The dominant perspective on expatriation characterizes the process as a continuing adaptation to existing job demands on an international assignment. Another, less studied perspective, emphasizes that expatriates can initiate tactics to acquire task, interpersonal, and affective resources for shaping their assignment experiences. Adopting a positive organizational scholarship lens and drawing on the job demands–resources model, we simultaneously examine both of these reactive demand-based and proactive resource-based pathways to expatriate retention. We propose that cross-cultural uncertainty demands and expatriate-initiated resource acquisition tactics both influence adjustment and embeddedness. Thus embeddedness works alongside adjustment to drive expatriates’ plans to remain in the international position, which in turn leads to actual retention. Using evidence from 2 separate panel studies (one with 2 waves and the other with 4 waves of data), we demonstrate the importance of the resource-based pathway for expatriate assignments.

Taking an international position is undoubtedly a challenge. Scholarly research has reflected that challenge for decades, consistently accounting for the psychological toll that expatriation takes (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). That is, predominant views cast the international assignment in demand-intensifying terms, viewing the process as one in which expatriates and their families make major psychological modifications to address potent, life-changing pressures (Bhaskar-Shrinivas,
Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005). Assignees themselves are depicted as having to respond to, and navigate, what is expected to be a stormy international transition (Black & Gregersen, 1991). That transition can culminate in costly psychological and behavioral strains (Takeuchi, Wang, & Marinova, 2005), including separation from the assignment (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999).

In other words, an underlying but critically important theme guiding the expatriate literature is the presumed relationship between the expatriate and his or her international environment. Prevailing research on expatriates follows a reactive behavioral paradigm of exposure to demands and adjusting to the uncertainty of work, interpersonal and broad cultural stressors in an international relocation (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003). In this paradigm, the environment primarily impinges on the person (E→P), who has to adapt. Poor adaptation leads to job withdrawal and to struggles outside the immediate work domain.

What has been less prominent in this stream of inquiry is the idea that expatriates can tactically shape their own cross-cultural experiences. Simultaneous with being responsive, expatriates can arrange their task and social worlds so they can flourish in—rather than merely weather—a potentially draining international transition (cf., Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). In this proactive behavioral paradigm, persons operate on their environments (P→E), acquiring resources and molding interpersonal connections. Construction of surroundings to fit the individual supports well-being and long-term persistence (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

In this paper, we contribute to the expatriate literature by simultaneously examining the reactive and proactive perspectives to provide new insights and data about managing international relocations. Adopting a positive organizational scholarship approach (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and drawing on the job demands and resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) as an overarching theory that integrates these two perspectives, we elaborate on the two different pathways to expatriate retention. Then we develop hypotheses by first focusing on how cross-cultural uncertainty demands and expatriate-initiated resource acquisition tactics affect expatriate adjustment, defined as psychological comfort with various aspects of the international assignment, and embeddedness, which refers to the breadth and depth of connectedness in one’s foreign posting. Second, we contend that adjustment and embeddedness are expected to drive stronger plans to stay in or even extend international employment. Third, we examine the link between retention plans and actual expatriate retention.
We test our framework in two time-lagged studies that account for dual effects of adjustment to uncertainty and proactivity in resource acquisition. Study 1 captures two waves and Study 2 involves four waves of empirical evidence, a design feature that has been lacking from most expatriate research (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; for recent exceptions, see Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, & Yao, 2009; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). In both studies we provide a test of retention cognitions as an effective predictor of actual retention among expatriates. This is an often-conjectured and debated, but until now, seldom-tested hypothesis that is especially important given the relocation constraints an expatriate might have. Our evidence demonstrates that linking proactive tactics and embeddedness constitutes an alternative (to the reactive adjustment to demands) pathway to expatriate retention.

Expatriate Retention: Reactive and Proactive Paradigms

In this study, we focus on expatriate retention rather than withdrawal, which has been the main thrust of extant expatriate research on the decision to prematurely terminate an international assignment. Our approach is grounded in positive organizational behavior, which is “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychology capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002, p. 59). This lens allows us to go beyond what is reactive and demanding and capture the mechanisms that enable expatriates to proactively pursue resources that are instrumental in flourishing and staying on the assignment. In line with positive psychologists (e.g., Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006) who advocate an integrative approach including both negative and positive aspects of human functioning, we examine the reactive demand-based and proactive resource-based pathways to expatriate retention. These two pathways correspond to the two behavioral processes of health impairment and motivation described in the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The Reactive Demands, Maladjustment, and Withdrawal Pathway

Expatriate researchers have typically referred to early return from an expatriate assignment as a form of withdrawal (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998), either in terms of turnover from the organization or as a transfer or repatriation within the original firm (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). This stream of research parallels the Mobley-extended models of turnover (e.g., Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Mobley, 1982) that focus on negative job
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attitudes as the primary instigation for quitting (Harrison, 2002). Within
the expatriate context, and in keeping with long-standing theories of de-
mands associated with the simultaneous transition to a new culture as
well as a new job, maladjustment for expatriates serves the keystone role
of dissatisfaction. In particular, maladjustment to work, interpersonal and
cultural stressors has been demonstrated to trigger expatriate thoughts and
plans to prematurely return home (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

According to the JD-R model, the health-impairment process involves
job demands that require effort or resource depletion on the part of em-
ployees and that are associated with psychological and physiological costs.
That is, demands have the potential to wear individuals down, with at-
tendant, adverse effects on well-being and performance. This process is
consistent with the stressor–stress–strain paradigm that researchers have
generally adopted to understand reactions to the uncertainties of living
and working in a foreign culture (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas,
2004). The emphasis to date has been on clarifying personal, familial,
organizational, and environmental demands that contribute to expatriate
(mal)adjustment, and the consequences of those adjustment difficulties
(Takeuchi, 2010). In particular, because of the presumed costs associated
with early return, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the psycho-
logical mechanisms in the decision to return home before the assignment
is scheduled to end, as a result of maladjustment.

The Proactive Resource Acquisition, Embeddedness, and Retention Pathway

As an alternative paradigm that can occur alongside the dominant, reac-
tive one, we begin with questions of when and why expatriates proactively
act on their environments and are motivated to stay in their international
work roles. Following some of the countervailing logic in the turnover
literature entertained by Mitchell and colleagues’ theory of on- and off-
the-job embeddedness (e.g., Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez,
2001), this proactive perspective parallels current conceptualizations that
expatriates have greater discretion over their task circumstances than most
research acknowledges and that they seek out and forge social ties (Chen
et al., 2010; Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010).

This alternative perspective is consistent with the motivational side of
the JD-R model. According to this process, resources are functional to the
achievement of goals; they stimulate positive affect, the broadening of be-
havioral repertoires, and personal growth. Proactive, resource-acquiring
behaviors allow expatriates to define and enact their jobs—to craft their
assignments—and to construct and shape their social and cultural con-
texts. Although they still face the well-documented demands of taking an
international position and the uncertainties associated with adjusting to a new cultural milieu, expatriates can still “take control to make things happen rather than watch things happen” (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010, p. 828). Proactive expatriates actively seek information, create new relationships, and frame circumstances in positive ways that will make their transition more effective.

