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## *Full Length Research Paper*

# **Culture Shock and Its effects on Expatriates**

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**This research is a study about the phenomenon of culture shock and the influence it has on expatriates who are deployed on assignments in countries all over the world. It talks about the psychological and emotional effects of culture shock on these expatriates and their journey throughout their assignments. The purpose of the study is to provide an in-depth view of the life of expatriates experiencing culture shock and dealing with it on a day to day basis. The research makes use of qualitative research methods by undertaking structured open-ended written interviews amongst expatriates from two groups. The first consists of expatriates situated in countries all over the world, working for an international government organization. The second consists of expatriates from a shipping organization in Glasgow, Scotland. Some expatriates are still on assignment and talk about their experiences, while others talk about the overall expatriate experiences of their careers. The expatriates make up a wide range of nationalities and the research is diverse in its nature. The results of the research reveal that culture shock is a raging phenomenon affecting almost every expatriate undertaking foreign assignment and has left them with both positive and negative experiences for life. It highlights the attitudes and nature of people from different cultures and shows how distinct people really are. The findings reveal the experiences of expatriates and the facts they reveal about the effects of culture shock on them and their families. The research shows the fundamental aspects of human nature and cultural values and the fact that human beings vary in every different aspect of life, yet are so similar in so many others. It is an insight into values, social norms, ethics, cultural aspects and religious associations of people from a wide range of countries and how expatriates experience this variety, while also struggling to cope with the various effects that are associated with it**

**Keywords:** Culture Shock, Expatriates, Organizations.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation is a study of culture shock; what it is and how it is experienced by expatriates when they go to work in foreign countries on assignments from their organizations. Primary qualitative research methods were adopted to undertake this project. The research is based on first hand data collected through structured written

interviews, like a questionnaire, filled by expatriates situated all over the world. Anonymity has been maintained throughout the research, however nationalities have been revealed. The research highlights the phenomenon of culture shock and how it affects expatriates, what its symptoms are and how expatriates

say it influences their daily life and that of their families while they are abroad.

The dissertation aims to project the facts surrounding the phenomenon of culture shock which is a sort of enigma to everyone. The literature contains rich facts about how and why this phenomenon happens and why it is so damaging and leaves behind after-effects which are hard to deal with. Expatriates are usually the most prone to culture shock because their assignments are of the nature that require them to travel extensively to foreign countries and live and work with people from different cultures, languages and backgrounds. A vast diversity of nationalities participated in this research. Expatriates belonged to diverse countries like Indonesia, Macedonia, South Africa, Mexico, France and Turkey, to name just a few. Also, a number of diverse countries like Uruguay, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Kenya served as the host countries for these expatriates.

The research has also looked into the effects of culture shock on the families of expatriates. The expatriates interviewed say that their spouses and children are equally affected by cross-cultural transfers and they often face many difficulties in adjusting. The literature devotes a major part of research that talks about the effects of culture shock on the families of expatriates. The interview questions seek to promote this aspect as well, by asking expatriates, aiming to find out the proportion of families out there, facing this reality.

## Literature Review

### Expatriates And Organizations

Expatriates usually differ from other people who travel such as tourists or migrants, in the length of time and reasons of travel (Cieri, Dowling and Taylor, 1991). Expatriates usually spend between six months and five years at a place, with the intention to return home and they normally have a motive or a purpose for being in a specific country in the first place (Furnham, 1988).

One of the challenges organizations face as they try to remain competitive in an increasing global economy, is the transfer of expatriates into foreign assignments (Sims and Schraeder, 2004). Most of the literature focuses on the competencies of expatriate managers (French, 2010). Intercultural or cross-cultural competence has evolved as an area for study within business and management literature since 2000, even though some contributions evolved a few decades ago. The global nature of business involves such competencies; the trend has resulted in many employees working in international assignments and particularly managers being sent on assignments abroad. According to Williams, Howe-Walsh, Scott and Brown (2009), companies use international assignments for the following reasons:

- There might be vacancies in a foreign subsidiary and a company might dispatch an international assignee to fill that vacancy.
- International assignments are important as they serve a purpose of developing global competencies within a management team so that a company can achieve and strengthen competitive advantage. These assignments also enhance the career prospects of individuals, thus ensuring that the goals of both the expatriate and the organization are met.
- Assignments help in the process of knowledge transfer within a company. This may involve the expatriate transferring knowledge to a subsidiary.

