# Balancing the profession and financial rewards: The case of expatriate professors

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**Purpose**

This study examines the impact of expatriation on professional standards and behaviours among expatriate professionals in order to explore the impact of different factors of expatriation.

**Methodology**

Analysis of survey data obtained from 364 expatriate faculty members in a country largely dependent on expatriate faculty is contrasted with Bluedorn’s (1982) Staying or Leaving Index (SLI) as a predictor for actual intention to leave and their motivation to remain or leave the host country.

**Findings**

Findings show how respondents perceive salary as a key motivator to remain in the host country while weighing this against the lack of participation in institutional governance or lack of tenure. While perceived low salary levels have a significant impact on the intention to leave we could not find evidence for salary having a direct influence on professional behaviours.

**Originality/Value**

Interestingly, academic freedom or collegiality are seen as a motivation to leave the host country by a significant share of respondents, however this does not actually result in an actual intention to leave. The authors discuss the results and their managerial and policy implications.

**Keywords:** Expatriation, independent expatriates, globalization of higher education, professional behaviour, academia

# *“Those who had few coins, here possess countless besants; and those who had not a villa, here, by the gift of God, already possess a city. Therefore, why should one who has found the East so favourable return to the West?”*

Fulcher of Chartres (1059 – 1127 CE)[[1]](#endnote-1)

# Introduction

The image of expatriates, not limited to but also of those working in the Middle East, is often associated with conceptions about financial rewards, and there is truth in this. Expatriation is a rewarding experience in many ways. Expatriates are most often a privileged group that enjoy a high status in the host country (Cohen, 1977) and more often than not, such status is particularly visible from a financial perspective. Yet, we do not know how such a focus on rewards among expatriates influences professional role behaviours or attitudes towards the profession.

Recently, the concept of independent expatriates (IE) has emerged in literature, bringing into focus those expatriates who “take advantage of the employment opportunities available in a global economy with a shortage of skilled workers” (Tharenou, 2008, p. 183) and who do so independently (Richardson, 2006). The insights gained from this new perspective extend and, at times, confirm or contradict findings from almost three decades of research into assigned expatriates (AE), those sent abroad by their employers.

In large parts of literature on both AEs and IEs, one of two approaches is pursued. Either the perspective of the organization and what the organization can do to improve success or retention rates either during or after the expatriate assignment (Baruch and Altman, 2002, Black and Gregersen, 1992, Black and Gregersen, 1999, Tung, 1988, 2005, Zeira and Banai, 1985), or the individual perspective with regards to implications on career, adjustment or personal circumstances (Bauer and Taylor, 2001, Dickmann and Harris, 2005, Richardson, 2006, Richardson and Mallon, 2005). Generally speaking, we know very little about the actual impact of expatriation on the nature of work itself, particularly professional work, which is undergoing significant changes globally (Wallace and Kay, 2008). The aim of this research is therefore to explore attitudes towards the profession in the context of expatriation.

# The context of independent expatriates

Even though Suutari and Brewster (2000) found that a larger percentage (33%) of expatriates were independent expatriates than had been thought, we know significantly less about them compared to assigned expatriates. Inkson et al., (1997) contrast the classical expatriate assignment with what they refer to as overseas experience, leading to recommendations for academics as well as policy makers on a national level to place a greater emphasis on the role of OE in economic development, particularly with regards to the skills and experience gained abroad. Further, there is a whole canon of literature by Richardson and colleagues (Richardson, 2006, 2009, Richardson and Mallon, 2005, Richardson and McKenna, 2002, Richardson and McKenna, 2006) exploring multiple perspectives based on very rich qualitative data from interviews with expatriate academics. Their contributions inform us from a multitude of perspectives, from the impact of family on expatriation (Richardson, 2006), the rationale for expatriating (Richardson and McKenna, 2002) to the implications for career (Richardson, 2009, Richardson and Mallon, 2005) or the relationship to their home countries while being abroad (Richardson and McKenna, 2006). A common feature of much of the literature on independent expatriates is the use of expatriate faculty as the sample group, whom researchers consider particularly suitable to researching IEs as they “operate outside of the traditional corporate assignment model” (Richardson, 2006, p. 469). This is due to the circumstance that the majority of expatriate academics take up employment directly with an institution in the host country rather than being assigned by their university.

