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“THERE IS NOTHING EITHER GOOD OR BAD, BUT THINKING MAKES IT SO” – CROSS-CULTURAL PERCEPTION AND COOPERATION IN BANGLADESH – IT’S NOT ABOUT CULTURE

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the dynamics of cross-cultural cooperation between Dutch expatriates and their Bangladeshi counterparts. As research on expatriates in Bangladesh is still lacking, an exploratory approach was chosen, in order to gain in-depth knowledge. It was found that national culture might be less important in the Bangladeshi context. Rather having a positive attitude and knowledge of the language was found to be important for effective management control in Bangladesh. Next to this, the cultural distance between the Netherlands and Bangladesh is larger from the perception of the expat and smaller from the perception of the Bangladeshi counterpart.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Perception, Cross Cultural, Culture, Expat

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world with an average GDP of 780 US Dollar per capita per year in 2012, (World Bank, 2012), it has very low wages, and businesses involving high-labor intensity e.g. textiles are attracted by this condition (Yanga and Mlachilaa, 2007; Rintoul, 2012). Research on Bangladesh is relatively limited (e.g. Rahman *et al.* 2015; Meherun *et al.* 2017), and research on management control in this area is scarce. Hogue and Hopper (1994) studied management control in a Bangladeshi jute mill, their most important finding was congruent to existing theory: the wider social, economic, political and institutional contexts govern the way management control operates in the organization. Because there are no scientific studies available considering expatriates as form of management control in Bangladesh and the effect of national culture, it will be interesting to conduct exploratory research, trying to gain in-depth knowledge, rather than performing quantitative analyses. From this perspective, specific situations can be examined and reflections can be made towards current available theories. Especially when setting up a new business, or when one tries to use expatriates as a form of management control, the information in this paper might prevent problems from occurring and could explain why certain aspects of business need to be handled with care. Expatriate adaptation, training and selection are important aspects of successful expatriate assignments, this paper will try to provide knowledge considering these processes for Dutch expatriates in Bangladesh. First, we discuss theory and methodology, after which we present our findings and

next discuss these findings and the implications they hold for managers, for theory development, and for further research.

2. Theory

2.1. Expatriate theory

Cross-cultural adjustment is defined as the process of adaptation to working and living in a foreign culture, it is perceived as the psychological comfort and familiarity an individual has in getting acquainted with the new culture (Black, 1988; Black *et al.* 1991; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). Black (1988) distinguishes three types of expatriate adjustment: work adjustment; referring to performance, supervision and responsibilities in the work environment, relational adjustment; the process of socialization with the community; and general adjustment, including the adaptation to life in a different country. The typology is valuable because it contains individual, contextual and organizational variables, several researchers have confirmed this typology (Black and Stephens, 1989; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Parker and McEvoy, 1993; Cerdin, 1996).

When using expatriates to control overseas subsidiaries, there are high expectations of success, however there is also a body of literature that suggests that expatriates face severe problems during their assignments (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Dunbar, 1992; Tung, 1998). Expatriates are highly committed to the headquarters and are induced by the corporate culture of the firm, this results in potential conflicts regarding culture with host country nationals and thereby reduce the ability to control (Paik and Sohn, 2004). Existing research generally agrees that failure is not due to technical incompetence of managers rather there are difficulties regarding inter-cultural adjustment (Bird and Mukuda, 1989; Tung, 1993). Therefore, Adler (1986), Black and Mendenhall (1990) and Jun *et al.* (1997) argue that difficulties in cultural adaptation can inhibit managerial performance leading to a failure in effective control over local operations. Cultural differences have an effect on behavioral patterns and social norms, this complicates interpersonal relations because expatriates and locals have a different background and thereby 'frame of reference' (Lachman *et al.* 1994). They define a frame of reference as a set of patterned meanings or collective mental programs that are shared by a specific group of people, this reference indicates appropriate and inappropriate behavior and how to act. Next to that, it has been proven that positive or negative reactions are often communicated through various non-verbal gestures, such as facial expressions, body postures or hand gestures (Ridgeway *et al.* 1985). If an expatriate faces adaptation problems and next to that, there are also communication problems, this intensifies the pressure, therefore many expatriates are forced to return home prematurely as a consequence of failed cultural adaptation (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Lachman *et al.* 1994; Black and Gregersen, 1998).

2.2. Expatriate training and selection

The goal of expatriate training is to educate the expatriate and their spouse about the other culture which makes it easier for them to interact and also predisposes them to rapid adjustment to the new culture (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1986). Brislin (1979) found three ways of cross-cultural training; cognitive, affective and behavioral. The cognitive approach refers to providing information in non-participative settings about the culture of a country. The affective training approach refers to exercising critical situations and reactions that are likely to happen in a culture and thereby trainees can learn how to delicately deal with this interaction. The behavioral method mainly covers adjustment to the communication style of the new culture, it involves knowledge and practical improvement about how the expatriate can establish positive relationships (Waxin and Panaccio, 2005). A number of researchers have used Brislin's (1979) model and included situational factors, e.g. hardness of culture and communication, duration of stay, function and role of the manager etc. (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011).

Tung (1981) argued there are five basic ways of training cross-cultural adjustment, namely; didactic training, culture assimilator, language training, sensitivity training and field experience. Tung (1981) suggests that the type of training to be received is dependent on the

purpose of the expatriate assignment, two important factors to consider are the degree of cultural distance or similarity and the degree of interpersonal interaction with local inhabitants.