### Culture Shock

The term 'culture shock' was coined by the anthropologist Oberg in 1960, who explained the symptoms and the process of adapting to a new and different culture (Marx, 2001). Oberg wrote his article based on his own observation of expatriate Americans (Mumford, 1998). Working in a new culture can produce a number of reactions, including confusion, anxiety, frustration, exhilaration, isolation, inappropriate social behavior and even depression. The experience of a new culture can be viewed as an unpleasant or unwelcome surprise or shock, which comes about when a person's expectations do not coincide with the reality.

Following Oberg, other researchers have tried to redefine the term culture shock. Guthrie (1975) prefers to use the term 'culture fatigue' from studies of American Peace Corps volunteers. Smalley (1963) focuses on the difficulties in communication, hence the term 'language shock', Byrnes (1966) focuses on 'role shock' and Bock (1970) describes culture shock as an anxiety reaction due to not being able to understand, control or predict the behavior of other people.

Reviewing these different meanings, Taft (1977) talks about six different aspects of culture shock: Strain; felt due to the efforts to adapt in a foreign culture; Sense of loss and deprivation related to friends, status and professions; rejection by the people of the new culture or rejecting them; confusion in identity, values and roles; anxiety, leading up to even disgust about various foreign practices; feeling helpless when not being able to cope with the new atmosphere. This concept of culture shock seems to be the best available consensus and has also been endorsed by Furnham and Bochner (1986). At the most basic level, culture shock is embedded within uncertainty. Upon the arrival of expatriates in the new culture, there is a general uncertainty regarding acceptable or unacceptable behavior. As they stay within that culture, there is a realization that certain behavior which is considered acceptable in their home culture might not be acceptable in the host culture and certain

behavior which is considered inappropriate or even offensive in their home culture might be acceptable in the host culture (Black and Gregerson, 1991). According to Black et al. (1991), this is something very important because when an expatriate or any individual as a matter of fact, leaves a familiar environment and enters an unfamiliar one, old habits and routines are uprooted and disturbed, hence creating a psychological uncertainty. This brings about a desire to reduce the uncertainty intrinsic in the new environment, specifically regarding behavior that might be required or expected. Certain factors increase or decrease uncertainty, also prompting an increase or decrease in culture shock (Sims and Schraeder, 2004). Perkins and Shortland (2006, p. 64) claim 'It is expected that most people will experience culture surprise when interacting with other cultures, and culture shock, to some degree, particularly when living and working in another country. Culture shock is a normal and predictable phenomenon, although those experiencing it may feel that they are inadequate or weak, even believing that they are suffering some form of mental illness'. Schneider and Barsoux (2003) when talking about cultural adjustment, particularly focus on the experiences of expatriate managers and suggest that culture shock does not just affect expatriates individually, Barsoux (2003) depict culture shock as a 'U-curve' in which they demonstrate that there is an initial positive stage followed by a downward spiral from which the expatriate and his family may or may not come out feeling well adjusted to their new environment. According to Adler (2002) the recovery process may take place three to six months after arriving in the new country whereas Perkins and Shortland (2006) believe that according to evidence, all the stages of culture shock, including adaptation, take place within six to eight months.

### **Phases of Culture Shock**

- The 'honeymoon' period is the initial phase of expatriation and the first stage of the U-Curve model, which is accompanied by a sense of euphoria and optimism, a general feeling of excitement associated with being in a new country. Expatriates report unrealistic and positive appraisals of their environment (Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor, 1991).. This honeymoon stage lasts from a few days or weeks to six months, depending on the circumstances. This time period gives way to a phase which can be compared to the feeling of 'the party's over' (Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor, 1991).
- This stage is marked by negative appraisals of the environment (Harris and Moran, 1979). Expatriates begin to notice the sources of irritation in the host culture when their own tried ways of behaving fail to achieve the required results (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003).