Countries such as those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) [[2]](#footnote-1) depend heavily on -mostly independent - expatriates in both their public and their private sector workforce. This has changed the demographics in GCC countries to an extent that expatriates account for the majority of the population in some of them and at least a significant proportion in most. While there are serious difficulties in getting reliable empirical information or statistical data for the region (see also Cordesman, 2002, Harry, 2007), numbers from 2006 put the average percentage of expatriates across the GCC at 37.1 % and at 81% in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 70% in Qatar and 64.4% in Kuwait respectively (Kapiszewski, 2006). Taking into account growth rates since and the ongoing economic development (recession notwithstanding), those numbers have most likely further increased since 2006 due to a prolonged period of economic growth. Even during the period of 1985 and 1999 – characterized by economic stagnation – the number of foreign workers coming into the GCC grew by almost two million (Niblock, 2007, p.139, Winckler, 2005, p.99)

Within the region, the dominance of expatriates in the academic workforce is not only a mirror image of the societies at large; in many circumstances the numbers of expatriate academics exceed the greater societal trend. For example, in Oman’s Sultan Qaboos University, the country’s leading public institution, expatriates comprised 66% of their faculty during the 1998/1999 academic year (Al-Lamki, 2002). Even more overwhelming numbers exist within the public higher education system in the UAE. The latest data from UAE University is that of their 2007-2008 faculty cohort, 570 out of 747 (76.3%) were expatriates (United Arab Emirates University, 2008). Zayed University meanwhile had 265 full-time faculty in 2007 and each one was an expatriate (Zayed University, 2008). Finally, the Higher Colleges of Technology reported nearly all of their 1092 faculty in 2007 as being expatriates (Higher Colleges of Technology, 2007).

# Independent expatriates and their motivation

Tharenou (2008) discusses the belief of being in control over the environment and being able to face the challenges of expatriation as highly relevant to expatriation and concludes that if people “believe that expatriation will be instrumental for gaining career benefits, their personal agency increases, and they are therefore more willing to expatriate” (Tharenou, 2008, p. 185). Richardson and McKenna (2002) suggest that money can increase the willingness of expatriate academics to put up with discomfort. Furthermore, they found that expatriate academics evaluated their experience more positively because of financial rewards even when their initial motivation for expatriation was not necessarily linked to seeking these rewards.

With research into independent expatriates being rather new, there remains some confusion regarding terminology and several terms are often used to describe the exact same thing. One of these concepts often used interchangeably with the independent or the self-initiated expatriate is the independent internationally mobile employee (Banai and Harry, 2004, McKenna and Richardson, 2007, Richardson and McKenna, 2006). Literature using this terminology is important for this paper as it allows additional insight into the motives guiding independent expatriates. McKenna and Richardson (2007) classify them in several categories with the first being mercenaries, or individuals who wish to move because of reasons related to maximizing rewards, e.g. money, lifestyle, status, and benefits. Further, they distinguish architects as individuals who move in order to build the architecture of a career independently of organizational structures as well as the category of refugees, individuals who wish to escape personal problems, e.g. financial problems or a messy divorce. Other categories they mention are those whose motivation is to experience the adventure of a new cultural and professional environment (explorers) as well as those seeking something for their personal life, e.g. a husband/wife; or those who are seeking self-knowledge, self-awareness and believe it can be facilitated in a different environment. Additionally, they identified individuals looking for risk and challenge as well as those who want to ‘‘do good’’, ‘‘add-value’’, improve others and spread skills, knowledge, and ‘‘advancement’’ to other parts of the world.

# Current thinking on professions

As we are exploring professional role behaviours of academics in this paper, it is necessary to explore the more general context of profession. The way we use the term today goes well beyond the previously limited focus on the “old” professions such as lawyers, doctors or professors. Not only has the context of these professions changed significantly, it has also widened and now applies to a highly diverse part of the workforce bearing responsibility for the provision of services to both internal and external clients (Maister, 1997). Medical doctors now work in large and often private hospitals while lawyers have not only faced significant growth in the size of firms they work in, but major changes ruling their profession, from the deregulation of financial markets (Flood, 1995) over legislative changes (Hitt, Bierman and Collins, 2007) to the proposed Legal Services Act 2010 expected to open the partnership for non-lawyers such as accountants or even real estate agents (Law Society, 2007).

