"What Makes Them Stay, What Makes Them Leave?"

Career Ambition, Job Embeddedness, and Voluntary Executive Turnover in Multinational Enterprises

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Abstract

Senior executives who sustain cross-border coordination, knowledge transfer, and strategic integration within multinational enterprises (MNEs) are among the most strategically consequential yet poorly understood retention challenges in MNE management. Job embeddedness theory (JET), the dominant voluntary turnover framework, was developed on domestic, non-executive populations, leaving open whether its assumptions transfer to Peripatetic International Executives (PIEs) — senior managers for whom cross-border mobility is a defining career feature. Using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, we conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with PIEs in the global life sciences industry, followed by an online survey (n = 258) spanning multiple GLOBE cultural clusters. Drawing on JET alongside Vroom's expectancy theory and Herzberg's motivation framework, we develop and test a career-ambition model of PIE retention. Results confirm that JET explains 37.3% of variance in intention to stay (ITS), but reveal a striking asymmetry: on-the-job factors — particularly career growth opportunities, values alignment, and skills utilization — account for the preponderance of explained variance, with family perception of organizational fit emerging as an additional significant predictor beyond these three career-related drivers, while off-the-job and community embeddedness factors exert minimal influence. A reduced four-factor model achieves 55.6% explanatory power. These patterns hold across gender, age, nationality, and tenure sub-groups. Our findings recalibrate JET for a high-mobility senior executive population, demonstrating a population-level assumption violation that renders the theory's community attachment logic inapplicable, and ground a career-ambition mechanism integrating expectancy theory into JET. We generate

actionable implications for how MNEs should design retention environments that preserve cross-border coordination capacity.

Keywords: job embeddedness; peripatetic international executives; global talent management; multinational enterprises; career ambition; executive retention; cross-border coordination

1. Introduction

The capacity of multinational enterprises (MNEs) to retain strategically positioned senior executives represents one of the most consequential and least understood challenges in global talent management. Senior executives who work across national boundaries — what we term Peripatetic International Executives (PIEs) — perform functions that are disproportionately important to MNE performance: they transfer tacit knowledge between subsidiaries, embody organizational culture across geographies, coordinate global strategy implementation, and serve as living repositories of cross-cultural organizational intelligence (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). When they leave, the loss extends far beyond their individual contribution. For MNEs specifically, the departure of a senior internationally mobile executive disrupts something that is difficult to reconstitute quickly: the cross-border relational capital, subsidiary trust, and tacit coordination knowledge that accumulates only through sustained international tenure. Estimates consistently place executive replacement costs at between 150% and 200% of annual salary (Bersin, 2013), but these figures capture only the direct cost of replacement. They do not capture the strategic discontinuity, relationship ruptures, and knowledge leakage that follow senior departures in globally dispersed organizations — nor the degradation of cross-border integration capacity that MNEs depend on for competitive advantage.

Despite this strategic importance, our theoretical understanding of what drives PIEs' decisions to stay with or leave their MNE employers remains surprisingly thin. The dominant framework for understanding voluntary turnover beyond job satisfaction — job embeddedness theory (JET), developed by Mitchell et al. (2001) — was built on two samples drawn from a grocery store chain and a hospital system, both operating in a single domestic context in the United States. Its three-dimensional structure of links, fit, and sacrifice, and particularly its emphasis on community embeddedness and off-the-job factors such as spousal employment, local social ties, and housing investment, reflects assumptions about what anchors people to organizations that are rooted in the experiences of employees who are geographically stable, community-invested, and whose primary social identity is organized around their local environment.

The subsequent two decades of JET scholarship have confirmed its predictive power but have also exposed the boundaries of its original formulation. Empirical replication has been extensive: Lee et al. (2004) extended the framework to a large administrative services organization, demonstrating that on-the-job embeddedness predicted not only turnover but also organizational citizenship behavior and job performance. Crossley et al. (2007) developed a global measure of JE and validated it in a longitudinal mixed-industry sample, confirming that embeddedness explained unique variance in turnover beyond job attitudes. Mallol et al. (2007) applied JET to culturally diverse samples including Hispanic workers, finding the construct robust but noting that its community dimension operated differently across demographic groups. Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) extended the theory cross-culturally to India and the United States, revealing that the relative weight of JE dimensions varied by cultural context. A meta-analysis by Jiang et al. (2012) drawing on 65 independent samples confirmed the negative relationship between both on- and off-the-job embeddedness and turnover, but also noted that off-the-job embeddedness was a consistently weaker predictor than its on-the-job counterpart — a pattern that meta-analytic aggregation had previously obscured. Across these applications, the populations studied have been predominantly domestic, relatively immobile employees in healthcare, retail, hospitality, public administration, and education — populations for whom geographic rootedness is a reasonable baseline assumption.

The extension of JET to internationally mobile populations is more recent, limited in scope, and has produced results that challenge the theory's original formulation rather than simply confirm it. Hussain and Deery (2018) examined self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in the United Arab Emirates and found that on-the-job embeddedness predicted turnover intentions while off-the-job embeddedness did not — a stark asymmetry that diverges from the pattern typically observed in domestic samples. Notably, off-the-job embeddedness acted as a moderator of the shock–turnover relationship, making community-embedded SIEs more likely to leave when faced with a career-level shock, suggesting that local ties can paradoxically accelerate departure for internationally mobile employees. Ren et al. (2014) found that organizational embeddedness predicted actual retention among expatriate teachers in the United States and Hong Kong above and beyond the effects of cross-cultural adjustment — with retention cognitions fully mediating the embeddedness–retention link — suggesting that the resource-based pathway of proactive embeddedness constitutes a distinct retention mechanism independent of the reactive demand-adjustment pathway. Research comparing assigned expatriates with SIEs has further complicated the picture: off-the-job embeddedness appears more predictive for assigned expatriates — who have organizational relocation support and structured family packages — while on-the-job embeddedness dominates for SIEs, who self-manage their mobility and whose retention calculus is more heavily career-focused (Andresen et al., 2018). This growing body of work suggests that, for internationally mobile professionals, the community embeddedness dimension of JET systematically

loses explanatory power relative to the organizational dimension — a recalibration that has not yet been theorized at the level of senior executive populations.

Critically, however, virtually none of this internationally mobile population research has focused on senior executives. PIEs are distinct from SIEs and assigned expatriates in ways that matter theoretically: they operate at strategic levels of the organization, possess scarce and firm-specific human capital, exercise substantial discretion over their own careers, and have typically made multiple international moves — meaning their family systems and community attachments have already adapted to mobility in ways that further weaken the relevance of the off-the-job JE dimension. This represents a potentially fundamental assumption violation rather than merely a sampling gap, and one that no existing study has directly addressed.