Our proactive conceptualization of expatriates parallels organizational literature that emphasizes employees as proactive agents in the socialization (Morrison, 1993) and the job crafting processes (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Although the socialization literature tends to highlight newcomers adaptation, two-way processes of adjustment are ongoing throughout the employment life cycle, and to a large degree, expatriates are always considered the outsiders on assignment. As job crafters, employees engage in self-initiated, bottom-up tactics to modify task, relational, and cognitive aspects of their job to change their work identity and make sense of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Recently, scholars have conceptualized job crafting in terms of demand reduction and resource attainment as a means of fulfilling or optimizing work goals (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, & Hetland, 2012). Regardless of organizational tenure, employees engage in proactive behaviors (Bindl & Parker, 2010) for job crafting to enhance the meaningfulness of their jobs (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010).

Building on this stream of research, we argue that expatriates can be “job crafters” as well; that is, they have latitude to define and enact their jobs, and they could actively construct and shape their work and cultural contexts for a more positive and meaningful experience. According to Ashford and Black (1996), individuals who are more proactive and experience more positive affect are more socially integrated, perform better, and have lower turnover intentions (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Accordingly, we contend that many expatriates are proactive in acquiring knowledge about the host country, in making contact with others, and in characterizing their experience in affirming ways (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Those who engage in such job crafting behaviors become more adjusted and embedded in the host environment and are more likely to remain in their international work roles.

**Hypotheses Development**

The reactive and proactive paradigms are aligned with the health-impairment and motivational processes, respectively, as detailed in the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Based on this model, we propose two different pathways for expatriate retention. According to the
Figure 1: Proposed Model of Expatriate Retention.

demand pathway, those who are susceptible to environmental uncertainty demands (i.e., cultural novelty, cultural value distance, and host country language deficiency) are more likely to suffer from maladjustment and detachment (i.e., lack of embeddedness) from the international assignment. In contrast, the motivational pathway depicts expatriates as self-initiated agents who acquire or create personal resources through proactive tactics (i.e., information seeking, relationship building, and positive framing), which motivate them to dedicate their efforts and abilities to become more adjusted and embedded in their jobs and in the foreign culture. In line with the JD-R, which contends that both pathways contribute to employee attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, we also develop arguments for the influence of adjustment and embeddedness on expatriate retention. In doing so, we consider the influence of adjustment and embeddedness on retention cognitions, defined as intentions to stay in the international position. Finally, we examine the role of such cognitions as precursors of expatriate retention. These relationships are depicted in Figure 1.

Cross-Cultural Uncertainty Demands and Expatriate Adjustment and Embeddedness

To understand why expatriates eventually leave their international assignments, scholars have focused on clarifying when and why expatriates
do not adjust to their new environment. Consequently, a great deal of research has helped to clarify the role of demands on expatriate experiences (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). An underlying assumption in this literature is that demands stem from uncertainties, and how expatriates cope with these uncertainties determines their adjustment. Given the interdependent nature of an expatriate assignment, it is also likely that uncertain conditions and environments will affect their embeddedness in their work and nonwork contexts (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Insofar as the most salient aspect of the expatriate experience is the new culture or country where they are living and working, we consider three cross-cultural demands that are relevant to environmental uncertainties: cultural novelty, cultural value distance, and host country language deficiency. Although these demands have been associated with expatriate adjustment, we contend that they will also influence expatriate embeddedness at work and within the foreign community.

**Cultural novelty** and **cultural value distance** refer to the extent to which the home and host country cultures are similar to or different from one another (cf., Shenkar, 2001 for critique). Cultural novelty is a perceptual assessment of similarities and differences between various commonplace features or everyday customs of the host and home cultures. It has been strongly related to expatriate adjustment in past research (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). Cultural value distance is a calculated difference based on cultural value dimension ratings for the host and home countries. Although cultural novelty has predominantly been used by expatriate researchers, sojourner scholars have found a consistent, negative relationship between cultural distance and adaptation (e.g., Leong & Ward, 2000).

In contrast to employees who relocate domestically, expatriates experience salient differences in various features of the general, cultural, social, and work environments of the new embedding culture (Harrison et al., 2004). When these differences are greater, expatriates face more uncertainty and are less likely to have values, thoughts, or behavior patterns that are compatible with the host culture (Bell & Harrison, 1996). Under such conditions, expatriates are less likely to adjust or fit comfortably within the new social and cultural contexts. This lack of fit suggests that they are less embedded in the host country.

**Host country language deficiency** refers to the expatriate’s (in)ability to communicate in the host country language. Several studies have supported the importance of host country language fluency on adjustment (e.g., Black et al., 1991; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993) and a meta-analysis by Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) indicated that it is a potent predictor of cultural and interaction adjustment. Foreign language fluency enables expatriates to obtain information that will facilitate their adjustment to the foreign culture (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). With
greater host country language fluency, expatriates should have a better understanding of the host culture’s norms and mores and be able to forge stronger ties with host country nationals (HCNs). Consequently, they will be able to cope more effectively with environmental uncertainties and fit into the social and cultural work and nonwork contexts. Without such language skills, expatriates are more likely to remain detached and fail to become embedded in the work organization or the community. Formally, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypotheses 1a–c:** The cross-cultural uncertainty demands of (a) cultural novelty, (b) cultural value distance, and (c) host country language deficiency are negatively related to expatriate adjustment.

**Hypotheses 2a–c:** The cross-cultural uncertainty demands of (a) cultural novelty, (b) cultural value distance, and (c) host country language deficiency are negatively related to expatriate embeddedness.

**Proactive Tactics and Expatriate Adjustment and Embeddedness**

Proactive tactics refer to behaviors that are initiated to create certainty and improve the status quo (Crant, 2000). Proactive tactics enable employees to acquire resources that assist them in the achievement of their goals, minimize the impact of work-related stressors, and/or stimulate personal growth and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). People are motivated to gain resources (Hobfoll, 2001). When a work environment is highly stressful, uncertain, and dynamic, which is what expatriates face when living and working in a foreign culture, it is not enough for employees to simply react to the environment; they must also proactively act upon the environment to gain resources (Aragon-Correa, 1998). That is, proactivity tends to arise particularly in dynamic and uncertain work contexts (Griffin et al., 2007). Therefore, we argue that expatriates are motivated to engage in proactive, resource-acquiring tactics to make their international transition more effective. In this study, we focus on three types of proactive resource acquiring tactics: information seeking, relationship building, and positive framing (Ashford & Black, 1996). These represent ways that expatriates actively try to acquire task-related, interpersonal-related, and affect-related resources, respectively, and they are appropriate across work and nonwork contexts, noting that expatriate relocations strongly involve both domains. Researchers have found that proactive behaviors facilitate a range of work-related outcomes, including job attitudes and person–organization fit (Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Below, we discuss how proactive tactics will motivate expatriates to adjust to various aspects of
the assignment and to establish stronger embeddedness into the organization and the community in which they live.