- The third and the fourth phase are slightly contested. According to Schneider and Barsoux (2003), in the third phase the expatriate experiences 'fight or flight' symptoms. For example either complaining about the local culture and customs or withdrawing into a cultural ghetto. Whereas, according to Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor (1991), the continuing development of psychological adjustment to relocation leads to the 'turning point'..
- The fourth phase according to Schneider and Barsoux is one in which the expatriate falls in love with the new culture, whilst rejecting the original culture; in other terms named 'going native'. On the other hand, Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor believe the fourth stage signals 'healthy recovery', as the expatriate accepts the new lifestyle and adjusts to the new circumstances.

### **Psychological And Cultural Shock**

Culture shock is both a psychological and cultural issue (Adler, 2003). Being a foreigner, it is normal to experience a variety of strong emotions. These however, may lead to significantly depressive moods. This is what is actually called "culture shock," which starts usually a while after the person arrives in the host country and can last up to a year or two, depending on the individual.

Quite a significant amount of knowledge exists on several aspects of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) (Sims and Schraeder, 2004). Surprisingly, however, the same cannot be said for the term 'culture shock' itself. Mumford (1998) observed that there have been no attempts to measure 'culture shock' or even to corroborate the term empirically. This is a surprising bit of research because it is estimated that US organizations spend approximately \$80,000 preparing each expatriate for his assignment and the imminent culture shock (Harisson, 1994).

### **Expatriate Failure**

Since expatriate assignments are significantly expensive to carry out, it is extremely important for the organization and the employee to ensure that they are successful (Simms and Schraeder, 2004). However, this is hardly ever achieved. The rate of failure for expatriate managers is well recorded. According to research (Webb and Wright, 1996) around 40 per cent of all expatriate assignments fail, with an estimated rate of failure in host countries of up to 70 per cent (Naumman, 1992). The costs associated with expatriate failure are quite high, reaching up to \$ 1 million dollars for each failure (Shannonhouse, 1996). The main reasons for failure are related to problems arising due to the inability of the family of the employee to adjust, disrupting the

expatriate's adaptation to the host environment; and the lack of the expatriate's interpersonal skills. However, the number one and two reasons for failure are the inability of the spouse and the employee to adjust to a foreign culture.

### **Cross-Cultural Interaction**

Due to increase in expatriate assignments, there has been a greater frequency and depth of cross-cultural interaction (Webb and Wright, 1996). Cross-cultural interactions are meant to bring those people together who have different behaviour patterns and cognitive abilities for interpreting different things (Triandis et al.1972). Those expatriates who are not familiar with the cultural norms and patterns of behavior of the host country cannot be happy while living abroad and as such can become a burden to the organization (Webb and Wright, 1996). International assignments and problems relating to adjustment to a foreign culture can affect work performance. Other severe problems such as drugs, alcohol and psychological problems can occur which can underestimate the skills and abilities of an individual whose career history has been otherwise quite successful with a healthy social and family life. Psychological research shows that there is a link between the number of life events that a person suffers from (for example divorce, changing jobs, bereavement) and psychological disorders (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1974). International managers who move to a foreign country experience life changing events such as changing country, job and house. This leaves a high risk to their psychological well-being and a risk of a performance deficit at their workplace. All this is ultimately a huge risk for the organization.

### **Stress and Culture Shock**

Moving to a foreign country naturally means stress for the expatriate. International assignments generally fall into the category of stressful life events (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Stress is a major part of expatriate assignments and can result in the initial months when the employee is experiencing culture shock and must learn how to deal with a new culture. It is to be noted that the usual way of handling a situation in one's own country cannot be applied in the host country. This causes more frustration and hence forms a vicious cycle – the expatriate tries to apply his own 'home rules' in the host country and ends up failing miserably, leading to increased stress.

