

## Cross-Culture Issues in Global Work Place Expatriates at Global Work Place

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**Abstract:** This paper describes issues related to cross-cultural measurement, and the assessment of aboriginal/expatriate people. We discuss implications as well as suggestions for completing assessments with different cultural groups. The issues described can be generalized to the measurement and assessment of aboriginal/expatriate people across the world. This paper reports on a study conducted among a group of expatriates in few organisation through expats blogs. The objectives of the study are to examine challenges faced by the expatriates and adjustments made to the challenges. Cultural clashes between foreign and local values are inevitable in which expatriates experience challenges. The study highlighted the psychological, socio-cultural and work challenges. Adjustments were based on individual initiatives based on the psychological and mental strengths of the expatriates, combined with efforts of peer expatriates, parent firms and host organizations. Cross-culture issues can be overcome through business education and appropriate training programmes to expatriate.

**Keywords:** cross-culture, expatriates, aboriginal, acculturation and globalise.

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### Objectives of study

- To recognize and respect cultural diversity.
- To know about expatriates issues at work place.
- To examine challenges faced by the expatriates and adjustments made to the challenges.
- To learn appropriate, effective ways to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- To know how to be diplomatic and sensitive to the dynamics of a cross-cultural workplace.
- To know how to be adept in a new environment.
- To understand ways to cope with constant change.
- To know about importance of business educations on cultural issues.

### Methodology

The study is mainly based on published information relation to cross-culture and expatriates in magazines, books, reports, journals and internet based expatriate blogs information. This paper attempts to analyze the impact of expatriates on the work culture and suggests the ways and means to overcome the issues faced on account by business education and appropriate trainings for the expatriate.

### Limitation of Study:

- The research is done only on few expatriates' blogs.
- The paper is based on only data available in books, magazines journals and web sites.
- The study is done on limited time.
- The evaluation of cross culture is dilemma to particular business.

### I. Introduction

As is known, the world is becoming nowadays a global village, in the sense that the technological achievements of this modern time have brought people closer together. This also means that people from different parts of the world and with different cultural backgrounds are working and communicating together. This fact is in a way interesting, but dealing with people from different cultures requires knowing the cultural diversities; for instance the way we deal with them, what we say and what we should avoid saying, how to communicate and to be aware of the cultural taboos because what is accepted in one culture might not be accepted in another. What applies to every day communication among cultures applies to communication in the workplace. Working with people in an organization requires dealing with certain issues such as motivating employees, structuring policies, cultural issues and developing strategies. In this case, there has to be a kind of understanding of the cultural diversities in order to apply the afore-mentioned issues in the workplace.

To start with, there has to be a good definition of the expression “culture” which can be defined as the inherited values, concepts, and ways of living which are shared by people of the same social group. To make the definition clear, culture is divided into two kinds; the first is generic culture which is a shared culture of all humans living on this planet. The second is local culture which refers to symbols and schemas shared by a particular social group.

### **Expatriate**

The term expatriate refers to “an employee sent by his or her company in one country to manage operations in a different country”, and by so doing, organizations can send their own employees from their parent countries or even from third countries to a host country. The process of adjusting and adapting to a culture other than one’s own is called acculturation.

### **1. The Concept of Workplace Culture**

The co-location of workers at each work site generates a workplace culture which is simply a shared understanding of norms, practices and values. Because the workers are co-located, behaviours and norms are visible to each other and there is more opportunity to engage in informal chit-chat leading to behavioural knowledge sharing. Thus, proximity and visibility enables a form of cohesion among the workers at a site that we are calling as the workplace culture. We will analyze GLOBALIS’ data further to shape and sharpen the workplace culture construct and demonstrate its role in analyzing behaviour in global work.

**1.1 National level:** It is well known that national cultures differ at the level of unconscious values which are acquired during childhood and these national cultures are stable, the afterward changes that occur are practices whereby the underlying values are left untouched.

**1.2 Organizational level:** Organizational cultures differ at the level of practices which can be described as superficial and they are to some extent manageable. These organizational cultures differ from one company to the other within the same country.

**1.3 Occupational level:** This kind of culture comes between the national and organizational cultures; getting into an occupation such as teaching requires the social values acquired coupled with the practices of the organization.

**1.4 Gender level:** Gender differences are recognized within the same culture, there is what can be called a men’s culture that differs from a women’s culture. Technically, men and women have the ability to perform the same tasks at the workplace, but they have differences when it comes to responding to the symbols used in society. The differences between men and women highly depend on the national culture of the country.

## **II. Cross-cultural Differences in Multi-national Corporations**

Geert Hofstede is a sociologist who studied employees working in a multi-national corporation (Reynolds & Valentine, 2011). He described four ways that can help in analysing and understanding other cultures as follows:

**2.1 Individualism vs. Collectivism:** In some cultures, the individual is emphasized while in others, the group is emphasized.