Information seeking refers to employees’ search for and acquisition of knowledge about the job, the organization, or situation (Ashford & Black, 1996). Information seeking is a key input to the sense-making process (Louis, 1980). Knowledge about the organization and about the community in general helps expatriates make sense of their international work roles and environments, and it serves as a resource advantage (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). According to Morrison (1993), information seeking is important for two reasons. First, information reduces uncertainty and enables expatriates to “understand, predict, and control their environments” (Morrison, 1993, p. 558). Second, information seeking enables expatriates to gain organizational and task-related knowledge, and prevailing norms and values that they need to become integrated into the work setting. People with a greater pool of resources are more capable of resource gain, and as resources are acquired, they are reinvested to obtain additional resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Consequently, as expatriates actively reach out to gain informational resources about their work setting and the social norms that exist, they are able to generate a wider behavioral repertoire for adjusting and for fitting and linking to their current international environment, and they are also more motivated to establish attachment (i.e., embeddedness) to the organization and to the community in which they live. Prior evidence in the domestic context supports the link between information seeking and organization fit (Kim et al., 2005) and attitudinal outcomes such as adjustment and job satisfaction (Morrison, 1993; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

Relationship building has to do with establishing friendship networks and arranging social support (Ashford & Black, 1996). For expatriates who are entering a new organization and community, developing relational skills (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) and fostering relationships with HCNs (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) are conducive to international relocation success. On one hand, relationships or social ties with host country coworkers provide expatriates with the critical support resources they need to make sense of and predict their environment and learn their place in the host organization and country (Farh et al., 2010). For example, research on expatriate social ties has demonstrated that social networks and social support are positive predictors of expatriate adjustment and psychological well-being (e.g., Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). On the other hand, expatriates can also change their work environment through active social networking. To the extent that expatriates develop relationships with their host country coworkers and become a part of formal social activities, they change the relational boundaries of their work roles (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and create their own networks
and work environment, which may translate into stronger motivation to be a part of the host organization and community (Bauer & Green, 1998). Therefore, relationship building not only provides expatriates with the interpersonal resources that they need to adjust and to get embedded in the work and nonwork environment, but it also creates greater motivational reserves for expatriates to adapt to and fit in their overseas surroundings. Relationship building in general has been associated with increased social integration, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Morrison, 2002; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

Positive framing refers to the use of cognitive self-control or self-management to perceive situations as gains to one’s personal outcomes rather than losses to one’s choices (Ashford & Black, 1996). Clearly, the latter has comprised the dominant viewpoint on expatriate experiences. Expatriates can not only enact on their work environments by seeking information from, and building new relationships with coworkers, but they can also shape their work context by cognitively composing the content of their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). By shaping impressions of what is and is not part of the job and altering how they see the job, expatriates can revise the meaning of their work and their social environment at work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In particular, interpreting events in the environment as supportive rather than antagonistic and viewing situations as opportunities rather than threats are problem-focused coping mechanisms that create certainty and allow expatriates to feel proactive and motivated to succeed in their new environments. When expatriates are facing adjustment difficulties on their international adventure, trying to have a positive outlook on problems will provide the critical emotional resources that help expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation. The experienced positive affect (e.g., Farh et al., 2010) will enable them to deal with the environment in a better frame of mind, which will eventually activate more energy or effort (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Lam, 2012) for expatriates to get embedded in their surroundings. Evidence from the newcomer socialization literature suggests that such cognitive appraisals are a strong positive influence on (domestic) newcomers’ social integration and job satisfaction (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Thus, we propose:

**Hypotheses 3a–c:** The proactive tactics of (a) information seeking, (b) relationship building, and (c) positive framing are positively related to expatriate adjustment.

**Hypotheses 4a–c:** The proactive tactics of (a) information seeking, (b) relationship building, and (c) positive framing are positively related to expatriate embeddedness.
Expatriate Adjustment, Embeddedness, and Retention

In line with the JD-R model, we expect both adjustment and embeddedness to be related to expatriates’ decisions to stay on the international assignment. Expatriate research has established a strong link between adjustment and expatriate retention cognitions (e.g., Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). The underlying argument is that expatriates who are not adjusted are more likely to respond by withdrawing from the assignment, either by quitting the job or returning home. In their meta-analysis, Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) found strong evidence for the influence of all forms of adjustment on the withdrawal cognitions of expatriates. To date, however, very few studies have examined the actual turnover of expatriates (cf., Reiche, Kraimer, & Harzing, 2011; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

In domestic withdrawal studies, theory and research provide strong support for the influence of embeddedness on retention, even when known affective predictors such as job satisfaction and commitment are included in the analyses (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to Mitchell and colleagues (2001), the greater an employee’s embeddedness on and off the job, the higher the likelihood that he/she will feel professionally and personally tied to an organization and a community. These ties are strong when an individual’s personal values and goals fit with the larger corporate culture and the surrounding community. Embedded individuals are also linked socially and psychologically with others within the work and nonwork domains, and thoughts of leaving an organization and community may induce perceptions of personal loss. Essentially, embeddedness carries the effect of social networks on retention (turnover; Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005).

Recently, Reiche and colleagues (2011) proposed and tested an organizational embeddedness perspective on expatriate retention. However, they did not examine the influence of embeddedness alongside adjustment. We expect that expatriates who are embedded within the organization and the community will be more likely to have intentions to stay, even when adjustment is taken into account. That is, based on the JD-R model, we propose that embeddedness will be a powerful motivational force that reflects acquisition of resources and constitutes a separate pathway to expatriate retention decisions (i.e., proactive pathway), in addition to the comprehensively studied effect of adjustment (i.e., reactive pathway). According to the meta-analysis of Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000), few resources are significant predictors of employee turnover. Therefore, we suggest that embedded expatriates possess more resources, thus having more energy and motivation to continue staying on their assignment. We also predict that expatriates who have thoughts of staying will be
more likely to remain in the international position and that these retention
cognitions will mediate the effect of adjustment and embeddedness on
expatriates’ actual retention. Thus, we propose:

Hypotheses 5a–b: Expatriate (a) adjustment and (b) embeddedness
are positively related to retention cognitions.

Hypothesis 6: Retention cognitions are positively related to ex-
patriate actual retention.

Hypotheses 7a–b: Retention cognitions mediate the relationship be-
tween expatriate (a) adjustment and (b) embedded-
ness and actual retention.

Study 1

Data Collection and Sample

For initial testing of our proposed relationships, we collected two
waves of data via Web-based surveys from expatriate international teach-
ers in the United States. The teachers were voluntary participants in a
cultural exchange program facilitated by a private, U.S.-based interna-
tional organization. This organization sponsors teachers’ J-1 cultural ex-
change visas and places them in U.S. public elementary, middle, and high
schools in seven states. The teachers renew their contracts on a yearly
basis. Until the time of our data collection, the maximum length of time a
teacher could stay was 4 years (per J-1 visa requirements). Our first sur-
vey was distributed to 613 of these teachers at the beginning of the school
year. It included measures of demographics, cultural novelty, host coun-
try language deficiency, proactive tactics, adjustment, embeddedness, and
retention cognitions. We obtained 181 completed surveys, representing a
response rate of 29.5%. Ten months later, at the end of the school year, we
obtained retention data on 175 out of the 181 expatriate teachers (97%
response rate), based on school records.

