Paradoxical Experiences Of Expatriate Managers In Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Although adjusting to a foreign culture is not easy, being immersed in another culture is an experience lived by a growing number of persons in the globalized world. It is intriguing that organizations often blame the individual when expatriate assignments fail (Deresky, 2002; Hodgetts, Luthans, & Doh, 2006) rather than recognizing that others may lack understanding of what it is like to be immersed in another culture. A study of Canadian expatriate managers who have worked for non-government organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia is presented. The research focused on interpreting the lived experience of expatriate managers using their own words and meanings. Written descriptions from participants were obtained and analyzed/synthesized using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The central finding is that individuals experience paradoxical ways of being when immersed, living and working, in another culture. The enhanced understanding obtained may result in alterations to present human resource management practices and strategies utilized in facilitating and supporting expatriate assignments and, thus, benefit expatriate managers and organizations alike.

INTRODUCTION

Today's global economy requires a growing number of expatriates to engage in international activities that result in increased contact of different cultures. The tasks of negotiating, contracting, managing, advocating and teaching can be daunting enough at home; however, when overseas, in an intercultural setting, they can be overwhelming. It is generally agreed that not all is perfect in the expatriate world, a fact of concern for all organizations that manage expatriates. Concern is heightened when recognizing that "ineffective expatriate performance and premature returns have been found to relate primarily to an inability to adjust to the foreign environment" (Andreason, 2003, p.42).

Whilst the expatriation process has been described and predicted in the literature, there exists a dearth of literature and a lack of understanding of the lived experience of being immersed in another culture. Osland (1995a, p.xv) pointed out that "most HR managers have never lived abroad, and some mistakenly treat expatriates as if they were no different from domestic employees". In fact, expatriate managers "have, and their management involves, issues and problems that go beyond those of most other employees … yet we know less about expatriates and the management of expatriates than we do about other employees" (Brewster, 2002, p.128).

To enhance understanding of what it is like being immersed in another culture, it is argued that much can be gained by obtaining the expatriate managers' perspective. With this in mind, the current research was developed as a phenomenological study designed specifically to give expatriate managers an opportunity to describe what life is like for them. The findings will provide future expatriates with valuable insight into their possible experiences, and may help present and former expatriates to make sense of their experiences. Also, the findings will enhance the understanding of human resource managers, particularly those who have never lived the experience, and will provide opportunities for them to alter strategies employed by organizations in supporting expatriate managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a comprehensive review of the literature, (Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl, & Osland, 2002) wrote that research on expatriation has increased significantly during the past twenty years; however, the subjective nature of the expatriate experience has not been researched adequately (Osland, 1995b) as scholars have relied on positivistic research methodologies (Landis & Wasilewski, 1999; Mendenhall, 1999). There are relatively few qualitative research studies completed on expatriation coupled by a definite "shortage of qualitative studies focusing on the situated individual's experience of expatriation" (Richardson & McKenna, 2002, p.68). A leading researcher in expatriation, Mendenhall (1999) argued that further emphasis on studying expatriation through the lens of alternative paradigms would capture important insights and illuminate expatriation from a more complete perspective.

The NGO sector, including secular development organizations and religious organizations, has a long history of managing offshore personnel (Anderson, 2005), reaching back many centuries with the Catholic Church (Brewster, 2002). NGOs employ large numbers of expatriates in numerous countries throughout the world, particularly in the developing world. Despite this lengthy and significant presence, NGOs "form something of an un-researched 'black box' which does not appear in the international human resource management literature" (Brewster, 2002, p.129); a certainty, yet one that is unanticipated somewhat. Indeed, in the extant literature, there is scarce reference to expatriate management of NGOs (Anderson, 2001; Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001; Lewis, 2002) due to the existing research mostly having been focused on expatriation in relation to multinational corporations. Intriguingly, this study involved participants who are Canadian and are employed by NGOs in Indonesia.

