OCB-Locals (H7b) with the intention to apply for another UN assignment.

**Moderators: Expatriate adjustment and openness to experience.**

The degree to which expatriates feel comfortable in the host environment reflects their adjustment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989). Aspects of the host environment that determine general expatriate adjustment (hereafter “expatriate adjustment”) include everyday life experiences (e.g., accommodation, food, healthcare facilities), the work environment itself (job content, performance standards), and interpersonal interaction (Black & Stephens, 1989). Though there is substantial theorizing on expatriate adjustment, empirical research, especially on how it relates to outcomes, is not abundant (Takeuchi, 2010; Salgado & Bastida, 2017). We believe that expatriate adjustment may influence the relationship of UN volunteers’ agreeableness and commitment to the local population with their job performance. Low level of adjustment for the expatriate means elevated concerns and difficulties in running one’s every day personal and work life in the host location and *vice versa*. We expect that under the condition of high adjustment to the hot

spot, those UN civilian volunteers who are highly agreeable and strongly committed to the local population will perform their prescribed duties (i.e., IRB) best. This is because they will be able to fully dedicate their energy, skills and other abilities to their work duties without distractions and impediments. In addition, it is reasonable to expect that in the absence of serious hindrances in the running of their own personal and work lives, agreeable and committed-to-the-locals volunteers will have more time and energy to engage in non-prescribed tasks to help the local population.

*Hypothesis 8:* Expatriate adjustment will moderate the relationship of agreeableness and commitment to the local population with IRB (H8a and H8c) and OCB-Locals (H8b and H8d).

Openness to experience (“openness”) is another trait of the big five, encompassing curiosity, willingness to expose oneself to different ideas, perspectives and ways of life, a desire for adventure, and artistic interests (Goldberg, 1999; McCrae et al., 2005). UN assignments, besides the difficulties and dangers they entail, also provide opportunities to explore different parts of the world that bring with them a variety of cultures, ideologies, physical locations, and approaches to life. Considering the characteristics of openness, it is reasonable to expect that high levels of the trait should further strengthen the link between sense of personal accomplishment and intention to apply for another UN assignment. That is the desire to apply for another assignment as consequence of their belief of fulfilling their current mission will be stronger if they also have a desire to explore and discover different locations, civilizations and ways of living.

*Hypothesis 9:* Openness will moderate the relationship between sense of personal accomplishment and intention to go to another UN assignment, with the relationship being stronger for those who score higher on openness.

The model that includes all proposed hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were 191 UN civilian volunteers (118 men and 73 women) from a variety of countries deployed in 16 hot spots in four continents (Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas). None of the participants were serving in a hot spot that was in their country of origin. Mean age was 41.95 years ( $SD = 8.16$ ). The average number of months already spent in their current mission was 9.75 ( $SD = 5.79$ ), while the average number of UN missions they had participated in as volunteers was 2.74 ( $SD = 1.68$ ). Mean age of line managers was 47.28 years ( $SD = 6.45$ ). Participants were solicited via direct contact by a former UN civilian volunteer who utilized her network of contacts with UN officials and volunteers. Contact, with a brief general description of the study (“understand experiences and views of people who serve in hot spots”) and a request for participation was addressed either via email or via the social media account of the volunteer. The contact message specified that it was necessary to also have a short questionnaire completed by one’s own line manager, whose agreement to participate was also needed. Upon agreement to participate, links giving access to the appropriate online questionnaires were sent separately to the participant and the line manager. Each had access only to the questionnaire they were asked to complete. Responses were registered by the online survey software, which generated the dataset (no missing data) in spreadsheet form that was converted into the statistical package we utilized as the basis for our analysis.

### **Measures**

Questionnaire language was English; although other languages are in use, English language is an essential prerequisite in the UN (United Nations Volunteers, 2020b). A 1-5 response format (e.g., 1: strongly agree, 5: strongly disagree) was utilized in all scales. Line managers completed the scales that assessed IRB and OCB-Locals, the rest of the measures were completed by the participants themselves.

*Intentions to go to another UN mission after the end of the current mission.* This was measured with three items in the template of Van Emmerik and Euwema's (2009) measure, which had been developed for professional soldiers in peacekeeping missions. The items were adapted to the population of the present study (e.g., "I do not intend to go to another mission with the UN once this mission ends", reverse scored).

*Sense of personal accomplishment.* This was measured with three items (e.g., "I feel I am positively influencing other people's lives through my work") from Maslach et al. (1996).

