BREAKING THROUGH CULTURE SHOCK TO SUCCESSFULLY WORK IN THAILAND

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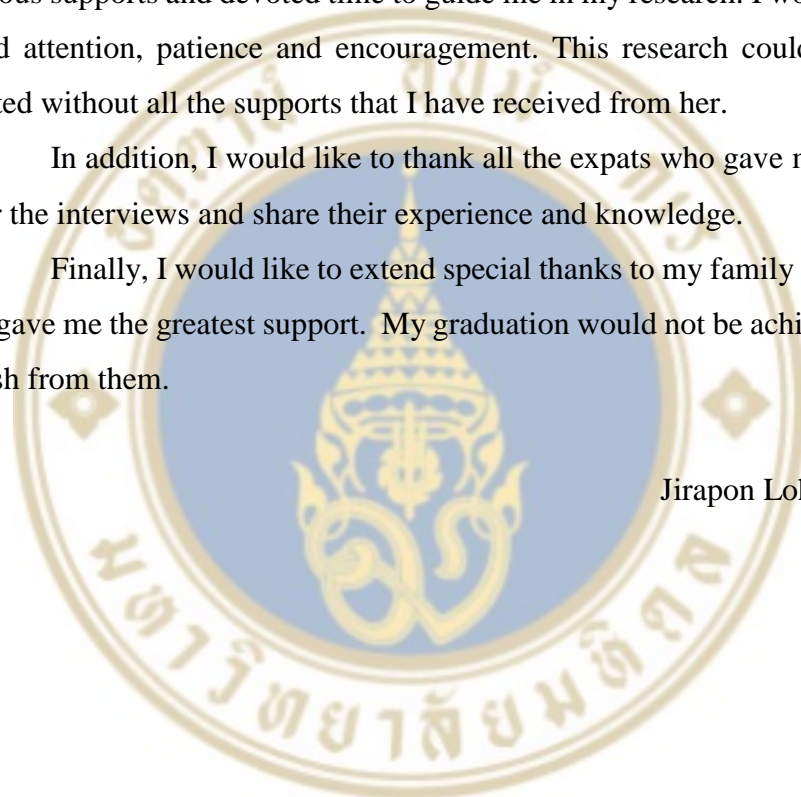Asst. Prof. Kannika Leelapanyalert,
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ABSTRACT

International assignments are on the rise for employees in multinational corporations. Workers employed by multinational corporations often accept an international project for professional and personal development. Thailand has a lots of expatriates immersing in a Thai culture while given responsibility for business initiatives. They need to adjust quickly to a new culture and job, social, and management differences from where they from while dealing with the business.

This qualitative study examines expats from interviews with a sample of ten expats from different industry. The participants share an experience to a new culture. The support of family and friends are dominant. Opportunities for future research should include the influence of expatriate spouses on the expatriate experience.

KEY WORDS: Culture Shock / Expats / Culture Adaptability

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

'Culture shock' is a sense of confusion and uncertainty with feeling of anxiety that may affect people exposed to a new culture or environment without enough preparation. The term "culture shock" is used to express profound negative experience in a new culture. This particular term was first used in an American newspaper, the Emporia Daily Gazette, Kansas in a report by Holt's research (Science Service 23rd October 1940). Culture shock is a result from losing cultural familiarity from what one used to. The experience of living and working in a new and highly unfamiliar culture may lead to a negative evaluation for the culture. This can cause the transition into a new culture to be a disturbing and unpleasant one. However, the intensity of one's culture shock depends on the level of preparation before being exposed to the new culture. Therefore, it is entirely possible that some might not experience the negative effects of culture shock.

In such a globalized world, people travel across borders all the time, particularly to participate in an international labour market. Foreign workers provide valuable knowledge for the host country. In the case of Thailand, the country had association with foreign countries since the ancient time. At present, there are a lot of foreigners working and living in the country. Some of the major reasons, for foreigners to be in Thailand are for vacation, education, work and business, among others. This study focusses only on a group of ten expatriates working in different industries in Thailand.