For Canadians to be effective in Indonesia, it is necessary to be aware of the significance of the differences between home and host cultures. There is no disagreement that "doing business in Indonesia will undoubtedly be different than it is in Canada" (Farry, Jasin, Soma, & Tobing, 1995, p.9) as indicated by Graham (2004, p.20) who wrote:

At times it all looks so simple and reasonable. The doomsayers must surely be wrong. How can such well traveled urbane people who speak English, laugh a lot, wear Western clothes, handle computers with ease and SMS with style be that much different? Surely not. Surely so. It's not simple; it is unreasonable; it is deceptive. What you see is not what you get. That's true for us and for them.

An important consideration is that it might take several years to learn and internalize another culture. Unfortunately many international organizations unfairly expect expatriate managers to hit the ground running or at least within a matter of weeks (Forster, 2000).

Many Canadian organizations do business in Indonesia and numerous Canadians are employees of these various MNCs and NGOs. Farry et al. (1995, p. 21) said "the NGO sector, which generally plays a positive role in the development of Indonesia, is growing". Whereas Canadians do not try to do things for the Indonesian people, they do work with them through a collaborative effort to help them to increase their capacities to do things for themselves (Crewe & Harrison, 2000). Thus, it is necessary for Canadians, in the process of making productive partnerships, to be immersed in the Indonesian culture. Immersion in the Indonesian culture involves living with paradoxical situations.

A leading qualitative researcher and scholar, Osland (1995a; 1995b; 2000) described how paradoxes are common experiences of expatriates, although paradoxes have been rarely empirically studied. Osland (1995b, p.50) described the concept of expatriate paradox in the following quotation, "A paradox is a situation in which a person faces contradictory, mutually exclusive elements at the same time. Paradoxes occur because expatriates are mediating between two cultures and two organizations".

Some other references of expatriate paradox in the literature include that of Suutari & Brewster (2001) who referred to paradox when describing how expatriates must be adequately immersed in the local country environment to be effective, but at the same time remain unattached in order to represent and act on the needs of the home county office. Another scholar, Richards (1996, p.557), wrote about the paradoxical qualities whereby "the stranger is physically near but socially remote, in that he or she will have different values and ways of behaving" as encountered when one lives the experience of being immersed in another culture.

To more fully understand expatriation, it was necessary to obtain the expatriate managers' perspectives by engaging in research of their lived experiences regarding what it was like being immersed in another culture. According to the literature, *lived experience* is the world as persons directly experience it and describe it in their descriptions (van Manen, 1990). To further elaborate, Keen (1975, p.21) ascertained that "the lived experience must be our guide in understanding other people and what things mean to them".

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative inquiry was the approach undertaken for the current research because subjective human experiences cannot be easily quantified. The phenomena associated with one's lived experiences are indicative of deep and personal interactions of persons in real situations. Therefore, the chosen methodology is structured to provide the opportunity for participants to describe their own personal experiences of being immersed in another culture. In this way, the method of inquiry was implemented within a context of discovery rather than within the quantitative context of verification (Giorgi, 1985). The research employed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) for utilizing and interpreting written descriptions that were collected from the research participants.

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method was developed for the purpose of discovering and articulating "meanings being lived by the research participants that reveal the nature of the phenomenon being researched" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p.252). Giorgi believed that a written or verbal description of a situation could form the basis of a research study when the meaning of these descriptions is the focus rather than the seeking of objective facts. One guards against distorting the language of the research participants from the actual dialogues or written responses by dwelling with the material, by immersing oneself with the whole experience. Thus, the researcher employed Giorgi's method because it is a systematic way to uncover and discover the meaning of the lived experience (van Manen, 1990) of research participants who have experienced the phenomenon being researched. The method includes specific ways of formulating research questions and explicit procedures for data collection and analysis/synthesis, as well, guidelines for participant sampling. As evidenced in the literature (Baker, Arsenault & Gallant, 1994; Aquino-Russell 2003; Hetherington 2002; Kraynie 1985; Ng & Sinclair 2002; Purola & Aavarinne 2001), Giorgi's method generally provides rich data descriptions and insight into the unique experiences of persons who lived the phenomenon.

