Indonesian Host Country Nationals: Feeling Respected Yet Not Respected

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ABSTRACT

Having completed research on the expatriate experience in Indonesia (Russell, 2006; Russell & Dickie, 2007; Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2010, 2011) we wondered what it might be like for Indonesian host country nationals (HCNs) to work with western organizations in Indonesia since there is a significant lack of literature based on the perspective of HCNs (Templar, 2010). Although not from the HCN perspective, we found literature about HCNs in relation to knowledge management (Vance, Vaiman, & Andersen, 2009; Massingham, 2010), empowerment and team participation (Zhang & Begley, 2011), remuneration policies (Mahajan, 2011), career development and promotability (Vo, 2009; Herrmann & Werbel, 2007), and relationship building (Varma, Pichler, & Budhwar, 2011). These realities spurred on our current phenomenological research which focused on describing the lived experience of Indonesian HCNs using their own words and meanings. Data descriptions were collected and analyzed using Giorgi's (2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) descriptive phenomenological method. One of the important findings pointed to HCNs living the paradox of feeling respected-not respected while working in western organizations located at home in Indonesia.

Keywords: Culture; Host Country National; Expatriate; Phenomenology; Indonesian; Respect

INTRODUCTION

The cross-cultural experience is being lived by a growing number of globally employed individuals and will continue into the future (Varma et al., 2011). Not unexpectedly, expatriates have been the primary focus of academic researchers leaving the HCNs perspectives mostly overlooked as noted by Templar (2010) who wrote, "the perspective of host country nationals (HCNs) has not yet received extensive study" (p. 1754). This fact prompted our interest in doing this research study.

The research participants in this study are Indonesian and we, the researchers, are Canadian. Considerable cross-cultural interaction between Indonesia and Canada has been occurring since 1949, when these two countries first exchanged resident Ambassadors (Government of Canada, 2010). It is a certainty that Canadian and other western non-government organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) will continue to do business with Indonesia. Therefore, it is clear that understanding of Indonesian colleagues' experiences is vital. Increasing this knowledge may lead to enhancing the overall working environments for HCNs who are undoubtedly valuable employees for most western organizations based in Indonesia (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012). Through our research study the meaning of the experience of HCNs working in western based organizations at home introduced concepts and a number of paradoxes that are lived by HCNs. We will focus on one paradox in this paper-namely: feeling respected-not respected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is ample literature focusing on what it is like for expatriates to be immersed in another culture (Russell, 2006; Osland & Osland, 2006); however, we have found scant literature about the HCN experience (Vo, 2009; Tarique, Schuler, & Gong, 2006; Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Apparently, in years past, HCN input, for the most part, was not sought due to the long prevailing opinion that HCNs were not very important in the overall success of

the organization (Mendenhall, Punnett, & Ricks, 1995). Clearly, the lack of recent literature on the impact of HCNs within the literature (Bartlett, Lawler, Bae, Chen, & Wan, 2002) points to an "ethnocentric belief that the success … depend[ed] solely on expatriates" (Bartlett, et al., 2002, p. 385) and "the majority of studies on [HCNs] consider the influence of HCNs on expatriates but not vice versa" (Takeuchi, 2010, p. 1050). There is however, some information about the HNC point of view on important matters including employer training and development (Vo, 2009; Herrmann & Werbel, 2007), and the perceptions of HCNs related to ethnocentric pay policies (Mahajan, 2011). The importance of understanding the HNCs' view is further highlighted by recently described practice to develop HNCs in order to "move away from decades of expensive and failed" (Owen, 2010, p.c100) expatriate assignments.

We (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012) believe, as do a few others in the literature, that HCNs are central to any successful international business venture (Toh & DeNisi, 2003) and are absolutely necessary "for increasing [organizational] effectiveness in the host nation" (Mahajan, 2011, p. 121). Therefore, and not surprisingly, there is "a growing call for refocusing international management research on the needs and contributions of HCNs" (Vance et al., 2009, p. 651). We have begun to change that view (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012). We were motivated to more fully understand this phenomenon and decided to obtain HCNs' own thoughts of their lived experiences while working with western organizations (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012). As Keen (1975) stated, "the lived experience must be our guide in understanding other people and what things mean to them" (p. 21).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was selected because it provided the opportunity for the research participants to describe their own personal experiences of what it is like for them to work for western organizations. Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) was utilized to determine the meaning of lived experiences and enabled Indonesians to participate in our research via email while we were in Canada.

Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method involves discovering and articulating "meanings being lived by research participants that reveal the nature of the phenomenon being researched" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252). Giorgi's method enables attaining rich data descriptions and insights into the personal experiences of individuals who have lived the phenomenon being studied.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The research participants were "selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Research participants were included in the study if they:

- were Indonesian,
- have worked (or presently work) for a western organization in Indonesia
- were able to read and write in English
- were willing to write about their experiences and submit using email.

Twenty-one Indonesians participated in our study. All were well-educated Indonesian men and women with significant employment experience. They gained their HCN experiences from working in more than 35 different western organizations including a wide variety of international non-government organizations (INGOs), transnational companies, and public service organizations.

To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to participants by the researchers to be 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, each research participant was invited via email to respond to the interrogatory statement: **Please write about a situation or experience that best describes what it was like (or is like) for you to work for a western organization in Indonesia**. The statement was planned to draw out, without

leading, the feelings and thoughts of the Indonesian employees (HCNs). They were advised to write as much, or as little, as they deemed appropriate. This process allowed us to capture the descriptions precisely and in their entirety with no inaccuracies due to transcription procedures (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012). Once all 21 written descriptions were received, we undertook Giorgi's (2009) analysis-synthesis process as described and adapted in Table 1. The steps appear linear; however, they are not.

Table 1 Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method

Step 1 -Dwelling with the written description
We engaged 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 research participant's experience to get a general sense of the whole.
Step 2 - Identifying Meaning Units (MUs)
MUs were established by going through the text and every time we experienced a transition in meaning, a slash was placed in the description of the text (Giorgi, 1989). MUs are written in the participant's own words.
Step 3 - Identifying Focal Meanings (FMs)
MUs were raised to a higher level of discourse and were reformulated to become FMs in the language of science. During this part of the process, meanings were uncovered (Spiegelberg, 1971).
Step 4 - Synthesizing Situated Structural Descriptions (SSDs)
We synthesized each set of FMs into an SSD for each research participant. It is the SSD that grasps the meaning of the lived experience from the perspective of the research participant. For the SSD, we synthesized and integrated the insights contained in all of the FMs into a consistent statement for each of the research participants' lived experiences.
Step 5 - Synthesizing a General Structural Description (GSD)
The GSD of this lived experience was generated from the synthesis of the research participants' SSDs. 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 research participants in an insightful and focused way (Baker et al., 1994). Giorgi (1975) stated that the GSD "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" (p. 88).

(adapted from Aquino-Russell, 2003, p. 99-103)

PRESENTATION OF DATA DESCRIPTIONS AND FINDINGS

We have included Table 2 to enable the reader to discern the processes undertaken in Giorgi's (2009) method and to depict an example of MUs, FMs, and the SSD for one research participant named Lusino (a researcher- selected pseudonym). The same process was also undertaken with the data obtained from the other 20 research participants.

Table 2

Meaning Unit #2: Lusino
MU #1 "The first thing that came to my mind is the discipline and the punctuality. My expat boss in [western organization] will become extremely mad if we came late to the office or to a meeting. We will also be fined. Second thing is the way my boss(es) led meetings. Very efficient and straight to the point. For eastern culture sometimes hard to accept especially when you need to criticized someone in front of the meeting audiences. Third thing is the working environment, so nice. I.e. my office furniture were excellent, the computer system, and also the benefits, i.e. health benefit for the employee and their family. Very good compare to local companies"
MU #2 "Sometimes my western boss(es) still thinking that Indonesian market is the same like they face in other country. So they try to implement their way to this market. Most of the time, it will fail. Indonesian people and Indonesian markets were so unique. In a very simple example, the way westerners do cold calling, cannot be use in Indonesia. So different and if we still use it, mostly it will be considered rude"
Focal Meaning #2: Lusino
FM #1 Lusino has experienced disappointment in western managers' frequent inability to blend their knowledge with Indonesian knowledge. The importance of listening is stressed because of differences in the local market place.
FM #2 For Lusino working in western organizations can be positive regarding benefits and up to date office facilities however, communication can be disrespectful when discipline and communication styles differ from the Indonesian culture.
Situated Structural Description for Lusino
For Lusino, working in western organizations has been positive regarding benefits and up to date office facilities however, communication can be disrespectful when discipline and communication styles differ from the Indonesian culture. Lusino has experienced disappointment in western managers' frequent inability to blend their knowledge with Indonesian knowledge. The importance of listening is stressed because of differences in the local market place.

We have included Table 3 to enable the reader to see a larger sampling of Situated Structural Descriptions (SSDs) for six of the research participants as their descriptions related to the paradox feeling respected-not respected. The General Structural Description (GSD) or the meaning of this lived experience was generated from the synthesis of all 21 research participants' SSDs and is presented immediately following Table 3.