Increasing number of organizations in Thailand are dealing with cross-cultural issues because of increased cultural mix within departments, different nationalities of project team members or management-level expatiates in international firms; these issues create increased challenges for such organizations. Expatriates bring along their cultural identities, which later come into contact with the host country's culture. The two cultures could differ, and such differences could lead to problems and

challenges, even contribute to failure, or foster a success of expat on international assignments.

Definition

The word "expatriate" originates from the mid eighteenth century from the Latin word expatriāre meaning gone out from one's country (from ex- 'out' + patria 'native country.')(Oxford English Dictionary 2010). The Dictionary of Human Resource Management (2001, p. 120), on the other hand, suggests that expatriation is the process of sending employees abroad on an international assignment. More simple explanation of Expatriate would mean a person who lives outside their native country (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 1995).

In this study, the word expatriate is shortened to 'expats', and is used in reference to foreign nationals and skilled workers who have been sent by their company to work in Thailand.

1.1 Problem Statement & Research Objective

At the moment, it is becoming more of a common situation for Thais to experience working with expats, this is due to the fact that they are more expats working and living in the country. In addition, more people are doing business with foreigners, being exposed to foreign cultures. Expats are private individuals having to cope with changes in their lives, and with their personal situations in a foreign country. These individuals can be trained to do a better job, set up for success, or set to fail; depending, partly, on preparations prior to departure.

Thailand has her own culture characteristics and traditions, so the expats working here might experience a certain level of culture shock. While some of the expats are successful in breaking though, the other might not. It is interesting to find out how they prepare and manage themselves through the cultural differences while living in Thailand.

The purpose of this study is to understand expats' experiences, their adaptation to Thai culture, and how they deal with cultural shock. The study focuses on their adaptation in a foreign country as individuals rather than on their business skills.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study is to examine the culture shock experience of expats in order to get a better understanding of the issues involved in this process and to be able to find ways to respond to the needs of those affected. It will make suggestions to help minimize the impacts of culture shock and enable a positive adjustment to Thai culture.

This study analyses social supports impacting the adjustment process of expats to Thai culture while working in Thailand. This research focuses on cultural tips which will benefit to expat who are new to Thailand and have never experienced working in Asia before. This research would also provide some guidance and the tips that have implications for expats before being exposed to the new culture.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Expats coming to Thailand go through a new cultural experience that can cause some level of culture shock, depending on how well they are able to adapt to the culture and cope with the difficulties. Understanding the culture shock experiences and adaptation processes will be the ways that can lead them to a success of the work experience in Thailand. Strong connections to own traditions and customs clearly distinguish them from the other cultures, and an encounter with a new culture causes reactions that may affect them in many ways. The influence of personality and cultural differences, symptoms of culture shock and the adaptation process of expats to local Thai culture will be explored to help anticipate ways of managing this complex phenomenon. For successful general adjustment, Winkelman (1994) recommends that those who are entering a new culture prepare for changes before their departure and get to know resources that will help them to cope and adjust to the new environment. This may help avoid severe problems and attending a cross-cultural training could be useful. It will help them to learn skills and acquiring cultural knowledge in order to reduce misunderstandings and learn cultural appropriate behaviors.

2.1 Culture shock symptoms

Moving to a new country which things they are used to are no longer in place and facing with unfamiliarity; on weather, landscape, language, food, social roles, values, customs and communication, could be a life changing and challenging experience . The business is conducted in a way that may be hard to understand. Culture shock is a very real experience for anyone who has lived or even traveled extensively in another country. The symptoms of culture shock are a cultural phenomenon seen only when individual lives in a different culture (Ishii, 1996). There are the feelings of reduced ability not being able to deal with the environment due to unfamiliarity with the

culture. A very common symptom of culture shock is the confusion about one's role and role expectations and about one's values and feelings of self-identity. The extend, intensity and length of culture shock seem to be a function of the differences between the home and the host cultures (Uwaje, 2009). The outcomes could range from a mere ambivalence or uncertainty in behavior to emotional paralysis, which may become neurotic problems such as phobias, psychosomatic symptoms, and depression. Oberg mentions that newcomers are often more concerned about minor pains and seem to get ill more often (Oberg, 1960). But however, it seems that being closer to home (both in terms of culture and geography) may limit the needed cultural interaction and potentially impair adjustment (Janssens, 1995 in Uwaje, 2009).