Survey participants hailed from 30 different countries representing
the following major world regions: East and South Asia (38.03%), Latin
America (Central and South America: 24.3%), Europe (12.15%), North
America (11.06%), the Caribbean (10.66%), and Africa (.97%). In this
sample, 64% were female and 58% were married. Average age was 38.
All teachers were highly educated, with 61.6% having a bachelor’s de-
gree, 31.62% a master’s degree, and .97% a doctorate (5.81% did not
specify).
Measures

Cross-cultural uncertainty demands. One element of the unique demands of working in an international job, cultural novelty, was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Black and Stephens (1989), who adopted it from Torbiörn (1982). Respondents compared their home country to the host country (1 = very similar to 5 = very different) on seven aspects, such as “general living conditions.” Coefficient alpha was .70. Another element was cultural value distance. Schwartz’s (1994) cultural value scores for conservatism, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, and egalitarian commitment were used to represent the cultural values of host and home countries. Cultural value distance was then measured as the root-mean-square of the four value differences between the host country and home country. Host country language deficiency was measured with the following question: how fluently do you speak the host country language? We coded the variable from 0 = do not speak host country language at all to 100 = completely fluent, and then reversed the numbers to indicate amount of deficiency.

Proactive tactics. We used Ashford and Black’s (1996) proactive tactics measure to assess the resource-acquiring behaviors that expatriates used in their overseas jobs. Four items tapped into information seeking: “tried to learn . . . policies and procedures of the new school, politics of the new school, official structure of the new school, and unofficial relationships at the new school.” Three “networking” items (i.e., “started conversations with people from different segments of the school,” “tried to get to know as many people as possible in other sections of the school on a personal basis,” and “tried to socialize with people who are not in your section”) measured relationship building tactics. Finally, positive framing tactics were measured with three items: “tried to . . . look on the bright side of things, see my situation as an opportunity rather than a threat, and see my situation as a challenge rather than a problem.” Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they engaged in each tactic: 1 = no extent to 5 = a great extent. Coefficient alphas were .88, .85 and .87, respectively. Confirmative factor analysis also supported the three-factor structure (CFI = .97; IFI = .97; NNFI = .95; SRMR = .05), exceeding commonly accepted cutoff values as indicative of good fit (e.g., Kline, 2005).

Expatriate adjustment. Expatriate adjustment was assessed using Black and Stephens’ (1989) 14-item measure that taps work, interaction, and cultural dimensions. Items were rated on a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 = very unadjusted to 5 = very adjusted. Coefficient alphas for these three dimensions of adjustment were .89, .93 and .94. To maintain a parsimonious theoretical model that examines the
role of adjustment as a whole, we standardized these dimensional scores and averaged them to create a total score for our regression analyses. The coefficient alpha for this adjustment composite was .95.

Expatriate embeddedness. Using Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield’s (2007) seven-item instrument, we measured expatriates’ perceptions of their organizational embeddedness. Some items were adapted to fit the teaching context. Questions included, “I feel tied to this school,” “It would be difficult for me to leave this school,” “I am tightly connected to this school,” “I am caught up in this school,” “I feel attached to this school,” “I simply could not leave the school that I work for,” and “It would not be easy to leave this school.” Responses were made on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Coefficient alpha was .93.

Retention cognitions. As the construct of withdrawal cognitions has been well developed in previous studies (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 1998), we emphasized the positive end of this construct rather than developing a new measure. We adopted the six-item withdrawal cognitions scale developed by Hom and Griffeth (1991) and revised by Shaffer and Harrison (1998) for the expatriate context. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to the statements (i.e., “I often think about quitting this school,” “I intend to search for another teaching position so I can leave this school,” “I plan to leave this school,” “I have decided to quite this teaching position,” “I will quit this school within the next year,” and “I will search for another teaching position within the next year”) on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). We reversed the scores to get our retention cognitions measure. Coefficient alpha was .92.

Actual retention. Teachers’ actual retention was measured at the end of the school year based on schools’ exit surveys and archives. We coded 1 = retention and 0 = turnover. As the maximum time a teacher could stay was 4 years due to visa constraints, we coded those whose tenure was 3 years and more at the time of first wave data collection but did not renew their contract as retention as well (which was only 1 teacher). The base rate for retention was 48%.

Control variables. Age, marital status (0 = single; 1 = married), tenure (measured by month), and gender (0 = male; 1 = female) were included as control variables.

Analyses and Results

Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations are presented in Table 1. We tested our hypotheses using linear and logistic
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**Note.** Coefficient alphas indicating estimated reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal; t1 is Time 1 (n = 181) and t2 is Time 2 (n = 175); retention is coded as 0 = quit and 1 = stay.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
regression analyses, supplemented by structural equation modeling (SEM). However, our eventual dependent variable, retention, is dichotomous, which violates a central assumption of SEM that variables—especially endogenous ones—should be continuous, with normal distributions (test statistics in small samples are badly biased; Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). Therefore, we used SEM for those hypotheses that did not involve retention per se.

For each step of our regression analysis, we included all the variables entered in the previous analysis step, including the four control variables.¹ For our SEM, because of violations of multivariate normality, and a total number of parameter estimates that exceeded the number of observations, we used single-indicator modeling, wherein each latent variable was reflected by a more normally distributed overall score, with error variance equal to 1 minus its estimated reliability (initially described by Kenny, 1979; used in applied psychological contexts such as Shaffer et al., 1999). That is, all the latent constructs were defined with a single indicator except overall adjustment, which was accounted for with three indicators corresponding to its dimensions: work, interaction, and cultural. The standardized regression coefficients and standardized SEM path coefficients for our hypotheses testing are presented in Figure 2.

As shown by Figure 2, for the demand pathway, host country language deficiency was negatively related to adjustment (Hypothesis 1c) and embeddedness (Hypothesis 2c). For the resource pathway, relationship building was positively related to embeddedness (Hypothesis 4b), and positive framing was positively associated with both adjustment (Hypothesis 3c) and embeddedness (Hypothesis 4c). Overall, our model explained 15% and 16% of the variance in adjustment ($F = 4.25, p < .01$) and embeddedness ($F = 4.35, p < .01$), respectively.

It is noteworthy that adjustment was significantly related to retention cognitions ($\hat{\beta} = .22, p < .01$) when organizational embeddedness was not in the regression equation but was not after adding embeddedness in the equation. On the other hand, organizational embeddedness remained a significant contributor (Hypothesis 5b), and explained 22% of the variance in the criterion ($\Delta F = 61.55, p < .01$), underscoring the importance of our emphasis on the resource-based pathway for expatriate assignments. In sum, our model explained 41% of the variance in retention cognitions ($F = 11.20, p < .01$). The structural equation model also demonstrated good fit as evidenced by fit indices (RMSEA = .07; CFI = .96; IFI = .96; standardized RMR = .04). Overall, the parameter estimates shown

¹The effects of control variables for each regression analysis are available from the first author.
in Figure 2 indicate support for Hypotheses 1c, 2c, 3c, 4b, 4c, and 5b. Hypotheses 1a–b, 2a–b, 3a–b, 4a and 5a were not sustained.

We used logistic regression analysis to test hypotheses related to actual retention. Supporting Hypothesis 6, as shown by Figure 2, retention cognitions were significantly related to actual retention after controlling for cross-cultural demands, proactive tactics, adjustment, embeddedness, and the control variables. Fit statistics were $\chi^2$: 119.09, $p < .01$; $-2$ log likelihood: 117.68; Cox & Snell $R^2$: .50; and Nagel $R^2$: .67.