This theoretical problem has practical urgency. The global war for executive talent has intensified, with MNEs competing across borders for a limited pool of internationally mobile senior leaders (Scullion & Collings, 2011; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Research on global talent management (GTM) has emphasized the strategic importance of retention (Collings, Mellahi & Cascio, 2019) but has produced relatively little empirical guidance on the specific mechanisms that drive retention decisions among highly mobile senior executives specifically — as opposed to all employees, or expatriates more broadly. The expatriate literature, meanwhile, focuses predominantly on assignment success and repatriation rather than on the longer-term career embeddedness decisions of executives who have made international mobility a sustained career mode.

This study addresses this gap directly. We investigate voluntary turnover intentions among PIEs in the global life sciences industry — a knowledge-intensive, research-driven sector in which senior executive talent is particularly scarce and strategically valuable. We test JET as a theoretical framework, but with a critical eye: we examine not only whether JET's factors predict intention to stay (ITS) — the attitudinal precursor to voluntary turnover and the standard dependent variable in retention research where prospective decisions rather than historical behaviour are the focus — among PIEs, but how the pattern of prediction differs from what JET's original formulation would anticipate, and what this tells us about the mechanisms through which embeddedness operates for this population. In doing so, we integrate Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene framework to propose that PIEs' retention decisions are organized around career ambition — a calculation of the valence, expectancy, and instrumentality of career progression within the current firm — rather than the community attachment and sacrifice avoidance that JET emphasizes for general populations.

We employ an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design: 26 semi-structured interviews with PIEs across 16 countries, followed by a quantitative survey (n = 258)

drawn from 38 countries, from a database of over 5,600 life sciences executives. This design allows us to both test the correlational structure predicted by JET and illuminate the causal mechanisms that connect embeddedness factors to retention intentions — something quantitative-only designs cannot achieve.

Our findings make several contributions to research on international business, global talent management, and voluntary turnover theory. The central contribution is a population-level recalibration of JET: we demonstrate that the theory's community attachment assumptions do not hold for senior internationally mobile executives, constituting an assumption violation rather than a contextual moderation effect. Building from this, we show that off-the-job factors are largely irrelevant, demographic moderators are absent, and the theory's explanatory power is substantially concentrated in three career-related on-the-job factors, with family perception of organizational fit emerging as an additional significant predictor. We propose and empirically ground a career-ambition mechanism that integrates JET with expectancy theory, offering a more complete account of how PIEs process their retention decisions. And we generate specific, actionable guidance for MNEs seeking to design retention environments for their internationally mobile executive talent.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Voluntary Turnover Research and Its Limitations for Executive Populations

The study of voluntary turnover has a rich theoretical lineage. March and Simon's (1958) equilibrium model established the foundational insight that employees weigh the costs and benefits of staying versus leaving, with job satisfaction and perceived job alternatives as the primary inputs. Subsequent decades of research elaborated this foundation: Mobley (1977) mapped the cognitive sequence from dissatisfaction to search to exit; Price and Mueller (1981, 1986) introduced structural antecedents including routinization, centralization, and pay; and Hom and Griffeth (1991, 1995) synthesized findings across hundreds of studies to establish meta-analytic benchmarks.

Yet a persistent finding across this literature is that traditional attitudinal predictors — job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived job alternatives — explain only modest proportions of variance in actual turnover behavior, with meta-analyses typically finding R^2 values in the range of 0.04 to 0.25 (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Hom et al., 2017). This explanatory ceiling motivated the search for additional mechanisms, culminating in Mitchell et al.'s (2001) introduction of job embeddedness.

Critically, however, virtually all this research has focused on general employee populations — hourly workers, nurses, teachers, call center agents — in domestic organizational contexts. High achievers perceive themselves as more mobile, have stronger external labor market opportunities, and may have systematically different relationships with organizations than anchoring models built on hourly or professional service workers assume (Groysberg, 2010). The theoretical framework that emerged from this gap in the literature — job embeddedness theory — carries its own population-level assumptions that warrant examination before it can be applied to senior internationally mobile executives, as we discuss in the following section.

2.2 Job Embeddedness Theory: Framework and Assumptions

Mitchell et al. (2001) proposed job embeddedness as a composite construct capturing the web of connections, compatibility perceptions, and anticipated sacrifices that anchor employees to their current positions. The theory organizes these factors along two axes: on-the-job embeddedness (connections, compatibility, and sacrifices related to the work organization) and off-the-job embeddedness (connections, compatibility, and sacrifices related to the non-work community). Each dimension is characterized by three sub-dimensions:

- Links: formal and informal connections between a person and their institution or other individuals, both within the organization and in the wider community.
- Fit: the perceived compatibility or comfort between the individual and their organizational or community environment, encompassing values alignment, goal congruence, and cultural comfort.
- Sacrifice: the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that would be forfeited by leaving — bonuses, career progression, community relationships, or accumulated social capital.

Mitchell et al. operationalized these dimensions in a 40-item scale and demonstrated that job embeddedness explained unique variance in turnover above and beyond job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Subsequent research has confirmed this additional explanatory power across multiple contexts (Crossley et al., 2007; Holtom et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2004).

However, the theory carries embedded assumptions that may not transfer to PIE populations. The off-the-job dimension assumes that community ties, local social networks, spousal employment, and housing investment represent meaningful anchors — which presupposes that employees have invested in stable community relationships and would experience real sacrifice in abandoning them. For PIEs, many of whom have already relocated multiple times and whose family arrangements have adapted to mobility, this assumption may be systematically violated. Similarly, the theory's link

dimension assumes that organizational networks develop through stable co-location — but for PIEs who manage geographically dispersed teams and maintain international professional networks, the concept of organizational links may have a different character and different implications for retention.

These assumption mismatches suggest that JET, while a plausible starting framework, may require significant theoretical modification when applied to senior internationally mobile executives. This study investigates the nature and extent of that modification.

2.3 Global Talent Management and PIE Retention

The global talent management (GTM) literature provides an important complementary lens. GTM focuses on the systematic attraction, development, and retention of high-performing and high-potential employees in roles that are strategically important to MNE operations (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Schuler, Jackson & Tarique, 2011). PIEs — senior executives who coordinate and implement strategy across national boundaries — clearly fall within the strategic talent pool that GTM theory designates as priority retention targets.