*In role behaviours (IRB).* These were assessed by the line manager with three items (e.g., "fulfils the responsibilities specified in his/her job description") adapted from Bettencourt and Brown's (1997) scale, developed to measure IRB of frontline contact employees.

*Organizational citizenship behaviours towards the locals (OCB-Locals).* These were rated by the line manager with three items (e.g., "he/she frequently goes out of his/her way to help locals"), also adapted from Bettencourt and Brown (1997) for the specific population of our study.

*Commitment to the local population.* This was assessed with four items (e.g., "I really feel that the local people's problems are my own") adapted for the needs of this study from Allen and Meyer's (1990) heavily utilized and validated affective organizational commitment scale.

*Agreeableness and Openness.* These were each assessed with four items, from the NEO Personality Inventory, *NEO PI-R* (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

*Expatriate adjustment.* This was assessed with 12 items using the scale developed by Black and Stephens (1989) as base. The items covered a number of life (e.g., living conditions in general, healthcare facilities, food) and work aspects (e.g., conditions to perform one's work properly) along with personal safety issues, which was added because this is a typical concern in most UN hot spots. Assessing the domain of personal safety was necessary towards achieving content validity of the measure. Coverage of all domains that pertain to expatriate adjustment within the specific host environment is a critical factor in its measurement (Hippler, Caligiuri & Johnson, 2014).

*Controls.* These were age, gender (1: female, 2: male), educational level (1: secondary/high school to 6: doctorate degree), time in the appointment (measured in months), number of UN missions served as volunteer before the current mission, continent of current basis [two dummies: Continent 1 (1: Africa, 0: other), Continent 2 (1: Asia, 0: other)], country of origin (1: developing, 2: developed), marital status (1: married, 2: non-married), type of hot spot (1: family duty station, 2: non-family duty station). These factors are known to affect the relationships between the variables in our model. For example, Oberholster et al. (2013) in their study with regular employees in humanitarian organizations concluded that motives for accepting an international assignment may be different for those originating from developing vs. developed countries.

The discriminant and convergent validity of the measures were supported by three Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs - EQS 6.1, maximum likelihood robust method). To assess model fit we employed the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI). These fit indexes with values of .90 or higher suggest an adequate fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). In addition, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used,

with values of .08 or lower indicating a reasonable fit and .05 or lower indicating a good fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). First, a CFA on IRB ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) and OCB-Locals ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) scales was performed. The two-factor model fit the data reasonably well, Satorra–Bentler scaled  $\chi^2(8, N = 191) = 20.83, p < .05$ ; CFI = .983; IFI = .983; RMSEA = .078, with all factor loadings significant at the .001 level (range from .78 to .96). Second, a CFA was conducted on the measures of agreeableness, expatriate adjustment, and openness to experience. After removing items with low and nonsignificant factor loadings, we retained three items for agreeableness ( $\alpha = 0.61$ ), nine items for expatriate adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ), and three items for openness to experience ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). The three-factor model had acceptable fit, Satorra–Bentler scaled  $\chi^2(87, N = 191) = 150.45, p < .05$ ; CFI = .925; IFI = .927; RMSEA = .077, with all factor loadings significant at the .05 level (range from .44 to .90). Finally, another CFA was performed on the scales of commitment to local population, sense of personal accomplishment ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), and intention to apply for another UN assignment ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ). This procedure led us to retain three items (from the initial pool of four) for the commitment to local population (one item was dropped due to nonsignificant factor loading;  $\alpha = 0.72$ ). This three-factor model had satisfactory fit, Satorra–Bentler scaled  $\chi^2(25, N = 191) = 29.30, ns$ ; CFI = .987; IFI = .988; RMSEA = .030, with all factor loadings significant at the .001 level (range from .49 to .93).

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## Analysis and Results

Intercorrelations are presented in Table 1. We tested our hypotheses using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM - EQS 6.1, maximum likelihood robust method) that enabled us to estimate multiple causal relationships simultaneously. To preserve statistical power given the

complexity of our hypothesized model that includes multiple direct, indirect, and moderating effects, all multi-item scales of our study variables were averaged (by calculating the arithmetic mean) and treated as manifest variables in the structural model. Further, in the calculation of the interaction terms for testing our moderation hypotheses, all related variables (i.e., commitment to local population, agreeableness, expatriate adjustment, sense of personal accomplishment, and openness to experience) were mean centred to reduce multicollinearity and obtain unbiased parameter estimates.

