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Intercultural Orientation and Support When Living as a Hispanic-American Expatriate in Jakarta

Ana Cristina Valdez Cordovez

Abstrak/Abstract

The population of Hispanic-Americans living in Asia is growing, but there is still a lack of knowledge about their nationalities or cultural background. Past studies and academic research are often too broad as they consider all expatriates as virtually the same. This article will fill this gap by focusing specifically on people originating from Central and South American countries and examining the challenges and adjustment difficulties they face during their assignments overseas. The research was conducted by using a qualitative methodology, hence, in-depth interviews as well as informal conversational interviews were jointly used as methods of data collection, along with theories such as U-curve theory and push-pull theory. The findings indicate that companies need to have a design strategy and full involvement both prior and during the expatriation process, as well as upon repatriation. In addition, it was found that better mechanisms in relation to cross cultural training, good orientation and improved organizational communication for expatriates and their families will enhance their adaptability to and familiarization with the host country environment, which will, in turn, ensure a successful overseas assignment.

Populasi orang Amerika keturunan Hispanik yang tinggal di Asia mengalami pertumbuhan, tetapi masih kurang pengetahuan tentang kebangsaan atau latar belakang budaya mereka. Studi akademis sebelumnya terlalu luas karena mereka menganggap semua ekspatriat sebagai hal yang hampir sama. Artikel ini akan mengisi kesenjangan ini dengan berfokus secara khusus pada orang-orang yang berasal dari negara-negara Amerika Tengah dan Selatan dan memeriksa tantangan dan kesulitan penyesuaian yang mereka hadapi selama penugasan mereka di luar negeri. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, dengan wawancara mendalam serta percakapan informal digunakan sebagai metode pengumpulan data, bersama dengan teori seperti teori kurva-U dan teori push-pull. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perusahaan harus memiliki desain strategi dan keterlibatan penuh baik sebelum dan selama proses ekspatriasi, serta pada saat pemulangan. Selain itu, ditemukan bahwa mekanisme yang lebih baik dalam kaitannya dengan pelatihan lintas budaya, orientasi dan komunikasi organisasi yang lebih baik untuk ekspatriat dan keluarga mereka akan meningkatkan kemampuan beradaptasi mereka dan sosialisasi dengan lingkungan negara tuan rumah, yang pada gilirannya akan memastikan keberhasilan tugas di luar negeri.

Kata kunci/Keywords:

Expatriates, cultural communication, organizational communication, adjustment, training

Ekspatriat, komunikasi budaya, komunikasi organisasi, penyesuaian, pelatihan

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Introduction

Sending an employee to an overseas assignment is not an easy task to accomplish because the process entails a lot of uncertainty. However, there are many companies that choose to do it hoping the experience will be beneficial for the future of the company. The main reason why organizations decide to invest in this process is because they are seeking to expand their profitability. A global presence is so important nowadays, that small and medium-sized companies seek new opportunities in different countries

in order to rapidly increase their market. Other benefits include gaining new perspectives, knowledge transfer, talent acquisition and development for future executive roles or global leaders (Carriker, 2012). Even though expatriation is very popular because of the benefits it can offer, companies must realize that there are many aspects to take into consideration involving this process. When relocating abroad, expatriates face new cultural attitudes and norms which can lead to cultural shock and other problems, this can ultimately affect not only the expatriates, but the companies as well.

An expatriate's failure is detrimental to the future of the organization because it can cause several issues, including high costs, inefficiency in the workplace, and early returns. As Tung's study (1981) outlines, "...expatriate assignments are not always successful & failure ranges are between 16 to 40%" (Tung, 1981: 68-78). This can eventually harm the profitability and reputation of the company, causing damaged client relations, as well as problems with local businesses and the government (Burgess, 2016: 1-5).

Another concerning factor is that not only do some employees fail to complete their assignment overseas in its entirety, but others also underperform in their tasks. Previous studies conducted by Ko & Yang (2011) confirm that "...nearly one-third of the expatriates who complete their overseas assignments did not perform up to the expectations of their superiors" (Ko & Yang, 2011, pp. 158-160). Furthermore, expatriate failure can have devastating monetary implications, as Burgess (2016) states, "...direct costs of a failed assignment can range from \$250,000 to \$1 million" (Burgess, 2016: 1-5).

At the same time, lack of information and assurance when expatriates return to their home country can lead to serious consequences for the company. Studies by Black and Gregerson (1999) indicate that one-fourth of managers who were sent abroad and completed an assignment, left their company, often to join a competitor, only within one year after repatriation (Black & Gregerson, 1999). When companies fail to keep their employees after investing some much money in their overseas assignments, they face substantial losses.

When talking about expatriates, literature and past research focuses mainly on people who come from countries in Europe and North America, leaving aside a whole other group originating from Central and South America. Even though these two geographical locations are comprised of several countries, the term Hispanic-Americans, widely used in this article, englobes many characteristics and elements shared among these countries. Among the strongest characteristics are: the Spanish language, the same process of conquest and colonization, a shared religious be-

lief and common customs and traditions.