When evaluating the body of literature concerning expatriate training, there are various perspectives. On the one hand, there is a group that considers cross-cultural training effective and on the other hand, there is literature proving insignificant support for the success of cross-cultural training. Black and Mendenhall (1990) and Black *et al.* (1991) examined the relationship between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural efficiency and found that the training is associated with feelings of well-being and confidence in the development of appropriate adjustment of behavior to the context of the new culture and thereby the improvement of relationships in the host-country. Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) drew the same conclusion in a similar study, with an indication that there is a positive relation between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural efficiency. Next to this, Earley (1987) found that cross-cultural training had a positive effect on the cultural adjustment process of the expatriate as well as on their managerial performance. Hammer and Martin (1992) drew the same conclusions from a similar study.

However, there is also literature stating that expatriate cross-cultural training is ineffective. Cerdin (1996) found that cross-cultural training had no influence on the three facets of adjustment identified by Black (1988), while his sample consisted out of 293 French managers that expatriated to 44 different countries. In general, MNCs do not provide enough training, preparation and support to expatriates (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011).

Brewster and Pickard (1994) find that expatriates and their partners have a positive attitude towards formal training, they believe that training enhances the ability to adapt to the new environment. Their belief in the training is not significantly related to their age, previous experience, destination or type of organization. Brewster and Pickard (1994) suggest that the expatriate community in the host country has a significant influence on the adaptation of the expatriate. Having received knowledge and thereby information about the host country makes the adaptation easier, however, an expatriate community has an even stronger effect. Therefore, it is recommended that expatriates with a destination that has a limited expatriate community, receive more training to overcome the adaptation process easier (Brewster and Pickard, 1994). From the previous literature indicated, the conclusion can be drawn that there are various meanings towards expatriate training.

Most MNC's acknowledge that sending the wrong person in an expatriate assignment can result in poor job performance, early repatriation and possibly personal emotional problems for the expat and his spouse, next to that, failure in the assignment often has critical organizational consequences at home and abroad, therefore expatriate selection is very important (Caligiuri *et al.* 2009). As mentioned, Tung (1981) first established that cross-cultural adjustment is a crucial factor in the success or failure of the expatriate assignment.

Tung (1998) continued that for jobs in the CEO and functional head categories, which involve more extensive contacts with people in the host society and a longer duration of stay abroad, it is noted that besides technical competence, greater emphasis should be placed on human relational skills. One should be able to interact effectively with host country nationals, particularly in assignments regarding countries characterized by large cultural distance from the home society (Tung, 1998). IHRM policies and practices at 80 U.S. multinationals provided empirical support that companies which adopted a contingency approach to their selection and training of expatriates experienced higher rates of success in their international assignments (Tung, 1998).

According to Caligiuri *et al.* (2009) the selection of individuals to fill international assignments is challenging, because the assessment of candidates focuses primarily on job context rather than job content. In many cases, the professional competencies are already assumed to be at an acceptable level after creating a first shift based on traditional principles regarding job content. Therefore, the selection systems in the next stage are developed to predict interaction with the environment. Increasing attention is paid to psychological and biodata factors, including personality characteristics, language fluency, and international experience to predict the success of an expat (Caligiuri *et al.* 2009). Four personality characteristics were found across extensive studies regarding high expatriate performance: 1, to be open and receptive to learning the norms of new cultures, 2, to initiate contact with host nationals, 3, to gather cultural

information, and 4, to handle the higher amounts of stress associated with the ambiguity of their new environments (Church, 1982; Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000; Shaffer *et al.* 2006). Specifically, greater emphasis would be placed on personality characteristics such as sociability and openness when assessing a candidate for a developmental or strategic assignment (Caligiuri, 2000).

3. Methodology

This research can be characterized as an empirical research and follows a theory development approach. This research will have an exploratory character with explanatory elements, because exploratory research is used when a subject or problem has not yet been defined and the primary goal of an explanatory research is to understand why a situation or problem occurs (Leeuw, 1996). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the main source of data collection because it is well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues, next to that it enables probing for more information and clarification of answers (Barriball and While, 1994). The explorative approach will be the best way to determine which variables are influencing the relationship between national culture and expatriates as a form of management control in Bangladesh. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue it is the intimate connection with empirical reality that permits the development of a testable, relevant, and valid theory. Cooper and Schindler (2003) add that interviewing is the best method of data collection when you need to know something about attitudes, opinions, feelings, thoughts or knowledge. While previous research has shown that explorative research might be conducted by mail surveys, to get a clear in-depth view, interviews are needed (Harrison and McKinnon, 1999). The process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation has been generally considered as triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), triangulation generally increases the validity of the research. Theory needs to be developed to a certain extent that it can be tested, therefore the research methods applied in this study will be semi-structured interviews, literature and document study, and direct observations.

The sample consists out of eight Dutch expatriate managers and eight counterparts, local colleagues of the expatriate managers, who are interviewed to get a perception of the cooperation from both perspectives. In total, there are sixteen interviews, most of which were conducted in Bangladesh. One interview was conducted with an expat manager while he was on holiday in the Netherlands, however, his counterpart is still interviewed in Bangladesh. By taking sixteen interviews, with eight expats and eight local counterparts, a comparison is made of self-perception and other-perception, next to that respondents are originating from all types of organizations, this all contributes to the internal validity of the research. Among the interviewees were five businessmen, from whom three are concerned with textiles, one engages in diverse sorts of project management and one businessman is active in both, project management and textiles. The other three expats are development workers, from which two are in a government agency and one is in an Ngo.

