Cross-cultural conflict and expatriate manager adjustment
An exploratory study

Avan Jassawalla, Ciara Truglia and Jennifer Garvey
*Jones School of Business, State University of New York at Geneseo,
Geneseo, New York, USA*

Abstract *A key reason for the return of expatriates before the official end of their foreign assignment is the uncertainty and frustration resulting from poor cross-cultural adaptation. The literature provides this general, normative view without much to say about the interpersonal conflict expatriates experience in the workplace abroad caused by cultural differences. Our exploratory study finds that conflicts with co-workers in host countries occur frequently causing high stress and discomfort, and provides three specific sources of conflict as recounted by sample managers. The implications of our findings include: selecting expatriate managers with high emotional intelligence, providing extensive pre-departure cultural training that consists not only of cultural facts but also interpersonal skills such as active listening, conflict management, and ethical reasoning, utilizing sensitivity training techniques to better prepare managers for new situations, and sending the expatriate on one or two pre-sojourn visits to familiarize themselves with the host culture and workplace norms even before the actual expatriate assignment begins. An additional implication is training the host-country workers, particularly those who will work most closely with the expatriate manager, on home country cultural beliefs and workplace norms. We aim to stimulate managerial thinking and further research on the workplace conflicts that challenge expatriates managers.*

When expatriate managers return before the official completion of their overseas assignments, the stress and low job-satisfaction resulting from culture shock is often blamed (Newman *et al.*, 1978). Many who stay until completion also reportedly struggle with cross-cultural adaptation and operate at decreased capacity (Cavusgil *et al.*, 1992). This results in lowered return on investment for the firm, and lowered self-esteem and slower career development for the expatriate (Yavas and Bodur, 1999). Why does this happen? From what is currently written, one of the principal causes seems to be the inability of expatriate managers to deal with cross-cultural adaptation – a broad term that includes issues related to differences in culture and language, living conditions, uprooting spouses and families, and working harmoniously with co-workers with different cultural backgrounds (Yavas and Bodur, 1999).

Our recent study of expatriates suggests that while a host of cross-cultural issues are important, none is more important than issues of interpersonal conflict arising from cultural differences. The general notions in the literature about the impact of cross-cultural adaptation fail to reflect this reality. For those interested in the specifics

of managing or preventing conflict situations during their foreign assignments, the literature offers little in the way of actionable insights.

In this paper, we take the initiating steps towards understanding interpersonal conflict as the key component of cross-cultural adaptation. Based on an exploratory study of 13 overseas assignments described by eight expatriates, we discuss how interpersonal conflict in the workplace is inherent to cross-cultural experiences of expatriates, identify some of its causes, and show what firms do and fail to do. Our small sample size, consistent with our exploratory intent, generates learning aimed at stimulating thinking and identifying useful avenues for new research and not generalizable findings.

Current thinking about cross-cultural adjustment

Current thinking about expatriate-related cross-cultural adjustment is normative, and has much to say about what expatriates and firms must do. For instance, scholars agree that expatriates must:

- reach a cognitive and emotional comfort level with the values, attitudes and behavioral practices considered the norm in the host culture (Caligiuri, 2000; Tung, 1987); and
- integrate the cultural assumptions of the host-country and adapt to the differences that exist in the physical, psychological, and communication environments (Wright *et al.*, 1996).

Scholars recognize that:

- distinguishing between more and less acceptable behaviors, language, and expressions can cause stress, and require unlearning of their existing and learning of new response strategies appropriate to the host cultures (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000); and
- the inability to learn new behaviors and respond appropriately during interpersonal interactions, scholars caution, raise the likelihood that expatriates will reject the host culture, develop a divisive, "us versus them" mindset, and return early (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000).