Theoretically, culture shock has been defined as the "stress induced by all the behavioural expectation differences and the accompanying uncertainty with which the individual must cope" (Black and Gregerson, 1991, p.

462). Solomon (1994), similarly, described culture shock as "An emotional and psychological reaction to the confusion, ambiguity, value conflicts, and hidden clashes that occur as a result of fundamentally different ways of perceiving the world and interacting socially between cultures: Disequilibrium" (p. 58).

The culture shock can involve such a situation where the various frustrations felt by the expatriate build up, leading to the explosion of emotions such as anger, depression and homesickness (Black et al., 1999; Harrison 1994; Winkelman, 1994).

### **Factors Affecting Culture Shock**

The literature suggests that there are five key factors affecting expatriate culture shock. These are mainly: 1) training of the expatriate, 2) demographic characteristics of the expatriate, 3) personality traits of the expatriate, 4) organizational support given to the expatriate and 5) the technical competence of the expatriate (Sims and Schraeder, 2004). It is necessary to explain them all in order to get an idea of how culture shock can influence an expatriate and his stay in the foreign country.

### **The Impact of Training**

The ability to adapt to new cultures is an important element of a successful international assignment (Forster, 2000). This is where cross-cultural training is so important. One of the main purposes of training programs is to introduce to the expatriates the importance of culture and to make them aware of cultural differences and how to be sensitive towards them. They should also be made aware of the psychological stresses that are liable to occur while they are on assignment abroad, when they try to adapt themselves to the living and working conditions of the host culture. However, it is important to remember that these are not a cure for everything. Their success or failure depends on the willingness of the expatriates to learn and develop new skills and attitudes. Also, the type of training provided to expatriates and their families can vary between different organizations.

### **Culture Shock and Expatriate Families**

It is one of the most important demographic factors with regards to culture shock amongst expatriates (Black, 1988; Black and Stephens, 1989; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Harvey, 1985; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001; Takeuchi, Tesluk and Yun, 2002; Tung, 1981, 1982). As Rahim has said, 'the effectiveness of overseas managers may be affected by the degree of adaptability and supportiveness of their families, especially the spouse' (1983, pp. 312). It is not possible that the experience of

an expatriate be in sync with the experience of his family, mainly the spouse and children. According to research by Shaffer and Harrison (2001), it is easier for younger children, who are in pre-schools, to adjust to a new country and culture compared to relatively older children. This increases the chances of culture shock amongst the older children. Expatriate adjustment is greatly dependent on the family's adjustment and vice-versa (Takeuchi et al., 2002). This is referred to as the 'spillover' effect by Takeuchi et al. These spillover effects will apply to the culture shock experience, that is, the increase in expatriate culture shock would increase the family's culture shock and vice-versa.

The wives or partners of expatriates are mostly the ones prone to experiencing extreme stress whilst adjusting to their new environment and situation (Harvey, 1985). Various researchers have given their opinions on this matter. According to Black and Stephens 'the adjustment of the spouse is highly correlated to the adjustment of the expatriate manager and the adjustment of the spouse and the expatriate are positively related to the expatriate's intention to stay in the overseas assignment' (1989, pp. 529).

### **Previous International Experience**

Another demographic factor which is linked to the reduction in uncertainty is the expatriate's previous work experience of living in a foreign country (Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; Nicholson, 1984; Torbiorn, 1982). Black et al. (1999) say that previous overseas experience can help expatriates with what to expect when moving to the new country and adjusting to the culture. Expatriates can use and rely on past experiences regarding the adjustment process and can rely on that experience to reduce the uncertainty associated with the transition (Louis, 1980). This can help lower culture shock and quicken cross-cultural adjustment (Black and Gregerson, 1991; Black et al., 1991). Overall, even though previous overseas experience does tend to make it easy to adjust the second time round but it is important to remember that exactly how that happens or what factors hinder or amplify the impact of previous experience, has still to be completely figured out by researchers in the field (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991)