A growing population of Hispanic-Americans is now being attracted to South East Asia, mainly because of the overall development of the continent. This has made the destination increasingly popular for overseas assignments and expatriation. One of the countries which embodies this is Indonesia, now considered one of the largest economies in Southeast Asia because of its variety of sectors and economic growth (HSBC, 2013). This archipelago attracts a large number of Westerners in search of better working opportunities and a better understanding of the local business market. However, going to work overseas in Indonesia can present huge challenges for foreigners. Geographically speaking, Indonesia is on the other side of the world in relation to Central and South America, and this distance results in a difference of language, food, culture, among other factors. This, combined with stress, insecurity and uncertainty, are huge factors which can affect foreigner's tenure in their new working environment.

As the majority of expatriates are accompanied by their spouse, partner, or family during their assignment overseas, this group of people were also considered as part of this study. According to Global Relocation Trends in their survey report (2012), 34% of the assignment refusals were caused by family concerns and 17% spouses or partners career (Global Relocation Trends, 2012). In order to mitigate the causes of expatriate and repatriate failure, it is important to analyze the elements that lead to it, and thereby provide appropriate training for them and their families.

This article will unveil some difficulties faced specifically by Hispanic-American expatriates and their families when living abroad in Indonesia. Furthermore, it will give possible solutions for companies to prevent issues from arising in the future and reduce the rates of expatriate failure or early returns when planning to send a prospective employee abroad. On the other hand, expatriates are expected to benefit from this article by incorporating practices suggested by this study so they can feel less stressed, confused and uncertain during this process. The study objectives include: (1) To unveil some of the main impacts of living in a foreign country, and the factors that might lead to success over failure in a job overseas by using proper communication mechanisms. (2) To evaluate some of the ways in which companies can prepare Hispanic-American expatriates and their families in their assignment overseas by using cross-cultural training and guidance from the human resources department.

Literature Review

This article was based on prior academic research which provides concepts that are worth analyzing and that will help create a foundation for expanding on areas and findings which will

benefit the expatriation process. In conjunction with this, two theories were used to support the study.

Some researchers such as Black (1990) highlight the negative effects that stress might have on an expatriate as well as the importance of a support system for an employee on an overseas assignment. He defines stress in his study under three major components, namely, uncertainty, where individuals face certain situations that have unknown outcomes, ambiguity in terms of performance expectations, and finally, lack of control over situations (Black, 1990). Stress leading to expatriate failure, therefore, can originate not only from the components mentioned by Black (1990), but from a lack of stability and support from Human Resources departments towards employees and their families. This is a concept which resonates with Onley's (2014) study where she states that *"...although companies provide some monetary aid in the form of benefits, they tend to leave out social factors that may play a big role in leading to assignment failure"* (Onley, 2014, pp. 1-14).

These factors can be highlighted by a lack of continued support for employee's spouses during expatriation, causing them to feel isolated and lost in a new environment, and this, will ultimately lead to stress and pressure on an employee and will affect his or her performance overseas. Fechter (2001) provides a similar view by presenting the clever metaphor of a "Golden Cage", where spouses – in this case wives – might have a lot of time and financial resources when accompanying their husbands on their overseas duties, but they tend to feel severely limited in their own personal lives (Fechter, 2001). This can be due to the fact that organizations tend to merely focus on the job assignment at hand, leaving aside social and personal aspects that might impact an employee's performance. This is where Loeve (2013) introduces the concept of existential loneliness, which *"...could lead to self-destructiveness, both for expatriates and their family members"* (Loeve, 2013: 35-55). Hence, companies should also focus on appreciating an individual at a more personal level and communicating better, not just based on workplace performance.

Plessis & Beaver (2008), on the other hand, look at the issue through a different lens, focusing not on the problems that arise once the expatriate is on duty overseas, but rather on the issues caused by a lack of appropriate training. The authors assert that training employees for international assignments as well as selecting the appropriate training is key during expatriation (Plessis & Beaver 2008:166-181). In essence, this idea is further supported by Fath, Bartol, Shapiro & Shin's (2010) study which proposes that pre-departure training should include a model in which companies physically mimic potential scenarios that an expatriate could encounter overseas, as this will *"...aid in the examination and analysis*

of their ability to cope, and it will help the companies themselves choose wisely and better prepare their candidate accordingly to succeed in overseas assignments" (Fath, Bartol, Shapiro & Shin, 2010: 434-453). Although Pokharel (2016) shares the idea of the importance of training in his study by stating that that *"...pre-departure training is key in the achievement of success for expatriates overseas"* (Pokharel, 2016: 21-22), he provides a different divide by also placing a strong focus on the important role communication plays in this process. Essentially, Pokharel (2016) states that good communication between the employee and the human resources department once the expatriate is abroad is absolutely imperative to ensure a smooth process. (Pokharel, 2016).