2.2 The stages of culture shock

Nearly everyone, regardless of maturity, previous experience abroad, or knowledge of the living country, experiences some degree of culture shock when initially move to a new country. Several researchers have named a number of stages of culture shock that people usually go through at different experience to various degrees. Culture shock can be characterized by periods of frustration, adjustment, and even depression. At the time it may feel more like homesickness, but what most people who haven't undergone any kind of pre-adaptation program don't know is that there are several stages one goes through when adjusting to a new language and culture. Most of the stages defined in the literature generally only differ in terminology from Oberg's (1960) initial four stages of cultural shock.

Step 1: The Honeymoon Stage

This first stage, according to Oberg, can be excitement about the pleasantness of the experience. In this stage the expats feel more like tourists than expats (Pedersen 1995). They are excited by the new and are really enthusiastic about their job (Marx 1999). The expats are intrigued and curious about everything that is different from what they are used to and at the same time amazed by cultural similarities (Pedersen 1995). During this stage, it still feels close to everything familiar back home. The expats are positively surprised as a result of their limited exposure to the local

culture of the newly entered.   They are fascinated by the new and surprised by people who welcome them.   They see things positively as they are usually the ones who voluntarily came to the new country (Oberg, 1960).

Step 2: The Crisis Stage

Oberg (1960) describes that the expats will have aggressive attitude towards the host country and developing stereotypes after honeymoon period is over. The expats get hit by the new culture and everything they have found amusing until now starts being irritating which results in culture shock (Oberg 1960). After the positive effect starts to fade away. Every experiencing no longer feels new; in fact, it's starting to feel like a thick wall that's preventing them from experiencing things. It will feel confused, alone and realize that the familiar support systems are not easily accessible. Then starting to deal with people or unknown situation how to handle and overwhelmed with. It might cause from negative experiences, angry and frustrate. It might create feeling to compare current culture to what is familiar. Then it will have confusion to go along with the lack of control the situation which will create more stress on working environment.

Step 3: The Stage of Development of a Positive Attitude

In the recovery stage the individuals start dealing with their emotions and create a positive attitude towards the surrounding people and environment of the host country (Oberg 1960). This is the first stage in acceptance, development of a positive attitude which will be the time that the expats realized how to survive in the new country and accept the difference culture and know how to deal with it. The feeling will be more confident and better able to cope with any problems that may arise and no longer feel isolated. It is a time of start adjusting and are positively meeting the challenges of how to function in the new culture (Oberg, 1960). If the expats have gained some knowledge, they are able open to more communicate with their colleagues and instead of criticizing them they start making jokes of them and even start being sarcastic about their dire straits. In addition to that, the expats accept that they have some problems and start asking for help from their coworkers and gradually reaching the last phase of their adaptation (Oberg 1960).