The literature has identified some of the important personal characteristics of expatriate managers associated with successful cross-cultural adaptation including openness and sociability (Caligiuri, 2000), and tolerance for ambiguity (Yavas and Bodur, 1999). However, much of the blame for poorly performing expatriates is placed on the firms. The notable difference in the planning horizons and the more extensive training firms provide to their expatriates are identified as the chief reason for Japanese and European expatriates to succeed more with cross-cultural adaptation than their American counterparts (Tung, 1987). Moreover, scholars blame firms for (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000):

- selecting managers for their technical skills and experience while ignoring issues of personality; and
- poor pre-departure training that is often focused more on cultural facts and figures and less on the nuances of interacting with others.

There is a clear tradition of research on conflict management across cultures that examines how people from different countries express and manage conflict in the

workplace. For instance, scholars have compared and contrasted organizational conflict as it occurs in Middle-Eastern countries and in Turkey versus the US (Elsayed-Ekhouly and Buda, 1996; Kozan, 1997). Differences in cultural artifacts, such as language, religion, geographical location as well as in cultural beliefs and values, are identified as some of the key causes for the differences in conflict management styles. The norm-heavy writings about differences across cultures and in the styles of conflict management, however, fail to speak to the practical realities of expatriates in our study who, in a general way, know the merits of openness and of understanding and adapting to other cultures, but are nevertheless hampered by interpersonal conflict situations arising from cross-cultural differences. Moreover, the state-of-the-art precludes drawing of literature-derived hypotheses that can yield practical and generalizable insights, and implicates an exploratory study. Our research therefore, focuses on exploring key cross-cultural conflict issues of expatriates to identify and generate interesting ideas that deserve additional academic scrutiny.

Research methodology

Through in-depth interviewing, we studied 13 overseas assignments experienced by eight former expatriates from nine firms (i.e. one expatriate recalled two experiences with two separate firms, and several recalled more than one experience in the same firm). The participants had served in Brazil, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Switzerland, UK, and Venezuela. Seven participants (five males and two females) were US citizens, who had spent one or more years on foreign assignments for American firms. One participant was a current expatriate from the UK, and assigned to his British firm's New York City branch for the past 1 year. Participants represented high-technology manufacturing, consulting, banking, and software development firms. This reflects a convenience sample based on multinational companies and expatriate managers who were available and willing to be interviewed in person.

We asked several open-ended, literature derived questions to each participant during our depth-interviews:

(1) What was the nature of each expatriate assignment you experienced?

(2) What were the key challenges you faced during each overseas assignment?

(3) What were the cultural differences you found most challenging?

(4) Which personal strengths did you find most helpful during your overseas assignment?

(5) What types of training (and other types of support) did you receive from your firm?

(6) What are your recommendations for future preparation of expatriate managers?

While these questions were asked to each participant, and in the same order, the interviews were strongly shaped by the probing questions we posed to seek further details and actual examples. We also practiced active listening aimed at motivating each interviewee to provide more descriptions and explanations. As active listeners, we suspended judgment, listened attentively, used eye-contact, and paraphrased each interviewee's responses to indicate our understanding and to provide opportunities for clarification or additional information.

Each interview lasting about 45 min was tape recorded and transcribed. The content analysis of interview transcripts, based on guidelines provided by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Miles and Huberman (1994), was highly iterative. We initially coded the transcripts and identified broad commonalities and differences. Then we identified the emerging themes and patterns in the data and reinforced them with actual instances from the transcripts (i.e. using managerial responses). To ensure inter-coder reliability, we separately analyzed the transcripts, compared and contrasted the findings from each interview, independently derived themes and patterns, and collectively reconciled these as presented next.

Learning

When we asked managers about the most challenging aspect of their experiences while on foreign assignments, all recount the difficulty with interpersonal conflict situations they encountered in the workplace as a result of cross-cultural issues. While we expected and anticipated discussion of problems associated with adjusting to new living conditions, managing spouses and family in new environs, and living with new cultural norms and mores, we found issues of cross-cultural conflict focal in their consciousness. Moreover, despite the literature's strong advocacy for training, its actual incidence in practice was dramatically low. To fully explicate the cross-culturally rooted interpersonal conflict experiences of expatriates, we next focus on the chief causes of conflict, how managers coped, and what their firms did or did not do.