The path-analytic structural model demonstrated a good fit to the data, Satorra–Bentler scaled  $\chi^2(153, N = 191) = 158.46, ns$ ; CFI = .958; IFI = .964; RMSEA = .033. Standardized path estimates partially supported Hypothesis 1, as commitment to local population was significantly positively related to OCB-Locals ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$  – H1b), but its corresponding relationship with IRB was nonsignificant ( $\beta = .03, ns$  – H1a). Hypothesis 2 was supported, as agreeableness was positively related to both IRB ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$  – H2a) and OCB-Locals ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$  – H2b). Similarly, Hypothesis 3 was also supported, both IRB and OCB-Locals were positively related to sense of personal accomplishment ( $\beta = .51, p < .01$  – H3a;  $\beta = .20, p < .05$  – H3b; respectively). Further, the path-analytic model provided support for Hypothesis 4, as sense of personal accomplishment was positively related to intention to apply for another UN assignment ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ).

To test the mediation hypotheses (i.e., Hypotheses 5 to 7), we estimated indirect effects using bias-corrected bootstrapping analysis with 10,000 repetitions and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). The indirect effect of commitment to the local population on sense of personal accomplishment via OCB-Locals was .05 and significant (95% CI [.02, .09]), while the corresponding indirect effect via IRB was .01 and nonsignificant (95% CI [-.04, .05]); thus, Hypothesis 5b was supported while Hypothesis 5a was not. Further, the indirect effects of agreeableness on sense of personal accomplishment via IRB and OCB-Locals were .15

and .05, respectively, and significant (95% CI [.07, .24], 95% CI [.02, .10], respectively), which lent support to Hypotheses 6a and 6b. The indirect effects of IRB and OCB-Locals on intention to apply for another UN assignment through sense of personal accomplishment were .12 and .04, respectively, and significant (95% CI [.02, .23], 95% CI [.01, .07], respectively). Hence, Hypotheses 7a and 7b were supported.

With respect to the moderation hypotheses, H8a was supported, as the interaction of expatriate adjustment  $\times$  agreeableness (Figure 2) was significantly positively related with IRB ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ), but H8b was not because the interaction was significantly but negatively related with OCB-Locals ( $\beta = -.24, p < .01$ ). The interaction is plotted in Figure 3, which shows that the highest OCB-Locals were displayed in the condition of high agreeableness and low expatriate adjustment. H8c and H8d were not supported: the interaction of expatriate adjustment  $\times$  commitment to local population was nonsignificant for both IRB ( $\beta = -.05, ns$ ) and OCB-Locals ( $\beta = .04, ns$ ). Hypothesis 9 was not supported, because the interaction of openness to experience  $\times$  sense of personal accomplishment was significantly but negatively related with the intention to apply for another UN assignment ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ). Figure 4 plots the interaction, with the strongest intentions to re-apply appearing in the combination of low openness and high sense of personal accomplishment. The plot also indicates that for those who scored high on openness, intentions to re-apply were constant across levels of sense of personal accomplishment. Overall, the  $R^2$  for the intention to apply for another UN assignment was .20.

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Insert Figures 2, 3, and 4 about here  
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### **Supplementary analysis.**

Hypotheses 5 and 6 in concert with Hypothesis 7 imply two additional indirect paths - not formally hypothesized in our model - from commitment to the local population and agreeableness via IRB and OCB-Locals, and via sense of personal accomplishment to intention to apply for another UN assignment. Bootstrapping analysis showed that of the indirect effects that originated from commitment to the local population, the first (i.e., commitment to the local population → IRB → sense of personal accomplishment → intention to apply for another UN assignment) had a path coefficient with value of .00 and was nonsignificant (95% CI [-.01, .01]); while the other (i.e., commitment to the local population → OCB-Locals → sense of personal accomplishment → intention to apply for another UN assignment) had a path coefficient with value of .01 and was significant (95% CI [.003, .03]). The indirect effects that originated from agreeableness (i.e., agreeableness → IRB → sense of personal accomplishment → intention to apply for another UN assignment; and agreeableness → OCB-Locals → sense of personal accomplishment → intention to apply for another UN assignment) had path coefficients with values of .04 and .01, respectively, and were both significant (95% CI [.01, .08], 95% CI [.003, .04], respectively).