**2.2 Power distance:** The culture that believes that organizational power should be distributed unequally.

**2.3 Uncertainty avoidance:** Hofstede found that some cultures tend to accept change as a challenge while others don’t.

**2.4 Masculinity vs. Femininity:** Hofstede himself tends to reject the terms “masculine” and “feminine”. These two terms should be overlooked in order to value other issues which are more important to the organization such as achievement and assertiveness.

## **III. Cross-cultural Management**

According to Nancy Adler (2008), she gives a good definition of cross cultural management: “Cross-cultural management explains the behaviour of people in organizations around the world and shows people how to work in organizations with employees and client populations from many different cultures.” The importance of cross-cultural management lies in the on-growing co-operation between companies in different countries where difficulties may arise because of the different cultural backgrounds. One of the well-known researchers in

the field of culture and management is Geert Hofstede (1980). Therefore, Hofstede's work is considered indispensable to any study on culture and management. He developed what is called a "dimensional approach to cross-cultural comparisons." As the world is witnessing nowadays "globalization", more and more companies are being run in different places all around the world. This will result in more activities all over the world which result in communication across cultures. Culture is something that human beings learn and as a result, learning requires communication and communication is a way of coding and decoding language as well as symbols used in that language. For example, humans communicate through many means other than language such as facial expressions, gestures, body language, posture etc.

#### **IV. Cultural Intelligence**

In order to live within a specific culture, the individual is supposed to adapt with the differences in that culture. According to Peterson (2004), Cultural Intelligence is the ability to exhibit certain behaviours, including skills and qualities, which are culturally tuned to the attitudes and values of others. Cultural Intelligence covers other areas such as:

**4.1 Linguistic Intelligence:** It is helpful to learn about the costumers' native language and using international business English can increase effectiveness when communicating with persons of other cultures.

**4.2 Spatial Intelligence:** It involves the space used during meetings and introductions.

**4.3 Intrapersonal Intelligence:** It involves awareness of one's own cultural style in order to make adjustments to international counterparts.

**4.4 Interpersonal Intelligence:** It includes the ability to understand other people and their motivations. In simple words, when dealing with people from another culture, one may know something about their language, the space to use while dealing with people, awareness about your culture and how to apply one's cultural behaviour with that of the other culture.

#### **V. The Effect of Cultural Values on Management**

Cultural values have a considerable effect on the way managers run an organization. The following figure presents the differences which managers may encounter when managing business at an international level.

##### **5.1 Time focus (monochronic/polychronic)**

Time is perceived differently in every culture according to its traditions, history etc. According to Hall and Hall (1990), the two authors distinguish two types of time systems: monochronic and polychronic. In cultures where monochronic time system is followed, time is used in a linear way where people perform one activity at a time according to a pre-set schedule. Moreover, their focus is on information rather than people. On the other hand, in cultures where polychronic time system is used people focus on more than one task and depend less on detailed information, and schedules are open to change. Also, people take priority over schedules.

##### **5.2 Time orientation (past, present and future)**

Cultures differ concerning their perception of time orientation. For instance, cultures concerned about the past are those that value past traditions in their culture. Their plans are focused on whether they are in concordance with the history and traditions of the company. While cultures concerned about the present are those interested in short-term gain. Future focused companies are those concerned about long-term benefits. An emphasis on cultures oriented towards the past is made by Hall and Hall (1990), whereby countries such as the Far East, India and Iran stick to the past. On the other hand, the urban US culture is oriented towards the present and short-term future and the culture of Latin America is oriented to both the past and present. As a result, past oriented companies emphasize traditions and build on them long-term plans. While future oriented companies emphasize longer-term plans and results.

##### **5.3 Power (hierarchy and equality)**

In the workplace, the level of power is emphasized in cultures which are oriented to hierarchy. The employees implement the directions of their manager and the role of the manager is to take decisions and distribute the work for employees. In some cultures, inequality is accepted and there are no attempts taken to change the situation. While in other cultures, inequality is considered as something undesirable and therefore it requires reform. Equality oriented cultures do not emphasize hierarchy although it exists in order to facilitate relations within the organization. As a result, managers are involved in the work itself rather than people whose

role is to give directions. Also, managers are not the ones that take the decision on their own; the decision making is done at the level of all employees involved in the issue.

#### **5.4 Competitiveness (Competition)**

Management may well encourage competition in an organization, particularly where the environment is that of a “free market”. In some organizations, competition among employees is encouraged in order to make the employees more responsible and more creative.

#### **5.5 Activity (action: doing or being)**

Some companies are considered to have “doing cultures” where the focus is on developing measurable, time-framed actions. In “being cultures,” the emphasis is put on the vision the company strives to achieve.

#### **5.6 Space (private or public)**

Cultures differ in their perception of space, what some cultures consider as private, it might be considered as public by another culture. There is also what is called “personal zone”; cultures differ when it comes to proximity during a conversation. In case this personal zone is crossed, this will cause discomfort. In some cultures, some personal or family issues are discussed openly, while in other cultures where privacy is of high importance there has to be high formality in conversations where the focus lies on business rather than on personal issues.