Why interpersonal conflict occurred

We can cluster the multiple causes expatriates attribute to their experience with interpersonal conflict into three broad categories, each referring to culture-related differences in perceptions, norms, and practices. We highlight these clusters next.

Differing perceptions of time, urgency, and implementation. The difference in work ethic is strongly recounted as a cause of interpersonal stress and conflict. Our sampled expatriate managers describe several specific instances from their own work experiences overseas as examples of cultural differences related to time, urgency and implementation. For instance, they note, American managers are:

(1) accustomed to working toward project deadlines, without much regard to the hours they devote; and

(2) willing to start early and work well into the night to complete projects, and expect others to do the same.

In contrast, working overtime during "unsociable hours" (as one sampled manager describes) is frowned upon in many European countries. While this statement based on narrow personal experience can represent an overt generalization, it is validated by other voices as well. For instance, both American managers expatriated to the UK, and UK managers assigned to the New York City office recount this issue as a cause for conflict. A manager returning from South America notes that his co-workers emphasized the importance of spending more time on social and family life than on work. The British manager in the New York City, describes the attitude of workers in the US as "very ambitious and driven" – contrasting sharply with what he is accustomed to in the UK.

Conflicts also arise because of the cultural differences related to the sense of urgency around producing results. American managers assigned to the UK and Germany express frustration over the length of time taken for new ideas to gain acceptance, and for new policies to take effect in corporate Europe. One manager describes this as the constant insistence on testing each idea already proven to be effective in the US environment – that among other things – inordinately delays implementation. Another expatriate reports her frustration with long-drawn decision-making processes in Europe. Describing how her co-workers spent longer time during the discussion phase to ensure that the final decision would be accepted and implemented by all concerned, the expatriate manager notes:

> The decision they (co-workers in the host-country) typically make is very, very similar to what you would make, but the way you get there is very different. In the UK they see the glass as half empty. So, you're sitting there and thinking: "don't you think we can do anything? Maybe there's a possibility we can do this or that?" On the flip side, they would say that Americans are too ... happy. We don't think about anything, we just go off and do it – which, in some ways, is really how we do a lot of things. We just go do it and then figure (things) out on the way. If it's not quite working, we fix it and (it's) sort of – ready, fire, aim sort of approach. Eventually, you'll end up in the same place but the path or how you're getting there is gonna be different and you can become very frustrated.

The insistence on "testing" ideas introduced by expatriates emerges as an often-experienced passive-aggressive resistance from host-country managers. Conflicts and frustrations appear to also arise from the differences in attitudes toward taking action. Our sample uniformly suggests that expatriates display a greater bias for action than local managers – at least when they find themselves in foreign locations. A manager recounts his frustrations with the extensive amount of time spent talking about alternatives versus the American norm of "just doing it".

Negative stereotypes. Negative stereotypes held by co-workers against Americans are cited as a cause of conflict experienced by nearly every American manager in our sample. In South America, one sample manager explained that expatriate Americans are viewed as "gringos (who) come in and stay for two to three years, fill their pockets, and leave". American expatriates recount problems associated with the feeling prevalent among employees in host countries who view them as exploiters of the local, underdeveloped economy, without a similar interest in investing in the local community. One manager recalls the hostility she faced because she was perceived as "spying for corporate headquarters". This caused conflict in the initial stages of her overseas assignment because co-workers jumped to the conclusion that she would be insensitive to the needs of their division.

Ethnocentricity also seem to cause cross-cultural conflict. For instance, American managers in Europe report facing the resentment of local staff, who felt belittled by the prospects of taking orders from an "outsider". One participant, recounting his problems arising from the attitudes of his South American counterparts who opposed centralization of decisions by the American headquarters, and were insistent on designing their own unique procedures, reports:

> The hardest thing for me was the local mindset of: "we are different from everybody else, we've got to do things differently". For the sake of efficiency, you want to execute the manufacture and sale of (your) product worldwide in a relatively uniform way. I wouldn't say they (host-country co-workers) didn't agree but they always wanted to test the proven success

that came from the US. The US policies were always suspect when they came overseas. (They would say) "Just because it's worked in the US doesn't mean it's going to work here". And I suppose there's some truth in that, but it became almost a knee-jerk reaction. So, that was challenging.