Step 4: The Stage of Adjustment

The final phase of the adaptation model is adjustment, if the expats get through it. The culture shocks are gone and the expatriates are able to perform their job in the most effective way (Marx 1999). It will be the time that they accept the new culture as another way of living and working. This is due to the fact that they start accepting and adapting to the new environment. The food, the drinks, the people and the customs that used to be perceived as "foreign" are now seen as delightful and enjoyable. Realizing that the host company culture cannot be changed because different countries have different way of doing thing. So accepting the culture in its context should be accepted and adjusting to the new culture is needed. The expats will be back being themselves again. They embrace the new culture and feel comfortable, confident and able to make decisions based on their own preferences. No longer feel alone or isolate and starting to feel at home because appreciation both the differences and similarities of the new culture. When the assignment is over and they return home, they start missing all that which at some point of their stay was irritating and even disgusting (Oberg, 1960).
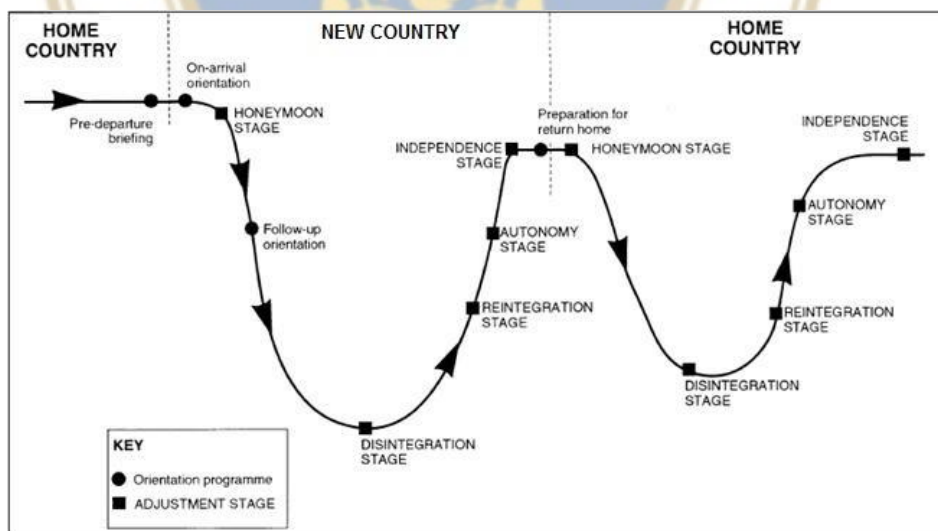

Figure 2.1 The W-Curve of Intercultural Sojourning adapted from "Orientated for Success" M. Barker 1990 based on Oberg (1960), and Gallahorn & Gallahorn (1963)

From the chart above, there are two periods; entry to host culture (new country) and entry to home culture. This study will focus only on transition when entering to host culture not including re-entering back to the home culture.

2.3 Thai Way

Ask those who have been to Thailand what they think of Thailand and the answer will be this amazing country is both ugly and beautiful, calming and infuriating, noisy and quiet, cheap and expensive, violent and passive, funny and sad (Culture shock! Thailand 1982). From this statement there are many ways of people think about Thailand. Living in Thailand can be not only interesting and exciting, but also very frustrating when the expats realize what the cultural differences are. Thailand provides numerous opportunities for the high-level executive to work in the international companies. It seems that most expats working in international companies should have a better psychological well-being and able to adapt themselves to working environment because most of staff would be able to communicate in English. But in fact, sometimes being able to communicate in English doesn't help because there are Thai-ways of working that expats might find it difficult to handle.

The western way of thinking is that confrontation can be positive if it results in a better understanding or a better way to get the job done. It is acceptable for people to be critical of each other's ideas or methods whether or not agreement has been reached. In the Western cultures, such behavior is seen as not argument but as debate (Toews and McGregor, 1998). Thai people, however, usually avoid direct or public confrontation and dispute. Criticism, if given at all, is delivered indirectly or privately. Constructive criticism is not a Thai concept (The Changing Face of Management in Thailand, 2009). For example, if Thai doesn't like a job, they generally won't complain. They will just collect their pay at the end of the month and leave, never to return. Most people think that it should apply with the lower level worker but it actually happens in anywhere. Another sample would be Thais in the workplace are more concerned with keeping their boss happy. Their ultimate concern seems to make sure that their boss is content. If their boss is happy then they will be looked after, or so the thinking seems to go. These new cultural experience includes differences in cultural perceptions, values,

and practices which influence the understanding of and attitudes towards working in Thailand in order to develop cross-cultural understanding, and effectiveness at transfer of skills and knowledge.