SAMPLING AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The 15 research participants were experienced expatriate managers, drawn from 12 different NGOs, with an average of 7.5 years spent living and working in Indonesia. Most had at least one university degree and many had been employed by more than one NGO. Several participants previously had been employed as expatriate managers in other countries in addition to Indonesia, which is the country of focus in this study. These participants were "selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth" (Patton, 2002, p.46). Silverman (2000, p.104) argued that "purposeful sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested". A good research participant has the experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to participate, and is willing to take part in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Giorgi's method encourages the researcher to have prior association with the research participants as it enhances the quality of the selection process, thus prior professional association with the research participants existed in this study. The participants were selected on the basis that they were Canadian expatriate managers, had experience with the phenomenon of being immersed in the Indonesian culture, had worked for an NGO while living in Indonesia, had lived and worked in Indonesia for more than two years, could read and write in the English language, and had a willingness to correspond with the researcher. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms, chosen by the research participants, are used instead of real names in any reference in this paper.

DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS

"The most straightforward way to go about … research is to ask selected individuals to write their experiences down" (van Manen, 1990, p.63). Thus, in the current research, data in the form of written descriptions were collected from 15 participants. This enabled the researcher to capture the descriptions verbatim and in their

entirety with no chance of inaccuracy as a result of transcription procedures. Further, Malinski (1999, p.201) recommended that email is an excellent way to "obtain written descriptions of a lived experience from research participants" so the descriptions were collected directly, via email, from the participants, who were located primarily in Indonesia while the researcher was living in Canada. Each research participant was asked to respond to the interrogatory statement: 'Please write about an experience or situation that best describes what it was like for you to live and work as an expatriate manager in Indonesia'. The statement was designed to draw out, without leading, the feelings and thoughts of expatriate managers and research participants were left to write as much, or as little, as they saw fit. Following receipt of the research participants' written descriptions, the researcher then undertook Giorgi's process (summarized by Aquino-Russell (2003, p.99-103) as described in Table 1.

Table 1 - Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method

Step 1 - Dwelling with the written description
This involved the researcher engaging in a rigorous process of intuiting, analyzing and describing the raw data descriptions which was completed through reading and rereading the entire description of each participant's experience to get a general sense of the whole.
Step 2 - Identifying Meaning Units
Meaning units were established by going through the text and every time the researcher experienced a transition in meaning, a slash was placed in the description of the text (Giorgi, 1989). The researcher operated with spontaneity while constituting meaning units (thinking: something important is happening here or there is a change here or something interesting is going on). By doing this, the researcher dwelled with the description longer than when it was first read (Giorgi, 1989).
Step 3 - Identifying Focal Meanings
The meaning units were raised to a higher level of discourse and were reformulated by the researcher to become focal meanings in the language of the researcher. During this part of the process, meanings were uncovered (Spiegelberg, 1971) and the analytical phase of data description interpretation was completed.
Step 4 - Synthesizing Situated Structural Descriptions
The researcher synthesized each set of focal meanings into a situated structural description for each participant. It is the situated structural description that grasps the meaning of the lived experience from the perspective of the participant. The investigator synthesized and integrated the insights contained in all of the focal meanings into a consistent statement for each of the participants' lived experience of being immersed in another culture.
Step 5 - Synthesizing a General Structural Description
The general structural description of this lived experience was generated from the synthesis of the participants' situated structural descriptions. This stage grasps the most general significance of the phenomenon under study and is aimed at capturing the meaning of the lived experience described by the participants in an insightful and focused way (Baker et al., 1994). Giorgi (1975, p.88) stated that the general structural description "leaves out the particulars of the specific situation and centers on those which … while not necessarily universal are at least trans-situational or more than specific".

"A check of the original researcher's procedure can be performed by any competent colleague" (Giorgi & Giorgi 2003 p.248); however, to ensure that the research method was properly employed, the researcher sought out and received expert mentoring from a scholar who is knowledgeable and experienced in Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi 1975; 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi 2003). This methodological expert reviewed the research process at various stages to advise on methodological issues, particularly in relation to the analysis/synthesis steps as developed by the researcher. It was not necessary that the expert agreed with the analysis/synthesis, but, rather, that the expert did not disagree with the analysis/synthesis process. This activity made certain that the Giorgi's method was employed appropriately by the researcher.