However, the GTM literature has identified several tensions in how MNEs manage internationally mobile talent. First, there is the challenge of balancing global integration (using PIEs as carriers of headquarters culture and strategy) with local responsiveness (adapting to host country conditions and talent) — a tension that directly implicates PIEs' sense of fit and their career progression perceptions (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). Second, there is the evidence that MNEs frequently fail to deliver on the implicit career promises that attract executives into international roles: repatriation is often poorly managed, and the career capital accumulated through international assignments is not always translated into advancement opportunities (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Stahl et al., 2009). This failure to deliver on career advancement expectations — in expectancy theory terms, a failure of instrumentality — may be a primary driver of PIE voluntary departures.

Third, the GTM literature has highlighted the importance of psychological contract fulfillment for retaining internationally mobile talent (Rousseau, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). When the implicit career bargain embedded in PIEs' international role — international exposure in exchange for accelerated advancement — is perceived to be unfulfilled, the resulting psychological contract breach may trigger exit decisions regardless of other embeddedness factors. This dynamic suggests that the mechanism connecting embeddedness to retention for PIEs may be fundamentally career-calculative rather than community-anchoring.

2.4 An Integrated Theoretical Framework: Career Ambition as the Retention Mechanism

Building on the foregoing theoretical analysis, we propose that PIE retention is organized around what we term a career ambition mechanism. This mechanism integrates three theoretical frameworks:

Job Embeddedness Theory provides the structural taxonomy of factors that influence retention. However, we propose that for PIEs, the relevant factors are almost exclusively on-the-job, and that their influence on ITS is mediated by career progression perceptions rather than operating through the sacrifice-avoidance mechanism that JET posits for general populations.

Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory provides the cognitive process model through which PIEs evaluate their career prospects. Expectancy theory proposes that motivation — and by extension, commitment to remaining in a current role — is a multiplicative function of: valence (the value placed on the anticipated outcome, i.e., the attractiveness of career progression within the firm); instrumentality (the belief that effort and performance will lead to the desired outcome, i.e., that strong performance will result in advancement); and expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance). We propose that PIEs' ITS decisions reflect an implicit expectancy calculation in which the firm's career opportunities (valence), the fairness and visibility of advancement processes (instrumentality), and the quality of leadership and organizational culture (expectancy) combine to produce a career progression prospect that anchors or releases them.

Herzberg's (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory provides the explanatory framework for the distinction between on-the-job and off-the-job factors. Herzberg proposed that motivators (achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement) produce positive engagement and retention, while hygiene factors (pay, working conditions, company policy, interpersonal relations) prevent dissatisfaction but do not drive positive commitment. We propose that for PIEs, off-the-job factors function as hygiene factors — their absence (e.g., a family unable to adapt to a relocation) can trigger departure, but their presence does not actively anchor — while on-the-job career factors function as true motivators.

This integrated framework generates the following research hypotheses. For the purposes of H3, we define career-related on-the-job factors as those whose salience for PIEs derives from their signal value for career progression — that is, factors that PIEs interpret as evidence of whether the organization offers a credible path to the career outcomes they value — rather than from their contribution to immediate job satisfaction or community attachment. The specific factors that qualify as career-related for this population are identified inductively in the qualitative phase (section 4.1), consistent with the exploratory sequential design.

H1: Job embeddedness factors will exhibit a positive relationship with PIEs' intention to stay.

H2: On-the-job embeddedness factors will explain significantly more variance in PIE intention to stay than off-the-job factors.

H3: Career-related on-the-job factors will be the primary drivers of PIE intention to stay.

H4: The relationship between job embeddedness and intention to stay will not be significantly moderated by demographic sub-group (gender, age, nationality, tenure, family status).

H5: Qualitative data will reveal a career-ambition decision mechanism consistent with expectancy theory logic, whereby PIEs evaluate career progression prospects as the primary determinant of retention.

2.5 Research Questions

To address the theoretical propositions above comprehensively, and following Alvesson and Sandberg's (2011) problematization framework, we articulate four research questions spanning descriptive, comparative, explanatory, and normative dimensions:

RQ1 (Descriptive): What is the relationship between job embeddedness factors and PIEs' intention to stay?

RQ2 (Comparative): How does the JE-ITS relationship vary across PIE sub-groups defined by demographic and occupational characteristics?

RQ3 (Explanatory): How does job embeddedness theory, modified by a career-ambition mechanism, explain variance in PIE intention to stay?

RQ4 (Normative): What management practices do these findings suggest for MNEs seeking to retain senior internationally mobile executives?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Positioning

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), combining qualitative interviews with a quantitative survey. This approach is appropriate for research where existing theory (JET) provides a plausible but potentially mis-specified framework for a new population: the qualitative phase illuminates which dimensions of the theory are salient for PIEs and how they operate, while the quantitative phase tests the resulting modified framework at scale. The integration of methods is not merely additive — the qualitative findings directly shaped the quantitative instrument, and

the quantitative results are interpreted through the qualitative lens to identify causal mechanisms, consistent with an explanatory sequential integration model (Morse, 2003).

Philosophically, the study is positioned within a pragmatist paradigm (Creswell, 2014), prioritizing the selection of methods best suited to answering the research questions rather than adhering to a single epistemological tradition. This positioning is consistent with the emerging consensus in mixed-methods international HRM research (Harzing & Pinnington, 2011).

3.2 Industry and Population Selection

The study is bounded to the global life sciences industry — comprising pharmaceutical, medical technology, biotechnology, and related sectors — for three reasons. First, this is a genuinely global, knowledge-intensive industry in which PIEs are particularly prevalent and strategically important: major companies operate in 50+ countries, require coordinated global R&D and commercial strategies, and rely heavily on senior executives to bridge headquarters and subsidiary operations. Second, industry bounding allows us to control for sector-specific factors that might otherwise confound cross-industry comparisons. Third, the research team has deep familiarity with the industry, which enhanced the quality of the qualitative interviews through shared contextual knowledge and terminology.

The target population comprised senior executives meeting the following inclusion criteria: CEO, Vice President, General Manager, Director, or Manager with regional or international team leadership responsibility, employed in the international affiliate or regional office of a life sciences MNE. Critically, participants were required to have current or recent experience working outside their home country, operationalizing the PIE construct.

3.3 Qualitative Phase

3.3.1 Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

Twenty-six PIEs were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) designed to achieve maximum variation across gender, role level, nationality, and geographic location. This sample size is consistent with the recommended range of 20-30 for thematic saturation in in-depth interview studies (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Morse, 1994), and saturation was confirmed when no new themes emerged in the final five interviews. Prior to the main qualitative phase, a pilot phase of eight interviews was conducted to validate and refine the interview guide; minor wording adjustments were made following the pilot, and pilot data were not included in the main analysis.