Such changes further add to the organizational-professional conflict, highlighting the complexities in the relationship between the professional and the values of the organization (Cohen and Kol, 2004). Hall (1968) considers such conflict resulting from pressures of conformity to organizational rather than professional values and from an emphasis on hierarchical control. One would expect further complications in the case of independent expatriates as they do not move to another country within an organization they have some familiarity with but rather to new territory, both in terms or national and organizational culture.

In order to shed light on what it means to be a professional, role behaviours provide a good starting point. Autonomy is considered a characteristic peculiarity of professional work, meaning that professionals demand autonomy in their work in as far as they expect to make their own decisions and judgments (Hall, 1968, Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim, 1977). Examples of autonomy in practice can be found in the relatively few levels of hierarchy and high levels of discretion in law firms (Greenwood and Empson, 2003) or in many professions encouraging ethical behaviour regardless of differing client interest (Shafer, Park and Liao, 2002). Public service orientation is another often mentioned characteristic, describing that the professional serves the interest of the public first and foremost as opposed to his or her own or even the client’s interests (Hall, 1968, Wallace and Kay, 2008). Moreover, Freidson (1994) suggests collegiality as a defining characteristic, collegiality which transcends organizational borders and is not limited to dealing with direct colleagues but a shared interest to protect professional status and to perform work through collegial exchanges (Abel, 1988, Wallace and Kay, 2008). Hall (1968) and Kerr et al. (1977) also discuss professional organizations, which have as great a role in the socialization into the profession as dedicated education such as e.g. law school has. Further, Wallace (2001) and Wallace & Kay (2008) introduce variety as a characteristic defining professional work, as opposed to routine or repetitive work.

# Academics and their profession

Knowledge creation and dissemination are the hallmarks of the academic profession and academics have always played a large role in the development and growth of society. In the current transitional period to knowledge-based economies, the position of the university and its constituent faculty has been amplified (Etzkowitz, 2008). At the core of an academic career exists professional characteristics and role behaviours which emphasize the professional status of the professoriate and even extend the definition of professionalism to degrees not enjoyed by many other professions. The academic profession has become defined by autonomy, academic freedom, tenure, and collegiality. It is these elements which allow academia to continue to expand the boundaries of knowledge and support development.

An academic career allows for a large degree of autonomy which manifests itself in a number of ways. More than most professions, academia has been recognized as one where the individual has a great deal of flexibility (Richardson, 2009). Within some institutional constraints, professors often have the choice of what courses to teach, when to teach, what research to conduct, with whom to conduct research, and what schedule to keep.

Another way in which autonomy is evident is through academic freedom, which is the belief that an academic should have a significant degree of authority with regards to their research and teaching which is thought to be a precondition in the search for truth and, in turn, of benefit to society. The history to this belief is quite long. It was Wilhelm von Humboldt, German Education Minister in the early 19th century, who first codified into law the principles of Lernfreiheit (=freedom to learn), and Lehrfreiheit (=freedom to teach). Though still a limited form of academic freedom that only extended to the campus and one’s field of specialization, this was a bold move to formally recognize and sanction academic freedom as a core element of the university (Altbach, 2001, Scott, 2006). This principle has remained a key element to the academic profession and is generally considered one that is worthy of protection.

This protection is primarily offered through the often misunderstood practice of academic tenure. Tenure has never been intended to be job-for-life assurance. Its intention is not to protect “deadwood” but to guard a professor from being fired for saying or doing something that the administration does not approve of. As early as 1940, the American Association of University Professors (2005) developed the Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure. They describe tenure as “a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society. (American Association of University Professors, 2005, p. 3)”

Ultimately, the role of tenure as a fundamental element of higher education and as the main guardian for academic freedom has been recognized. Some researchers (Hohm and Shore, 1998) go as far as saying that institutions without tenure cannot be considered real universities.

Collegiality as it pertains to the academic profession takes on a major role. Though Merriam-Webster (2008) defines collegial as the equal sharing of authority amongst colleagues, within higher education this has many manifestations from peer review in research to peer evaluation of teaching, promotion and hiring committees to higher forms of institutional governance such as a faculty senate. With reference to academic journals, peer review is thought to increase the quality of articles and to act as a stamp of approval from the community of scholars. Though critics question its efficacy (Ware, 2008), it is still seen as the best method available to ensure academic rigor. Committees of peers often also take a significant role in higher education evaluatory practices in which academics are assessed according to teaching, scholarship, and service. Colleagues are recognized as the most appropriate people to perform such evaluations because they have the necessary understanding of the process and discipline to be effective (Theall, 2009). Similarly, collegial governance “depends heavily upon the participation of colleagues to establish and realize a shared purpose…to participate in decision-making, and it is the hallmark of academic decision-making” (University of Alberta Secretariat, 2006, p. 23). The voice that academics often have in institutional decisions is a unique characteristic of the profession.