### **Discussion**

The study developed and tested a context-specific model to predict the intentions of UN civilian volunteers in hot spots to apply for another mission upon the end of the current one. The model contained personality, attitudinal and performance variables that were chosen for their theoretical relevance to the nature of the expatriates – international volunteers in the non-profit sector – and the nature of the mission – humanitarian. Person-Environment (P-E) fit, which suggests that the degree of fit of the characteristics of the person with those of the broad environment determines the favourability of outcomes, served as additional theoretical backdrop behind these choices. In this way the study responds to highlighted needs for research in expatriation in the non-profit sector along with research that takes into account the

context of expatriation. Here the emphasis was on volunteers in humanitarian missions for an organization (the UN) that has as one of its main aims to offer aid and relief to people in locations that are afflicted by war or natural disaster.

In general, and with some notable and interesting exceptions that we will discuss, the results supported the hypotheses and, hence, vindicated the suggestions that context-specific research can shed additional light on mechanisms for expatriate experiences and outcomes. Intention to apply for another UN assignment upon completion of the present one was related to whether volunteers felt that they were accomplishing their purposes. Our assumption, based on theoretical reasoning and earlier qualitative studies, was that people who join UN missions as volunteers do so mostly because they see it as a calling towards a superordinate goal that is of moral importance to them. The result concurred with that reasoned assumption because it showed that the stronger the belief that they were fulfilling the purpose of their mission, the more likely they were to be thinking of going on another mission.

Also in line with hypotheses that were formed taking into account the presumed mission-centred mind frame of the volunteers, IRB and OCB-Locals each played a role in the formation of intention to pursue another mission via their relation to sense of personal accomplishment. That reinforced the importance of taking into account the characteristics of the expatriates – in our case their mission was presumably central to their lives –, and the context: job performance measures were context-specific, especially OCB-Locals, discretionary helping behaviours oriented specifically towards the local population. We should point out that IRB, performance in formally prescribed roles, was more strongly related to sense of accomplishment than OCB-locals was. This pattern was somewhat unexpected (though no formal hypothesis had been posited). A potential explanation is that the mission-centredness of volunteers made them see their formal duties as absolute priority.

Finally, enacting the hypothesized mechanism, the two variables chosen with the nature of the expatriates and the context in mind, agreeableness and commitment towards the local population, were related to job performance, albeit only agreeableness was related to both IRB and OCB-Locals. We expected that commitment towards the local population would manifest itself strongly as OCB to help and contribute to the welfare of locals, which it did. However, we also expected it to show in IRB, which it did not. Because of that pattern, the influence of agreeableness on intentions to go to yet another UN mission was more consistent (it was directed via both performance measures) than the influence of commitment to the local population (it was directed via a single performance manifestation, OCB-Locals). Personality traits are enduring characteristics that encompass action tendencies that manifest themselves in a variety of situations (e.g., Fleeson, 2001; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi & Goldberg, 2007), and this may be the reason why agreeableness was related to both performance measures. Overall, therefore, agreeableness, which as a personality trait is deeply entrenched, was shown to be more salient and consistent in the tested model than commitment to the local population, which is an attitude and therefore less deeply rooted than personality (Schleicher, Hansen & Fox, 2011).

Nonetheless, the general suggestion of the results is that the part of the hypothesized model that was concerned with bi-variate and mediated relationships carries substantial validity. The picture, however, was different with respect to the moderating effects. Three moderating effects were identified (out of the five hypothesized), but only one of those concurred with expectations: UN volunteers who scored high on both agreeableness and adjustment to the hot spot were rated highest in IRB. The two other significant interactions contrasted with expectations, and could be described as “arresting”. Specifically, the highest levels of OCB-Locals were displayed by those scoring high on agreeableness but reporting low adjustment. That was surprising, one potential explanation being that low adjustment for

expatriates may reflect especially poor conditions for locals, which acts as a motivator for those with strong empathy and altruism (i.e., high agreeableness) to apply themselves beyond their formal work duties in order to help, which would be reflected on strong OCB-Locals. The fact that the relationship of agreeableness with OCB-Locals was rather flat under the condition of high adjustment (Figure 3) supports this tentative explanation.