The final sample comprised 59% male and 41% female participants, with 61% aged over 40 years — consistent with the demographic profile of senior life sciences executives

globally. Participants were drawn from 16 countries, spanning all major GLOBE cultural clusters (House et al., 2004), ensuring broad geographic diversity. Job roles included General Managers of national affiliates, Vice Presidents of regional operations, and commercial and medical directors with multi-country responsibilities.

3.3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the primary researcher, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, conducted via video conference. The interview guide followed a laddering approach (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988), beginning with broad questions about career experiences and progressively drilling into specific factors influencing the participant's intention to stay with or leave their current employer. This technique encourages participants to move from attribute-level responses to value-level motivations, making it particularly appropriate for investigating the underlying drivers of retention decisions.

Questions were organized around the six dimensions of the Job Embeddedness framework (on-the-job and off-the-job links, fit, and sacrifice), with open-ended probes designed to elicit both the relevance and the causal mechanisms of each dimension. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim.

In accordance with the ethical guidelines of the authors' institution, which preclude the retention of personally identifiable data beyond the period required for analysis, audio recordings were deleted following transcription and verification of the transcript data. Transcripts were anonymized prior to analysis, with all identifying references to individuals, organizations, and locations removed or replaced with generic descriptors.

3.3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: data familiarization, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Coding was conducted deductively (using the 40 JE items from Mitchell et al.'s original scale as a priori codes) and inductively (allowing emergent codes not anticipated by the existing framework). This hybrid approach is appropriate when an established theoretical framework exists but may require modification — it preserves the theoretical structure while remaining open to its limitations.

A quantitative scoring system was applied to the coded data to identify the most salient JE factors: each factor was scored based on the frequency of mention weighted by the emphasis given by respondents (classified as primary, secondary, or incidental), yielding a ranked list of JE factor salience. Twelve factors in total emerged with sufficient salience to inform the quantitative instrument. Eleven of these correspond to items in Mitchell et

al.'s (2001) original 40-item scale. An additional factor emerged inductively and is not present in the original scale: interaction with other cultures.

3.4 Quantitative Phase

3.4.1 Survey Instrument Development

The quantitative instrument was developed from the qualitative findings, consistent with the sequential exploratory design. The final survey measured 12 JE factors, all derived from the qualitative phase: eleven adapted from Mitchell et al.'s (2001) original 40-item scale, and one novel factor that emerged inductively (interaction with other cultures). These 12 factors were measured across the three dimensions of links, fit, and sacrifice, along with the dependent variable (ITS) and demographic controls. ITS was measured on a 10-point Likert-type scale (1 = definitely planning to leave, 10 = definitely planning to stay), reversed from Mitchell et al.'s original to enhance intuitive interpretability. The JE factors were measured using adapted items from Mitchell et al.'s (2001) 40-item scale, with modifications made to reflect the specific language and context identified in the qualitative phase.

The survey also collected demographic data including gender, age, marital status, family composition, country of origin, country of current employment, job position, organizational tenure, number of prior international assignments, and type of organization.

The instrument was piloted with a subsample of 10 executives and refined based on comprehension feedback before deployment.

3.4.2 Data Collection

The survey was distributed via the SurveyMonkey platform over a two-month period. Invitations were sent to a database of 5,600 life sciences industry senior executives compiled from LinkedIn, supplemented by outreach through relevant professional associations and LinkedIn groups dedicated to the life sciences sector. An initial pool of 358 responses was received. These were subjected to two screening criteria: respondents were excluded if they had not worked outside their home country (failing the PIE definition) or if they did not hold a senior management role as defined in the inclusion criteria above. After applying these screens and excluding incomplete responses, 258 qualified responses were retained for analysis, yielding a qualified response rate of 4.6% against the original database — consistent with documented rates for senior executive surveys (Baruch & Holtom, 2008), where the combination of seniority, time pressure, and survey fatigue consistently produces single-digit response rates.

The final sample was 66% male, consistent with global senior management benchmarks (Grant Thornton International Business Report, 2021). Seventy percent of respondents were aged 45 or older, 84% were married, and 54% had children under 18. Sixty-six

percent held executive-level roles (CEO and C-suite). All participants were employed in the life sciences sector, with 71% in the research-based pharmaceutical segment. Mean organizational tenure was 8.3 years, and two-thirds of respondents had worked internationally in at least one country outside their origin, with over one-third having worked in three or more countries.

3.4.3 Analytical Strategy

The analytical strategy proceeded in four stages. First, basic ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with robust standard errors was used to test the overall relationship between JE composite scores and ITS (testing H1). Second, a series of individual factor regressions identified which JE dimensions drove the relationship (testing H2 and H3). Third, an extended regression model incorporating all demographic controls was estimated to assess robustness and test whether controls attenuated the JE-ITS relationship. Fourth, a series of interaction regressions tested for moderating effects of each demographic sub-group variable (testing H4). Finally, a reduced-model regression using only the four highest-explanatory-power factors was estimated to assess parsimony and predictive improvement. All analyses were conducted in Stata 17, with robust standard errors throughout to address potential heteroskedasticity.

4. Results

4.1 Qualitative Findings: The Primacy of Career Factors

The qualitative phase revealed a consistent and striking pattern: on-the-job factors dominated PIEs' accounts of their retention decisions, while off-the-job and community factors were largely peripheral. This finding emerged across gender, nationality, and role-level sub-groups, suggesting it reflects a structural feature of PIE decision-making rather than idiosyncratic variation.

Three on-the-job factors emerged as primary drivers of ITS across the majority of participants. Career growth opportunities was the most frequently cited factor, with participants linking their ITS directly to their assessments of the firm's trajectory and its implied career pipeline. Organizational culture and values alignment were the second most prominent factors, with participants consistently describing the perception that their personal values were congruent with those enacted (as opposed to merely espoused) by organizational leadership as a fundamental anchor. Critically, however, participants did not frame values misalignment as mere cultural discomfort or workplace dissatisfaction. Rather, they described it as a career signal: when enacted organizational values suggested that meritocracy was absent, that international contributions were invisible to headquarters, or that advancement was politically rather than performance-driven, PIEs

interpreted this as evidence that career progression within the firm was not a credible prospect. Values alignment thus functioned as an instrumentality cue in expectancy theory terms — evidence that strong performance would or would not lead to advancement — making it career-related in its effect on ITS even when it presented as a cultural factor on the surface. Leadership quality — specifically the accessibility, fairness, and strategic coherence of direct supervisors and senior leadership — was the third most salient factor.