The respondents participated in a semi-structured interview, in which questions are prepared regarding the research design of this study, however, there is room for improvisation if particular topics prove extra relevance. In general, the interview questions are based upon the conceptual model and the inherent theories. Every theory has its own impact on the relationship between national culture and management control, therefore the questions are established on the current knowledge of the theories and on the points of interest regarding this research. All the interviews are taped with an audio recording device, after recording the interview is typed out in full, this represents the raw data of the research. Considering the confidentiality of the respondents, their names and companies will not be mentioned in the paper. However, the respondents are asked whether it is allowed to give a description of the business context and to what degree confidentiality is of importance to them.

The interpretation of data will be done with the use of qualitative research tools. Before being able to compare the data to the theoretical issues an analysis is required. The data is analyzed in three different steps: categorization, unitizing and proposition development. Categorization creates the organization of data in significant categories depending on relevance and literature. The goal of unitizing is to reduce and rearrange the data of the categories in a more

manageable format. Proposition development is based upon seeking patterns and relationships in the data.

4. Empirical findings

This section will consider the empirical research findings. The results of the data collected from the interviews will be presented in this section. Every headlined topic is connected to one of the specific questions of the interview.

4.1. Business culture

50% of the expat participants describe the business culture of Bangladesh as being dependent on networking, one expat respondent said:

'It is not important who you are, but it is important who you know'.

The system of patronage and nepotism is fed by this basis, and the other way around, 50% of the other expat participants did not discuss this. Next to this, 25% of the expat participants mention that most businesses are related to politics, what makes them strong as their party rules, however it makes them vulnerable when they are in the opposition and less interested in creating strategy as the future is insecure in terms of periods of 5 years reign. 50% of the counterparts are experiencing the Dutch business culture as more professional and strict regarding quality and planning. One counterpart participant added that Dutch make a distinction in personal and professional contact, however Bangladeshi experience these two things as one in a relationship. The remaining counterparts did not discuss this specifically.

4.1.1. Power and Hierarchy

All expat participants agree that power is very central and patriarchal managed in the society, in the government and in the businesses of Bangladesh, there is high dependence on the boss. This is reflected in for example, everybody standing up when the boss walks into the room for a meeting. Power in Dutch organizations was seen as structured as a flat pyramid where the distance between the boss, the management and the lower level employees is relatively small, people are not afraid to be critical towards each other and can approach their boss whenever there are issues. The shape of the typical Bangladeshi organization is curved towards the top, where the boss is situated. Under this boss are several layers of management with limiting decision-power, which indicates the distance between the management and the boss is already very high. Under the layers of management, there is a very large group of workers at the bottom, from layer to layer, it is not allowed to be critical to the layer above you, nor is it allowed to skip one layer. It was surprising to find that 50% of the expat respondents from two organizations admitted to have created an organizational structure, which is similar to the flat pyramid. It was mentioned that for management purposes, information is needed from lower levels to maintain efficiency and optimal decision-making, therefore they transferred their organization into the style of the flat pyramid.

75% of the counterpart respondents discussed the matters of power and hierarchy, they agreed on the fact the hierarchies are weaker in the Dutch business culture, 50% of the counterparts of the 2 organizations who claimed to have implemented a flat organizational structure agreed with their supervisors. It was noted that typical hierarchies in the society of Bangladesh are stronger than in the Netherlands, however for optimal management one counterpart claimed that it was needed to maintain distance with the employees, otherwise productivity issues can arise.

4.1.2. Strategy

In terms of strategy, there are diverse opinions, however 87.5% of the expat respondents indicate that the average strategy in Bangladesh is short-sighted. One respondent engaging in several projects says:

'Businesses in Bangladesh typically follow a strategy of high quantities, low margins, labor-intensive work and high risks'.

25% of the expat respondents indicate that copying behavior occurs within branches, start-ups are being made in a branch without having thorough knowledge about the branch segment, just because a successful businessman makes a new investment. 37.5% of the expat participants maintain that larger organizations, as well as the government have decent multi-year strategies. When regarding the participants in the counterpart group, 50% of them indicated that in terms of strategy, Dutch managers are focusing on the long-term and 37.5% of the counterpart participants indicate that Dutch managers have a higher degree of professionalism, meaning plan implementation, review of achievements, problems and controlling. 12.5% of the counterpart participants did not make remarks about this topic and among the sample 25% of the counterpart participants even criticized Bangladeshi management regarding governance on emotion rather than calculation, bad implementation plans and opportunistic behavior. However, across different organizations the overall picture of strategies is very diversified.

4.1.3. Traditions

Traditions in business are mainly evolving out of religion, 87.5% of the expat participants said that most companies and other government organizations participate in providing the abilities for the Friday prayers and the national holidays. One expat respondent was surprised that there is less value given to birthdays and individual organizations might have specific traditions as well. From the counterpart group, only 37.5% had input to this question, they confirmed the image sketched by the expat participant, however two of them added that participation in events is highly valued and makes them feel appreciated.