FINDINGS

Through the utilization of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003), the general structural description (or meaning) of being immersed in another culture was generated in an effort to enhance understanding of what the 'lived experience' is like for expatriate managers. The general structural description (or meaning) is the central finding of the research and is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 -General Structural Description (or Meaning)

Feelings of Understanding/Not Understanding
Despite cultural training, previous experiences and feelings of cultural knowing and understanding, being immersed in another culture inevitably surfaces potential feelings of embarrassment, anxiety and uncertainty with not understanding.
Feelings of Discomfort/Comfort
When being immersed in another culture, one feels discomfort with the trial and error processes that enhance one's learning and avoidance of cultural errors. Adjustment and comfort occur amidst inescapable feelings of alienation, irritability and unhappiness. These feelings of discomfort are countered somewhat by cultural comfort and knowledge of 'going home'.
Feelings of Powerfulness/Powerlessness
Foreigner status and feelings of powerfulness are present when being immersed in another culture; however, observable differences give rise to feelings of powerlessness, vulnerability, self-consciousness and being judged by others.
Feelings of Belonging/Not Belonging
Expatriates have dispiriting feelings of belonging, yet never really belonging, when being immersed in another culture. The feelings arise amidst the reality and contentment of special treatment by hosts and home when - sought after for sharing one's opinion, u*tilized* as a sounding board, and mentored, yet knowing and feeling one will not ever truly belong.
Feelings of Being Open to New Culture/Yet Holding on to Own Culture
When being immersed in another culture one experiences feelings of being open to new cultural experiences; yet one holds on to one's own national culture through comparisons while at work and in non-work situations.
Feelings of Freedom/Restriction
When being immersed in another culture one's feelings of freedom are restricted through lack of comprehension of unwritten, unpredictable, contradictory and mystical cultural practices of hosts. What emerges is a constant cautiousness for one's own personal security.
Feelings of Being Supported/Not Supported
The deficiency of home country organizational assistance fuels ones' feelings of disappointment and feelings of not being supported amidst the generosity, caring and community support from one's cultural guides and family in the new culture.
Feelings of Being Changed /Unchanged
One's personal changes may not be recognized by others who perceive one as being unchanged; yet one's rewarding transformation of living and working while being immersed in another culture is cherished, shared with others and memorable.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study was carried out to answer the research question: What is the general structural description (or meaning) of being immersed in another culture for expatriate managers? The answer to this question leads to a better understanding of what it is like to be an expatriate manager immersed in another culture, as well as suggestions for improvements in support for the expatriate experience. Bearing this in mind, being immersed in another culture involves living new ways of being and experiencing paradoxical feelings. It is noted that "paradoxes are not opposites, but are dimensions of the same rhythm lived all-at-once where one is in the foreground and one is in the background" (Parse, 1998, p.30).

In this section, the eight paradoxes (depicted in Table 2) and components of the general structural description are discussed individually in relation to the meaning units from the research participants' descriptions and within the context of the literature review.

Feelings Of Understanding/Not Understanding

The participants described how feelings of not understanding often occurred even though they possessed a sizable amount of knowledge as a result of cultural training and previous experiences. For example, Pak Jasiento, in his experiences with a wedding ceremony, described never fully understanding the cultural experiences notwithstanding significant cultural training, self-training, plus three years of experience living and working in Indonesia. As well, another research participant, Prunes, continued to be "surprised, alarmed, elated and frustrated by this multi-cultural nation" despite 16 years of experience living and working in Indonesia. Justin Edwards credited past experiences in various developing countries and subsequent in-country cultural and language training in greatly enhancing his adjustment to the Indonesian context. These examples point to the fact that even participants with

considerable knowledge gained as a result of lengthy tenures still find themselves with paradoxical feelings of understanding yet not understanding including embarrassment, anxiety and uncertainty.

The literature reinforces the notion that there are deficiencies in training practices from the expatriates' perspective (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). This is congruent with the findings of the present study where, despite significant training, expatriates still do not fully understand cultural behaviours as experienced on an ongoing basis. This may be due partly to the reality that unique personal and professional challenges which expatriates experience are not well understood by human resource managers (Black & Gregersen, 1999) and, therefore, cannot be integrated into expatriate training programs. The findings also point to the complexities of life in multi-cultured Indonesia. Thus, it appears that training could never be expected to do the complete job, leaving significant aspects to learning by actually living the experience.