Turning to Hypotheses 7a and 7b, as adjustment was not significantly related to actual retention when retention cognitions were not in the regression equation, no mediation was found for adjustment. Therefore Hypothesis 7a was not supported. On the other hand, organizational embeddedness ($\exp(\hat{\beta}) = 1.99$, $p < .05$) was significantly related to actual retention when retention cognitions were not in the equation but became nonsignificant when retention cognitions were entered in the regression. Retention cognitions ($\exp(\hat{\beta}) = 4.60$, $p < .01$) were positively related to retention. Therefore, retention cognitions fully mediated the relationship
between organizational embeddedness and retention. To provide a more rigorous test for the mediation effect, we conducted a bootstrap analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Using 1,000 bootstrap samples, the 95% bias-corrected (BC) confidence interval ranged from .0049 to .1074, indicating that retention cognitions mediated the relationship between organizational embeddedness and retention. Therefore, Hypothesis 7b was sustained.

Discussion

In this first study, we collected data from expatriate teachers at two points in time, wherein independent and mediating variables were separated from actual retention by 10 months. For the reactive, demand-based pathway, we found support for the negative relationship between one cross-cultural uncertainty demand, host country language deficiency, and expatriate adjustment and embeddedness. More important, for the proactive, resource-based pathway, we found that two proactive tactics were positively associated with expatriate embeddedness. In particular, networking with host country colleagues and casting circumstances in a more favorable light were associated with greater organizational embeddedness. Positive framing was also found positively related to adjustment. Further, expatriate teachers who were embedded in their host organizations were more psychologically inclined to stay in their international position, even after accounting for their adjustment levels. They were also more likely to renew their contracts.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of resource acquisition (i.e., relationship building, positive framing) and organizational embeddedness for expatriates and provides an estimate of the effectiveness of using retention cognitions as a surrogate for actual retention. However, because of possible common method biases and the collection of demands and resources and mediators (adjustment, embeddedness, and retention cognitions) at the same time period, the results should be interpreted cautiously. Thus, to confirm our findings with greater sensitivity to the unfolding of expatriate experiences over time, we conducted a second study.

Study 2

Rationale and Overview

In Study 1, we only used the “networking” subscale to measure “relationship building,” and our “embeddedness” construct did not capture community or “off-the-job” dimension of embeddedness (Mitchell et al.,
Given the importance of relationship building and organizational embeddedness as inputs to expatriate retention in Study 1, it is warranted to examine whether socializing, another subdimension of relationship building (Ashford & Black, 1996) and community embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001), also matters for expatriates. In addition, although Study 1 used an across-time, two-wave approach, the tests of Hypotheses 1 to 5 were cross-sectional and could not speak to the temporal sequence of the variables. Thus, to address these methodological shortcomings and further demonstrate the external validity of our findings, we conducted a second study.

Study 2 involved four waves of data collected over a year, via paper-pencil questionnaires from expatriate English teachers under the Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR). Specifically, cross-cultural uncertainty demands, proactive tactics and demographics were measured at Time 1. Adjustment and embeddedness were measured at Time 2. Retention cognitions were measured at Time 3, and actual retention was determined at Time 4.

Data Collection and Sample

The NET Scheme is an initiative whereby the Hong Kong government subsidizes primary and secondary school English teachers from overseas. Teachers in this scheme are recruited by the Hong Kong government from various countries, including Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States; they are employed on a renewable 2-year contract basis. We targeted all NETs with schools that employed only one teacher in the scheme. The full list of schools with expatriate teachers was obtained from the Hong Kong government. The population size of expatriate teachers was 561 for Time 1. The Time 2 sample frame included those NETs who responded to the questionnaire at Time 1, and this was repeated throughout the three waves of surveys. At Time 4, we contacted all schools of the teachers who responded to the first questionnaire to see if the expatriate teachers had resumed their contract or had left their school.

The first data collection was at the beginning of the school term. Time 2 was 4 months after the school term started. The third data collection was 5 more months later, near the end of the academic year. Time 4 was 3 months later, the beginning of a new school year.

At Time 1, 207 usable returns were received for a response rate of 36.9%. At Time 2, questionnaires were sent to 207 Time 1 respondents and 143 returns were received representing a response rate of 69%. At
Time 3, questionnaires were sent to 143 Time 2 expatriates and 109 returns were received, for a response rate of 76%. All 207 Time 1 schools were contacted at Time 4 to confirm continued employment of the expatriate teachers (100% response).

Almost all of the expatriates came from four English-speaking countries, with Australians (51.5%) representing around half of the respondents, followed by New Zealanders (21.6%), Canadians (12.3%) and British (9.9%). Most of the expatriates were spread out among three age ranges: 30–39 (34.5%), 40–49 (29.2%), and 50–59 (29.8%). The proportions for gender and marital status were evenly distributed with 47% women and 52% married. Most expatriates were bachelor degree holders (57.3%) with no children (49.1%) and living in Hong Kong alone (54.4%). Very similar profiles were found for respondents across surveys; there was no evidence of systematic response bias over time.

Measures

Cross-cultural uncertainty demands. The same measures were used as in Study 1 to measure cultural novelty, cultural value distance, and host country language deficiency. Coefficient alpha for cultural novelty was .68.

Proactive tactics. The same items from Ashford and Black (1996) as in Study 1 were used to measure information seeking and positive framing. Coefficient alphas were .87, and .86, respectively. For relationship building, we included two of three subscales from Ashford and Black (1996): 3 items for “general socializing” (i.e., “attended school social gatherings,” “attended school parties,” and “participated in social school events to meet people”) and the same 3 items for “networking” as we used in Study 1. We excluded the third subscale, “relationship building with boss,” because it is less relevant for professional teachers. Responses ranged from 1 = no extent to 5 = a great extent. Coefficient alphas were .87, and .90, respectively, for the two subscales. Factor analysis supported the four factor structure with good fit indices (CFI = .99; IFI = .99; NNFI = .99; SRMR = .05). Second order factor analysis suggested that the two subscales loaded on the same underlying construct (CFI = .94; IFI = .94; NNFI = .92; SRMR = .09). Thus we consolidated the two subscale scores to form an overall measure of relationship building tactics, with a resulting coefficient alpha of .87.

Expatriate adjustment. The same items were used as in Study 1 to measure work, interaction, and cultural adjustment. Coefficient alphas were .84, .90, and .94, respectively. Subscale scores were standardized
and then added together, resulting in a coefficient alpha of .93 for overall adjustment.