It was also intriguing that the combination of strong feelings of personal accomplishment and low (instead of high) openness was associated with the strongest intentions to apply for another mission. For volunteers with high openness, the intention to re-apply was apparently independent from their levels of sense of personal accomplishment (Figure 4), and considerably lower than for those in the low openness–strong accomplishment combination. An admittedly *post hoc* explanation is that discourse about openness and expatriation has thus far viewed the trait as a simple antecedent or correlate of expatriation intentions or adjustment (e.g., Huang, Chi & Lawler, 2005; Remhof, Gunkel & Schlaegel, 2014) rather than as part of a more complex relationship that involves interaction with other factors. High levels of openness can be associated with inability to maintain focus for long on a particular objective (Dougherty, Cheung & Florea, 2007; Rose, Fogg, Helmreich & McFadden, 1994). Our participants were already in a UN mission, hence, those who were high on openness may have been desirous of an experience of a different nature afterwards. Equally, seeking variety in experiences may not have been a priority for those low on openness, of whom those who felt they were fulfilling their mission wished to repeat that experience. This account, along with the previous one to explain the interaction effect for OCB-Locals, was developed on a *post hoc* basis and needs to be tested empirically.

Overall, especially because many of them were counter to expectations, the results of the testing of our moderation hypotheses further underline the importance of considering expatriation in context.

### **Implications for Practice**

While further research is required before we might be able to generalize, the study already provides insights for the UN itself and perhaps for other organizations posting workers to humanitarian hot spots.

Sense of personal accomplishment, satisfaction that the volunteers derived from knowing or believing they were fulfilling their mission of humanitarian nature, was central in the model. Source of that feeling of fulfilment was good performance in the expatriate mission, both in prescribed duties and in discretionary acts to help the local population. The clear implication is that the UN and organizations of similar nature should consistently reinforce the sense of accomplishment in their employees, especially those in special missions. This could be achieved by regularly praising volunteers (but also permanent employees in hot spots) for good performance or effort, and by providing frequent constructive performance feedback. Line managers have a role to play in this part, and making them aware of it should be part of induction and training.

Agreeableness emerged as a strong predictor of a range of outcomes. Those outcomes included both measures of job performance, in-role and organizational citizenship towards the locals - which is certainly what the UN and organizations of similar nature desire from their volunteers - and intentions to take another mission. The implication is that agreeableness could be explicitly considered when developing selection criteria for recruiting volunteers.

Given the potential for individuals' transferring learning from one mission to the next, there is an obvious benefit in attracting more people who are likely to undertake multiple missions (despite that the UN stresses that "volunteering is not a career"), and in supporting those people. On the other hand, the UN might consider deploying those individuals who are less likely to undertake another mission to hot spots from which transfer of learning is less likely and therefore less is lost if it proves to be their one and only UN undertaking.

Moreover, since we found that those high on openness have weaker intentions to apply for another mission because they might be looking for new experiences, assigning them into an atypical mission would make it easier for the UN to find a second mission of different nature for them.

Finally, it appears important to have discussions on deployment openly with the volunteer candidates – we are individuals not demographic profiles – and such discussions might also incorporate some elements of realistic job preview. It has been found that people contracted on a tour-to-tour basis find it difficult to imagine the reality of what it would be like before their first tour (Matuszewski & Blenkinsopp, 2011). Hence, employers can do more to make them aware of some of the elements of life and work on the mission that frequently surprise first-timers. The UN might consider how it might give similar previews, with the aim of maximising the probability of desired outcomes.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

In the study we make assumptions about causal relationships. Though these assumptions were based on logical reasoning, theory, and earlier research, the design of the study (cross-sectional) does not permit absolute certainty about causality. Further, despite the use of all recommended statistical procedures for testing for indirect effects, the cross-sectional nature of our data may raise concerns about the validity of the findings with respect to mediation hypotheses and the attached indirect effect estimates (e.g., O’Laughlin, Martin & Ferrer, 2018). Properly designed panel studies that employ carefully chosen multiple points in measurement can alleviate relevant concerns (Spector, 2019).

The measurement of job performance, IRB and OCB-Locals utilized the ratings of line managers. This is typically seen as a methodological advantage (in terms of validity of assessment and in terms of lowering the possibility of common method bias, for a recent discussion on the veracity of this assumption see Bozionelos & Simmering, 2022). However,

supervisor-ratings of performance may have limitations within the specific conditions of our study. In particular, line managers may not have always had the opportunity to adequately observe OCB the volunteers were performing towards the local population, which could fully or partly explain why IRB was more strongly related than OCB-Locals to sense of accomplishment.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted causal path analysis. Although our sample size of 191 participants exceeds the minimum recommended sample size of 100 to attain valid statistical conclusions with SEM (Bollen, 1989; Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010), the complexity of our path model that includes multiple direct, indirect, and moderating effects may call for a larger sample size. Further, while our measurement models indicated reasonably good fit to the data, there might be cases (i.e., factor loadings below .50) that could constrain our models. Therefore, future research with larger samples that replicate our measurement approach could add further credence to our findings.