# The importance of this study

The question we seek to answer in this study is whether financial rewards, which were identified as a key motivator for expatriates to live and work in the UAE according to a recent poll (YouGov, 2008) are also a key concern of expatriate academics and to what extent such a concern would influence their attitudes towards professionalism. This inquiry is important because an individual’s self-definition as a member of a certain profession is closely linked to enacting a particular professional role (Pratt and Dutton, 2000) and by extension gives rise to role identity (Chreim, Williams and Hinings, 2007). Understanding the dynamics underlying change in professional role identity and behaviour extends our understanding of those performing significant roles in organizations and society, whether at home or abroad.

Within the multiple definitions of what it means to be a professional, we aim to explore whether being a comparably well-paid expatriate professional chokes the desire to maintain professional standards representing the very core of one’s profession. To be more precise, we aim to understand the impact of a potentially very strong reward focus- the mercenary perspective put forth by McKenna and Richardson (2007) which is often associated with the Middle East- on the professional role behaviours of expatriates. This is important for multiple reasons.

First, this is a question of expectations from both the employer and the employee side and relevant to the wage setting mechanism as much as to levels of professionalism amongst expatriate faculty. Arguably, professionally oriented faculty are needed in order to build universities able to compete globally as academia very much relies on cooperation among peers and a certain degree of altruism and dedication to the profession.

Second, this is relevant to the very basic concept of an academic career, whether faculty in an expatriate environment can actually rely on their peers and their employer to provide a reasonably “academic” environment. Altbach (2003, p. 3) cautions in this respect: “What we do know about the conditions of the academic profession and of academic work in the developing world is not positive. Conditions of work and levels of remuneration are inadequate, involvement in institutional governance is often very limited, and the autonomy to build both an academic career and academic programs in the university is often constrained”. Further, within the UAE, tenure does not exist as faculty are generally on 3 - 4 year contracts. Academic freedom, while it does exist, is framed within a context which is appropriate to both the culture and the society. This means that limitations exist, so the mere existence of limitations actually represents a lack of academic freedom. Faculty does have some say in the way the institutions operate but not to the degree that is the norm in Western institutions. In commenting on the more autocratic nature of the decision-making processes in the region Mazawi (2003) noted that “the broader social and political culture seems to have pervaded the university space and affected administrative and governance styles” (p. 236). Because of this, the UAE tries to offer fairly competitive packages with the hope that the financial and lifestyle rewards will compensate for the professional issues that exist. For example, institutions such as Zayed University benchmark their salaries against the data provided by The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources and try to match the salaries offered by other Masters degree granting institutions in the United States. The major benefit from a salaries perspective is that the UAE is a tax free environment, so whatever employees are paid, they take home. A competitive salary along with free housing and other benefits are intended to make the UAE an attractive destination for expatriate faculty.

Third, on a more general level, we would expect this study to have implications for hiring decisions at public higher education institutions in the UAE and beyond by adding to the understanding of motivational factors and their relation to money. It may be that by strengthening the professional elements of academia, the financial aspect will play less of a role.

# Research method

Similar to Richardson (2006) as well as Richardson and Mallon (2005), expatriate faculty were chosen as the participants for this research because they are particularly appropriate for studying independent expatriates since they are rarely assigned expatriates and have a long tradition of independent international mobility (Welch, 1997); this stretches from the Sophists in Ancient Greece to the Medieval European Universities to the expatriate faculty across the globe today. Hence, the expatriate faculty members from the five public tertiary institutions in the UAE were the targeted population for this research.