**Expatriate embeddedness.** Embeddedness has been operationalized in two different ways in previous research. For our first study, we adopted Crossley and colleagues’ (2007) global measure of embeddedness. This measure only captures organizational embeddedness. Mitchell and colleagues (2001), who introduced the concept of “job embeddedness,” also developed a measure that assesses both “on-the-job (organizational)” and “off-the-job (community)” embeddedness. They suggested that embeddedness can be operationalized as an equally weighted composite of its three facets: fit, links, and sacrifice. This measure has been widely used in embeddedness research (e.g., Hom et al., 2009; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). For this study, we adopted the embeddedness measure from Mitchell and colleagues (2001) to include both organizational and community embeddedness. Specifically, we focused on the “fit” dimension of embeddedness. For expatriates, links and sacrifices within the host country are probably less salient due to the temporary nature of the international relocation. Furthermore, links and sacrifices transcend cultural boundaries, whereas fit has implications for daily activities both on and off the job within the context of the foreign culture. We used Mitchell and colleagues’ (2001) measures of “fit to organization” (seven items: “I like the members of my work group,” “My colleagues are similar to me,” “My job utilizes my skills and talents well,” “I feel like I am a good match for this school,” “I fit with the school’s culture,” “I like the authority and responsibility I have at this school,” and “I feel good about my professional growth and development”) and “fit to community” (four items: “I really love living in Hong Kong,” “Hong Kong is a good match for me,” “I think of Hong Kong as home,” and “Hong Kong offers the leisure activities that I like”). Responses were on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Coefficient alphas were .93 and .89, respectively. As we did with adjustment, we standardized and then aggregated the two types of fit to create an overall embeddedness index. Coefficient alpha for this embeddedness composite was .92.

**Retention cognitions.** Retention cognitions were assessed using the same measure (reverse scored) as reported above for Study 1. Coefficient alpha was .93.

**Actual retention.** Actual retention was assessed by contacting school administrators to confirm the teacher’s employment in the subsequent school year. Responses were dummy coded with 1 = retention and 0 = turnover. The base rate for retention was 55%.

**Control variables.** As in Study 1, age, marital status (0 = single; 1 = married), tenure (measured in months), and gender (0 = male; 1 = female) were included as control variables.
Results

Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations are presented in Table 2. As in Study 1, we used linear and logistic regression analyses to test our hypotheses supplemented by SEM. For our SEM, we defined all the latent constructs with one single indicator, except for adjustment, which accounted for three indicators (three dimensions of adjustment), and embeddedness, which accounted for two indicators (organizational and community embeddedness). The standardized regression coefficients and standardized SEM path coefficients are presented in Figure 3.2

As shown in Figure 3, for the demand pathway, cultural novelty was negatively related to adjustment (Hypothesis 1a) based on our regression analysis. In addition, consistent across the regression analysis and our

2The effects of control variables for each regression analysis are available from the first author.
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<td>.09</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
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<td>.27**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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</table>

*Note. Coefficient alphas indicating estimated reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal; t1 – t4 are Time 1 – Time 4; n = 207, 143, 109, and 109, respectively; retention is coded as 0 = quit and 1 = stay.

*p < .05, **p < .01.
SEM, cultural novelty (Hypothesis 2a) and host country language deficiency (Hypothesis 2c) were both negatively related to embeddedness. For the resource pathway, relationship building was positively related to adjustment (Hypothesis 3b), and positive framing was significantly associated with embeddedness (Hypothesis 4c). In addition, relationship building was also positively associated with embeddedness (Hypothesis 4b) in our regression analysis. Overall, our model explained 6% and 19% of the variance in adjustment ($F = 1.85, p < .10$) and embeddedness ($F = 4.41, p < .01$), respectively.

Adjustment (Hypothesis 5a) and embeddedness (Hypothesis 5b) were both related to retention cognitions in our regression analysis. Embeddedness explained 7% of the variance in the criterion beyond adjustment ($\Delta F = 10.26, p < .01$), and our model in total explained 16% of the variance in retention cognitions ($F = 2.82, p < .01$). The structural equation model demonstrated good fit (RMSEA = .08; CFI = .91; IFI = .92; standardized RMR = .06), although the positive relationship between adjustment and retention cognitions did not hold. Overall, the parameter estimates in Figure 3 indicate full support for Hypotheses 2a, 2c, 3b, 4c, and 5b, and partial support for Hypotheses 1a, 4b, and 5a. Hypotheses 1b–c, 2b, 3a, 3c, and 4a were not sustained.

Using logistic regression, we tested hypotheses related to actual retention (Hypotheses 6 and 7). As shown in Figure 3, retention cognitions were positively related to actual retention after controlling for cross-cultural uncertainty demands, proactive tactics, adjustment, embeddedness, and the four control variables. Fit statistics were $\chi^2$: 40.07, $p < .01$; -2 log likelihood: 68.44; Cox & Snell $R^2$: .30; and Nagel $R^2$: .48. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported. In addition, retention cognitions fully mediated the relationship between embeddedness and actual retention. Specifically, embeddedness ($\exp[\hat{\beta}] = 2.63, p < .01$) was a significant predictor of actual retention when retention cognitions were not in the equation but became nonsignificant when retention cognitions were entered in the regression. Retention cognitions ($\exp[\hat{\beta}] = 4.38, p < .01$) were positively related to retention. The bootstrap analysis (95% BC confidence interval ranged from .0188 to .1411) confirmed the mediation. On the other hand, as adjustment was not significantly related to actual retention when retention cognitions were not in the equation, no mediation was found for adjustment. Therefore, Hypothesis 7a was not supported whereas Hypothesis 7b was supported.

**Discussion**

In this second study, we replicated and extended the design of Study 1 to include four waves of data from expatriate teachers in Hong Kong.
For the reactive, demand-based pathway, we found support for the importance of two cultural demands: cultural novelty and host country language deficiency. For the resource-based pathway, we found the same two proactive tactics played a pivotal role in shaping the embeddedness of expatriates. Specifically, those who engaged in more relationship building activities and those who had a positive outlook were more likely to get embedded in their assignments. In addition, relationship building also contributed to expatriate adjustment. As hypothesized, expatriate embeddedness was associated with retention cognitions, beyond the effects of adjustment, and retention cognitions predicted actual retention.

General Discussion

In this paper, we augmented the “reactive” paradigm of expatriates responding to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune during international relocations and cast expatriates as proactively acquiring task, interpersonal, and affective resources to become adjusted and embedded in the host organization and foreign community, and, ultimately, to continue their employment in the host country. Adopting a positive organizational scholarship approach and drawing on the JD-R model, we examine this proactive resource-based pathway to expatriate retention alongside the reactive demand-based pathway. With two panel studies of expatriate teachers in the United States and Hong Kong, our findings highlight the importance of resource acquisition and embeddedness for expatriates. After discussing these findings in more detail below, we elaborate on their theoretical and practical implications as well as the strengths and limitations of our study.

According to the demand pathway, the expatriation process is a reactive adaptation to the uncertainty demands of living and working in a foreign culture, and high uncertainty leads to stress and ultimately turnover. The first cross-cultural uncertainty demand we considered was cultural novelty, which was only important for Study 2 but not for Study 1. Although cultural novelty is typically considered a stressor that increases the difficulty of adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), previous evidence on the effect of cultural novelty has been inconsistent (Thomas, 1998), with some scholars reporting positive (Black & Gregersen, 1991), negative (Black & Stephens, 1989), and nonlinear (Takeuchi, Lepak, Marinova, & Yun, 2007) effects on cross-cultural adjustment. On the other hand, few studies have examined cultural novelty’s effect on embeddedness. Our findings in Study 2 suggest that perceived discrepancies between host and native cultures are harmful for expatriate adjustment and embeddedness. However, due to the inconsistent findings across the two studies and the
mixed evidence from previous literature, we encourage future researchers to take a more complex consideration of cultural novelty by examining possible contingency factors, such as expatriates’ cross-cultural competencies (Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006).