4.1.4. Environment

In general, the expat respondents indicated that the business environment of Bangladesh consists out of 20 billion USD in revenues by textiles and related textiles production, the second biggest industry at a size of 400 million USD is composed out of food, fish and shrimps, all other industries are very small and the majority of the people still work in agriculture. One expat respondent indicated that Bangladesh being one of the poorest overcrowded countries in the world, organizes its chaos very well. The infrastructure is relatively good, meaning you are able to ship something from one corner to the other corner of a country in one day. Things get done, there is huge manpower and willingness to work, and the growing middle class creates a lot of future potential, however there is also corruption and nepotism, which influence business.

4.2. Coping and adaptation

4.2.1. Coping by participant

In general terms, participants of the whole sample focused on the same things when dealing with the 'other' culture. They emphasized being adapted, open, learning, integrated, gaining acceptance and gaining two-sided respect. Managing expectations was considered to be a crucial part of the process, as well as being flexible, tough and have the ability to deal with hierarchies.

4.2.2. Perceived coping by counterpart

The expat participants convey that the local counterparts are generally having an attitude of acceptance, interest, flexibility and adaptability. There is agreement on all expat participants that this is due to a special foreigner status, meaning that because of low education and low standards, foreigners are being regarded as special and local civilians automatically engage in submissive behavior. However one participant adds that concerning appropriate behavior, mainly the same do's and don'ts are applicable. 75% of the expat respondents mention that although they are working together with their counterparts, they expect low knowledge of the Dutch culture. The counterparts as a group indicate that the Dutch expats are mostly behaving integrated, adapted, flexible, cooperative, straightforward, open, kind, logical, have willingness to learn about the culture they are working in.

4.2.3. Own behavior

In general, the expat participants say they adapt, respect and try to be delicate, tactical, cautious, tolerant, professional, avoiding certain topics and escalations, however it is also mentioned that one should also demonstrate their own principles, and there should also be a degree of acceptance and respect for that. The counterpart respondents regard their own behavior as accommodating, adjusting, learning, respecting, being logical, friendly and straightforward.

When comparing the answer of the expats and the counterparts the perception that people have of one another is correct for the major part. However, the local counterparts do not really notice that the expats are trying to demonstrate tactical behavior and avoid certain topics. The expats have problems with the logic of Bangladeshi, however the local counterparts regard themselves as logical, this is also incongruent. However, this might have to do with the fact that the counterparts in the sample are not representative for the normal population of Bangladesh, they are generally higher educated and intellectually developed to a larger extent.

4.2.4. Adaptation problems

Among the adaptation problems that the expat respondents ran into, multiple times it was mentioned the environment inside Dhaka was confronting for the expats, especially the busy traffic, the pollution, and the obnoxious urban behavior of people. However, 87.5% of the expats discussed that due to previous experience in Bangladesh or in other countries, it was easier to understand what should be expected and what was going on. 25% of the expat respondents said they had to get used to the special status you have as a foreigner, meaning that most normal Bangladeshi people automatically behave as submissive because of the power distance dimension.

Among the local counterpart respondents 87.5% said they had no trouble in adapting to work with an expat, mainly because the expats have a cooperative, supportive and friendly attitude that is logical and straightforward. One counterpart respondent mentioned he had trouble with the pace of the work, however, he got used to it after a while, 25% of the counterpart respondents said that they did not need to adapt because the expat was already totally adapted.

4.2.5. Expat facing troubles

62.5% of the local counterparts never experienced an expat facing difficulties, however the other 37.5 percent did. One counterpart participant said that Dutch expats get into trouble when they work with the wrong Bangladeshi people, and when they do not understand how to work the local systems of rules and regulation. The wrong people were defined as dishonest people who are concerned about personal gain rather than long-term business, the local systems mean being involved with corruption or morally questionable issues to get things done. When keeping the moral standards from the Netherlands, it might be difficult to get things done and a lot of energy and time might be lost. 25% of the counterpart respondents also mentioned that people from the administration department have more problems in adapting, because they work mostly internally

and have less contact with local people. One counterpart respondent mentioned problems can arise in the start especially when people are not open, other factors that have influence are the employment of their partner and children's education and environment.

4.2.6. Factors for successful adaptation

Among the factors for successful adaptation the expat respondents all answered more than three factors, the most clearly factors for successful adaptation coming forward were the expat community, adaptability, ability to absorb, toughness, flexibility, openness, sociability, acceptance, patience, communication skills, knowing locals, a positive mindset, the ability to put things in perspective, take initiative and having a good home.

4.3. Selection and training

4.3.1. Selection

Regarding selection procedures 87.5% of the expat respondents answered they found their job through their network of family and friends or from previous jobs. It was mentioned by all of the expats that background and previous experience were considered most important, next to that professional competencies were considered a basic requirement. 37.5% of the expat respondents were in the profession of development work, 37.5% of the expat respondents were in the textiles and trading business, 12.5% of the expat participants were skilled and educated in project management and 12.5% of the expat participants were active in both textiles and project management.

4.3.2. Selection characteristics

Regarding selection characteristics for an expat, the majority of the expat participants answered that openness and sociability were very important factors. Other factors were also important: tolerance, flexibility, genuine interest, ability to improvise and absorb, self-reliant, toughness and experience. The group of the counterpart participants agreed with the expat colleagues by all mentioning that being social and being open was a requirement for an expat. Next to that there is also some congruence regarding qualities as ability to integrate, being interested, having mutual respect, acceptance and understanding.