The institutions were all contacted through phone, email, website, or personal contacts, but only four of the institutions agreed to participate. The fifth institution did not respond after an initial positive contact had been made, so they were not included in the study. Because one institution has 16 branch campuses spread throughout the country in a number of small centres, only its four campuses in the metropolitan centres of Dubai and Abu Dhabi were included in the sample. This means that the estimated sample was approximately 1600 faculty. Upon institutional approval, the potential participants were invited to participate in a confidential online survey via email. Though surveys were obtained from 372 faculty, only 364 were deemed complete and usable. Hence, the response rate for acceptable submissions was approximately 23%.

Two sections from the online survey are particularly useful for this enquiry. The first was a modified version of Matier’s (1990) instrument which measured motivations to stay or remain at the current higher education institution. The motivations to stay or remain section consisted of a 50 item, 5-point Likert-type scale which was scored 1-strong motivation to leave, 2- motivation to leave, 3- neutral motivation to remain or leave, 4- motivation to remain, and 5- strong motivation to remain. For the purposes of this investigation only the 5 items pertaining to the profession and the one cash salary item were investigated, and given that a score of 3.0 on this scale is neutral, any mean score above this is considered more of a motivation to stay, while any mean score below this is considered more of a motivation to leave. The second part of the online survey utilized for this study was a version of Bluedorn’s (1982) Staying or Leaving Index (SLI) which measures intention to leave one’s current position. A five item version with a 7-point scale which ran from 1- Excellent to 7- Terrible was utilized, so the minimum score one could receive was 5- an indication that they intend to remain for an extended period, and the maximum score one could receive was 35- an indication that they intend to leave in the immediate future. The range of time on this scale was from 6 months to more than 3 years. As typical contracts are for 3-4 years, these measures seemed appropriate. Because there is a robust body of research (Bluedorn, 1982, Kim, Price, Mueller and Watson, 1996, Mobley, 1977) showing that intention to leave is the most accurate precursor to actually leaving, Bluedorn’s instrument was deemed suitable. In a 1982 synthesis of intent to leave research, Bluedorn found that “in 19 of the 20 comparisons, intent to leave was the most accurate predictor of staying or leaving behaviour” (p. 94), and it was the second most precise predictor in the other.

# Analysis

Besides the data gathered from the SLI and the item cash salary, data were collected from the five items pertaining to the profession; collegiality, nation building (ability to affect change), contractual employment, degree of academic freedom, and voice in decision making processes. Lack of tenure was addressed through the contractual employment item. This was done because of the sensitive nature of asking directly about lack of tenure. Data analysis was accomplished through the use of SPSS. For analysis of the SLI and the motivational items, basic descriptive statistics were performed. The relationship between SLI and cash salary utilized Pearson’s correlation coefficient. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to identify any significant mean differences between the independent variables cash salary, those pertaining to the academic profession, and the dependent variable of intended length of stay. Level of significance was an alpha of .05. If a two-way ANOVA showed a statistical difference, Hochberg’s GT2 was employed as a post-hoc analysis, because of its appropriateness with large sample size disparities, to determine where the differences of interest existed (Field, 2009).

# Findings

A precursor to being able to examine relationships between the profession, money, and the motivation to stay or remain, it is necessary to examine the findings of the SLI. The descriptive data provided in offers an overall summary of just how long participants believed they would be staying or leaving at their current institutions.

**Insert here**

The data was weighted towards the lower end signifying that faculty were considering remaining for an extended period of time, regardless of the reality of short term contractual employment. All measures of central tendency along with the percentiles demonstrate an adequate level of commitment to the institutions from the faculty. This is especially true when the pervasiveness of the 3 year contract is considered. In fact the most common score with a frequency of 39 was the minimum possible score of 5. This means that a full 10.7% of all participants rate their chances of remaining at all of the measured intervals as excellent. Conversely, only 16 (4.4%) of faculty members rated their overall chances of remaining as terrible or nearly terrible as indicated by the outliers illustrated in the box and whisker diagram as circles (). This is probably representative of faculty who has already made the decision to leave.

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The mean scores for each of the six variables under investigation reveal the degree to which faculty view items as motivations to remain or leave. The more an item’s mean score is below the neutral 3.0, the more satisfied the faculty are, and the reverse is true. The more an item’s mean score is above 3.0, the more dissatisfied with an item they are. Of the six motivational items under investigation, cash salary was the variable with the lowest mean score which is indicative of satisfaction (see ).