Feelings Of Discomfort/Comfort

The participants described the process of trial and error as essential in learning how to participate appropriately in the new cultural environment. One participant, Thomas Austin, described feeling uncomfortable with the necessity of *learning as one goes*, and that there was no rule book to use as a guide. Batik utilized the term "lessons learned", which is common 'lingo' in NGO circles, to describe how she would build on her knowledge through actual experiences while at the same time she would seek cultural knowledge from cultural mentors in regards to getting comfortable in new situations. Batman described how his *learning on the fly* led to a discomforting situation when participating in an inappropriate behaviour according to local religious customs. These examples illuminate the reality that the participants, learned about the culture by doing, and experiencing through, what is commonly known as, a 'trial and error' process. While learning in this manner, the research participants frequently described being upset and uncomfortable amidst feelings of annoyance and impatience. The thoughts of returning home were comforting--a light at the end of the tunnel.

These findings are supported in the expatriate literature. Zimmerman et al. (2003, p.48) utilized the term "exploration" in describing how expatriates gradually modify their inclinations and behaviours based on their experiences in the foreign cultural environment. The literature supports the fact that cultural errors, by Westerners in Indonesia, are common, and sometimes serious, as in the case of the unknowing manager who once fired an oil rig worker publicly instead of privately, the latter being the acceptable cultural norm. The manager recognized his mistake while being chased around the oil rig by the axe carrying ex-employee (Katz & Seifer, 1996). This rather extreme example exemplifies the fact that one may not know the rule of a particular culture, until it is broken.

Feelings Of Powerfulness/Powerlessness

Several participants described their elevated status as foreigners and the feelings of powerfulness or powerlessness it entailed. Pak Jasiento described being invited to numerous weddings for people they barely knew and in some cases invitations from people they did not know at all, simply because they were foreigners. Although Pak Jasiento just wanted to blend into the crowd at a wedding he attended, he described being 'seated' in a prime location for all to see. This served to enhance his hosts' social status but left Pak Jasiento with the feeling of being used, self-conscious and vulnerable. Prunes, although in a position of power, felt powerless amid the local cultural milieu and in dealing with what appeared to be a serious health issue of an Indonesian co-worker, and so he reluctantly agreed to engage in the services of a 'dukun' (witch doctor). These examples point to the fact that the expatriate managers' position as foreigner, readily identified through 'observable differences', brought the research participants power and status but also made them feel powerless in certain situations. Feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness were experienced frequently by the participants. The findings are related to the literature as per Osland's (2000, p.233) research. She described a "social acuity paradox" that has the expatriate possessing a great deal of power, yet not exercising this power in order to obtain full participation and mutual assistance from host nationals.

Feelings Of Belonging/Not Belonging

The participants described experiences in which they had feelings of belonging, yet realized they were always going to be outsiders. Thus, the potential for belonging in a substantial way to the Indonesian cultural

environment was limited or non-existent. This reality is illuminated by Made who stated, "While I have always felt comfortable with Indonesians around me and they have certainly made me feel at home, I cannot say that I have ever felt Indonesian". Interestingly, Sophia described temporarily feeling very much like she belonged in one village; however, she found, upon leaving that particular small village for another, the belonging she had felt was actually superficial acceptance because she was again seen as an outsider (a foreigner) and thus had to start all over again. This is a similar experience as one described by Made who, because he had mastered the Indonesian accent, was able to experience true momentary feelings of belonging and being perceived as Indonesian while speaking on the telephone and not being seen.

These examples point to the fact that the participants experienced feelings of belonging in the local cultural environment; however, these special feelings tended to be intermittent and superficial. Although the participants wrote frequently of receiving special treatment, they also accepted that they will always be considered as outsiders in the eyes of the local people. There is scant literature describing the expatriate experience in relation to the feelings of belonging/not belonging. One exception is the research of Osland (2000, p.233) which reinforces the study findings with her conclusion that expatriates experienced "feeling at ease anywhere but belonging nowhere". In addition, there are references in the extant literature about the expatriate's ability to 'fit in' which is comparable to 'belonging' in the new cultural environment given that Barber (2004, 131) defines 'belong' as being able to "fit a particular environment".