Table 3

Situated Structural Descriptions (SSDs)
Christo-This research participant has experienced similarities related to expected time management and results-based management strategies as well as differences in management styles (including: respect, ruthlessness, uncaring attitudes) while working for western organizations.
Erika-This research participant's vast experiences working in western organizations have been driven by superior remuneration because of family issues and love of the work. Most of Erika's managers valued and practiced democratic management styles including: respect, fairness and openness of communication which are critical for professional work, yet this was not always consistent and led, at times, to serious conflict and misunderstanding of religious differences. There were also situations where work colleagues became friends and a blending of cultural and technical perspectives at the local level occurred creating synergy and transforming the impossible to become possible.
Gita- This research participant experienced working for a western company that was respectful of host country laws, and believed that the organization truly cares for its workers as demonstrated by substantial remuneration (pay and benefits).
Lusino- For this research participant, working in western organizations has been positive regarding benefits and up to date office facilities however, communication can be disrespectful when discipline and communication styles differ from the Indonesian culture. Lusino has experienced disappointment in western managers' frequent inability to blend their knowledge with Indonesian knowledge. The importance of listening was stressed by Lusino because of differences in the local market place.
Ridwan- This participant believes that working for a western organization is all about business: choosing the right staff, getting the job done without cutting corners, giving appropriate training and remuneration in a respectful work environment.
Siti-This participant had overall good experiences while working in western organizations, yet has experienced western managers who do more taking than giving when it comes to changes in behaviours to adapt to the culture; Siti has experienced manager's suspicion regarding reasons for illness and less respect, and non-appreciation for Indonesians' capabilities.

GENERAL STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION – CENTRAL FINDING

The GSD of this lived experience was developed from the synthesis of all 21 research participants' situated structural descriptions. The central finding of this research (GSD) is the *meaning* of the experience and is as follows:

For Indonesians working in western organizations at home, time is paradoxically lived while being fairly-not fairly remunerated. Even with a results/outcomes focus on sustainability, limits exist with decisions being made outside Indonesia. Feeling respected-disrespected is experienced at work, depending on the management style while reverse culture shock is experienced when facilitating expatriate cultural immersion.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This phenomenological research uncovered the meaning of the lived experiences of Indonesians working for various western organizations based in Indonesia. In this discussion we will focus on one component of the findings that surfaced in many of the research participants' data descriptions. This finding relates to the paradox *feeling respected -not respected* as experienced by the research participants.

This paradox is expressed as:

Respect occurs when Westerners were *open to differences while treating individuals fairly, where open communication, freedom of expression, and equality occurred in the workplace yet at the same time, disrespect occurred when HCNs were not listened to, and when Indonesian leaders' contributions were not valued* (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2012).

The paradox: *feeling respected –not respected,* from the GSD, is illuminated by selected examples from the research participants' own written descriptions and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Participant	Examples from Research Participants Written Descriptions of Experiences
Christo	"expats who work there were always on time and they respect opinion and open for suggestion" … "I love working in [western organization] because the freedom to express creativity at my field here is accepted and respected, I can become myself"
Christo	"The stress I got there was unbearable, the way they treated … the local employee … is just like between the Master and Slave".
Erika	"our country director was such a democratic person, where I could just jump in, ask and discuss. And no fear of anything as I trusted his judgment" "I feel appreciated and respected. Good time. Communication is very good, respect is there" " this person in this position made me completely disheartened …no respect nor fairness , or any explanation to help me understand"
Ridwan	"most of the westerners … are polite and respect our custom and culture"
Siti	"I was sick and cannot come to the office He couldn't accept and ordered me to the office soon. Why can't he respect and understand about his staff condition.
Lusino	"the way my boss(es) led meetings. Very efficient and straight to the point. For eastern culture sometimes hard to accept especially when someone is criticized in front of the meeting audiences" "My expat boss in [western organization] will become extremely mad if we came late to the office or to a meeting. We will also be fined"

Clearly, experiencing the paradox of feeling respected-not respected is a reality for HCNs, from their perspectives, while working in western organizations in Indonesia. Siti illuminated the paradoxical situation best when she wrote:

From the all my experience of having [western] managers absolutely, they have different characters and habits. I have felt happy working in International Organization. I received a new experience and new knowledge but at same time I have felt annoyed at the times they try to change the rules as they like. It is unreasonable because I then always have to be changing my rules and system whenever I got a new Boss. It is so not effective. Not just it, they always under estimate every Indonesian people... they think [HCNs] cannot work and cannot decide anything. They are always dictating what we should be doing and they often make orders without reading my job description. That is always leads to me arguing with my manager (Siti- Research Participant)

Furthermore, the research participant, Erika, noted that she experienced "values of democratic, fairness and openness" that left her feeling respected as an employee, yet this was not always evident as she also experienced the disheartening feeling of being disrespected in some western organizations. This, she suggested, was dependent on the particular management style of the organization and or manager.