Our second cross-cultural uncertainty demand, cultural value distance, was not an important contributor to adjustment or embeddedness in either study. We measured cultural value distance based on Schwartz’s (1994) cultural value dimension ratings for the host and home countries. The nonsignificant results across both studies suggest that the objective cultural difference between home and host country may not be that critical for expatriates. Nowadays, with increasing globalization and increased exposure to diverse cultures, it is possible that people may not hold the dominant cultural values of their home country. So rather than use nationality as a proxy for culture, it is important to understand expatriates’ actual cultural values and how they are different from those of the host culture.

Our third cross-cultural uncertainty demand was host country language deficiency, which was negatively related to embeddedness across both studies. This is not surprising given that host country communication skills are usually considered a necessary prerequisite for international assignments (Jordan & Cartwright, 1998). However, it is noteworthy that host country language deficiency was harmful for adjustment in Study 1 but not in Study 2. The different findings might be due to differences in the two samples. As noted by Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005), the effect of host country language ability on expatriation may be dependent on whether expatriates are from English-speaking countries and whether they are going to English-speaking countries. HCNs might be more accommodating in terms of adjustment to native English speakers than those who are assigned to English-speaking countries (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Therefore, expatriates in Study 1 might have more difficulty to adjust if their English skills are lacking. On the other hand, for Study 2, the expatriate teachers were in Hong Kong to teach their native language, English. So fluency in the host country language, Cantonese, might not be that important for adjustment.

As an alternative to the debilitating cross-cultural demands that wear expatriates down, we considered expatriates as proactive agents who initiate resource-acquiring tactics. Facing uncertain and dynamic working environments, it is especially important for expatriates to proactively enact on their environments to craft resources. For the resource pathway, consistent across the two studies, we found that relationship building and positive framing were the two tactics that facilitate a successful international experience. In particular, positive framing was related to adjustment in Study 1, and relationship building was associated with adjustment in
Study 2. More important, both of these two tactics consistently predicted expatriate embeddedness across the two settings.

Employees cannot afford to stay isolated and must develop a relationship philosophy of work (Hall, 1996). For expatriates who face the challenges of interacting with HCNs, relationship-building behaviors provide the interpersonal resources that expatriates need to get embedded in the work environment. On the other hand, positive framing offers expatriates affective capital or emotional regulation assets. Through positive framing, individuals “alter their understanding of a situation by explicitly controlling the cognitive frame they place on the situation” (Ashford & Black, 1996, p. 202). This tactic helps increase individuals’ self-confidence and self-efficacy, resulting in more positive affect and greater sense of control over the situation (Ashford & Black, 1996). For both of our samples, relationship building and positive framing represented ways for expatriates to acquire resources and craft their assignments, which were critical for their embeddedness in the international assignments.

In neither study was the sense-making tactic of information seeking an important mechanism for expatriates to create more certainties surrounding their foray into a foreign culture. This might be explained by “hangover effects” (Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005). As Boswell and colleagues (2005) demonstrated in a study of job changers, as job changers gain more information about their new organization and are exposed to less attractive aspects of the new job, their job satisfaction tends to decrease. Expatriates tend to have high expectations about their foreign assignments (Black & Gregersen, 1990). With more information about the reality of their assignments that does not meet their expectations, expatriates often experience maladjustment (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Buergi, 2001). Thus, although information seeking may generate more informational resources for expatriates, more information does not necessarily lead to greater adjustment or embeddedness.

As far as we know, this is the first study to assess the concurrent roles of adjustment and embeddedness on retention. Although adjustment was positively related to retention cognitions for the two studies, after accounting for embeddedness, the significant findings went away. Instead, embeddedness consistently predicted retention cognitions across the two settings beyond adjustment. Therefore, expatriates who are embedded in their host organizations and community are more likely to consider staying in their international positions. By testing the effects of embeddedness in the presence of expatriate adjustment, we demonstrated that this is a potent input beyond adjustment and represents a separate pathway to expatriate retention. We also found evidence for retention cognitions as an effective predictor of actual retention, and as a mediator of the relationship between expatriate embeddedness and actual retention. Although the effect
of retention cognitions on retention has been well-established in domestic turnover studies, it has not been assessed using expatriate samples.

Theoretical Implications

By highlighting the importance of proactive behaviors and expatriate embeddedness in international experience, we make several contributions to the expatriate literature. First, we move beyond the “reactive” paradigm that has dominated this literature by casting expatriates as proactively acquiring resources to craft their assignments. Building on the JD-R model, we suggest that expatriate research is dominated by the reactive approach that emphasizes the role of demands from the international transition, channeled through expatriate (mal)adjustment, and affecting psychological and behavioral withdrawal. In contrast, we advocate an alternative, proactive approach corresponding to the role of resources that expatriates can draw upon to make things happen, broadening their repertoire and linking the environment to them. Taking an integrative approach as advocated by positive psychologists (e.g., Linley et al., 2006), we examine the proactive resource-based pathway alongside the reactive demand-based pathway to expatriate retention. Specifically, we study three proactive tactics that expatriates can engage in to acquire resources alongside three cross-cultural demands. In particular, we find relationship building and positive framing are important tactics that facilitate expatriate adjustment and embeddedness. Through building relationships with HCNs and framing circumstances in positive ways, expatriates not only gain more interpersonal and affective resources, but they also create greater motivational reserves and a wider behavioral repertoire for fitting and linking to their overseas work environment. This is consistent with what Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) described as “job crafters” who could actively compose both what their jobs are physically and what their jobs are cognitively. Thus, expatriates can be “crafters” and are able to shape their own work and cultural experiences to achieve success. Together, the proactive tactics for resource acquisition correspond to the resource side of the JD-R model. By revising the passive perspectives of how expatriates behave during the international relocation and focusing on the effects of proactive resource acquiring tactics on expatriate experiences, this study brings positive organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) to the expatriate literature and demonstrates the usefulness of applying the resource side of the JD-R model to expatriate research.

Second, we connect embeddedness with proactive resource acquisition tactics and demonstrate that it constitutes a separate pathway to expatriate retention beyond adjustment. Although a recent study on expatriate
effectiveness by Chen and colleagues (2010) drew on the proactive perspective to highlight the importance of expatriates’ cross-cultural motivation to proactively pursue international assignment goals, adjustment was still the underlying theoretical construct that drove expatriate experience. We contribute to the expatriate literature by going beyond adjustment to examine whether and how expatriate embeddedness in overseas organizations and communities help expatriate retention. Specifically, we included three cross-cultural demands and adjustments to reflect the demand side of the JD-R framework. We set adjustment alongside embeddedness to see if a resource-based pathway has a unique influence on retention. As in the domestic literature (Mitchell et al., 2001) and consistent with recent findings for inpatriates (Reiche et al., 2011) and repatriates (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), embeddedness represents a total force that keeps expatriates in their international work roles. Our results, based on two studies with expatriate populations in different parts of the world, demonstrate that the resource-based pathway (i.e., proactive tactics to embeddedness) has a distinct and important effect along with the comprehensively studied demand-based pathway (i.e., adjustment to demands). That is, embeddedness provides an alternative, positive perspective for understanding the experiences of those living and working in foreign cultures.