The expatriates in this study bear characteristics of both assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. Though the literature has generally treated the two groups as distinct (e.g., Andresen et al., 2015; Linder, 2019; c.f. McNulty & Vance, 2017) it appears that there are expatriate populations, like the one we studied, who fall into both categories.

Furthermore, individuals who volunteer for humanitarian missions outside their home countries under the conscious understanding of exposing themselves to significant danger without the promise of a career may have not been given the attention they deserve in existing typologies of internationally mobile workers (see, for example, Baruch, Dickmann, Altman & Bournois, 2013). Considering the large number of non-profit organizations that operate internationally and rely on volunteers, the size of this population should be large enough to warrant further research.

Finally, the model was developed having in mind the characteristics of the particular expatriates (international volunteers in the non-profit sector serving in humanitarian missions) and the context (geographical areas where crises of humanitarian nature take place). This was dictated by the motives behind the study. Therefore, and exactly for the reasons behind the intended contribution of the study, potential generalizability of findings is confined to expatriates of a similar nature and contexts that resemble that of this study. Future research should therefore try to replicate and extend the present study. For example, the UN is an inter-governmental organization that arguably has worldwide acceptance and recognition. It would be worth looking at expatriate volunteers in non-profit organizations that are private, such as non-government organizations (NGOs) or religious organizations. Though these organizations often operate under the humanitarian premise, the nature of their operations and the characteristics and motives of the volunteers they attract may differ from the UN.

**Data Availability Statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Figure 1. The hypothesized model.

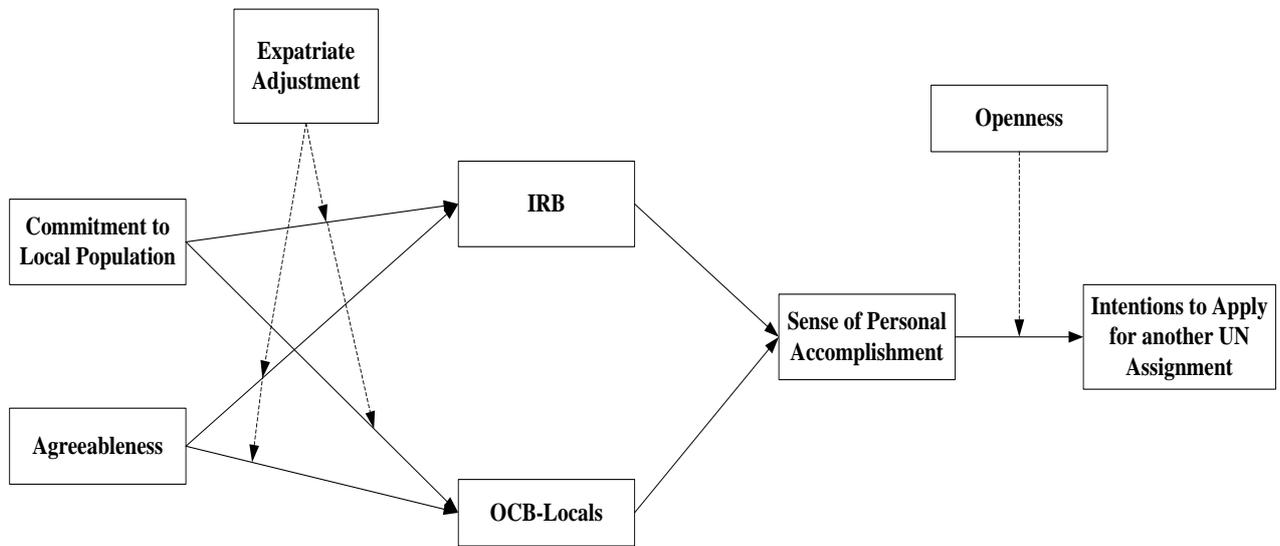


Figure 2. In-Role Behaviours (IRBs): Interaction between agreeableness and expatriate adjustment.