The cynicism about American greed and arrogance that expatriates encountered appears closely linked to the strongly negative attitudes toward US foreign policy that exist in other parts of the world. One expatriate in our sample with experience working in Asia explained that anti-American sentiments bubbled just below the surface. Any political incident led to angry expressions and arguments from his co-workers. After a US bombing of the Chinese embassy, this expatriate manager located in Hong Kong found himself in a heated office debate that led to extended tensions with his colleagues.

Another negative stereotype commonly held is that Americans are overly pushy and opinionated. Host nationals, our sample reports, hold this negative view because in their own countries, ostensibly, greater emphasis is placed on listening, discussion, and consensus building. Many expatriate managers faced conflict early in their assignments because this negative stereotype pre-existed, and hurt their attempts to gain credibility for their ideas. Some sample managers shed light on the basis for the stereotypes. One expatriate explained that this often occurs because "Americans go overseas thinking they're the best, they're there to teach, to instruct, or to manage from a position of superiority". Another expatriate described how he had observed many US expatriates "get together and bash the locals".

Ethical dilemmas. Sampled managers note that conflicts arise not just because the legal systems in less-developed countries differ from those in the US, but there are clear differences in how laws are enforced. While bribing governmental officials, providing cash incentives to buyers and sellers to obtain special treatment are illegal in most countries, these laws are less rigorously enforced in some. Moreover, because legal systems are complicated and often obscure in some countries – it is impossible for American expatriates to ensure that all their actions are unquestionably legal. In other words, when laws are too many and unclear, virtually any action taken by the expatriate (and the host organization) can be defined as a transgression of some legal boundary. This raises the unique specter of bribery to ensure that one is not continually prosecuted or suffers the wrath of local governmental officials with high nuisance value. Expatriates often face conflict because local customs and business ethics abroad clash with those in the US. Bribing governmental officials, an accepted custom in parts of Asia and Latin America, a manager recounts, caused his greatest ethical dilemma. One sample manager who had worked in South America, describing similar ethical dilemmas arising when American managers face subtle pressure to use local, but substandard, suppliers or products and services, noted:

Another challenge, a big one for me, was different value systems. All things being equal, if your product or service was as good as a local one or the local guy could do things you could not do (you would use the local company). Competing on a level playing field is very difficult and (the government insisted that) we would not want to do things that local companies can do. Let's say (these are) bribes or certain incentives or tax incentives by the government to use local firms. (These were seen as) perfectly understandable, perfectly ethical. So, it was a combination of outright bribes and corruption, and incentives that the government out rightly offered local firms.

How managers coped
Although conflict frequently occurred, expatriate managers report that they learned to cope and eventually win the cooperation and respect of colleagues in the host-country. They relied on several personality traits, or acquired and internalized skills and abilities to overcome conflict situations. Good listening skills, loyalty toward the firm, open-mindedness, and going native (i.e. interacting and living with locals versus living in "American Ghettos"), and developing a strong sense of humor, are recounted as useful initiating steps. Two managers note that the time they and their spouses took to learn the language of the host-country before going overseas represented a useful step. Three other inherent or acquired abilities are also cited as useful.

First, for instance, managers recount the importance of flexibility, i.e. the inherent or acquired ability to think on one's feet, being able to shrug off disagreements as "these things happen," taking the initiative to talk to co-workers to better understand them, willingness to learn and adapt on the job, patience with the new situation, and, as one manager expressed, understanding that "your way isn't the right way, it's just one of the ways to do things". A sample manager, recommending flexibility and patience, explains:

> I am not a very patient person by nature but I became a patient person particularly in Asia, where it can take Asians literally days to get around to the point. To plunge right into business is considered impolite, rude, so you sit through countless hours of showing one another's pictures of families, talking about your background. On the whole, Asians truly enjoy that (and) I think for them it creates a bond with an otherwise completely foreign person – this person looks different, and this person talks different. And sharing one's pride in one's family creates a bond. I think for them it sets the tone of what they like to . . . a phrase they like to use is "mutual benefit". It levels the playing field.