The findings serve to enhance overall understanding in relation to the HNCs' feeling *respected-not respected* while working for western organizations in Indonesia. The results of this study modestly respond to the need for literature relating to the HCNs' perspective. However, there is much more to do because the HCN's perspective in the human resource development "activities of multinational … have gone largely unexplored in the … literature" (Bartlett et al., 2002, p. 400). There is mention in the extant literature about the ability to openly discuss and or represent differences of opinion especially those having cultural or religious bases (Yi-Feng & Tjosvold, 2007; Lui & Shaffer, 2005; Van Marrewijk, 2004; Toh & DeNisi, 2003). This matched very well with the research findings and thus we can confidently propose that a working environment of openness fuels HCN feelings of being respected. Furthermore, it is not organizationally effective when HCNs ''are not treated with respect, [or] decisions are not explained properly'' (Carr, McWha, MacLachlan, & Furnham, 2010, p. 324). It is no surprise that "organizational justice research suggested that treating people with dignity and respect increases their perceptions of fairness and the likelihood of accepting outcomes (Bonache, Sanchez, & Zarraga-Oberty, 2009, p. 2138).Therefore, it is vital that "MNCs must focus on relational values such as equity and respect for differences to be truly effective (Harvey, Speier & Novicevic 1997, p. 461).

It is noteworthy that the managers of some organizations are trained to be open and democratic. This style leads directly to understanding and respecting cultural differences (Van Marrewijk, 2004). Training, such as this, is imperative as it often results in "high [cultural] adaptation by foreigners [that] may be viewed by collectivists

[Indonesians] as showing respect, readiness, and eagerness to fit in the perceivers' culture" (Pornpitakpanp, 2003, p. 98). As reinforced in the data descriptions, "there is at least some ethnocentricity in [western organizations'] behavior with respect to the management of host country nationals" (Lawlor & Bae, 1998, p.141). For example, westerners just need to reciprocate the respect they automatically receive from the Indonesian HCNs. This perspective is supported by Tarique, Schuler, & Gong (2006) who wrote, "people in high power distance cultures like France, Spain, and Indonesia tend to recognize and show respect for people with greater authority, prestige, status, and material possessions" (p. 214). It is clear that practitioners and researchers should not be overlooking the HCN perspective in regards to respect. Lowe, Milliman, De Cieri and Dowling (2002) noted "most of what has been written … is focused exclusively on … the expatriate" (p. 47). As noted with the current findings, this will definitely need to change as the HCN perspective is too important to ignore. It is also critical to remember that HCNs usually far outnumber expatriates in western organizations (Bonache et al., 2009) further strengthening the fact that has been proposed for over 20 years; that the HCN perspective is essential (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992).

CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to enhance understanding of what it is like for Indonesians working in western organizations in Indonesia, the study was designed to explore Indonesians' perspectives of the phenomenon by illuminating their lived experiences. The researchers expect understanding may lead to improvements in human resource practices including strategies for facilitating respect and supporting the HCNs experience, thereby benefiting both Indonesians and the organizations that employ them. The findings also have implications which apply to a wide range of interests in the international management field including those of academic researchers and educators, human resource management professionals, senior managers, HCNs, and expatriates of the past, present, and future. Most importantly, it is clear that the management personnel of western organizations should be very interested in the HCN perspective, particularly in regards to the issue of respect as it can negatively impact HCN productivity and, in turn, impact overall organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

In our world, HCNs obtain a wide variety of experiences and develop strong personal feelings while working in the western organizations within their own countries. To help individuals working in organizations to understand the complexities involved, we suggest that the perspectives of HCNs be sought and integrated at every opportunity. HCNs have a tremendous amount of knowledge to share with international managers whose work will be abetted through an enhanced understanding of the challenges of managing today's global workforce. Furthermore, the shared knowledge will also help provide present and future HCNs with accurate and valuable insights into the nature of the HCN employment experience. Most importantly, as research participant -Erika said: "… [when] working together [with respect] the impossible becomes possible!"

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