4.3.3. Preparation

The reaction of the expat participants to the question of how they had prepared for their assignments was surprising, 50% directly answered not having prepared anything at all, 25% admitted just to have made some logistical preparations and only 25% made logistical preparations, talked with experienced people and delved into the literature about the country. There was not a single expat, who received training regarding cross-cultural adjustment and national cultural differences. This indicates an extra relevance for this study as the majority thought that training would be very helpful and effective.

4.3.4. Potential training aspects

87.5% of the expat participants responded that a future training should be based upon practical things, do's and don'ts of the society and what to expect in daily life as these are the things you will constantly be dealing with. In addition, 62.5 percent of the expat respondents argue that information about the country will enhance adjustment and make one able to put things in perspective. The majority of the expats mentioned that training might be helpful; however, it is not possible to simulate the real experience of Bangladesh in a training. One expat respondent answered that training would be nonsense, rather commonsense, logic, and being open-minded next to professional skills would be enough for an expat coming to Bangladesh.

Among the local counterpart group of respondents, potential training aspects would be also based upon informational and practical training; however, the majority of the counterparts would go into detail on specific topics. An expat should gain inside knowledge of the Bangladeshi culture by understanding the situation of the country, the local systems, the mentality, the family orientation, the state of development and the interdependence between these things.

4.3.5. Prior knowledge or learning by doing

The sample of the local counterparts answered congruently that prior knowledge would be good for an expat and that learning by doing would be the second necessary step for optimal functioning in Bangladesh, both are important. Some counterpart participants also noted that prior knowledge might catalyze the learning by doing process as it becomes easier to rationalize and put things in perspective.

5. Culture and control

5.1. Personal perspective of culture

When striking a balance of regarding culture as a problem, an excuse or a motivation it was interesting to see that 87.5% of the expats considered culture as a motivation in their positions in Bangladesh. One expat respondent illustrated:

'The ability to learn two different cultures and thereby bridging the gap between the Netherlands and Bangladesh from the perspective of local management and home country policy is motivating, however there are frustrations in the learning and understanding process of the Bangladeshi culture'.

For the counterparts, the perspective of culture is diversified, for 37.5% of the participants culture was considered as a motivation, passing on information about the local circumstances, risks and behaviors improves the ability of the expat to work with the Netherlands. 25% of the counterpart participants regarded culture as an excuse for things to go wrong and 12.5 percent regarded culture as a problem, because the mentalities are very different, the remaining counterpart participants, 25% were indifferent.

5.2. Cooperation

Among the group of expats, 87.5% was facing problems in working with local people and all of them considered the problems were cultural related. The most grounded and intertwined problem was based on the lack of logic, with individuals and the society as a whole. It was mentioned multiple times that the dynamic of hierarchies in the society leads to problems, as subordinates are afraid to confront or inform their manager, they have the tendency to sit on problems. Sitting on problems generally increases the problem until the problem explodes, this failure in communication is regarded as a problem by Dutch expats.

Also related to communication problems, it is the fact that English is not the mother tongue of Dutch nor of Bangladeshi, the level of English might be too low sometimes and as the interpretation of words might differ, this can lead to conflict. Considering the issue of quality, this is a problem because Bangladeshi have a different standard in what is normal and acceptable. Many Bangladeshi have not seen products of high qualities that are normal for Western standards, therefore it is difficult for them to get used to.

Another problem for the majority of the expats is the opportunistic behavior, patronage, corruption and nepotism they are confronted with. Especially concerning organization control, conflicts of interest arise when organizational means are used for personal benefit. One expat respondent quoted: *'This is also perceived in the society, structurally people use public means for personal benefit'*. For example, there is a car accident on the highway, the owners of the two cars get out and start a discussion, but do not move and block the road for all the other people in the traffic who then suffer for their problem. Another example is the fact that people build houses

halfway on the streets, while they have no permit. Also, it is considered normal that government officials profit from their positions.

The management of time is indicated as a problem for most of the expats, especially concerning the fact that Dutch have the tendency to be strict in production, planning and shipping, because they are dealing with Western customers. However, Bangladeshi manage time more flexible, this generates discrepancies and conflict and therefore the expats indicate that timing and planning should be organized by very capable people or Western managers, otherwise there will always be delays. From the group of counterparts 37.5% did not experience problems when working with Dutch expats, they thought the expats were very well adapted, the other 62.5% of the local counterparts did face problems.

Some Bangladeshi recognized that the way of systematic working and high-skill thinking was problematic from time to time. Dutch people have the tendency to fail understanding local systems and customs, intentions are mostly good, however bluntness exists. For example, when dealing with the government, it was argued that Dutch needed to adjust better as for example when a VAT-number or an export certificate was required quickly, a payment might be needed to a government official. When the payment was not being made, it could take a lot of lost energy and time to get the certificate or permit, while it would be easier to just deal with it the way the system worked in the society.

A problem for the local counterparts considering the hierarchies is that Dutch people have a higher value for equality, therefore, they sometimes deal with people in a matter that is considered too friendly by their local counterparts. Power distance must be maintained otherwise people will not work for you anymore, because they regard you as a friend. If the expat acts too friendly, the local counterpart has to fix the productivity issues with the other locals, therefore a certain degree of hierarchy must be maintained. Congruent to the problem of communication explained by the expats, the English language is a problem, especially interpretation of words can differ in written contact. This might lead to situations of misunderstanding and conflict.