Feelings Of Being Open To New Culture/Yet Holding On To Own Culture

All participants' descriptions were interpreted as being open to the new (Indonesian) culture, yet they described everyday experiences in which they compared or judged the Indonesian culture against the Canadian culture, recounting similarities and differences. Further, there were descriptions that depicted the expatriates promptly reverting to behavioural patterns that are typical within the Canadian culture when faced with highly stressful situations. For example, one participant, Thomas Austin, wrote about "fiercely" clinging to his own "cultural backpack". Certainly, Thomas Austin was open to fully experiencing the new culture but even after three years in Indonesia he described feeling "held back" by frequent feelings of bewilderment and confusion about the host culture. Other research participants consistently described their openness to the new culture, yet often looked to their home culture as a standard or benchmark in making sense of particular aspects of the host culture. For example, Batman reflected on the attitudes of the health care providers in determining that they were very comparable to the Canadian situation. Similarly, Batik, when invited to an Indonesian wedding ceremony that was to take place in its entirety between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m., instantly recalled the numerous Canadian weddings which involved a much larger timeframe. Indeed, Pak Jasiento's wedding experience confirmed the differences between the Canadian custom of discussing the weather or chatting about the happy couple which did not happen at the Indonesian wedding he attended.

Congruency with the extant literature is seen in relation to participants' hasty reversion to their familiar Canadian culture in cases of serious health crises as depicted in the findings. Even in cases of much less urgency, it is only normal to gravitate to the familiar. "One might rationalize that this is why many Canadians overseas often seek out other members of their own culture to socialize with or why they find themselves frequently eating lunch at familiar fast food restaurants" (Black & Gregersen, 1999, p.4). Clearly, behaviour most associated with the Canadian culture is not far removed from the surface.

Feelings Of Freedom/Restriction

The participants expressed thoughts related to situations of experiencing paradoxical feelings of freedom/restriction. For example, Archer's experience of being immersed in another culture meant being restricted to activities involving the adjustment to the new working environment and learning the Indonesian language. In fact, it was so restricting for him that he described the situation as leaving "the monastery" when he finally, after some time in Indonesia, was able to get his freedom upon renting his own house. Archer described this regained independence (or freedom) as "getting his life back" meaning it was more in line with how it would have been had he been living back home in Canada. In a similar vein of thought, Prunes described his immersion in another culture as analogous to

a zoo animal where freedom/restriction is a way of life for the animals. He also described feeling like a "space alien" thereby, as with zoo animals, was never free from inquisitive gawking and invasion of privacy. Prunes even described his anticipated end of the assignment departure date as when he would make his "escape" (from the restriction) by returning home to Canada. Overall, the research participants described experiences where they had paradoxical feelings of freedom/restriction. The utilization of powerful words including: 'monastery', 'zoo' and 'space alien' emphasized the feelings of experiencing a freedom that is significantly restricted.

The extant expatriation literature supports the paradoxical concept of freedom/restriction which is a finding in this study. For example, Osland (2000, p.233) referred to being 'freed from many of one's own cultural rules, yet at the same time being restricted by certain host country cultural norms, which must be conformed with if one is to function well in the foreign environment'. Osland labeled this expatriate experience a 'mediation paradox'.

Feelings Of Being Supported/Not Supported

Research participant Tristan Philips described feelings of disappointment he experienced due to the dearth of support from his home organization. For example, his paycheques were deposited in his Canadian bank account which made accessibility cumbersome and expensive. His feelings of disappointment came as a result of receiving no support from the head office in determining the best way to gain regular and cost effective access to this money. In another case, Tristan Philips described a lack of assistance from head office in regards to obtaining an Indonesian work visa despite being "guaranteed" this support during his job interview. Many participants, instead, described various forms of support provided by local persons as helpful and meaningful experiences when being immersed in the Indonesian culture. For example, Archer described having a local cultural mentor at the NGO where he was employed. Further, Batik wrote of having received generous cultural guidance from local friends who wanted to ensure she was properly dressed for an important cultural activity. She described the process of "tailor-made clothes" as significantly different when compared with simply "buying clothing off the rack" as is typical in Canada. These examples point to the fact that the participants received a significant amount of support, in the form of caring and mentorship, from various local hosts and communities.