**Insert here**

Collegiality and nation building are the next best perceived items, but it is with contractual employment and degree of academic freedom when issues begin to emerge. Although still with a mean score below 3.0, these items begin to have a substantial number of faculty rating them as motivations to leave. Contractual employment has 91 (25%) of faculty rating it as a motivation to leave, while degree of academic freedom has 112 (30.8%) participants rating it as a motivation to leave (see Figures 2 and 3) . In both of these cases, this represents a significant portion of the faculty who are not satisfied with these two major constituents of the academic profession.

**Insert Figures 2 & 3 around here**

However, it is within the voice in decision making item that the mean score is first above the 3.0 threshold; in addition 158 (43.4%) of the participants are not satisfied with their involvement in the decision making processes at the institutions (see Figure 4). It appears as though the public higher education institutions in the UAE are not meeting the expectations of a significant number of faculty with regards to their voice in the decision making processes.

**Insert Figure 4 here**

One of the ways this was investigated is that Pearson’s correlation coefficient was conducted to examine the relationship between cash salary and SLI. The supposition was that mercenary expatriate academics would expect to stay longer than those without this monetary motivation. The way that both scales were constructed meant that a low score on the SLI indicated a more extended stay, while a low score on the cash salary represented a motivation to stay, a sign of satisfaction with the salary. There was a significant relationship between the total SLI score and the importance placed on cash salary, r = .30, p (two-tailed) < .01.

The first relationships measured through the two-way ANOVA involved the independent variables of academic freedom and cash salary and the dependent variable of SLI total- expected length of stay. There was no significant effect of concern for academic freedom and expected length of stay F (2, 355) = 2.26, p= .105, and no interaction effect of significance between concern for academic freedom and value placed on cash salary F (4, 355)= 1.48, p= .208. However, there was a significant effect of the value placed on cash salary and the length of time one was planning on staying, F (2, 355)= 16.17, p<.001. Post- hoc analysis showed that the intended length of stay was significantly shorter for those who rated money as a motivation to leave (p<.001), an indicator of dissatisfaction with the salary, than for those who rated salary neutrally or as a reason to remain. This indicates that those with a negative view of the cash salary intend to stay significantly shorter (M= 20.06, SD= 8.51) than those neutrally motivated by salary (M= 15.30, SD= 7.74) and those who view it as a reason to remain (M=12.81, SD= 6.93). The significant effect between cash salary and intended length of stay is repeated throughout these analyses.

Similar to academic freedom, both collegiality and nation building failed to reveal any significant effects or differences beyond cash salary and intended length of stay. No significant effect for intended length of stay and collegiality emerged F (2, 355)= 2.47, p=.086, while there was no interaction effect between cash salary and collegiality F (4, 355)= 1.20, p= .310. No interaction effect of significance was found for cash salary and nation building F (4, 355)= 2.38, p= .051, and no significant effect between nation building and intended length of stay exists F (2, 355)= .503, p=.605.

The independent variables of voice in decision making processes and cash salary with the dependent variable of intended length of stay were the next relationships investigated. A significant effect for voice and expected length of stay F (2, 355)= 3.66, p=.027 was determined. Through post-hoc analysis, intended length of stay was shown to be significantly shorter for those who rated voice as a motivation to leave (p<.001), an indicator of dissatisfaction with voice, than for those who rated voice neutrally or as a motivator to remain. This indicates that those with a negative view of the voice in decision making processes intend to stay significantly shorter (M= 11.90, SD= 7.14) than those neutrally motivated by voice (M= 12.03, SD= 5.9) and those who view it as a motivation to remain (M=16.06, SD=8.05).There was no interaction effect of significance between voice and cash salary F (4, 355)= 2.02, p= .091.

The final variable investigated with cash salary and the dependent variable of intended length of stay was contractual employment- the proxy for tenure. No significant interaction effect of significance between contractual employment and cash salary F (4, 355)= 1.01, p= .402, but a significant effect for contractual employment and intended length of stay did emerge F (2, 355)= 12.01, p< .001. Post-hoc analysis indicated that intended length of stay was significantly different for those who rated contractual employment as a motivation to leave (p<.05) versus those who rated contracts as a motivator to remain. This indicates that those with a negative view of the contractual employment intend to stay significantly shorter (M= 11.16, SD= 5.6) than those who view it as a motivation to remain (M= 17.24, SD=8.73), but not for those neutrally motivated (M= 13.94, SD= 7.21).