Skills utilization, while lower in qualitative salience (rank 11, salience score 14), was nonetheless mentioned by a meaningful subset of participants. Importantly, these participants did not frame under-utilization as a job satisfaction concern — a sense that their work was insufficiently stimulating in the moment. Instead, they connected it directly to career trajectory: being placed in a role that did not fully deploy their capabilities was read as a signal that the organization did not perceive them as a high-potential executive on an upward path. In this sense, skills utilization functioned as a career-stagnation signal for PIEs rather than a day-to-day job quality variable, grounding its classification as a career-related factor in H3. By contrast, off-the-job factors — city of residence, community social ties, housing, spousal employment, children's schooling — were mentioned relatively infrequently and typically in passing rather than as primary considerations. When they did arise, it was usually as threshold conditions (factors whose inadequacy could trigger exit consideration) rather than as active anchors. This pattern is consistent with Herzberg's hygiene-motivator distinction: off-the-job factors functioned as conditions whose inadequacy could trigger consideration of exit, but whose adequacy did not actively produce intent to stay.

The qualitative data also illuminated the mechanism connecting career factors to ITS in a way consistent with expectancy theory. Participants systematically described their retention decisions in terms of a career calculus: they assessed the firm's overall growth trajectory and innovation pipeline as indicators of future opportunity (valence); they evaluated the fairness and visibility of internal promotion processes as signals of whether strong performance would lead to advancement (instrumentality); and they assessed the quality of leadership and organizational culture as indicators of whether their efforts would be recognized and rewarded (expectancy). This convergent pattern across independent participants provides strong qualitative support for H5.

Table 1 presents all 12 JE factors ranked by salience score from the qualitative phase, illustrating the dominance of on-the-job career-related factors.

Table 1: Top 12 Job Embeddedness Factors by Qualitative Salience Score

Rank	JE Factor	Dimension	Salience Score	On/Off Job
1	Career growth opportunities	Sacrifice	57	On-the-job
2	Organizational culture and values alignment	Fit	53	On-the-job
3	Leadership style and quality	Fit	44	On-the-job
4	Internal organizational network	Links	41	On-the-job
5	Compensation and benefits	Sacrifice	25	On-the-job
6	City of workplace	Fit	25	Off-the-job
7	Family perception of organizational fit	Fit	24	On-the-job
8	Relocation impact on family	Sacrifice	22	Off-the-job
9	Work/life balance (manage my time)	Fit	18	On-the-job
10	Partner work status	Links	16	Off-the-job
11	Skills utilization	Fit	14	On-the-job
12	Interaction with other cultures	Links (novel)	14	On-the-job

4.2 Quantitative Findings

4.2.1 Sample Description

The quantitative sample demonstrated broad geographic coverage across GLOBE cultural clusters, with the Anglo cluster (US, UK) and Germanic cluster (Germany, Switzerland) most represented — consistent with the global distribution of major pharmaceutical headquarters identified by EvaluatePharma. Latin American, Southern European, Northern European, and Asian clusters were also represented, permitting meaningful cross-cultural comparison.

4.2.2 Finding 1 — H1 Supported: Job Embeddedness Predicts PIE Intention to Stay

The basic OLS regression confirmed a robust positive relationship between JE composite scores and ITS. The model explained 37.3% of variance in ITS ($R^2 = 0.373$, $p < 0.01$), with a coefficient of $\beta = 0.287$ ($p < 0.01$), representing 99% statistical power. This explanatory power exceeds the meta-analytic benchmarks for job satisfaction and organizational commitment as standalone predictors (Griffeth et al., 2000), supporting H1 and confirming JET's explanatory relevance for PIE populations.

The extended regression model, incorporating all demographic and organizational controls (gender, age, marital status, family composition, country of origin, country of work, job position, tenure, number of foreign assignments, and organization type), yielded an increased R^2 of 0.482, with the JE score remaining a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.300$, $p < 0.01$). This robustness across controls indicates that the JE-ITS relationship is not confounded by demographic variables.

4.2.3 Finding 2 — H2 and H3 Supported: Career-Related On-the-Job Factors Drive the Relationship, with Family Perception as an Additional Predictor

Multiple regression analysis identified four JE factors as the primary drivers of ITS variance. Three of these are career-related on-the-job factors, confirming H3. A fourth factor — family perception of organizational fit — also emerged as a significant predictor; as discussed in section 5.1.2, this factor is theoretically interpretable as career-adjacent for PIEs, though it was not specified as career-related in the original hypothesis:

Table 2: Primary JE Factors — Individual Regression Results

JE Factor	β coefficient	p-value	Individual R^2
Career growth opportunities	0.773	< 0.01	0.312
Family perception of organizational fit	0.718	< 0.01	0.274
Alignment of personal and organizational values	0.610	< 0.01	0.198
Skills utilization	0.360	< 0.01	0.142

It is worth noting that, while family perception of organizational fit involves a family referent, its content is organizational rather than geographic: the item measures the family's assessment of whether the organization is a good fit for the executive, not their attachment to a location or community. This distinguishes it from the off-the-job factors that showed null results, and explains its classification as an on-the-job embeddedness factor — a point developed further in the discussion.

Critically, off-the-job factors showed minimal and statistically non-significant relationships with ITS. City of the workplace produced $\beta = 0.355$ ($p > 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.010$), and relocation impact on family produced $\beta = 0.037$ ($p > 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.000$). These null findings are theoretically important: they directly contradict JET's original prediction that community embeddedness factors should be meaningful retention anchors, supporting H2 and indicating that the theory requires substantial recalibration for PIE populations.

A reduced model using only the four primary factors achieved $R^2 = 0.556$ — a 49% improvement over the full 12-factor model — confirming H3 for its three career-related predictors and demonstrating that the addition of family perception of organizational fit substantially improves predictive validity. Together, these four factors suggest that a parsimonious career-focused version of JET, augmented by the family organizational endorsement mechanism explored in the discussion, has stronger predictive validity for PIEs than the comprehensive original framework.

4.2.4 Finding 3 — H4 Supported: No Demographic Moderation

Interaction regressions across all demographic sub-groups yielded no statistically significant moderation effects (all interaction terms $p > 0.05$). The JE-ITS relationship did not differ significantly by gender ($\lambda = -0.006$, $p > 0.05$), age ($p > 0.05$), nomadic status ($p > 0.05$), marital status ($p > 0.05$), family composition ($p > 0.05$), tenure ($p > 0.05$), country of origin (all GLOBE cluster interactions $p > 0.05$), or country of work ($p > 0.05$).