Methodologically, we contribute to the expatriate literature by using two separate panel studies, one with two waves and the other with four waves of data. In both studies, we also measured actual retention as well as retention cognitions, thus providing an estimate of the effectiveness of using retention cognitions as a surrogate for actual retention. Despite the consistent advocacy for longitudinal studies that include actual turnover of expatriates (e.g., Harrison et al., 2004), this is one of only a handful of studies that examine expatriate actual retention (cf., Reiche et al., 2011; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) and follow expatriate experiences longitudinally (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2005; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007).

Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical importance of our results, our study has several implications for international human resource (IHR) managers. First, to help minimize cross-cultural uncertainty during the international relocation, home and host organizations can provide language and cultural training to enhance expatriates’ host country language fluency and host culture sensitivity. On the other hand, given the benefits of being proactive, IHR managers may consider using employees’ ability to engage in proactive behaviors as part of the criteria for selecting expatriates. More important, organizations can train expatriates to be more proactive
regardless of their personal dispositions. In particular, our study suggests that actively building and fostering relationships and thinking positively are specific tactics that contribute to embeddedness. Therefore, organizations can design training programs to improve expatriates’ skills in building relationships with HCNs and cultivate expatriates’ abilities to frame circumstances in positive ways. Besides, IHR managers should also ensure they have other human resource policies and practices in place to encourage expatriates to engage in proactive behaviors. For instance, they should create avenues for expatriates to develop strong relationships and social networks both within and outside of the workplace. This could take the form of social activities that offer opportunities for expatriates to interact and communicate with other members of the host organization. On the other hand, ensuring that expatriates have someone, such as a peer or supervisory mentor, to talk to about day-to-day problems can provide expatriates with emotional support and help expatriates to look at the positive side of the challenges of being an expatriate. Finally, as embeddedness serves as a critical pathway to expatriate retention, it is important to create an environment that is conducive to feelings of attachment and connectedness in order to retain valuable expatriates.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

As with all studies, our research has both strengths and limitations. One strength of our study is that we used two separate panel studies with multiple waves of data. In particular, for Study 1, we employed an across-time, two-wave approach with retention data collected 10 months later than the rest of the variables. To minimize common method variance, for Study 2, we used a lagged design with four waves of data collection. Although Study 2 provided a stronger test of our model, a longitudinal design with repeated observations of the same variables over time will provide more confidence in testing the temporal order of events (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Therefore, the causal implications of our model should be interpreted cautiously, and we continue the call for more longitudinal designs in expatriate research.

In addition, because we based our study on two samples of expatriate teachers who initiated their own international relocation, this may limit the generalizability of our findings. However, we believe our two samples are representative of the expatriate samples studied in the expatriate literature. For example, more than half of the studies included in the meta-analysis by Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) used a mixed sample of corporate expatriates and self-initiated expatriates (e.g., Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Shaffer et al., 2006). We suggest that our model should also
apply to other self-initiated international professionals as well as traditional corporate expatriates. Given that self-initiated expatriates do not have parent organization support, being proactive becomes particularly important for them to adjust to the international environments. However, corporate expatriates should also be proactive in acquiring different resources and shaping their cross-cultural environments. Future studies should examine the generalizability of our model to other self-initiated expatriates as well as traditional corporate expatriates.

In a related manner, the expatriates in both of our studies, on average, were past the first year of their assignments. That is, we did not capture the proactive tactics that expatriates used, although they were new on the assignments. Although proactive tactics are typically considered as a means of offering greater agency to newcomers in the socialization literature, they represent behaviors that every employee can engage in to alter work meanings and work identity in their jobs (Berg et al., 2010), and they will arise particularly in dynamic and uncertain work contexts (Griffin et al., 2007), such as those expatriates face. Our main interests were on the proactive nature of the resource acquisition behaviors that offer greater agency to the expatriates who are outsiders in their host country settings. Although not always new, expatriates are always different, having come from elsewhere and always constituting a distinctive minority in their host country environments, almost regardless of how long they had been there. That is, the proactive tactics could be engaged at any time and not just when expatriates first arrive (and shortly thereafter). They represent a continuing strategy for acquiring the necessary and perhaps even surplus resources that allow expatriates to more fully construct environments in which they comfortably embed themselves. Still, it would be interesting for future research to examine whether proactive tactics play different roles for expatriates at different stages of their assignment. The adjustment literature has suggested that the sequential unfolding of adjustment over time follows a U-curve with four stages: “honeymoon,” “culture shock,” “adjustment,” and “mastery” (Torbiörn, 1982). So will the use of proactive tactics change this U-curve progression of adjustment? In addition, what is the differential effectiveness of proactive behaviors over time? Do expatriates use different types of proactive behaviors at different stages of their international assignment? All these questions warrant future investigation.

In addition, with regard to proactive tactics, in this study, we specifically examined three types of behaviors that reflect task-directed, socially directed, and affect-directed tactics for acquiring resources on assignment. Future research is encouraged to explore other types of proactivity (Crant, 2000; Parker & Collins, 2008), such as proactive motivation (Parker et al., 2010) and proactive personality (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999),
to see whether they also contribute to the resource pathway of favorable expatriate experiences. So for expatriates, what are the distinctive roles that proactive behaviors and proactive personality play? The relationship between proactive personality and proactive behavior should also be explored (Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010).

With regard to embeddedness, we used two different measures of embeddedness, thereby triangulating our measure and strengthening the validity of our study. However, although we measured the global perceptions of embeddedness in our first study, we only measured the “fit” dimension to capture expatriate organizational and community embeddedness in our second study. According to Mitchell and colleagues (2001), embeddedness is conceptualized in terms of fit (i.e., perceived compatibility or comfort with the job and community), links (i.e., the formal or informal collegial and community connections), and sacrifice (i.e., the perceived cost of leaving a job or community). We are particularly interested in the “fit” dimension because fit has been demonstrated to have important implications for the expatriate context (Van Vianen, De Pater, & Kristof-Brown, 2004), although collegial and community connections, and the sense of sacrifice may need more time to develop. Therefore, links and sacrifices are less relevant for expatriates due to the temporary nature of the international relocation. Still, we encourage future research to take a comprehensive perspective on embeddedness and investigate whether links and sacrifices also exert influences on expatriate retention.

Finally, across both studies, embeddedness provided additional explanatory power for retention beyond adjustment. However, we did not take into account external influences that may influence expatriates’ retention decisions, such as spouse adjustment, financial incentives, or physical environmental, features such as pollution and safety concerns. Still, our focus is on a separate pathway to retention versus withdrawal cognitions. By testing the effects of embeddedness in the presence of expatriate adjustment, we were able to see if a resource-based pathway contributes uniquely to retention. In addition to explaining retention, future research may also explore whether our proactive framework, or the focus on the resource pathway, helps explain other favorable expatriate experiences, such as performance, engagement, or thriving (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

Conclusion

International relocation can be a tumultuous experience. However, rather than simply weather the international move, expatriates can actively employ proactive tactics to acquire informational, interpersonal,
and affective resources for building their assignment experiences. Using two separate studies, each with multiple waves of data, we demonstrated the importance of proactive behaviors and expatriate embeddedness on expatriate retention. Future researchers are encouraged to take a proactive perspective and to further explore the possible factors that contribute to the positive experiences of international relocations.

REFERENCES


