

Intercultural adaptation: An exploratory study with Portuguese expatriates in Angola

Ivone Pinto, ISCAP - P.Porto

Dora Martins, ISCAP - P.Porto

This paper aims to present the results of the intercultural adaptation of Portuguese expatriate workers in Angola. More specifically, it explores the perception of the expatriates participating in the study regarding their adaptation to the Angolan intercultural context.

Intercultural adaptation presupposes the definition of the degree of psychological and family comfort that the expatriates feel in relation to the new environment as well as the degree of ease or difficulty with which they adapt to the day-to-day and the development of the work in the host country (Ramalu et al., 2010; Chang, 1997). Since intercultural adaptation is a process that involves behavioral, emotional, cognitive and attitudinal changes resulting from interaction with a new and different cultural context, intercultural adaptation behaves as a determinant of the (in) success of the international mission (Ramalu et al. 2010). The well-being of an expatriate results from the acceptance with the new culture, the ability to perform the function in the host organization as well as the ability to relate to the natives of that country (Lee & Vorst, 2010). However, the cultural differences between the country of origin and the host country may result in a set of barriers to which expatriates are exposed. In addition, expatriates are confronted with values, beliefs and perceptions that may differ from those they believe in or from those with whom they are familiar (Geetika & Gupta, 2012). Considering that intercultural adjustment continues to deserve high attention by researchers in international human resources management (Dabic, Gonzalez-Loureiro & Harvey, 2015), and at the same time the trend of expatriation growth in Portuguese companies to the Angolan context in recent years, reinforce the pertinence of this study.

To obtain empirical evidence, a qualitative methodology was used. The instrument for collecting privileged information was the semi-structured interview, and 13 interviews were conducted with Portuguese expatriates in Angola.

The results suggest that the process of intercultural adaptation of Portuguese expatriates to the Angolan context is not standardized, since three possible behaviors were perceived by the participants involved in the study: (1) existence of an intercultural shock in the initial phase of arrival in Angola but outdated with the international mission; (2) existence of an intercultural shock that has never been overcome; (3) lack of intercultural shock.

We conclude that the process of intercultural adaptation of Portuguese expatriates to the Angolan context may be influenced by (1) contextual factors such as the cultural, economic and political differences between the two countries; (2) by factors of an individual nature, such as personality traits of individuals and; (3) factors of an organizational nature, namely the lack of good organizational support practices for the intercultural adjustment of expatriates.

Finally, the conclusions suggest that organizations with experience in expatriation may need to reconsider their expatriation policies, with particular emphasis on issues related to intercultural preparation. The main contributions, limitations and suggestions for future studies are also presented.

Keywords: Intercultural adaptation; Angola; International Management of Human Resources; International Mission, Expatriation, Expatriates.

References

- Chang, Y. (1997). Cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates: Theory & research findings on American and Japanese expatriates. *Seoul Journal of Business*, 3(1), 147-167.
- Dabic, M., González-Loureiro, M. & Harvey, M. (2015). Evolving research on expatriates: What is “known” after four decades (1970-2012). *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(3), 316-337, DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2013.845236.
- Geetika & Gupta, A. (2012). International assignments, expatriate adjustment and perceived impact of parent organization support. *The Business & Management Review*, 3(1), 57-65.
- Lee, L. & Vorst, D. V. (2010). The influences of social capital and social support on expatriates' cultural adjustment: an empirical validation in Taiwan. *International Journal of Management*, 27(3), 628-649.
- Ramalu, S. S., Rose, R. C., Kumar, N., & Uli, J. (2010). Personality and expatriate performance: the mediating role of expatriate adjustment. *Journal of Business Research*, 26(6), 113-122.