On top of adaptation, training, and communication, selecting the right candidate is a major step. As recognized by Vojinic, Matic & Becic (2007), this is *"...a challenge and a vital task for Multinational companies. After all, the aim of the companies is to meet the requirements of international operations and to avoid high cost of failure"* (Vojinic, Matic & Becic, 2007: 140-145), which unfortunately, tends to place a shadow on other important aspects that might come into play. Another important aspect that companies need to consider in order to avoid unnecessary costs, is the re-entry or repatriation and the importance of addressing this matter in companies that do not want to lose their employees within two years of returning from abroad. As Klaff's (2002) study states, counseling is an essential aspect of keeping the employee. Nevertheless, this should be done with plenty of time in order to give the expatriate, *"...the opportunity to prepare for entering a new phase in his or her life, as well as to prepare for a new position in the home office"* (Klaff, 2002: 40-44).

By analyzing the studies mentioned above, it is clear that they share some similarities among each other as well as with this research paper, but there are various concepts that have not been examined in detail, which this paper will address. Concepts such as culturally-dependent mentoring, training during the entire expatriation process as opposed to just pre-departure, and internal organizational communication techniques, all which play a very strong role in the entire practice of expatriation.

The theories used for supporting the development of this research were U-curve theory and intercultural sensitivity theory. The U-curve theory was developed in 1955 by the sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in order to categorize into four stages the phases people can face when living abroad.

As the illustration shows, during the first three months, foreigners go through the first stage called *honeymoon*. In this stage, as everything is new and different, people feel fascinated with the new culture and excited to learn about the country. The second stage is *crisis*, or often referred

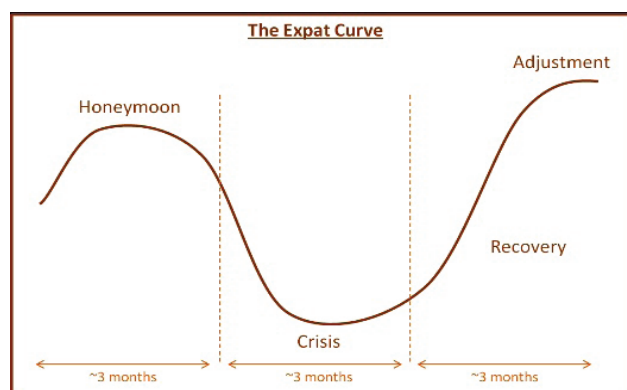


Figure 1. Stages U-curve theory
Source: Foley (2012)

to as cultural shock. In this stage, the initial excitement wears off and people start to idealize and miss home. Foreigners are often frustrated, confused, and unable to function effectively (Foley, 2012).

The third stage is the *recovery*. In this stage, foreigners start to gradually adapt to the new culture and understand, both emotionally as well as intellectually, that there are eminent differences. By this stage, foreigners experience less discomfort and tend to feel more in control in many situations as elements such as social cues have become easier to read and identify. Finally, during the ninth month of the cycle or U-Curve, expatriates go through the fourth stage called *adjustment*. In this stage, individuals are already adjusted to life within a new culture. They now realize and are able to accept that there are both good and bad things within their new environment. Not only that, but also people start to feel able to perform everyday activities without too much effort.

Every expatriate living and working in Jakarta, Indonesia, experiences many changes, as well as a mixture of feelings and expectations which strongly involves differences between two cultures: their own culture and a new culture within the new country they are entering. Even though this theory has its limitations, it still remains as an effective medium to explain adaptation when foreigners live abroad. As it is very relatable to the majority of foreigners, at one point or another, people tend to feel identified with at least one of the stages in the U-Curve.

On the other hand, intercultural sensitivity theory developed by Milton Bennett in 1986 analyzes the ways in which people react to cultural differences. He developed the idea that when peo-

ple progress and become more culturally sensitive, their orientation changes from ethnocentric to ethnorelative (Dabbah, 2016).

Ethnocentrism is seen as one's own culture as the only culture, or the better culture. On the other hand, ethnorelativism is described as "the experience of one's own [culture] and other cultures as relative to context" (IDR Institute, 2014). In other words, ethnorelativism means that one's own culture is seen as equal among the many other cultures that exist. Intercultural sensitivity theory is divided into six stages with the purpose of representing how a person thinks and interprets events that happen around them. This stages are denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration. The first three are represented by ethnocentrism and the other three are represented by ethnorelativism.

As it is shown, the ethnocentric stages are depicted in a red gradient because those stages are characterized by a negative mindset about cultural difference, while the ethnorelative stages are represented in the green gradient because they are characterized by a positive mindset. This theory represents how an expatriate can potentially adapt positively or negatively in cross cultural situations. If expatriates behave in a more ethnocentric view, their job performance might not be as well as expected because it would be quite difficult for them to interact, respect, and communicate with local people.

On the other hand, if an expatriate goes to another country with an open mind and a positive mindset, their job will become easier as they will not have any problems communicating and interacting with people from different cultures. Foreigners who travel with this set of mind, will rapidly go through the adaptation and integration stages because they readily accept the fact that if they are going to live away from home, they need to accept the differences that this entails. Foreigners that embrace these differences in a positive way, will find it less of a struggle to learn the language and, as they become more curious about this new culture, will be more inclined and motivated to learn all about it.