### **Personality Characteristics of The Expatriate**

Many researchers have looked at the skills necessary for an expatriate to be effective in a cross-cultural environment (Brein & David, 1971; Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Stening, 1979). However, few organizations recognize the role of chief traits and key competencies on expatriate culture shock (Ioannou, 1995). Research shows that there are certain traits and

competencies possessed by expatriates which can result in increased or decreased likelihood that they will be negatively affected by culture shock (Black, 1990; Black et al., 1999; Harrison, 1994; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). The key traits identified in the literature include:

a) Cultural flexibility, which involves an individual's cognitive flexibility. It encompasses both openness to new and different behaviours and the flexibility to replace the activities that were enjoyed whilst in the home country, with new, different activities in the host country (Black, 1990). This is a critical part of overcoming culture shock (Black, 1990; Harrison, 1994; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985), otherwise the expatriate might experience loneliness, frustration and isolation which will inhibit adjustment (Black, 1990; Church, 1982);

b) Ethnocentricity, which is influential in its affect on expatriate culture shock and cross-cultural adjustment. Ethnocentricity means the values and beliefs of one's own culture are superior to those held by people in other cultures (Wortzel and Wortzel, 1985). Research proves that ethnocentric expatriates are more prone to culture shock – of 'a severe and debilitating' type, and are more likely to fail an expatriate assignment than those individuals who are more tolerant and patient of their circumstances (Caligiuri and Di Santo, 2001; Church, 1982; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Stening, 1979).

c) Stress, the way an expatriate reacts to it can be an important factor in determining if the individual can overcome culture shock and be successful in cross-cultural adjustment (Black, 1988, 1990; Byrnes, 1966; Church, 1982; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Oberg, 1960; Tung, 1981, 1982).

d) Interpersonal skills; an over-view of the literature (Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978; Hammer, 1987; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985) revealed that a common cause of culture shock amongst expatriates is related to interpersonal conflict with the host country nationals.

### **Organizational Support Activities**

Quite a significant amount of literature suggests that the amount of organizational support that the expatriate receives, during the course of the assignment, is crucial in that it influences culture shock (Eisenberger, Fasolo and David-LaMastro, 1990; Punnett, 1977). Higher levels of perceived organizational support lead to a greater level of affective commitment to make the international assignment successful. A greater level of affective commitment by the expatriate would increase the probability that the expatriate would make the necessary behavioural modifications that are required in order to reduce culture shock and facilitate cultural adjustment. According to Punnett (1997), in-country social support was very important once the initial culture shock was being felt. Organizational support such as with housing,

schooling and travelling were of utmost importance when overcoming culture shock. Black et al. (1999) found that if there are expatriate co-workers, they could provide information about the do's and don'ts of the host culture to these fellow expatriates. This social support can decrease culture shock and uncertainty.

### Technical Competence of the Expatriate

As stated earlier, that expatriate candidates are usually selected on the basis of their job skills or technical and job-based knowledge, it is still the case that an expatriate needs to have certain capabilities, experience and skill to undertake the tasks assigned to them. Job-related abilities do impact culture shock (Baker and Ivancevich, 1971; Black, 1990; Black et al., 1999; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Miller, 1972, 1973; Tung, 1981; Vassel, 1983) and those expatriates who demonstrate higher levels of technical or managerial competence are likely to experience lower levels of culture shock. Despite the importance of expatriate skills and abilities, evidence suggests that choosing candidates solely on the basis of job-related abilities is a mistake (Shilling, 1993). The solution is to create a combination of the two – job-related skills and personality traits /competencies and selecting candidates on the basis of these. Although it is difficult to find expatriate candidates who possess both these abilities, research shows that these expatriates are most likely the ones better able to handle and overcome culture shock and adjust successfully (Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Shilling, 1993).