#### **5.7 Communication (high-context or low-context)**

According to Hall and Hall (1990), they defined the concept “context” which is the surrounding circumstances in which communication occurs. They also made a distinction between high context and low context as follows: A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context communication (LC) is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. For example, Japan is considered a high context country because information is implicit in the text while the USA is considered a low context country because the information is given clearly.

#### **5.8 Structure (individualism or collectivism)**

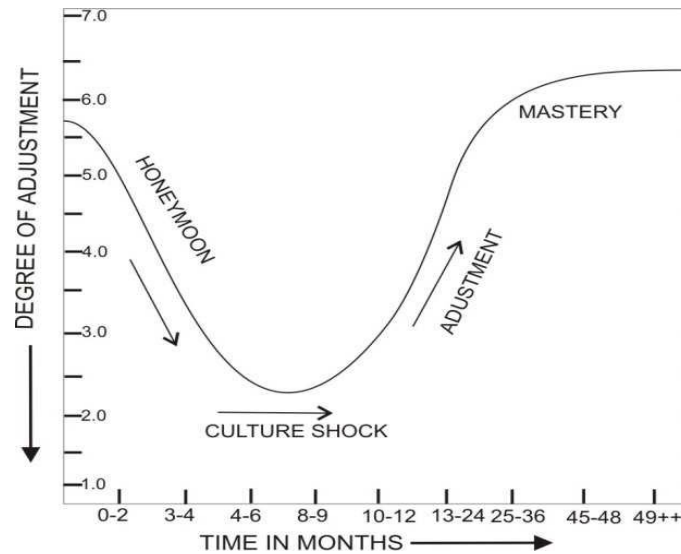
The term “structure” refers to organizational structure in business. Individualism refers to the culture that focuses on the individual over the group. In this case the individual is supposed to be more self-reliant and there is less need to resort to the group and there is no difference between in-groups and out-groups. Collectivism refers to the shared values of the group where the interests of the group overweigh the interests of the individual. Individualism and collectivism are two opposite concepts. Hofstede (2005) studied individualism and collectivism in different countries. The result was that the United States ranked first in individualism where parents bring up their children on self-reliance. American children were raised to express their own opinions and ideas; they are responsible for their choices when it comes to their college study as well as job choices. In other cultures, such as the Japanese, emphasis is placed on the group approach rather than on the individual approach to all aspects of life. The Chinese and Malaysians also value the group approach and the family. From a personal point of view, cultures that value individualism will have more independent managers and employees who show responsibility towards any task they have to perform which may lead to creativity. On the other hand, in cultures that value collectivism managers and employees in the top management tend to delegate authority to other employees. This may result in some problems in the organization whereby the task is undertaken by the others.

### **VI. International adjustment of expatriates**

The international adjustment is the degree to which the expatriate feels comfortable living and working in the host culture. The international adjustment is divided into four stages Viz., honeymoon stage, culture shock, adjustment and mastery.

- **Honeymoon stage:** The expatriate and his family members are fascinated by the culture of the host country, the accommodation, the transportation facilities, educational facilities to the children etc., during the early state of arrival. This stage last up to 2-3 months period.
- **Culture shock stage:** The company takes care of the new arrivals and completely neglects the previously arrived employee and his family after three months. During the stage, the employee has to take care of himself and his family members. Expatriate gets frustrated, confused and unhappy with living and working abroad. His social relations are disillusioned during this stage. He gets the shock of the existing culture.
- **Adjustment stage:** The expatriate slowly learns the values, norms, behaviour, of the people, their culture etc. He slowly adjusts himself to the culture of the foreign country.

→ **Mastery stage:** The expatriate after adjusting himself with the culture of the foreign country, can concentrate on working efficiently. He learns and adopts to the new environment completely and becomes like a citizen. He behaves and functions like a citizen at this stage.



## VII. Suggestions and Recommendation

- ✓ To increase the greater awareness about cross-culture at work place
- ✓ To provide the importance of business education
- ✓ To provide appropriate training to the expatriate and their family to cope up the cross-culture issues at work place. Many organisation providing the different training methods and programmes to the expatriate and their family members like class room training, vestibule training, cross-culture issues and cross-culture challenges at work place.

## VIII. Conclusion

This paper presents the cross-culture issues and challenges faced by the expatriate at the work place. These issues and challenges are because of different cultures like languages, communication, gestures, space, times, religions, body languages, verbal and nonverbal communications and so on. It is true that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures is a valuable resource to be protected and developed, and that a major business educational effort is needed to convert the diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding. In this comments the expatriates highlighted that in the 21st century globally employable graduates are needed who do possess intercultural empathy. This is already an urgent need in the business world where multicultural encounters have become a common practice. The cross-culture issues and challenges can be overcome with the help of business education and expatriate training programmes.

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