This pattern of null moderation is itself theoretically significant. It suggests that career-related on-the-job factors function as universal drivers of PIE retention, independent of demographic background — a convergence of preferences that may reflect the self-selection process by which individuals become internationally mobile senior executives. Support for H4 has important practical implications: it suggests that MNEs can implement career-focused retention strategies without significant need for demographic tailoring.

Table 3: Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis	Prediction	Finding	Supported?
H1	JE positively predicts ITS	$R^2 = 0.373$, $\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.01$	Yes
H2	On-the-job factors dominate	Off-the-job factors non-significant	Yes
H3	Three career factors primary	Three career factors confirmed; family perception additional predictor ($R^2 = 0.556$)	Yes
H4	No demographic moderation	All interaction terms $p > 0.05$	Yes
H5	Career-ambition mechanism	Qualitative data consistent with expectancy logic	Yes

5. Discussion

The central contribution of this study is a population-level recalibration of job embeddedness theory for senior internationally mobile executives: we demonstrate that the community attachment assumptions foundational to JET do not apply to PIEs, constituting an assumption violation rather than a contextual moderation effect, and that PIE retention is instead organized around a career-ambition calculus in which executives evaluate the valence, instrumentality, and expectancy of career progression within the current firm. The sections that follow develop the theoretical implications of this finding across three levels: the recalibration of JET itself and its integration with expectancy theory (section 5.1.1 and 5.1.2), the novel family organizational endorsement mechanism that extends the career-ambition model (section 5.1.2), and the consequences for global talent management and MNE cross-border coordination capacity (section 5.1.3).

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Before detailing the specific theoretical contributions, a word on the generalizability of findings from a single industry is warranted. The life sciences sector was selected not merely as a convenient sampling context but as a theoretically generative one. Global life sciences firms combine three features that make them a particularly informative setting for studying MNE integration through senior executive talent: they are among the most globally integrated industries in the world, with R&D, regulatory affairs, commercial operations, and manufacturing coordinated across dozens of national subsidiaries; they depend on cross-border knowledge transfer and relational continuity at the senior executive level to a degree that few other sectors match; and they compete for a demonstrably scarce pool of internationally mobile senior talent, making retention both strategically consequential and empirically tractable. In this sense, life sciences functions as a theoretical laboratory for globally integrated MNEs rather than an idiosyncratic context — a setting in which the mechanisms linking executive retention to MNE cross-border coordination capacity are visible in their most concentrated form. The career-ambition mechanism identified here is likely to generalize to other knowledge-intensive, globally integrated sectors such as management consulting, financial services, and technology, where the same structural conditions — high executive mobility, scarce cross-border talent, and coordination-dependent competitive advantage — obtain. Future research testing this boundary is encouraged, but the theoretical logic is not industry-specific: it is a function of the organizational conditions that life sciences exemplifies.

5.1.1 Extending and Recalibrating Job Embeddedness Theory

This study makes its primary theoretical contribution by extending JET to a population — senior internationally mobile executives — for whom the theory's original assumptions do not hold, and by identifying the specific ways in which the theory must be recalibrated. Our findings reveal that JET is partially applicable to PIEs: its on-the-job dimensions retain significant explanatory power, and the overall framework is directionally correct in

predicting that embeddedness factors will anchor retention. However, the off-the-job and community embeddedness dimensions that JET originally proposed as major retention forces are essentially irrelevant for this population.

This finding contributes to a growing literature questioning the universality of JET across populations and contexts (Jiang, Liu & McKay, 2012; Hom et al., 2020). Prior work has identified cultural differences in JE structure (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010) and has noted that JET may operate differently for high-performers (Allen et al., 2010). More directly relevant, an emerging body of research on internationally mobile populations has begun to document the systematic erosion of the off-the-job dimension for employees whose careers are defined by mobility: Hussain and Deery (2018) found that off-the-job embeddedness failed to predict retention intentions among SIEs and could paradoxically accelerate departure when community-embedded SIEs faced career-level shocks; Ren et al. (2014) demonstrated that organizational embeddedness predicted actual retention among expatriate teachers above and beyond cross-cultural adjustment; and Andresen et al. (2018) showed that the relative weight of on- and off-the-job dimensions shifted systematically between assigned expatriates and self-initiated movers. Our findings are consistent with this pattern and extend it in a theoretically important direction: whereas prior studies examined non-executive internationally mobile workers for whom the assumption violation was partial, PIEs represent a population for whom geographic community attachment has been structurally subordinated to career mobility across multiple prior relocations, making the off-the-job dimension not merely weaker but substantively irrelevant. This distinction matters theoretically because it shifts the explanation from a contextual moderation effect — off-the-job embeddedness matters less in mobile contexts — to a population-level assumption violation: for PIEs, the construct itself does not apply.

The practical implication of this finding for JET as a theory is that the construct requires population-specific calibration rather than universal application. For mobile executive populations, a parsimonious four-factor model — comprising the three career-related predictors (career growth, values alignment, and skills utilization) plus family perception of organizational fit — achieves 55.6% explanatory power — a substantial improvement over the full 40-item instrument applied to this population, and higher explanatory power than any single attitudinal predictor achieves in the general employee literature.

5.1.2 The Career-Ambition Mechanism: Integrating JET with Expectancy Theory

The study's second major theoretical contribution is the empirical grounding and theoretical development of a career-ambition mechanism that explains how JE factors influence ITS for PIEs. Our qualitative findings reveal that PIEs process their retention decisions through a recognizable expectancy calculus: they assess the valence of career advancement within the firm (as signaled by organizational growth, innovation pipeline, and perceived career ceiling), the instrumentality of their efforts (as signaled by leadership

fairness, meritocracy perceptions, and internal mobility opportunities), and the expectancy that their efforts will be recognized (as signaled by organizational culture, leadership quality, and values alignment).

This integration of JET with Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory represents a novel theoretical contribution. Prior JET scholarship has largely focused on documenting the embeddedness-turnover relationship without specifying the cognitive processes through which embedded employees decide to stay. Our career-ambition mechanism provides this process account for PIE populations, suggesting that the relevant question is not 'how entangled am I in this organization and community?' (JET's implicit question) but rather 'does this organization offer me a credible path to the career outcomes I value?' (the expectancy question).