These findings are supported in the extant expatriate literature. For example, Hutching's (2002, p.32) work on Western expatriates located in China indicated "a scarcity of in-post support by the employing" MNCs, which "may be surprising considering the growing importance of China in today's world economy". It is well documented in the literature that in-post support should be ongoing throughout the overseas assignment (Edkins, 1995; Jassawalla, Connelly, & Slojkowski, 2004; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). This support is often supplied to expatriates by host country nationals or by fellow expatriates at the foreign location (Hutchings, 2005). Indeed, while home organization support is important, the social and work relationships with local host nationals are also a central source of support for expatriates in navigating their way through an unfamiliar cultural environment (Shim & Paprock, 2002).

Feelings Of Being Unchanged/Changed

The participants described uniquely rich and memorable experiences where they gained cultural knowledge and thus experienced feelings of being changed in meaningful ways. For example, Imron, from his experience of attending weekly religious meetings on Islamic philosophy, felt he had gained insight into dimensions of Islam which are rarely presented in conventional writings. He described his learning as being linked with enhancing understanding of Indonesian culture in a special way unique to and different from other Westerners. It is interesting that Justin Edwards mentioned many negative aspects of living and working in Indonesia but still described himself as "lucky". Similarly, another research participant, Luke Gerard, wrote of his growth and the personal changes he experienced from living in a village where no one spoke English nor had ever seen someone like him, except on TV. The examples reveal participants' significant feelings of being unchanged/changed amidst treasured and memorable experiences while being immersed in the Indonesian culture. They wrote of their strong desire to remember personal experiences in order to share them with important others back home.

The findings are supported in the extant literature. For example, most expatriates reminisce fondly about the cherished and memorable experiences of their life overseas (Richards, 1996). Also, the fact that expatriates tend to be

proud of their accomplishments is evident in the findings and supported in the literature. For example, Osland's (2000, p.228) research findings describe the expatriates' "pride in succeeding at difficult work assignments, making it 'on their own', feeling 'special', and taking pride in their ability to acculturate and adapt to change".

CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to enhance understanding, the study was designed to explore expatriate managers' perspectives of the phenomenon of being immersed in another culture by identifying the reality of people's lived experiences. The researcher expects understanding may lead to improvements in human resource management practices as well as strategies for facilitating and supporting the expatriation experience, thereby benefiting both the expatriate and the home organizations that employ them. The findings also have implications which apply for a wide range of interests in the expatriation field including those of academic researchers and educators, human resource management professionals, senior managers and expatriates of the past, present and future. Contributions and recommendations for expatriate research and human resource management practice are as follows:

Expatriate Research

Mendenhall (1999), in noting that the expatriate literature was composed primarily of quantitative studies, called for other types of methodologies to be utilized in order to advance the literature. The approach undertaken in the current research has responded to Mendenhall's call and, in the process, has contributed a wide range of specific examples of expatriates' lived experiences.

The research contributes to the literature in the NGO sector by involving inquiry undertaken with participants who are experienced employees of NGOs. Although researchers such as Anderson (2001) studied expatriate managers working for NGOs, much of the extant literature that was found related to expatriates working for MNCs. Therefore, it is recommended that further research involving NGOs be pursued, especially considering NGOs have seen significant expansion in numbers of expatriates over recent decades.

In the current study, the perspective was that all expatriate concepts are interrelated and, consequently, focus on the whole experience of understanding the 'lived experience' as opposed to breaking it into independent pieces for study. The researcher recommends that more studies on the lived experience of being immersed in another culture are necessary to further advance understanding about the phenomenon. One cannot know all there is to know about the meaning of individuals' lived experiences as a result of one research study; meanings change for people from moment to moment and there will always be something new to uncover and practical models to develop.

The successful utilization of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method has proven to be a significant qualitative methodological contribution to the field of expatriation research. The researcher was able to generate meaning from the thoughts and feelings of the research participants based on their personal descriptions of being immersed in another culture. Further studies could be undertaken using Giorgi's method with expatriates of various other countries and organizations.