From the perspective of the locals, another problem is prejudice mental behavior and the lack of trust. There are good and bad people everywhere, however it is not fair to judge someone or to distrust them when there is no inducement. Therefore, it works demotivating if someone works very hard and then recognizes there are transparency issues and advice is put aside without proper argumentation.

5.3. Problem solving and control

Problem solving in the sample of the expat respondents happened by putting in place systems that guard and control, timing, planning and opportunistic behavior. Next to that, solving the problem together was preferred, by communication, discussion, evaluation and improvisation. Acceptation, patience and understanding are essential in problem solving for the expats. Among the counterpart participants solving problems is quite congruent to a part of the expat participants, the majority of them think that problem solving is a process that should be done together, especially by communication, discussion, explanation, evaluation and understanding, problems should be solved.

Among the group of expats 62.5% of the participants specifically quoted that control should be strict, interestingly these expats were all active in the private sector. They agreed that management in a professional organization should be sophisticated and that expats have the expertise to run this. Putting in place systems that safeguard and control, planning, timing, opportunistic behavior are considered very important. One expat respondent quoted:

'Expats are of an objective nature as they are not influenced by patronage or nepotism, they can be considered objective as they do not have any relation to specific individuals who are family, friends or neighbors and therefore conflicts of interest with organizational goals will not arise'.

It should be avoided that employees have the opportunity to serve their own interests by using means of the organization. One expat participant stressed that control should be based upon a contingency approach, because even if there are control systems from other similar

countries, this might help in calculation of efficiencies and waste, however they will not be able to capture the finesse and gaps that allow for controlling problems in Bangladeshi organizations.

Regarding the hierarchy dimension of Bangladesh, multiple expats contribute that it is very important that the expat will only manage his managers and that he will not engage in the management of the worker as well. Expats should manage the local Bangladeshi managers and the local managers will manage the workers. If the expat will engage in approaching the workers, this will be ineffective as he undermines the authority of the local managers and there will be a communication barrier concerning language and intelligence.

When considering quality, samples should be taken randomly, one expat participant said: *'I always, check, crosscheck and double-check'*, this indicates very strict control. Another expat manager said: *'When working together with locals, control should be strict but with full trust'* which indicates that being prejudiced and distrusting can backfire. One expat participant mentioned control should be soft on the relationship, but hard on the content, as in Asian cultures, just as in Bangladesh, relationships and networks are considered highly important. An expat participant explained that there should be learning curves for the local people to improve standards and learn professions; however, the risk taken in this situation is that once skills are mastered, the expat becomes superfluous.

25% of the expat participants revealed that locals would also possibly be able to fill their position, however, they recognized that having a special status as a foreigner might get easier entries and therefore automatically increase performance abilities, just as the fact that foreigners have more integrity regarding positions in development work and thereby have advantages in working conditions. 100% of the sample of local counterparts recognized that Dutch expats in Bangladesh function as an effective system for management control. The reasons for this is that Dutch expats are perceived to have skills, vision, education, experience, strategy, low tolerance and strict control. It is interesting to find that this seems congruent with the Dutch expats from the private sector. Next to this, the participants describe that the attitudes of Bangladeshi are curious, diligent and willing to learn, which might explain the enthusiasm on working with expats.

5.4. Improving expat abilities

Regarding the improvement of expat abilities the expat participants where diversified, it was mentioned that learning the language would increase control, colonial behavior should be avoided, and there should be a focus on teaching locals how to work, as this will eventually increase successful business. One respondent mentioned that there is a lot of theoretical knowledge, however the gap with practice is really high, there should be more implementation and stimulation of economic development to increase the total situation of the country.

The answers of the local counterparts are mainly congruent with the expats, however there is a focus considering improving the abilities of expats by increasing the learning and transition of knowledge. Some also consider learning the language and increasing transparency would help and it should be noted that managing the root-level workers will decrease the management control abilities, Bangladeshi management should manage Bangladeshi workers and the expats should manage Bangladeshi management.

6. Discussion

Expatriate theory maintains that parent nationals provide a mechanism for control in settings with control as potential problem due to complexity (Boyacigiller, 1990). This is congruent to the findings in the research. Conform the findings of Paik and Sohn (2004) is the affirmation of the fact that the level of cultural knowledge plays a critical role in the determining the effectiveness of expatriates.

The typology provided by Black (1988) concerning cross-cultural adjustment is congruent with the findings in the interviews, especially coming forward is the fact that the general adjustment has an impact on most of the expat participants in Bangladesh. It is mentioned by many expats that the environment of Dhaka was confronting, the busy traffic, pollution and obnoxious urban behavior of people required adaptation and acceptance. However, it is also

coming forward that work adjustment and relational adjustment can be difficult and might be somewhat intertwined, as many relationships with the locals exist at work. An important finding congruent with Brewster and Pickard (1994) is that the expat community has a high influence on degree of success in the adaptation process. Especially having an expat community and a platform as the Dutch Club in Dhaka is regarded of high importance for social contacts, reflection of experiences and a place of Western norms and values.

From the interviews it becomes very clear that Bangladeshi and Dutch have a very different 'frame of reference' (Lachman *et al.* 1994) indicating behavioral and social norms, patterned meanings and collective mental programs shared by a specific group of people, which is congruent towards the theory. Next to this, there is also congruence in theory and findings concerning importance of communication through non-verbal gestures such as facial expressions, body postures, or hand gestures (Ridgeway *et al.* 1985).