Lastly, it is important to mention how the expatriate experience affects performance at the workplace. Despite its importance, many managers continue to base candidate selection criteria only on technical expertise and often employee (familial) willingness to go. This kind of strategy not only results in a failure of expatriates to adjust, but also inadequate on-the-job performance (Caligiuri, 1997; Gregersen & Black, 1990; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). When asked about the main causes of assignment failure, poor candidate selection was mentioned by 84% of companies participating in the GMAC GRS-NFTC-SHRM Global survey (2001). Adjustment failure costs well above \$150,000 (U.S.) per person (Briscoe, 1995), in addition to an estimated cost of \$80,000 for training, relocation, and compensation (Dowling, Schuler, & Welch, 1996). With such figures, organizations cannot afford to continue making expatriate selection decisions based on heuristics.

### METHODOLOGY

The dissertation has made use of empirical methods to study the effects of culture shock on expatriates. The

method undertaken for this research is qualitative, since the aim is to gather an understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. According to Bryman (1988, p. 46), the qualitative approach of research is “an approach to the study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyze the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied.” This is the most apt portrayal of the method used to carry out this research.

Qualitative research is the kind of research design which has many different emphases from quantitative research (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). One of the most prominent and significant differences between qualitative and quantitative research is the priority given to the perspectives of those who are being studied rather than the concerns of the researcher. Apart from that, a certain kind of emphasis is on the interpretation of observations in accordance with the subjects' own understandings.

The methods adopted for this research made use of structured, open-ended written interviews, instead of face-to-face interviews. The reason for that was merely because of the difficulty in accessing the expatriates due to their geographical locations around the world. Interviews would have been difficult to conduct over the telephone due to the different locations of every expatriate. The most problematic issue in this case would be the time difference – since every country is either a few hours ahead of UK or a few hours behind UK. It would have been almost impossible to interview each person at a time which would have suited both the participant and the researcher (keeping in mind the time difference). The issue of recording these interviews and then transcribing them would have proved time consuming and quite difficult.

### Preparation and Pre-Departure Training

A majority of the respondents said that they were informed of their assignment either two months or a few weeks in advance. Most of the expatriates were not provided any form of pre-departure training whatsoever. In response to the question, they wrote “none”. One French expatriate, now working in Italy, said: “Absolutely nothing. Even no support for the logistics: how to find an apartment, school for kids, etc, which is very different from assignments from countries like the US or from the private sector”.

This is interesting because none of the expatriates from the US said that they had received any sort of pre-departure training. He was also told that he would not be allowed to travel alone. Another was a Japanese expatriate who said that his organization provided him extensive training before deploying him to every country that he has lived in as an expatriate. Training included lifestyle learning of host country and cultural awareness. Another Japanese expatriate also said he received

training before being deployed. This included lifestyle and security training, along with work-related training. On the other hand, an American expatriate who has travelled extensively around the world, currently based in Indonesia, said that he was provided pre-departure training only on his very first assignment. Some expatriates wrote "Not Applicable" in response to the question.

### **Emotions and State of Mind**

The question based on this theme received varying answers. The question was asked with regards to the emotions and state of mind of the expatriates when they first came to the host country. Generally, a vast majority of the expatriates said that they were excited but slightly apprehensive at the same time. An Irish expatriate, who has lived in eleven countries, responded in these words: "First appointment was a kaleidoscope of perceptions and new sensory inputs; this can be quite overwhelming until you recalibrate your own perceptions of 'the norm' and can reestablish some kind of emotional equilibrium. Of course all these new experiences were exciting and could easily be overwhelming. I am particularly accepting of change and enjoy new experiences and challenges, but this is not for everyone. Those who take comfort in routine and stability would find the dislocation of living working and socializing environments very threatening." One Japanese expatriate said that although he was excited to be in a new country, he was still a bit worried about crime and insecurity. Another Japanese expatriate, living in Pakistan, said that there was a mixture of excitement and uneasiness in his mind. He went on to say: "However, as is always, there was more excitement than fear or insecurity when I first came to Pakistan".