Methodology

This article uses qualitative research because it is suitable for answering humanistic 'why?' and 'how?' questions in order to interpret and understand social life. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative method as "... an interpretive, natu-

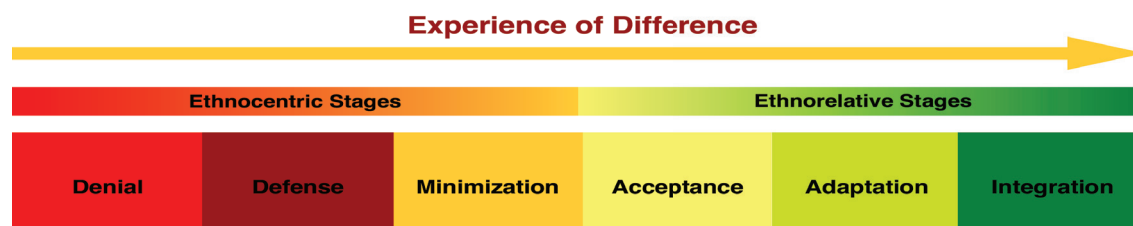


Figure 2. Ethnocentric vs Ethnorelative stages
Source: IDR Institute (2014)

realistic approach to the world, where researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:3). This type of methodology will help gather rich information that can be gained in the form of written descriptions and visual evidence. As Williams (2007) states, this type of method "... allows to investigate the meanings that people attribute to their behavior, actions, and interactions with others" (Williams, 2007: 66).

The qualitative data collected for this article consists of in-depth interviews as well as informal conversational interviews. An in-depth interview is defined as "... a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation" (Boyce & Neale, 2006: 3). It is an individual, one-on-one time with participants to establish rapport, making them feel comfortable (Boyce & Neal, 2006). By doing so, the researcher can explore participants' perspectives and get more insightful responses. On the other hand, informal conversational interviews are defined as interviews that do not use any kind of structure and can take place in a casual setting (Kirkman, 2006). In this kind of interview, researchers use observation as the main tool and tend to take brief notes in order to remember the most important points of the conversation. The main advantage of using this approach is that respondents see it as a simple conversation, therefore these interviews may "... foster low pressure interactions and allow respondents to speak more freely and openly" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

It is important to note that the interviews of this study, both in-depth and informal conversational, were conducted as semi-structured interviews. "*Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail*" (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008: 20-32). These interviews will be open-ended and guided more like a conversation rather than a question-answer session. This helped to explore additional points and change direction, if necessary. To ensure the reliability of the data, a recording device was chosen as an instrument to record the interview session with the permission of informants. All the information shared during the interview were then documented for data analysis. As the respondents are from Hispanic-American countries, the interviews were recorded in Spanish and later on transcribed and translated.

These interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes each and used a descriptive and explanatory research. The in-depth interviews were conducted in formal environments, such as offices and meeting rooms. The informal conversational in-

terviews were conducted in public places such as coffee shops and restaurants. In this type of interview, these types of places were key in order to observe and identify the subject's reactions and attitudes on how they behave in a natural environment involving mundane situations.

The total sample of this research was eight interviewees, which were pre-selected as they come from Central and South-American countries. More specifically speaking, the people analyzed for this research come from Argentina, Ecuador, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and Colombia. Thus, these individuals share the same language, the same historical background, same religion, similar traditions, and culture. At the same time, it is important to note that all of them are either currently working or living in Jakarta, Indonesia, as expatriates.

As this article focuses not only on employed expatriates, but their families as well, among these interviewees there were also two spouses that are not currently working. The other individuals, are expatriates employed in different companies and have different positions. Two of them are embassy-employed individuals, two work in the hotel industry, one is an employee from an oil and gas company and one works in a relocation and real estate company. This sample of individuals helped add validity to the research as the questions asked were presented through various points of view and experiences. The individuals interviewed ranged from the ages of 37 to 62. This age gap is due to the limited amount of Hispanic-American individuals currently residing in Jakarta.

The study was generated using primary and secondary data. This article uses relevant past research to have an enriched literature, but at the same time it includes data collected from primary sources through the in-depth interviews and the informal conversational interviews to provide a more unique and accurate information for the specific problem.

Results and Discussion

Selecting Employees

International assignments are typically very expensive, this is why selecting the perfect employee for an assignment overseas is crucial. Companies that manage their expats effectively, view foreign assignments with an eye on the long-term goals for the company. Hence, having a strong candidate selection assessment can help these companies with expatriate ROI (Return of Investment). More specifically, money invested by these companies - in the form of a well-selected workforce - will eventually be regained through higher profitability, more international exposure, and good reputation.

There are many companies that consider that the best candidates for a job abroad are people who have already lived overseas, because they already know how the expatriation process is.