Second, a personality trait manager recounts as particularly useful an infectious sense of optimism, i.e. their inherent or acquired ability to focus on the net benefits – i.e. the trade-off between what they get, and what they give up – during their foreign assignment – that allows them to deal with conflict situations. For instance, managers note the opportunities for monetary incentives (housing and hardship allowances), career advancement, and travel to new places tends to offset the negative aspects of expatriation including interpersonal conflict. Third, managers recount their well-developed sense of adventure and the enjoyment they derive from interacting with new people. A manager explained how just plain smiling at his new co-workers – regardless of the facial expressions he encountered – helped create a positive experience.

What support firms did or did not provide
Six of the eight managers note that their firms provided no formal training for their sojourns. One recounts his firm's "sink or swim" policy that places the responsibility of learning about the foreign culture squarely on the manager. One manager notes that the firm provided two books to read on her own. Two describe their personal initiative to learn the new lingua franca. One describes his personal initiative to contact his foreign counterpart and discuss the details of his new assignment. One manager notes that he received an overview of the foreign division upon his arrival in the host-country. Two managers note that they were familiarized with the business practices of the host-country via a 1-day training seminar prior to departure.

What the managers recommend

Managers make two types of recommendations – one aimed at the individual expatriates and other aimed at the firms. Managers suggest that individual expatriate managers should:

- visit the foreign location with their spouses beforehand to gain realistic perspectives on what to expect when they eventually go there to work; and
- adopt an optimistic posture, expect the unexpected, listen, appreciate the differences, and increase sensitivity and tolerance toward others.

Similarly, sampled managers recommend that multinational firms should:

- select people carefully, based on their personalities and their ability to adapt to foreign cultures, in addition to their technical problem-solving skills and knowledge;
- make clear what is expected of the expatriate manager; and
- provide a domestic mentor, who serves as the chief liaison and a proponent during the employee's absence.

Implications

While our learning concurs with the literature that has stressed: selection based on personality traits, pre-departure training, a focus on adjusting to new housing (and other) arrangements for family, and developing new interpersonal relationships in the host environment, expatriate voices provide new perspectives into areas that deserve additional academic scrutiny. Because they find themselves unprepared and often overwhelmed by conflict situations, sample managers stress the importance of preparedness. Their voices point to the naivety of selecting expatriates based only on technical skills and a track record of success in the home environment, and expecting a replication of their performance in foreign locations.

In terms of value added implications from our study, there are four issues we can derive from the integration of our learning with current thinking in the literature. Two caveats are important, however, at this juncture. First, because they emerge mostly from the voices of American expatriate experiences in foreign locations, our implications are more likely to speak to American businesses with operations overseas than to others. Second, because they emerge from an exploratory study, our discussions are not presented as generalizable implications but as issues that deserve the attention of managers and scholars.

Selecting expatriates

Concuring with the literature, we learn that expatriates' personality matters. Flexibility, optimism, enthusiasm and humility seem to help expatriates adjust and manage interpersonal conflict. This learning concurs strongly with current views of expatriate selection which conclude that:

- majority of firms use technical competence as the sole selection criterion but technical skills are insufficient in helping expatriates with adjustment issues (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000);
- managing cross-cultural conflicts relies more on personality traits (Caligiuri, 2000); and

- selection and training combined can help expatriate managers with cross-cultural adaptation (Odenwald, 1993).

Similarly, our learning also concurs with writings that show the importance of openness and sociability (Caligiuri, 2000), patience and tolerance for ambiguity (Yavas and Bodur, 1999), self-confidence and willingness to change (Forster, 2000) as personality traits of successful expatriates.