An Italian expatriate living in Pakistan wrote that although she was excited about the new country and culture, she was a little concerned about accommodation "due to the bureaucratic procedure." She did not explain it further. An Ethiopian expatriate wrote that he was excited but "somehow cautious" upon arrival in Pakistan.

Some expatriates wrote that when they first arrived in their host countries, they were excited about the prospects of new opportunities with regards to their specific fields. For example, scientists, researchers and engineers, all working for a Governmental organization, wrote that they were very excited about the opportunity of learning from scientific facilities that their host countries were providing. A Turkish expatriate wrote that when she landed in America, she was very excited about the availability of scientific facilities that she would get to explore. A Pakistani expatriate wrote that he was genuinely excited to come to America, because he was seeking opportunities that he knew America could provide. Another Pakistani expatriate, who moved to Saudi Arabia, wrote: "I was excited and enthusiastic

about learning new techniques in engineering and to know about new people."

### **The Phases of Culture Shock**

The question about the phases of culture shock was the most detailed. The responses were very interesting. One American expatriate wrote that he experienced all the phases of culture shock. Currently, he is working in Indonesia and said that he worked in China, on and off for eighteen years, as an expatriate and eventually left because he felt that he was getting too cynical about things there. A majority of the expatriates say that they experienced 'the honeymoon phase' and one American expatriate, living in France wrote that it has been six weeks since he came to his host country and he is still in the 'honeymoon phase.' Phase one and two, 'the honeymoon phase' and 'the party's over phase' were the most common phases experienced by the expatriates. Some wrote that loneliness and homesickness were felt but culture shock was not specifically experienced. One Turkish expatriate, living now in the United States, wrote that she was homesick but she did not experience culture shock per se. She believes that basically everything is the same from lifestyle point of view, except language.

An Italian expatriate living in Turkey said that he does not recognize himself in any of the phases mentioned. And he also wrote that the country had a very religious background, which he respected and tried to avoid things like drinking in public, which might have been considered offensive. It was noticed that some expatriates did not respond directly to this question, such as this expatriate. They wrote generally about culture and behavior. Another expatriate, an Iranian living in Italy, who replied in a similar manner to the above mentioned expatriate, said that he believes that there are several things that have a negative impact on a person when one travels in other areas and in different cultures, such as society, behavior, clothing, food, movement, style of talking and religion but after a while a person builds up tolerance.

### **Symptoms Of Culture Shock And Interaction With HCNs**

Responses differed with every expatriate in questions about 'symptoms' of culture shock and the interaction with the host country nationals. Some expatriates wrote that they did not experience culture shock at all, writing that they were well-prepared, confident and ready to handle anything. Some wrote that they did not feel any different than they did back home and that there were no surprises in the host country and that people are generally the same everywhere. While certain other expatriates wrote that the major symptoms of culture shock were feelings of loneliness, sadness, frustration,

shock at the living conditions of people and their attitude. A Japanese expatriate wrote that his biggest culture shock in his host country Pakistan was that he felt the nationals complained about everything and he was surprised about the people's way of thinking and acting.

An American expatriate wrote about his culture shock symptoms in Saudi Arabia, saying that he was very upset about the attitude of the local people and found them to be arrogant and disrespectful towards foreigners.

One Japanese expatriate wrote about his general experiences as an expatriate. He said that he was rarely shocked. He found similarity of mind and flow of feelings in countries like Indonesia and Uruguay but faced difficulties in Bangladesh and Mexico initially, eventually worked it out by communicating with host country nationals. He wrote that he was able to then adjust "naturally."

### **Stress and Family Adjustment**

A vast majority of expatriates wrote that they were stressed out most of the times and this was due to homesickness, cultural adjustment, language barriers and frustration at HCNs. All of those who were stressed dealt with it in a positive way. Some expatriates confided in their spouses, some took it out by working out at the gym or swimming, some turned to reading and some resorted to silence. They all wrote that it is important to combat stress by doing positive things. An Irish expatriate wrote that stress should be handled positively, not by drinking. A Brazilian expatriate who is working here in UK at a shipping organization, wrote that he has noticed that he has been getting more stressed and tired as the job becomes more demanding.