Nevertheless, this study revealed that prior international experience is not always directly correlated to expatriate success. Despite the common perception, prior international experience is not an important factor to predict a good job performance. A good portrayal in this case is Fabian, an Ecuadorian citizen who has moved various times around the globe due to his diplomatic career. He has lived in Czechoslovakia, Peru, Switzerland, and Poland. Even though he has experience with the expatriation process, he comments that now that he lives in Indonesia, he feels there are profound cultural, religious, linguistic, racial, customary, and dietary differences. In other words, the life experiences he has encountered in Indonesia are far different from those in his previous tenures overseas, which only highlights the fact that previous experience in overseas assignments might not always be a good reference point when selecting a candidate for expatriation.

Similarly, it was found that people who are successful in their job or role in their home country will not necessarily have a good performance overseas. This is because working in a business environment and culture that the person is used to is easier than working in a new environment. Essentially, individuals who perform well at home will be pushed to leave their comfort zone, which in most cases, ends up affecting job performance to a certain degree. The difference in business culture and working environment will force an adjustment which will, in most cases, affect performance negatively until adaptation has taken place.

The last finding, which slightly resonates with the previous finding, states that managers frequently send the wrong people abroad. This is because they select candidates only taking into account technical or job-related skills. Managers sometimes fail to place focus on qualities like tolerance, flexibility, self-confidence and mental or emotional stability, which might have an even bigger effect than technical qualifications. Therefore, a strong analysis of both the job as well as the individual selected for that job are crucial when it comes to expatriation. Employees need to be independent, be willing to change and adapt even in unusual circumstances and deal with diverse groups of people and cultures.

Cross-Cultural and Pre-assignment Training

Having cultural conflicts and too little or no accurate information regarding expatriation in Indonesia can cause several clashes. This is exactly why companies need to help their employees in this transition, and the best way to do so is to have a proper prior preparation and cross-cultural training so that they embark on their journey overseas with less misconceptions, stereotypes and fears.

Once having completed the interviews, it was shown that none of the respondents had prior preparation provided by the company before de-

parting to Indonesia. Two of them were briefed, but only for technical job-related purposes and only one of the respondents visited Jakarta at his own expense before making the move. It is important to highlight that from the interviewees who are working, all have had previous job experience in different places abroad before moving to Jakarta, but none of them in the Asia-Pacific continent.

Companies know that negotiation tactics and marketing strategies can vary from culture to culture. However, most do not believe that the variance is significant enough to authorize the expense of programs and training designed for candidates on international assignments. A good example is Matias, an Argentinian citizen, who spent a couple of years working in the Middle East before moving to Jakarta. He commented that before his move to Indonesia he did not receive any preparation or training by the company, so he then resorted to reading books on his own to acquire some general knowledge about the country. This is something which, unfortunately, did not benefit enough in terms of preparation for his venture to Indonesia. He also asserted during his interview that he would have liked to receive training about the cultural issues and the overall way in which business is conducted in Indonesia. Matias touched on some interesting topics during his interview. He came to find that the biggest difference in regards to the business culture in his home country, Argentina, and in Indonesia, revolves around the sense of belonging and weight of responsibility of one's job. In essence, he claims that individuals in his position (Executive Chef in a luxury hotel) back in Argentina, have a much bigger sense of belonging and commitment. They wake up every day and go to work because of a true passion and desire to serve and fulfill their role. In Indonesia, however, individuals in the same or similar positions go to work not for a passion per se, but to have some kind of income or employment. This is most clearly seen through the fact that a break during work hours is absolutely imperative, and days off are a must, regardless of any upcoming important event. As this example shows, business culture varies among countries drastically and this could have a negative effect on expatriates, so companies still need to invest in training and prior preparation for them.

For positive and long-term results, it was found that training should be specifically focused on each individual, and it must be related to a specific country or area where the expatriate will go. This training cannot be a set model of culture or a training that was used for other occasions, and it should be customized for the duration of the assignment. Besides, as this thesis focuses on people from Central and South American countries, the training should be tailored specifically for them, taking into account the cultural divide between the country of origin and the

host country as well as the degree of difficulty the job entails. Simply put, the bigger the difference in culture and language between host and home country, the harder it is to get adjusted. At the same time, if the new job is much tougher than the one at home, with more responsibilities and challenges, expatriates will have to undergo training and orientation with more rigorous content, including more interaction with host nationals, and a higher level of communication techniques. To determine and design the suitable training, three dimensions have been included in these findings: Cultural, language, and business culture training.

Cultural training is mainly conducted to increase the knowledge about the host country and teach how to interact effectively with members of another culture. It is a process of adaptation to the new reality that must occur long before going abroad. The preparation should include a period of study of the local reality, namely the history, the geography, the customs, the culture of the country, the climate, the food, among others.