This integration also illuminates the role of Herzberg's hygiene-motivator distinction in PIE retention. Our finding that off-the-job factors function as threshold conditions rather than active anchors — consistent with Herzberg's characterization of hygiene factors — while on-the-job career factors function as genuine retention motivators, provides empirical support for a motivation-theoretic interpretation of JET that has not previously been developed in the voluntary turnover literature.

A note on transparent post-hoc theorizing is warranted here. Hypothesis 3 predicted that career-related on-the-job factors — defined as those whose salience derives from their signal value for career progression rather than immediate job satisfaction — would be the primary drivers of PIE intention to stay. The qualitative phase identified career growth opportunities, values alignment, and skills utilization as the factors meeting this definition. All three were confirmed as primary quantitative predictors, fully supporting H3. However, family perception of organizational fit also emerged as a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.718$, $p < 0.01$) — stronger in beta weight than the other three combined. This factor was not specified in H3 as career-related. Consistent with norms for transparent hypothesis reporting in international business research (Meyer, Witteloostuijn & Beugelsdijk, 2017), we report this as an additional finding and offer a post-hoc theoretical interpretation in what follows, rather than retroactively recasting it as a confirmed element of the original hypothesis. We argue that this finding extends rather than contradicts H3, and that the interpretation is theoretically coherent rather than opportunistic.

The apparent paradox — a family-related factor among the top predictors despite the broader irrelevance of off-the-job factors — dissolves once the construct’s content is examined carefully. The family perception item does not measure geographic anchoring — the family’s attachment to a city, community, or social network. It measures the family’s assessment of the organization itself: whether the family believes the company is a good fit for the executive. That is a professional validation, not a geographic anchor — and it operates as an on-the-job embeddedness factor in everything but its source.

This interpretation is consistent with Ramesh and Gelfand's (2010) foundational work on family embeddedness, which defines the construct as the extent to which the family feels connected to the organization and views it as a good match for the employee — explicitly an organizational-fit judgment, not a community-attachment judgment. Ramesh and Gelfand demonstrated that family embeddedness of this kind predicted retention across both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, suggesting it captures something universal about the role of family endorsement in career decisions. For PIEs, whose family units have typically sacrificed geographic stability in support of the executive's career, this dynamic takes on particular force: the family's endorsement of the organization functions as a form of career validation that reinforces the executive's own assessment of whether the firm offers a credible career path. Interpreted in expectancy theory terms, positive family perception of organizational fit amplifies the PIE's own valence assessment — the family's endorsement of the organization as a worthy vehicle for career advancement strengthens the executive's commitment to pursuing that advancement within the firm. This reframing positions family perception of organizational fit not as an anomalous off-the-job result, but as a theoretically coherent component of the career-ambition mechanism.

Beyond its role within the career-ambition mechanism, this finding allows us to theorize a novel mechanism through which a known JET factor operates for PIEs: the family as organizational endorsement agent. Family perception of organizational fit has been part of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) original JET instrument since its inception, and Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) demonstrated its cross-cultural predictive validity. What has not previously been theorized is the specific mechanism by which it operates for a population defined by repeated geographic mobility. Prior JET scholarship has treated family-related factors exclusively as off-the-job anchors — sources of geographic stickiness rooted in spousal employment, children's schooling, and community social capital. The GTM and expatriate literatures have similarly conceptualized family involvement in retention primarily through the lens of relocation adjustment and family hardship (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Stahl et al., 2009). Neither tradition has theorized the family as an active evaluator of the organization itself — a source of career-oriented organizational judgment that shapes the executive's own retention calculus. For PIEs, who have repeatedly asked their families to bear the costs of geographic mobility in service of career advancement, the family's endorsement of the organization functions as a legitimating signal: it confirms that the sacrifices required by the PIE career are being directed toward an organization that is worthy of them. When that endorsement is absent — when the family perceives the organization as a poor fit for the executive — it may undermine the executive's own career-ambition calculus by introducing doubt about whether the organization can deliver on the implicit career bargain.

5.1.3 Contributions to Global Talent Management Theory

5.2 Implications for MNE Management Practice

The career-ambition model of PIE retention generates five specific recommendations for MNE talent management practice:

5.2.1 Manage the Valence of Career Prospects

Organizations should deliberately and proactively communicate their growth strategies and their implications for executive career opportunities. PIEs assess career valence primarily through organizational cues — the firm's investment in innovation, its pipeline development (in life sciences terms, its therapeutic area choices), its geographic expansion plans — as leading indicators of future executive opportunity. Rather than allowing these signals to be read implicitly, MNEs should use their strategic planning processes as deliberate retention management tools: clearly communicating what current strategies imply for the evolution of executive roles and the pipeline of advancement opportunities available.

5.2.2 Manage Instrumentality through Leadership Quality and Process Fairness

PIEs' perceptions of whether strong performance will lead to career advancement — instrumentality in Vroom's terms — are shaped primarily by the quality and fairness of direct leadership and the perceived meritocracy of internal advancement processes. Organizations should invest in leadership development that emphasizes performance transparency, recognition of international contributions, and active career sponsorship. Formal internal mobility programs that create visible pathways for cross-functional and cross-geographic advancement can strengthen instrumentality perceptions, as can making the criteria for advancement into senior international roles explicit and consistent.

5.2.3 Cultivate Values Alignment as a Retention Asset

Values alignment emerged as the third strongest predictor of ITS in our quantitative analysis, and among the most prominent factors in the qualitative phase. This suggests that organizational culture — specifically the degree to which enacted organizational values align with PIEs' personal and professional values — functions as a critical retention asset. MNEs should invest in cultural audits that identify alignment gaps for internationally mobile executives and should ensure that the leadership behaviors visible to PIEs genuinely reflect the values articulated in corporate communications. The 'toxic leadership' phenomenon — where senior leaders' actual behaviors contradict stated organizational values — emerged in qualitative data as a particularly powerful driver of exit intention.

5.2.4 Manage Off-the-Job Factors as Hygiene, Not Motivators

The finding that off-the-job factors exert minimal positive influence on ITS — but that their inadequacy can trigger exit consideration — suggests that MNEs should manage relocation support, family adaptation programs, and community integration assistance as

essential hygiene provisions rather than expecting them to generate positive retention effects. Companies should ensure that the relocation package and family support infrastructure meet a threshold of adequacy — sufficient to prevent family-driven exit triggers — while recognizing that investment beyond this threshold is unlikely to generate proportionate retention returns.