One Japanese expatriate wrote that he did not experience any stress at all. He said the trick is to 'Do in Rome as the Romans do.' Some expatriates did not take their families with them. One expatriate said that he would work longer hours to avoid coming home to an empty apartment. An Irish expatriate, whose wife and children accompanied him, said that his children had difficulties adjusting in Bangladesh but were assisted by their school which had a specific program designed to help expatriate children adjust to the prevailing environment of the country.

### **DISCUSSION**

One of the themes that the literature extensively talks about is the phenomenon of culture shock itself (Oberg, 1960), its symptoms and the phases of culture shock (Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor, 1991). All these, in effect, generally are about culture shock, its effects on expatriates and the inter-cultural and cross-cultural competencies of these expatriates (Sims and Schraeder,

2004). The findings have revealed that the phenomenon is experienced by a majority of expatriates who participated in the research and has affected them all in a different manner.

Whilst talking about culture shock and its effects, it is seen that it affects expatriates as they travel extensively to different countries around the world. It has psychological and emotional effects on expatriates and (Adler, 2003) can result in change in behaviour of these expatriates. The literature talks about the fact that culture shock is deeply rooted within uncertainty (Black and Gregerson, 1991) and many expatriates are uncertain of how to react in an environment or situation that they are not used to, that is new to them. This uncertainty leads to culture shock.

### **CONCLUSION**

This dissertation mainly aimed to understand and explore the phenomenon of culture shock amongst expatriates on assignments abroad. It talked about many things that are associated with culture shock and highlighted the causes and effects of this phenomenon. The dissertation focused at first on the literature based on culture shock and its stages and influences. It explored the facts and highlighted the already conducted research and its results of the studies on culture shock. The dissertation then explored the psychological, emotional and other aspects of culture shock through qualitative research conducted in the form of interviews conducted amongst expatriates from around the globe. This research involved participation from various nationals, who gave their accounts of experiences of their expatriate assignments and their views on culture shock and how it affected them.

The findings were analyzed through qualitative analysis to reveal the factors associated with culture shock and then discussed to highlight and contrast the themes that came out of the literature and the interviews. The results of the study has given a remarkable insight into this phenomenon and revealed certain eye-opening incidents which require the attention of international governments and human rights organizations. Issues such as hostile attitudes and ethnocentric behavior of nationals of certain nations need to be investigated. The attitude of host country nationals towards expatriates is important in understanding and combating culture shock. It has also been understood from this research that there is too much focus on training expatriates and their reaction to HCNs. Some attention also needs to be given to the HCNs; where they need to be trained to welcome their guests graciously and not treat them as if they were somehow inferior to themselves. The responses from some expatriates revealed that particular people in some countries need to be less arrogant and display some courtesy towards people who have left behind their

homes and sometimes their families, to come down to foreign lands and cultures in order to work on assignments.

This research portrayed the honesty and openness of expatriates in talking about their expatriate experiences. It has been an essential learning experience for the researcher as well because it revealed so many new things which the literature alone did not. Many expatriates have talked about how personal the experience of expatriation becomes when one begins to settle down after having experienced culture shock. Relationships begin to be formed and people's lives are changed for the better after encountering new people, new sights and sounds, new cultures and behaviors.

It was felt that the main purpose of the research was achieved through reading the responses of the expatriates from such diversity of nationalities and cultures and by understanding what they had to say. The research was authentic and rich in its nature and portrayed the essential human element of personal experience. The dissertation explained and analyzed culture shock amongst expatriates, its reasons and forms and ways to avoid it. It helped understand many factors associated with adjustment of expatriates and highlighted aspects of cross-cultural interaction amongst host country nationals and expatriates. The research was an overview of the simple fact that human beings all around the world, no matter how different they may be in cultures and identities, yet share the same human emotions of excitement, sadness, happiness, loneliness and feelings of appreciation, disappointment, gratitude and remorse.

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