Language training aims to narrow the communication gap between cultures. This is why a linguistic preparation should be included for prospective expatriates. By adopting this type of preparation, combined with cultural training mentioned previously, expatriates will have the possibility to interact with local people, which has been reflected in this study as a huge advantage. It was found that if a person is able to engage in a conversation in Indonesian language and has an understanding of the local culture early on upon arrival in the host country, it will be much easier to adapt to the new culture and also to increase the ability to cope and work in an unfamiliar environment. All the interviewees know how to speak English even though it is not their native language. Despite their English competency, however, it was found that this is usually not enough unless the expatriate is relocating to an English-speaking country. Business tasks go more smoothly if the expatriate speaks the local language. Therefore, knowledge of the local language is important for task performance and general politeness and cultural acceptance in the host country. All the respondents expressed that it would have been much more comfortable living in Indonesia if they would have received at least basic courses on the language before their departure. For the majority, this is the barrier that prevents them from achieving complete integration.

The business-culture training helps in running smooth business across nations and cultures. It allows for a discovery of how each individual deals with new and challenging working environments and stressful situations. Training specifically focused on business culture will aid in the improvement of an expatriate's negotiating ability, access to information and effectiveness in the new host country right from the beginning of their tenure. It is necessary to help future expatriates under-

stand that a behavior that is considered a norm in their home country can be considered offensive to the people in another country. Therefore, understanding and respecting these differences are crucial if they want to get accustomed to the new place. At the same time, if the working environment is different, the management style most likely will be different too. Therefore, this type of training will offer meetings between the expatriate and the host-country manager to discuss cultural differences that might affect the success of the assignment. Topics such as tools and techniques to prevent misunderstandings as well as mutual expectations of the expatriate and the manager, must be addressed. It is important to note that this training should also be tailored specifically based on the role of each individual in the organization and their position.

Companies should realize that spending a lot of time and money carefully searching for key people to send overseas can turn out to be a waste of an investment if they use generic and ineffective training programs. Similarly, offering no training at all is certain to obstruct the effectiveness of the expatriation process.

Family Adjustment

There are many overseas assignments that fail, not necessarily because of poor performance, but because of family adjustment issues. When employees move abroad with their families, the adaptation process is more complex because of the additional pressures. This is why companies need to deliver a customized cultural training program not only for the expatriates, but for the family as well. After asking the respondents if the companies had provided a training for their family, all responded that they did not receive any training nor guidance before moving to Jakarta.

Apart from handling the new culture and being pressured to have a good performance at work, when expatriates bring their families, aspects like a spouse's career, children's schooling and relatives back home play a big role in stress and possible failure. The process of accepting the new way of life has to be done by each member of the family that accompanies the worker abroad. When this process does not occur at the same time, it can cause inter-familial problems which can ultimately lead to earlier returns. This is what happened to Fabian, the Ecuadorian Ambassador. Even though Fabian and his family are used to living overseas, each country greatly differs from another, and the places in which he found himself at ease, his family did not share the same feeling and vice versa. To put it into perspective, he shared that when he was working abroad in Czechoslovakia, he obtained great results at work and felt fulfilled. Meanwhile, living a country with a socialist regime posed many challenges and limitations for his wife at the time. On a different work venture in Switzerland, however, the tables were turned. His then wife was very happy, as the more lenient govern-

mental structure of the country allowed for more freedom for her. Fabian did not find himself in a good position at work, and this lack of emotional stability affected the relationship in the end.

When moving to Indonesia, he had already split from his wife and so he moved overseas on his own. This decision came with positive and negative aspects. Fabian expressed that coming alone has helped in the process of adaptation because pressures of the job and the environment affect him only, and the decisions he makes every day do not depend on anybody other than himself. He also added that he now has more time and is more focused at work. On the negative aspects, he said that Indonesia is a complicated place to move to alone because it is difficult to establish a broad agenda of interpersonal relationships with Indonesian or foreign people. He shared, "...at most you can think about going to a meeting every weekend, no more than that because the time it takes you to move from one place to another is too long to just get together and drink coffee" (F, Valdivieso, personal communication, March, 24, 2018). Along with this, he stated that there are times when he has felt alone without his family and that he definitely can feel the distance of being on the other side of the world. "There have been many times when I needed support, but I do not have it here. I needed someone to talk to here at home beside the walls" (F, Valdivieso, personal communication, March, 24, 2018).

Factors such as the length of notice prior to the transfer, the location of the international assignment, and family relationships are what companies need to take into account when sending expatriates with their families overseas. Giving expatriates enough time notice prior to the relocation is important, so they can prepare themselves and their families mentally and physically. In addition to this, they need to become familiarized with the new country and sort out their living situation, school, and other basic elements.

Another finding was centered on the fact that many individuals working abroad struggle with their spouse's career. This happened to Mercedes from Argentina, as she was not able to work because her husband's employer could only provide her with a Housewife Visa. She shared that just by the second week of living in Indonesia, she was very irritated with her partner already, and the fact that she was often home alone made her feel useless. This is why it is a good idea for companies to provide counseling and assistance by giving the spouse other options, so they can have something to do while living abroad.