What the literature has yet to adequately discuss are practical issues of actual expatriate selection, i.e. the literature has failed to significantly address the practical question focal in the minds of HR managers: how should potentially successful expatriates be identified? In this regard, we find clear advantages in integrating the thinking that has occurred in the area of emotional intelligence (EI) with our learning about better selection of expatriates (Goleman, 1998). For instance, Goleman contends that while IQ has long been used as a measure of a manager's competence, EI is equally good if not a more important indicator (Dulewicz and Higgs, 1999). Moreover, the potential advantages of integrating this stream of thinking are clear from the evidence that shows enhanced performance of salespeople (Sojka and Deeter-Schmeiz, 2002), accountants (Kirch *et al.*, 2001), and leaders (Cooper, 1997; Goleman, 2000; Sosik and Megerian, 1999) upon the application of EI concepts.

Table I shows the links we derive between Goleman's EI dimensions and the personal traits and abilities of expatriates we identify from our study as those that relate to effectively managing interpersonal conflict in cross-cultural situations. For instance, applying the notion of EI to our context suggests that expatriate selection should be based on: self-awareness; i.e. the ability to recognize one's own emotions, moods, and reactions; self-regulation, i.e. one's intuitive ability to control or express emotions, suspend judgment, and deal with ambiguity; self-motivation, i.e. one's resilience and

Components of EI	Skills and abilities that increase cross-cultural adaptation
Self awareness	Knowledge of differences between home and host cultures, realization of the impact of cultural values on performance, admitting initial difficulties in adjusting to new cultural norms and seeking help
Self regulation	Being open to new perspectives, managing uncertainties with self learning and improvement, resisting the urge to impose own values on host culture, understanding the link between host culture and cross-cultural conflicts, being flexible and patient when uncomfortable situations arise
Self motivation	Maintaining optimism in the face of new challenges, effectively handling stress, seeking new ways of achieving assignment goals, consciously balancing advantages of overseas assignments against challenges and stressors
Empathy	Listening skills, sensitivity to differences, asking questions and seeking to understand before reacting, willingness to change so as to show respect for others, openly sharing information that provides others with more understanding, respecting opposing view points
Social skill	Being outgoing, smiling and friendly, building friendships, seeking common ground despite cross-cultural differences, being open-minded and engaging in discussion rather than passing judgment, socializing and communicating informally to build rapport and future cooperation

Table I.
EI components and
selection criteria for
expatriate managers

ability to persevere despite obstacles; empathy, i.e. one's ability to place oneself in another's shoes and understand differences in values and perspectives; and social skill, i.e. one's ability to build relationships by seeking commonalities and friendships regardless of differences.

How can the EI of potential expatriates be assessed in practice? For drawing inferences about the EI quotient of potential expatriates, there are clear advantages in conducting face-to-face interviews and posing situational and behavioral questions over paper-pencil tests (Goleman, 1998). In such interviews, questions are posed in the form of hypothetical situations that expatriates are known to face, and candidates are asked to imagine themselves in such situations and describe the actions they are most likely to take (Latham *et al.*, 1980). Behavioral questions are also used to inquire into actions candidate have taken in the past. The premise of behavioral interviews is simply stated: past actions are good predictors of future performance (Janz *et al.*, 1986). Other avenues that Goleman (1998) recommends for evaluating the EI quotient of potential candidates include surveys of previous and current co-workers and supervisors. In sum, therefore, while scholars have studied expatriate selection and many have advocated selection based on personality traits, our findings implicate two specific areas for future research:

(1) actual selection methods used by multinationals to assess personality traits and interpersonal skills; and

(2) link between expatriates' EI and success in handling workplace conflicts overseas.

Training expatriates

Our study identifies several new areas for training the better prepared expatriate. Current thinking advocates two types of training:

(1) language training for improved communication in the host environment (Andreason, 2003); and

(2) cultural training for intelligent responsiveness in different psychosocial and cultural milieus (Tung, 1982; Yavas and Bodur, 1999). Descriptions of best practices in expatriate training are also reported in the literature (Tung, 1987).