# Conclusion & Discussion

The interesting aspect of the analysis is the gap between what is mentioned as a motivation to leave and which of these items eventually ends up really influencing the decision to leave. In other words, while academics – like most other employees - have issues they complain about it, it is crucial to pinpoint those that really push people away. Of course, being pushed away as an expatriate, generally has greater ramifications than simply being pushed from an organization because it usually means leaving the host country altogether. The loss of expatriate academics to a host country can be especially potent because of the way in which they are involved in knowledge creation and dissemination, foundations of a knowledge economy.

Across the factors investigated in this research, money was the strongest motivation to stay in the host country and at the same time a significant hindrance for a prolonged stay where respondents were unsatisfied with their salary. The importance placed on money supports the Richardson and McKenna (2002) contention that expatriate faculty will endure discomfort if the financial rewards are deemed satisfactory. While respondents on average were very or at least somewhat satisfied with most factors tested – from cash salary to academic freedom – several issues were nevertheless identified by a significant share of respondents as a motivation to leave, among them the practice of limited term contracts, the degree of academic freedom, and voice in the decision making. In each of these cases, a substantial number of faculty appeared to be dissatisfied. In a situation where at least 25% of faculty rate key professional characteristics as inadequate, problems exist and seem to support Altbach’s (2003) assertion that the academic work environment in the developing world is sub-par.

With Bluedorn’s (1982) Staying or Leaving Index (SLI) as a predictor for actual intention to leave however, dissatisfaction with the cash salary showed a significant relation to early departure while neither nation building, collegiality, nor academic freedom showed any links to length of stay, neither in a positive nor in a negative way. In other words, while these three insignificant items were rated as motivations to remain or leave, they did not actually have a significant relationship with the expected length of stay. Therefore, whether faculty are satisfied or unsatisfied with e.g. academic freedom, it does not seem to be strong enough to see action follow words of dissatisfaction. This is different from lack of tenure, which is not only perceived as a problem by a significant share of respondents but as a strong enough problem to actually leave the host country. Tenure is an indicator of institutional commitment to the individual and when it is missing, as is often the case in the developing world (Altbach, 2003), commitment from academic to institution is also lacking. Looking at the voice faculty has in the decision making process, this is actually seen both as a motivation to leave and has a significant negative impact on the SLI. Notably, Macpherson (2008) posited lack of voice as the major reason for poor levels of faculty retention at a private university in the UAE.

These results have both managerial and policy implications. First, findings support the continuing need for elevated salaries as salaries are seen as the strongest motivation to remain on one hand and have a major negative impact on the SLI where they are perceived as too low. Although the salary implications will perhaps be difficult for administrators and requisite funding bodies to maintain, it still appears that this is a crucial aspect of retaining members of the professoriate given the current academic environment. It may be however, that by addressing the other key emergent issues of voice in decision-making and tenure, the pre-eminence of salary will be minimized in the eyes of faculty.

Second, the issue of low levels of participation of expatriate faculty in the decision making process as previously identified by Altbach (2003) and Mazawi (2003) is a major hindrance for retention and by extension possibly for recruitment. The same is true for lack of tenure. If Gulf countries are serious about building world-class capacity in their academic environment these issues will need to be addressed. This would require profound institutional change and while anecdotal evidence suggests movement in this direction, both with the country and regionally, the results remain to be seen. For instance, with the opening of New York University’s Abu Dhabi campus in 2010, the institution professes that the full academic freedoms and tenure positions that are enjoyed by faculty at its Washington Square campus will be enjoyed by faculty in Abu Dhabi (New York University, 2009). Although not a public UAE institution, NYU Abu Dhabi is heavily financed by the local government which may signify a positive change with regards to academic freedom and tenure in the public institutions. In the case of another GCC county, Rupp (2009) cites the example of a new university in Saudi Arabia (KAUST) where faculty coming in from Stanford have been guaranteed equal rights like they enjoy in the US, however this so far only concerns those travelling into the country on an infrequent basis, not independent expatriates on longer term contracts.