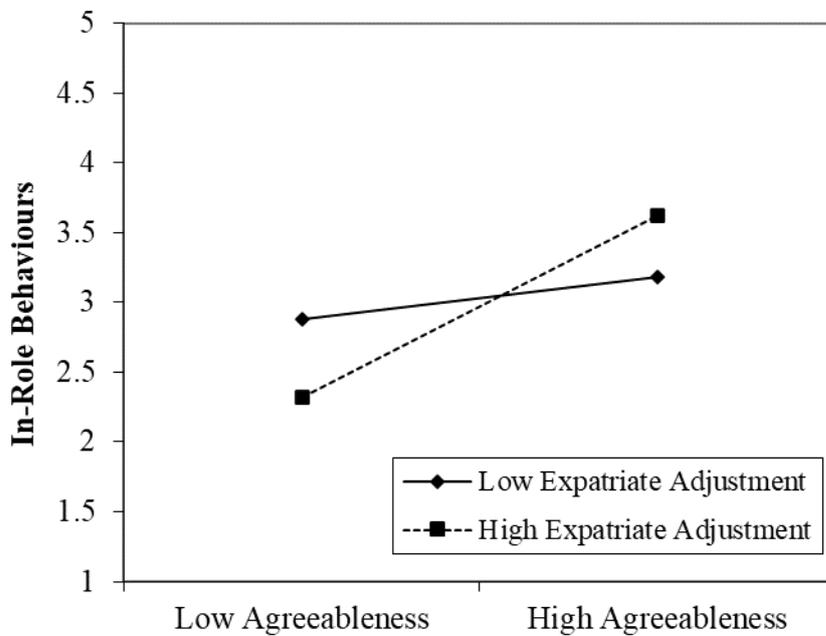


Figure 3. OCB-Locals: Interaction between agreeableness and expatriate adjustment.

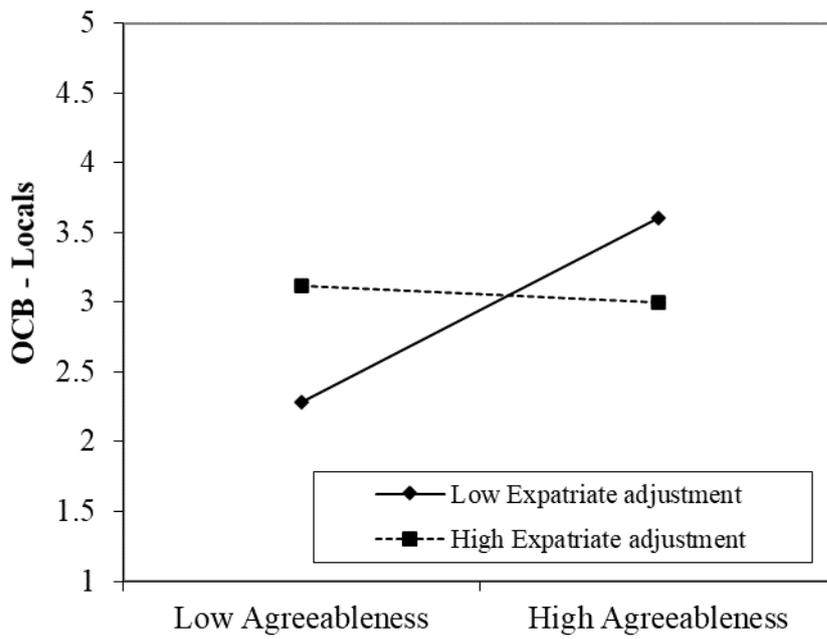


Figure 4. Intentions to re-apply: Interaction between sense of personal accomplishment and openness.