There are, however, two issues relevant to real-world expatriate experiences that remain unaddressed. First, expatriate training in any meaningful form seems largely absent in practice, resonating with the writings of Forster (2000) and Leiba-O'Sullivan (1999). We find that pre-departure training, when it occurs, is often limited to provision of materials to familiarize managers with facts about the host-country and the key aspects of their overseas assignment. Second, while we can see how pre-departure training in language and culture can be useful to expatriate managers, such training seems inadequate for managing some of the key challenges of their day-to-day reality; i.e. unexpected situations that require extensive renegotiation, ethical dilemmas that defy solutions, and the loss of composure and temper that can severely impede effectiveness. Provision of facts and figures, and language training, however, does not make a training program. Our study implicates pre-departure training in skills such as active listening, ethical reasoning, and conflict management. Additional research and new thinking about training is clearly needed for developing well-prepared expatriates.

In this regard, the use of sensitivity training to help expatriates suspend judgment, listen, reason, and win hearts and minds in foreign locations is clearly implicated. Our sample suggests that they need to learn:

- new and effective ways of building relationships and trust with people in foreign locations; and
- informed perspectives into how host nationals define and interpret situations, and why they behave the way they do in light of their culture-bound interpretations.

While scholars have referred to the importance of such sensitivity training (Cavusgil *et al.*, 1992; Dowling *et al.*, 1999), and computer-assisted learning modules seem available (Cushner and Landis, 1996), practice has trailed the thinking in the literature by a wide margin. We urge future research on:

- types and methods of pre-departure training that firms actually provide their expatriate managers; and
- contrasting those expatriates who receive interpersonal skills training versus those who do not in terms of their cross-cultural adjustment.

Training host-country nationals

At least a notable cause of conflict that expatriates experience in host environments seem associated with negative stereotypes of American managers held by host-nationals. It is curious to find the literature largely placing the burden of learning and adaptation on the expatriate; i.e. "when in Rome, do as do the Romans". Our study highlights not just the importance of training expatriates for effectively engaging unexpected and other situations in the host environment, but also the importance of training key host nationals for interacting and collaborating with visiting expatriates. There is some support for this line of thinking in the literature (Odenwald, 1993). For instance, Vance and Pederon (1993) define such training as an ethical imperative for global firms because training key host nationals can help lower stress and increase the expatriate's effectiveness. Such training is known to help reduce discriminatory treatment that expatriates often face, and which can lead them to reject the host culture (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000). Additional research is needed in firms that do provide training to key host nationals on the nature of such training as well as its impact on expatriate managers' cross-cultural adaptation and success.

Pre-sojourn visits

Managers we interviewed report great benefits and learning when the company sponsored a visit for the expatriate and his/her spouse to the host-country months before the start of the overseas assignment. Such a visit provided them the opportunity to become intensely aware of:

- The nature and extent of culture shock that can occur, and the nature and extent to which one's familiar vocabularies, expressions, and modes of conduct fail to produce desired responses from host nationals; and
- Reinforce the commitment to intensify/accelerate language training. Pre-departure visits, we learn, serve as trial runs that help managers get a second chance at making first impressions (Forster, 2000; Yavas and

Bodur, 1999). Additional research is needed to gain an understanding of the cost and benefits of such pre-sojourn visits over the long-term.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural adaptation is the biggest challenge that derails expatriate success. Our study sheds light on one key area of adaptation and provides multiple guidelines for human resource managers and senior executives hoping to ensure expatriate success. Managerial voices seem to urge firms to:

- focus on helping expatriates understand and manage conflict situations arising from cross-cultural differences;
- use emotional intelligence assessment as a vital part of selection;
- enhance training content and methods to prepare participants for the day-to-day reality of interacting with host nationals;
- train key host nationals for collaborating with expatriates; and
- create opportunities for lower-stress, familiarizing pre-sojourn visits.

Additional exploratory research that can access a wider array of experiences and voices promise to shed light on these important components of managing vital human resources in foreign locations.

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