When comparing the theory by Hailey (1996) towards the findings in the interviews there is partial congruence. Hailey (1996) provides that local Singaporean managers feel underappreciated by expatriate managers, which came forward from one local Bangladeshi in the sample. It also came forward from one local Bangladeshi manager that in his career, he experienced an expat who was insensitive regarding culture and thereby had a negative effect on the ability to perform in the organization, which is congruent to the theory of Hailey (1996), discussing Singaporean expat management. However, the majority of the expats and the local counterparts did not perceive this problem, this might have to do with the fact that most Bangladeshi management is still in a developing stage and the situation is not completely comparable to Singapore.

From various interviews, it has become clear that without proper understanding of the local behavioral patterns, one might unintentionally offend or disturb local personnel (Bird and Mukuda, 1989; Tung, 1993). This is congruent with these theories, for instance, one expat participant mentioned that if a female Western buyer would enter his organization inappropriately scarcely dressed, he would provide her with some clothes to cover her body, as she otherwise would offend local people in the organization.

Regarding expatriate training, it is important to note that none of the expat participants had engaged in a cross-cultural training, however, the majority preferred to have had one. Only one participant had a negative attitude towards cross-cultural training and regarded adjustment as commonsense and thereby a basic skill for an expat. The other expats thought training would be very useful in getting a better understanding of what exactly is going on in the society and increasingly gain the ability to put things in perspective. When asking for specific aspects about Bangladesh that should be treated in a cross-cultural training, it came forward that the cognitive approach which encompasses providing information about the country, the affective approach, which encompasses exercising of practical situations and to a lesser extent, the behavioral approach, which encompasses communication style, are important aspects that a potential training would need to include, this is congruent with the theory of Brislin (1979). Tung (1981) also presents five types of training that are congruent with the aspects provided by the expats on potential cross-cultural training for Bangladesh. However, Tung (1981) maintains that the type of training is dependent on degree of cultural distance and the degree of interpersonal interaction with locals. Especially regarding the interaction with locals, this is incongruent with the findings, because Tung (1981) insinuates that less interaction with locals means less training should be given concerning this topic. From the interviews, it became clear that the expats facing problems, where more internally oriented and therefore lacked skills in dealing and understanding the culture of Bangladesh.

Considering training effectiveness, there are various meanings from the literature, the respondents in the interviews did not receive cross-cultural training, therefore, no comparison can be made. However, the majority was positively oriented towards cross-cultural training and would have preferred to receive training before their assignment. This is congruent with the theory by Brewster and Pickard (1994) who indicate that expatriates and their partners have a positive attitude towards formal training, as they believe it enhances the ability to adapt in the new environment. From the interviews, it becomes clear that training has limitations, one expat respondent quoted: *'Bangladesh cannot be simulated in a training, you have to feel it, smell it,*

taste it and experience the culture'. This indicates an extra dimension for more relevance considering specific situations and their complexity and thereby limitations of training.

Selection of expats is examined by Caligiuri *et al.* (2009), the empirical findings are congruent towards the theory. Professional competencies are regarded as a basis and mostly a motivation to work as an expat. When selecting, there should be a focus on international experience, language fluency and personality characteristics, which is congruent regarding theory and findings. The four traits of importance for an expat according to Caligiuri *et al.* (2009) are being open to learn new cultures, being able to initiate contact with host nationals, being able to gather cultural information and being able to cope with ambiguity and stress of new environments; this is congruent to the information provided by the expat sample. Another interesting finding conforming the theory of Caligiuri (2000) is the fact that sociability and openness as qualities for an expat are specifically regarded as very important. Congruent to the theory of Bandura and Wood (1989) self-efficacy is mentioned multiple times as being an important personality characteristic for expats.

When specifically focusing on the language fluency as a criterion for selection, it is interesting to see that the majority of the expats regards knowledge of the Bengali language as a very important factor for the success of expatriates. It contributes to feeling at home in a society, it increases the management control abilities and it contributes to communication in the sense that the exchange of knowledge and transparency is eased, which is in line with the research of Harzing and Feely (2008).

Considering expat failure, there is not a lot of data gained from the interviews, it was mentioned multiple times by expats and by local counterparts that people working internally have most difficulties with culture. One specific case was cited that included expat failure due to failing cultural adaptation, the person was said to be not open, lacked social abilities and had a colonial mindset. This confirms the findings by Caligiuri *et al.* (2000).

7. Considerations

Looking at the totality of the expat literature and the empirical findings, it might be arguable that attitude, personality characteristics and experience are more important for an expat than knowledge of cultural dimensions. Not only when considering adaptation, but also for selection and training of expats, it might be more important to focus on attitude rather than knowledge of culture. Among the answers of the expats for successful adaptation, none of the participants indicated knowledge of the culture as important; rather flexibility, acceptance, toughness, patience and a positive mindset are stressed. These subjects are all related to the attitude of a person when considering an expatriate assignment. Similarly are the answers provided to the question of expat personality characteristics: openness, sociability, flexibility and toughness are indicated, this provides extra reason to believe that attitude of a person is crucial for the success of an expat assignment. As coming forward from the total range of interviews, the specific situational context is different everywhere, the diversity is very high. In this sense, knowledge of culture in dimensions or indicators from any perspective are often too general and not directly specific to a situation or position, this suggests that attitude of a person is highly important.