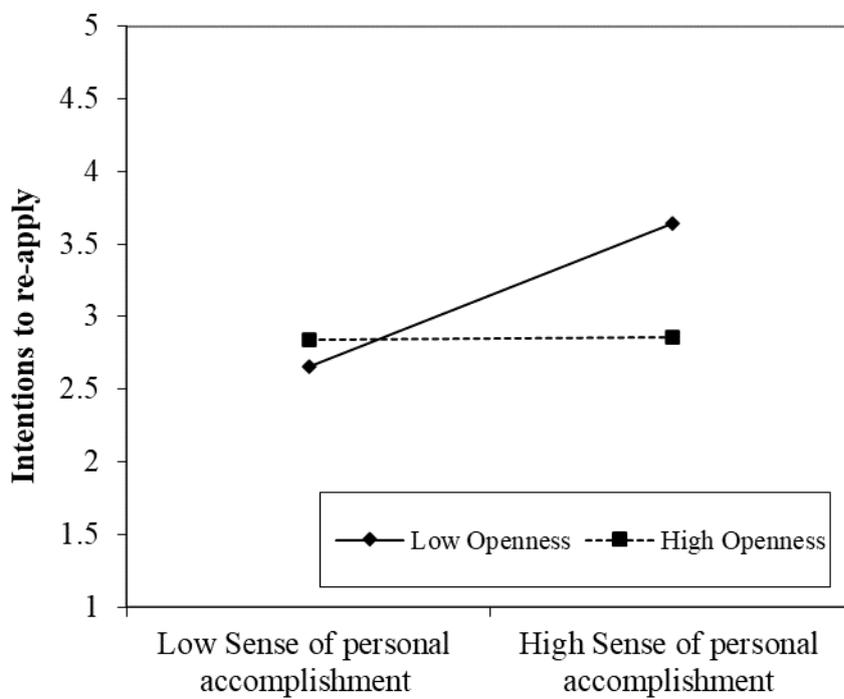


Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations ( $N = 191$ )

|                                      | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5     | 6      | 7      | 8     | 9     | 10     | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14   | 15    | 16    | 17   |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Age                               | 41.95    | 8.16      |        |        |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 2. Gender                            | 1.62     | .49       | .25**  |        |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 3. Education                         | 4.09     | 1.22      | .03    | -.12   |        |        |       |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 4. Time in mission                   | 9.75     | 5.79      | .26**  | .19**  | -.06   |        |       |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 5. Missions                          | 2.74     | 1.68      | .23**  | .09    | -.05   | .26**  |       |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 6. Continent 1                       | .80      | .40       | -.01   | .00    | -.16*  | -.16*  | -.07  |        |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 7. Continent 2                       | .08      | .27       | .05    | -.13   | .07    | .18*   | .01   | -.57** |        |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 8. Origin                            | 1.34     | .48       | .06    | -.06   | .22**  | -.05   | -.02  | .01    | -.13   |       |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 9. Marital Status                    | 2.19     | 1.69      | -.33** | -.24** | .04    | -.14   | -.02  | .05    | -.02   | .25** |       |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 10. Hot spot                         | 1.76     | .43       | .02    | .06    | -.19** | -.22** | -.07  | .53**  | -.34** | -.05  | -.08  |        |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 11. Intentions to re-apply           | 3.61     | .72       | -.02   | -.01   | -.00   | .10    | .02   | -.24** | .08    | -.03  | -.01  | -.25** |       |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 12. Sense of personal accomplishment | 4.02     | .53       | .17*   | -.01   | .05    | .11    | -.00  | .05    | -.02   | -.00  | -.03  | -.06   | .17*  |       |       |      |       |       |      |
| 13. Commitment to local population   | 3.14     | .76       | .02    | .06    | .17*   | -.03   | -.01  | -.07   | .02    | -.18* | -.00  | -.01   | .06   | .03   |       |      |       |       |      |
| 14. Expatriate Adjustment            | 3.29     | .80       | -.00   | .09    | .20**  | .14*   | -.00  | -.36** | .09    | .11   | .06   | -.41** | .19** | -.00  | .34** |      |       |       |      |
| 15. Agreeableness                    | 3.96     | .56       | -.09   | -.13   | .10    | -.08   | -.13  | -.03   | -.04   | .15*  | .34** | -.01   | -.08  | .25** | .11   | .14  |       |       |      |
| 16. Openness                         | 3.67     | .70       | .02    | -.07   | .24**  | .00    | .05   | .02    | -.13   | .16*  | .22** | .03    | -.08  | .24** | .08   | .08  | .36** |       |      |
| 17. In-Role Behaviours (IRB)         | 4.35     | .51       | .04    | -.10   | .09    | .01    | -.16* | -.10   | .08    | -.02  | .14*  | -.06   | .19** | .49** | .05   | .07  | .32** | .22** |      |
| 18. OCB-Locals                       | 3.20     | .83       | .08    | .06    | .08    | .07    | -.00  | -.01   | .03    | -.04  | .10   | -.02   | -.00  | .25** | .42** | .18* | .34** | .25** | .14* |

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$