In terms of training, it was found that experimental training is the best method for families, because it includes practical exercises, workshops and simulations. Nevertheless, a pre-assignment visit is the best way for the expatriate and family members to get a first genuine taste of the host country and what they will be facing during the placement. Nicolas, an Ecuadorian citizen, is one

of the only respondents who visited Indonesia before his expatriation. He commented during his interview that visiting the host country first was the best way to answer some basic questions and to have a better concept of the country and culture. Topics like how to take public transportation, how and where to buy simple house amenities, finding local landmarks in order to know his way around, and mainly how people react to particular situations are things that Nicolas was able to discover during his visit.

By using experimental training, especially a pre-assignment visit, the family can have a better notion of what to expect. This allows families to return home with more elaborate or profound questions that can be clarified during pre-departure training. Even though this could be a big expense for the company, not providing any training or any pre-assignment visits could result in a bigger loss of income due to assignment failure.

Mentor/ Local guide

Aside from training and preparation, a local mentor was found to be the most useful help for expatriates and their families once they arrive in Indonesia. This person should be preferably local due to the fact that this can provide for more accuracy when answering questions, giving advice and in-depth information.

The mentor can be useful especially during the first months, as he or she can provide activities such as a local tour which may include walking around the local community, familiarization with local supermarkets, international schools, hospitals, shopping places, government departments, banks, and other places of interest. At the same time, this person can be a great help for families when addressing cultural aspects and giving advice on topics like how to dress appropriately or how to greet people. In other words, the mentor would provide specific information on appropriate behavior based on the culture of the country.

After the interviews, it was discovered that all respondents agreed that having someone to assist and support them, especially during the first months, would have been really helpful. The majority of respondents commented that having a guide raises the chances to stay in the country, to avoid problems and early returns. As Nicolas expressed in his interview, "...having a reliable person that helps you understand the local reality as well as the culture and language can be a great support to know how one can operate in a new environment and achieve a faster adaptation" (N, Nermalceff, personal communication, March, 28, 2018). Aurora, a Cuban national that works in Santa Fe, a relocation and real estate company, shares a similar view to that of Nicolas. In her interview she said that, "... it is extremely beneficial to have someone like a mentor to become a figurative bridge between ones' perceptions or what one is used to, and the true local reality of a host country" (A, Castro, personal communication,

March, 30, 2018). There are books, maps, articles and of course, the internet, which can all be very helpful when researching about a place. However, having a person in the form of a mentor can provide a sense of mental and emotional stability. A book or webpage might say it is customary for employees in Indonesia to take a long break during their shift or not show up to work due to a simple stomach ache, but a mentor can physically provide support by reassuring personally that it is indeed acceptable in the workplace. Overall, a mentor will assist an expatriate during the initial relocation process and will play a key role in communicating how local people think and act, so that expatriates can better understand, accept and adapt to their customs.

Support in the New Location – Human Resources Department

It is important to note that having a local mentor does not mean the company should provide less assistance. Continuous support and training throughout the assignment period are important to ensure a successful adaptation and develop a true sense of commitment to the job. International assignments are a process and not a one-time situation. Thus, training initiated prior to the transfer has to keep on after relocating overseas. Lamentably, the only time companies pay special attention to their expatriates overseas is when something goes particularly wrong and by then, it can sometimes be too late.

The responsible party for supporting expatriates once they arrive, is the human resources department of the host organization. Being immersed into another culture without being prepared may cause foreigners to feel the need for support. If the support is not there, confusion and uncertainty about the culture may create significant cultural shock. This is why, they need to have good communication with the human resources department in the home country, in order to keep track on the process of adaptation of their employees, as well as to deal with any necessary arrangements so the process goes as smoothly as possible. They should be the ones responsible for arranging an introductory meeting to present the expatriate to the team, on top of putting together an induction program for the expatriate and accompanying family members upon arrival to advise or notify them of essential information related to working and living conditions in the country of service.

The local HR department should help by accompanying the expatriate to relevant local authorities, assisting in searching for a house, giving information regarding the visa process and general living conditions. It is important to have constant meetings, especially the first months after arrival. A good way to keep expatriates included is to have organized activities during one day where specialists on cultural issues give speeches about cultural differences, and where representatives might speak about the new job role. Accompanying family members should be welcome to partici-

pate in these activities, as this will give them the opportunity to extend their social network.

In terms of the human resources department from the home country, they have the obligation to continuously check up on the expatriates they have sent overseas. For this to happen, a good support and constant communication is crucial. Interviews revealed that the majority of expatriates do not have a good communication with the company at home. As Deborah, a Panamanian citizen mentions, the communication can be really hard because of the distance and time difference between Indonesia and Panama, nevertheless, when they do communicate everything ends up being only about the job. In other words, communication is limited to business and job monitoring, but it does not reach a more profound personal level. They have never asked her about how she is doing in the new country, or if she needs anything in particular. Something very similar was addressed by Fabian, as he stated that the communication has not been fluid between him and the HR department in Ecuador, his home country. There has not been any kind of support and understanding towards his situation. The major decision makers in the home country have never travelled to the host country themselves or been anywhere overseas. This has led them to be more close-minded and less understanding towards Fabian's situation. For instance, when Fabian needs something specific, the HR department in Ecuador sees it not as a necessity but rather a luxury.