Reevaluating the concept of training and learning, it might be very logical to shift the focus in expat training towards training on attitudes like flexibility, openness and sociability instead of focusing on specific cultural dimensions or cultural nominators. Another interesting finding is that the majority of the expats had no preparation and no training, however all the expats are regarded as successful. Therefore, it is remarkable to find that the majority of the expats would recommend training to potential expats who are planning to go to Bangladesh. Why would the entire sample recommend a training while in reality the expats are all proven to be successful in their positions.

When comparing the corporation between the expats and the counterparts, it seems that the expats perceive the distance to the culture of Bangladesh as larger than the counterparts view their distance to the Dutch culture. The cultural distance, which might be regarded as a distance from point A to point B, is perceived differently comparing the sample of expats in contradiction to the sample of local counterparts. The local counterparts regard the Bangladeshi culture as somewhat different, but also somewhat similar to the Dutch culture, especially when considering

personality traits. However, the Dutch expats perceive the Bangladeshi culture as highly different and very complex. This also comes forward from the fact that Bangladeshi do not notice the fact that Dutch expats are trying to be tactical, avoiding certain topics and having difficulties with Bangladeshi logic. When regarding adjustment and adaptation, it also comes forward that a part of the expats had to adapt themselves to their new surroundings, but also to the new people and ways of working. The expats also mention unanimous that when having the option to choose their personal perspective of culture as a problem, excuse or motivation, that for them culture is clearly a motivation to combine two worlds. While asking the local counterparts, the same question the sample is divided between culture as a problem, excuse for things to go wrong, a motivation or nothing at all. This contributes to the indication that expats perceive the cultural distance as larger. Another way of explaining the different perception of cultural distance lies in the fact that 87.5% of the expats are facing problems that are culturally related, while only 62.5% of the local counterparts are experiencing cultural related problems.

In spite of all other things discussed, the expats are all regarded as successful. Therefore, it might be possible to conclude that culture is less important than previously indicated. However, the entire sample agrees on the fact that culture is important regarding expatriate management and controlling of organizations. Maybe the crucial factor in expatriate management lies in the fact that attitude is important, like being flexible, being open, being social and thereby have the ability to learn the content and dynamics of specific cultures as the diversity of specific contexts is very high.

8. Conclusion

An important finding in this research is that although the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Bangladesh seem large, the majority of the respondents have a good cooperation, meaning the relationship between the Dutch expat and the Bangladeshi counterpart. As provided in previous sections, there are multiple problems and mentality differences, however expats are still regarded as an effective instrument for management control abilities, not only by themselves, but also by their counterparts.

When evaluating the concept of expatriate training, it can be discussed whether it is more important to focus on cultural training, training on attitudes or training concerning the language of the country. The perspective that is ascending from the interviews and the theory is that cultural training might have limitations when considering the scope of culture, nevertheless cultural training is greatly recommended by the participants and the literature. However, personality traits and characteristics are emergently considered of more importance, regarding the theory and regarding the empirical findings. Therefore, training on e.g. openness and flexibility might need more focus and less attention should be paid to culture. This is compatible to the theory of Harzing and Feely (2008) who regard language as a subject requiring more research, which is also an emerging perspective from the empirical findings. Just as for selection purposes, having the right mindset, attitude and knowledge of the language, control abilities of an expat increase, as it becomes easier to get acquainted with culture and overcome cultural barriers.

Considering the cultural distance between the Netherlands and Bangladesh, it can be said that the perceived distance is larger for the expats than for the local counterparts. This might have to do with the fact that the local counterparts are working in their normal environment and the expats are trying to adapt to their environment. Therefore, the perceived differences from their perspective might be considered small. However, this might also have to do with the fact that the Dutch expats are operating in a completely different environment from what is normal for them and therefore they are forced to adapt themselves in a broad range of situations. Regardless the level of adaptation, there will always remain a degree of complexity, because the diversity of Bangladesh is very high, this causes the expats to perceive the cultural distance between the Netherlands and Bangladesh as larger.

A limitation in this research might be that when considering the sample of expats and their local counterparts, the research can be biased because failed expats are more difficult to approach. This research was conducted on expats that were all active in Bangladesh. Therefore, the perception of this sample might be more positive than the perception and experiences of failed

expats would be. Next to that, among the interviewees were only 2 women, the other 14 participants were men. This might cause bias in the results. However, there were no obvious differences between the interviews with men and women.

Evaluating the research gaps presented in the introduction, it has become clear that more research is necessary concerning the totality of this subject. This need is created by the large population of Bangladesh living in high density, making the country subject to a lot of potential for economic growth. If the economy will continue to grow, the future will lead many more MNC's and other businesses to Bangladesh. Therefore, this research increases insight in the culture of Bangladesh, especially from the management control aspect. More research is needed considering language, experience and attitude as important aspects of management control abilities instead of focusing mainly on cultural factors. This actually indicates that the research conducted for this paper widens the research gap as new and unexplored factors surface, which was the intention of this research. These subjects can be linked to the expat theory in the sense of expat adaptation, training and selection. With respect to the cooperation between the expats and local counterparts, it is interesting to notice that the perceived relationship is partially different. This indicates that the research gap concerning this topic is filled, however more situations could be researched to find more specific factors that are structurally perceived in another way by expats and local counterparts.

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