2.4 Individual Personality

All expats can be affected by culture shock, but the degree to which they suffer depends on the host country and its specific cultural characteristics, the individual personality of the expats and how effective they are in doing their job, their attitude towards the people from the host country and vice versa, and the significance of the international assignment (Adler 2008; Marx 1999; Oberg 1960). Individual features of people to understand their reactions to a new setting need to be looked at. Wade and Tavris (1999) refer to personality as a "distinctive pattern of behavior, thoughts, motives, and emotions that characterize an individual over time". Personality traits that are central in interacting with people, behaving in certain ways, and dealing with new situations are of interest when entering new cultures which are often influenced by expats' home cultures. The way people are raised may have as much an impact on their personality. This personality will be related to cultural adjustment and influent people's behaviors. It has been seen as predictive of how well the expats can adjust to a new culture. In order to be able to make a successful transition in learning how to meet needs of physical well-being, such as food and security, comes before meeting school and work requirements.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This methods study was designed to explore the adaptation process and culture shock experiences. This chapter will explain in detail how the research was conducted. The choice of qualitative research will be discussed. It will be explained how the data was gathered and how it was analysed.

3.1 Research design

The quantitative researches are often highly structured in order to reach a high validity and reliability (Bryman 2008) but in qualitative research, interviews tend to be more flexible. According to Silverman (2000), exploratory studies need to be less structured than confirmatory studies. A suitable method for analysis will be the qualitative content analysis because it permits taking into account the context in which the material was generated and at the same time it considers the theoretical background of the research (Mayring 2007). This methods study was designed to explore the adaptation process and culture shock experiences of various expats. Moreover, qualitative methods are concentrating more on the individual than on the general (Mayring 2003). Qualitative research is mostly inductive. Although backed up with a theoretical framework, the data should be guiding the study, not a theory (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). The purpose of method seeks to provide a valuable, rule guided structure, stemming from its background and history to explore how the expats experience the culture shock and how they deal with it professionally. The category system could be revised during the process in a flexible way according to the material (Mayring 2007).

3.2 Population and sampling

For this study, applying a qualitative, explorative approach, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. The target samples are five expats from different industry who are currently working in Thailand and other five who used to work in Thailand. A total of ten expats, representing both genders as well as western and non-western countries chosen through purposive sampling. They were approached through different channels. Some were executive in the office, ex-business partner, and personal contacts or recommended by others. In this sampling approach, the researcher tries to find cases rich in information (Patton 2002) providing certain attributes demanded by the character of the study (Silverman 2000). For this study, the attributes were related to the background of the expatriates such as country of origin and age, trying to have a sample covering a broad range of expats, but also by their accessibility. The transcribed interviews were structured and analysed through qualitative content analysis.

3.3 Data collection

The interviews seem to be a suitable method because they allow asking open-ended questions to a small sample and exploring individual experiences or opinions. It is a sampling method which allows individuals engaged to share their experiences and the way they dealt with the culture shock in their working life. Purposive sampling was a common method used to search for respondents in qualitative design (Merriam, 2009). This study used semi-structured interviews because this type of interview focuses on the interviewee's opinion and experience, aiming to get in-depth data (Bryman 2008). The pattern of interview was more conversational rather than a formal interview, and the conversation based on participant not interviewer (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). After that the pattern of data was developed and evaluated the meaning (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Before conducting the interviews, the questions were distributed into different categories. There was an interview guide which makes sure that important theoretical issues are covered in the conversation and it facilitates the analysis according to categories. The reason that the interview was not completely structured because it would permit the interviewees to talk about the individual opinions and experiences in a non-constraining ways. Furthermore, the

questions in the interview guide could be asked in an order that seemed most suitable for the individual interview as the interviewees came from different cultural backgrounds, possible misunderstandings regarding the interview questions had to be taken into consideration (Patton 2002). Clarifying questions were asked whenever it seemed necessary to check how the interviewees understood the questions and whether the interviewer understood their answer right.

The interview items were grouped into guideline categories. The interview questions were designed to get a more in-depth understanding of the cultural experience of expats and their problems and concerns in adapting to and working in Thailand. Some of the questions followed by the guideline categories below. An interview guide and question were developed and can be found in the appendix.

- General Information
- Experience of Cultural Differences
- Attitude
- Culture shock Experience
- How to handle culture shock.