Repatriation

If the company has spent a lot of money on sending expatriates to their international assignments it would be wise to protect their investment and keep those expatriates in the company for as long as they can. Managers at the home country find it difficult to understand that returning expats need help readjusting after just a few years away. In fact, some companies even feel it is not necessary to support or train employees in regards to repatriation. If companies do not keep expatriates on site until the end of the assignment, they can feel unappreciated, which in turn, might lead them to decide to leave the company which consequently can be very expensive for the company. As Mercedes mentioned in her interview, living abroad for some years can dramatically change things, as upon returning, the expatriate expects things to be exactly where they were left off. She shared, "... my biggest fear is the day we return to Argentina. We have been living outside for many years now that it will really difficult for us to go back. My group of friends continued with their life, my family continued with their life, but one puts everything in pause the moment one leaves. Everyone continued their day to day, but the perception of how everything should be, is still in the past so it can be really difficult to go back" (M, Goni, personal communication, February, 22, 2018)

Being away, even for a year or two might mean that many changes have taken place, both in and

out of the office. Companies often go through management changes, and this could have happened while the employee was away. In fact, companies might have also reorganized its reporting structure or even modified its policies and overall business culture. Upon arrival, the employee will have to deal with new decision makers within the company, creating uncertainty and sometimes coping difficulties. In regards to the personal aspects, employees sometimes must face changes with their family or friends' lives. Perhaps some family members might have moved away, friends had a different partner or family children are not that young anymore. On the other hand, expatriate's kids might have a very tough time settling back into school and perhaps having to make friends again. In the end, the reality is that a lot of changes take place while the employee is gone, and that is something that must be considered by companies before sending them back.

It was found that a good alternative for companies is to have a secure position for expatriates when they return home. This position should not be the exact same as it was before as the expatriate left for the overseas assignment, as it would feel like a demotion. It is important to assess the skills that the expatriate has gained during their experience overseas and for that expats should provide a lengthy report which indicates both achievements and shortcomings and also their career goals. The company should then use it to assess how the expatriate has evolved or improved while overseas and which available job opportunities fit the employee's capabilities and the company's needs upon a return back home.

Not only should the organization assist the repatriated with job-related duties, but it should assist by facilitating the transition in the employee's personal life. One option is to offer debriefing programs for both the expatriate and their families upon their return. In this way, common repatriation difficulties can be overcome. After asking interviewees if they think these kind of programs would work, they all agree, recognizing that it will give them the opportunity to examine and evaluate their sources of anxiety and frustration. Even though, it could be claimed that the programs might be costly, effective and responsible organizations should be willing to make the investment as it is a small price to pay in order to retain individuals who have sharpened their skills, gained cultural insight and experience to make improvements for the company.

Conclusions

Sending an employee on an overseas assignment to a country like Indonesia may not only entail traveling thousands of miles, but it will also demand drastic changes in regards to day to day life and working-culture. The expatriation process is not an easy task to accomplish because it entails an experimental approach and factors such as work and family adjustment; a lack of both train-

ing and effective communication is what makes this transition full of uncertainty and stress.

There are still many companies that fail to place a high emphasis on training for expatriates as they normally consider it unnecessary. This is why, unfortunately, expatriate assignments are not always successful and early repatriation is common.

Adapting to a host culture involves many challenges. Therefore, strong organizational support systems within the company through the human resources department, as well as a good organizational communication are both key in the expatriation process. Companies need to help expatriates from the start until the end of the overall adjustment if they want positive results.

Even though this entire process can be costly for companies, it is better to invest in training than to have expatriates fail on their assignments. Failure is proven to be damaging, not only financially, but also in regards to reputation, decreasing the possibility of expanding and improving as a company.

Another factor to consider is the fact that the majority of expatriates are accompanied by their spouse or partner during their assignment overseas. This is why companies need to provide the same kind of support for them as they do for their employee. A family or spouse that feels comfortable and at ease will provide stability for the expatriate and will more likely lead to successful results in their job.

While training prior and during an overseas assignment, as well as receiving mentoring, good communication and support, organizations often fail to see that a big part of the expatriation process is actually related to repatriation. It might be difficult for an expatriate or his/her family to adjust to a new culture and environment, but being away from home for a few years might actually cause issues with adaptability and adjusting upon returning. Companies sending employees overseas should continue to support these individuals—and their families—by providing prolonged support as well as better job opportunities for the employee, this is mainly because the employee would have gained a number of skills while abroad which should set him apart from his/her local coworkers.

As highlighted by this study, the entire process of expatriation entails various elements. From hesitation and frustration to depart, adaptability and adjustment issues, failure to complete and assignment, family altercations, to even issues going back home. Companies seeking to grow and improve by increasing their global presence through expatriation should be weary of all the aspects involved. Overall, investing in training programs and support systems for expatriates might be result to be a beneficial investment for a company when handled and monitored correctly.

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