5.2.5 Engage Families as Organizational Endorsement Agents

The finding that family perception of organizational fit is the second strongest predictor of PIE intention to stay ($\beta = 0.718$, $p < 0.01$) carries a specific and actionable practical implication that is distinct from conventional family support programming. MNE relocation and mobility functions have historically designed family engagement around the management of transition risk: relocation logistics, spousal career support, children's schooling provisions, and community integration assistance. These provisions are necessary — their inadequacy functions as a departure trigger, as section 5.2.4 establishes — but they are not sufficient to generate the positive family organizational endorsement that our findings identify as a primary retention lever.

Generating positive family perception of organizational fit requires a different kind of engagement: one focused not on easing the family's transition to a location but on building the family's understanding of and connection to the organization itself. In practice, this means deliberately extending organizational culture, strategic vision, and leadership quality visibility to PIEs' families. Concrete mechanisms might include inviting families to strategic events and leadership forums, not merely social occasions; communicating organizational achievements and strategic direction through channels that reach family members; and ensuring that the executives' immediate supervisors and senior leaders engage families directly, not only at onboarding but as an ongoing practice. The underlying logic is that the family's endorsement of the organization as a worthy vehicle for the executive's career is not formed at relocation and fixed thereafter — it is maintained or eroded by the ongoing signals the family receives about what the organization stands for and whether it is delivering on its implicit career promise. Organizations that manage this signal deliberately, treating family organizational engagement as a retention investment rather than a welfare obligation, are likely to generate meaningfully stronger family endorsement and, through it, stronger PIE intention to stay.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should inform interpretation and future research. First, the industry boundary, while theoretically justified, limits the generalizability of findings to the life sciences context. Future research should test the career-ambition

model in other knowledge-intensive, globally integrated industries — financial services, management consulting, technology — to assess whether the pattern of on-the-job dominance and demographic universality replicates across sectors.

Second, the sampling methodology — combining a professional database with LinkedIn outreach — introduces potential selection bias toward executives who are more professionally networked and more open to survey participation. Executives in particularly senior or sensitive roles, who may have the most strategically consequential retention decisions, may be systematically underrepresented. Future research should attempt to access these populations through alternative methods, such as executive search firm partnerships or professional association collaboration.

Third, the cross-sectional design of the quantitative phase limits causal inference. Intention to stay is a well-validated proxy for actual turnover behavior (Holtom et al., 2008), but longitudinal designs tracking the ITS-behavior link for PIE populations would strengthen the causal claims implicit in our framework. Future research should employ longitudinal designs that track PIE cohorts over time, measuring both the embeddedness factors and actual retention or departure outcomes.

Fourth, the career-ambition mechanism we propose, while grounded in qualitative evidence and consistent with expectancy theory, has not been directly tested as a mediating mechanism in a structural model. Future research should develop and test a full structural equation model specifying career progression perceptions as a mediator between JE factors and ITS, with organizational growth, leadership quality, and values alignment as antecedents.

Fifth, our findings raise interesting questions about the antecedents of the patterns we observe. Why do PIEs appear to converge on career-related retention preferences regardless of demographic background? Future research might investigate the self-selection processes that lead individuals to pursue PIE careers, and whether the apparent homogeneity of PIE retention drivers reflects genuine preference convergence or the influence of MNE socialization on executives who have spent years in globally integrated organizations.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to understand what makes senior internationally mobile executives stay with or leave their MNE employers, using job embeddedness theory as a theoretical starting point and a sequential mixed-methods design spanning 16 countries in the qualitative phase and 38 in the quantitative survey. Our findings reveal a clear and

consistent answer: PIEs stay when they believe the organization offers a credible path to the career outcomes they value, and they leave when that belief erodes.

This career-ambition model of PIE retention represents a significant theoretical development. It reveals that JET, while partially applicable to PIE populations, requires fundamental recalibration: off-the-job and community embeddedness factors — central to the theory as originally formulated — are largely irrelevant for executives whose careers are defined by mobility. The dominant embeddedness factors are on-the-job and career-related — career growth opportunities, values alignment, and skills utilization — and they operate through an expectancy calculus rather than a sacrifice-avoidance mechanism. Family perception of organizational fit emerged as an additional significant predictor, interpreted in the discussion as a career-endorsement mechanism consistent with the broader career-ambition model.

These findings have direct implications for how MNEs manage their globally mobile executive talent. The strategic retention levers are not relocation packages or community integration support — they are career transparency, leadership quality, values alignment, and skills deployment. Organizations that manage these factors deliberately and proactively, communicating the career implications of their strategic choices and building leadership cultures that fulfill the career advancement promise implicit in PIE roles, can expect meaningfully stronger retention of their most strategically valuable internationally mobile executives.

In a global business environment defined by the increasing scarcity and strategic importance of senior internationally mobile talent, understanding and acting on these drivers is not merely an HRM optimization — it is a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability Statement

Empirical data involved in this paper can be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author used Claude (Anthropic) in order to improve clarity and readability of the manuscript. AI-assisted language editing tools were used solely to improve clarity and readability. All conceptual development, analysis, and interpretation are the author's own. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Appendix I: Job Embeddedness Items Used in Quantitative Survey

The following 12 JE factors were measured in the quantitative survey. Eleven are adapted from Mitchell et al.’s (2001) original 40-item scale. One additional factor emerged

inductively from the qualitative phase and is not present in the original scale: interaction with other cultures.

1. Career growth opportunities within the organization
2. Alignment of personal and organizational values
3. Leadership style and quality of direct management
4. Degree to which current role utilizes skills and competencies
5. Interaction with other cultures (cross-cultural exposure in current role) †
6. Strength of internal organizational network
7. Family perception of fit between the executive and the organization
8. Compensation and financial benefits package
9. Perceived impact of relocation on family well-being
10. Desirability and quality of current city of employment
11. Work/life balance and autonomy to manage one's time in the role §
12. Partner work status in current location ‡

Intention to Stay (dependent variable) was measured on a 10-point Likert-type scale (1 = definitely planning to leave within 12 months; 10 = definitely planning to stay for the foreseeable future).

† Novel factor not present in Mitchell et al. (2001) original scale, emerged inductively from qualitative phase. § Work/life balance and autonomy corresponds to item 17 of Mitchell et al. (2001): "I have enough time for personal pursuits", adapted for the PIE context. ‡ Partner work status corresponds to item 38 of Mitchell et al. (2001): "my spouse/partner's job is located here", adapted for an internationally mobile population. Unlike the other factors, this item was not measured on the 1–5 Likert scale but as a binary variable: participants selected from a list of employment statuses, coded as 1 (partner employed in any capacity) or 0 (partner unemployed and not seeking work), serving as a proxy for off-the-job links.