The current research extends Osland's (2000) work with the emergence of additional paradoxical ways of being for expatriates immersed in another culture. A recommendation for future study is to focus specifically on each of the paradoxical experiences portrayed in the current research. Focusing solely on paradoxical experiences would enhance further the understanding of what it is like to live and work amidst contrary ways of being.

Human Resource Management Practice

International human resource management (IHRM) continues to develop as a critical profession in light of increasing globalization, especially when one considers the economic growth in huge countries like China and India. Combined with an increased understanding of lived experiences of expatriates, the growth and development of IHRM are an excellent opportunity for human resource professionals to assist expatriates who may be overwhelmed by the paradoxes and challenges involved in being immersed in another culture so different from their own. The findings

have expanded on the work of Osland (1995a, p.211) who, over a decade ago, recommended that "HR departments should respond to expatriate questions and concerns immediately. Still, it is common for some departments to ignore requests by out-of-sight expatriates until the volume is cranked up to howls of outrage". Indeed, one of Osland's research participants said: "Somebody at headquarters needs to know it's tough to work abroad" (p.210).

Generally, current human resource practices relating to expatriation are centred on the selection procedures along with training activities for expatriates; however, it is apparent, that expatriates are left largely to their own means and devices during the overseas assignment itself and, in fact, seemingly are forgotten until repatriation time. This is not acceptable. Thus, it is recommended that human resource professionals make frequent and regular contact with expatriates who are working overseas to find out what the experience is like for them. They need to listen and support the expatriates given the reality of extreme paradoxical experiences of those when immersed in another culture. Again, the recommendation reinforces Osland's (1995a, p.211) view that "the only way to know who needs extra help or attention is to call and check on their progress. … Companies should not assume that expatriates are doing well overseas". Yet it is *not* about *seeking to find that someone is NOT doing well*, but seeking to understand what the employee's experience is like and what would be helpful to make the extremes more manageable. All persons will know what is best for them and be more confident in their work because expatriates do not wish their experiences to be harshly judged or unnecessarily criticized, especially by others who are not living the experience or not seemingly understanding the experience.

The lived experience of being immersed in another culture is a highly individualistic experience and employees' experiences must be understood in order to enact change to enhance their lived personal and professional experiences in situations. Standardized strategies are often used at present; however, they may be studied more easily and improved by use of regular, qualitative research methods. Persons in the home organization need to become more understanding and more aware of their own shortcomings in their relationship with expatriates. Shaffer et al. (1999) recommended that a well-chosen mentor, who has experienced the phenomenon, can assist greatly in the overall well-being and productiveness of the expatriate. Thus, a mentor should be assigned to each overseas employee; a useful, practical and relatively cheap alternative to present-day practice

It is helpful to remember that "most HR managers have never lived abroad, and some mistakenly treat expatriates as if they were no different from domestic employees" (Osland, 1995a, p.xv). Thus, it is believed by the researcher that enhanced understanding emerging from this research study has the potential to alter the way that human resource professionals choose to deal with expatriates.

CONCLUSIONS

The research purpose has been fulfilled. It has been accomplished by generating the general structural description, which provides insights to help organizations and expatriates find strategies for enhancing outcomes for both the individual and the organization. Indeed, the study sought to provide information and perspective to enhance the understanding of human resource professionals, expatriates, as well as academics in relation to expatriate managers' lived experience of being immersed in another culture. In the process, the research has explicated and shed meaning on the paradoxical experiences that are the reality for expatriates as an essential precursor to describing strategies for reducing their impact. It is expected that the information will resonate with both human resource professionals and expatriate managers as they read the findings, and that it will enhance their understanding of the lived experience of being immersed in another culture.

In the world of today, many factors point to an ever-increasing number of persons living and working away from their home countries. Expatriates will have a wide variety of experiences and strong personal feelings during their time of being immersed in another culture. To help organizations and individuals understand the complexities of the phenomenon, it is important to continue to explore the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of expatriates through their descriptions of what it is like to be immersed, living and working, in another culture. Expatriates have a tremendous amount of knowledge to share with human resource professionals and academics. Both will be aided by a better understanding of the challenges associated with managing today's global work force. Furthermore, the shared knowledge also will help present and former expatriates to make sense of their experiences, and through education and training, provide future expatriates with valuable insights into the nature of overseas experiences.

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