To limit the significance of cash salary and raise the satisfaction with voice in decision-making and contractual employment, there are a number of possible solutions that could be employed. With voice for example, as advised by Macpherson (2008) institutions should “progress towards governance based on a more liberal-democratic philosophy [that] might provide an environment more congenial to Western-educated academic colleagues” (p. 136). This could be manifested in the forms of a faculty senate or in the creation of an institutional ombudsman- options exist but will need to be catered to the unique requirements of each institution. Given the fact that expatriates in the UAE are granted residence visas based upon employment contracts and that there is no immigration, the allocation of full academic tenure is probably not tenable at this time. However, options such as longer term or rolling contracts may be suitable and serve to meet the professional expectations of the faculty.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. A major limitation – yet interesting learning experience for the authors – is that we expected stronger and more significant relationships between salary and professional behaviour and focused on this aspect more than was necessary knowing what we know now. Also, the low response rate has weakened the significance of our findings as has the fact that it was – on purpose – conducted in an expatriate dominated environment, making the findings less generalisable than we might want them to be. Further, the terminology of the self-initiated expatriate, while somewhat established in literature is still comparably new and often difficult to pinpoint in both definition and terminology. Taking into account the diversity among those who decide to pursue their careers overseas, it is often hard to differentiate between professionals who are emigrating and those who are expatriating with the intention of staying in the host country for a few years and then returning to their home country or moving on (McKenna and Richardson, 2007). A UAE specific problem with this definition is that there are - by default – no immigrants, but only expatriates or guest workers as all employment and settlement of foreigners in the country is tied to renewable, 3 year visas without a formal path or right too citizenship. Nevertheless there are significant numbers of expatriates who would fall into the immigration category due to their length of stay in most other countries.

Finally, the subject of the expatriate dominated environment is a rare and new realm and this study has been conducted in one such country only. Testing these findings across countries with different levels of expatriates such as the other GCC countries could provide further insights into this type of environment. As mentioned in the limitations, the concept of independent expatriates would also benefit from a clarification in terminology and one major theoretical paper on the concept, as thus far terminology ranges from overseas experience (Inkson*, et al.*, 1997), self-directed expatriates (Richardson, 2006), self-initiated expatriates (Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari, 2008) to internationally mobile independent professional (Banai and Harry, 2004).

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**Tables & Figures**

|  | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| N | 364 | Range | 30 | |
| Mean | 14 | Minimum | 5 | |
| Median | 12 | Maximum | 35 | |
| Mode | 5 | Percentiles | 25 | 8 |
| Std. Deviation | 7 | 50 | 12 |
|  | | 75 | 17 |

Table 1: Staying or Leaving Index

| **Factors** | **Mean** | **Std. Deviation** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cash salary | 1.94 | 0.979 |
| Collegiality | 2.41 | 0.939 |
| Nation building (ability to affect change) | 2.41 | 0.859 |
| Contractual employment | 2.88 | 0.936 |
| Degree of academic freedom | 2.95 | 1.091 |
| Voice in decision making processes | 3.32 | 1.11 |

Table 2: Factors investigated in this research

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | |
| Total Score | Median  Figure 1: Staying or Leaving Index distribution |

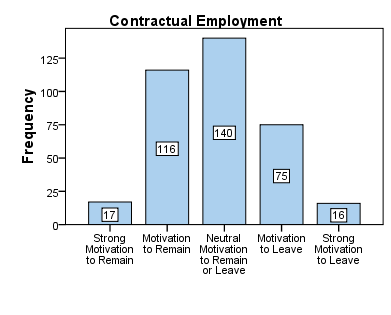


Figure 2: Contractual Employment Frequency

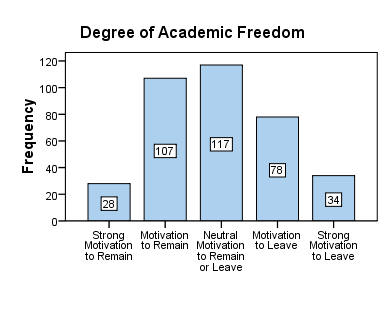


Figure 3: Academic Freedom Frequency

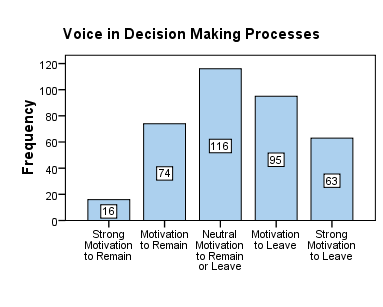


Figure 4: Voice Frequency

1. Quoted in Peters, E. (1998), "*The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and other source materials*", University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. GCC = Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [↑](#footnote-ref-1)