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed in order to process them for the subsequent analysis. The research method most often used to analyse interview transcripts in order to reveal or model people's information related behaviours and thoughts (Patton, 2002). Therefore, defining the coding unit is one of the most fundamental and important decisions (Weber, 1990). The conclusion from the coded data involves making sense of the themes or categories identified, and their properties. These findings will be analysed and discussed in relation to the academic literature. The research findings will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the data after interview investigated the way expats handled the culture shock. The data were collected by in-depth interviews. The results of the qualitative data will be used to answer and discuss the research questions.

4.1 Observation findings

According to the findings of this study, most of interviewed expats seem to be quite successful in achieving business goal by understanding themselves and well adjust into Thai working environment while they are still keeping their identity but they took different period of time to adjust. Overall, the findings regarding the expats' attitude and satisfaction as well as their ability to deal with the foreign environment suggest that they succeeded in adaptation. The influence of personality and cultural differences on stages and symptoms of culture shock and the adaptation process of the expats to Thai's culture. The culture will be explored to help anticipate ways of managing this complex phenomenon on influence the expats' adaptation and cultural shock experience in Thailand.

4.2 Demographic profiles of respondents

The sample group are from seven different countries, which has the age range between 26-52 years old. One female and two males are from non-western countries. One non-western female is from Philippines, and the two males are from Korea and India. Of the seven interviewees from western countries one is female and five are males. The female is from Germany, the males are from USA, Scotland, German, Switzerland and Denmark. Six of them are executive management level and another four are junior level. They are from global corporate companies with head

office from different countries different industries namely trading, agriculture product & service, IT, shipping, education, retail, and service industry. The ten participants were interviewed by in-depth semi structure interview in this study.

4.3 Factors toward breaking thought culture shock consumption

The expats were interviewed on their experiences toward their expectations about culture shock once they first arrived. The results revealed that the majority of respondents feel that the Thais avoid of direct confrontation.

The Culture shock symptoms

The expats who have no difficulties with cultural differences also reported having fewer and less severe symptoms of culture shock. The only expats who claimed to have no problems with Thai culture and also stated that they had not experienced symptoms of depression, homesickness, loneliness came from a country with similar cultural patterns as Thai. It can be hypothesized that expats with Asian backgrounds can anticipate less severe culture shock symptoms living in Thailand, or have better coping strategies and resources to ask for assistance. At the same time, age and social characteristics need to be considered in this respect, as well as Levels of preparation prior to coming to a new culture or experience of other Asian cultures prior to moving to Thailand. All of these factors seem to have an influence on the experience of culture shock symptoms of the expats.

The stage of the culture shock

In general, expats from non-western countries are having more characteristics in common with Thai culture. Nearly everyone from western countries experience some degree of culture shock regardless of maturity or knowledge of the country compared to those from non-western who tend to not experience culture shock to such a degree. Western expats often mention that it was fantastic food here and they even can enjoy their home country food which is not difficult to find because there are variety of restaurants in Thailand. Food may seem to be a minor thing to complain about

in a country that offers so many food options, but it needs to be considered that familiar food also has a comforting effect and it is first thing that they tried.

Step 1: The Honeymoon Stage

Most of the people are exciting about Thailand when first arrive according to Oberg. They are excited by the new and are really enthusiastic about their job (Marx 1999). The expats are still excited about life in the new culture and work in the new office even though some of them have travelled to Thailand before. Those who have never been here before still find the new experience very exciting. At the beginning of the stay, most of them had experiences like tourist excitement. Some support statements are listed below:

"I was excited about the challenge of working in a culture so different from America."

"I was pretty excited, but also a little overwhelmed. Bangkok was full of new impressions and loud and big."

"Eyes opened. Listening and observing new way of life."

"I felt excited and was looking forward to the new experience."

"I felt curious but comfortable life here."

The overall perception is positive and accompanied by excitement, curiosity, a sense of discovery and adventures. They collected interesting experiences and impressions. They enjoy a very good time and feel little fear from the host culture as the environment of the new culture is considered to be amazing and exotic. So this allow them to express enjoyment to the host culture with low level of responsibility for their behaviour so once they experienced inconvenience, they still perceived them as a part of the adventure. The differences between home and newly adopted culture are still perceived in positive terms.

Step 2: The Crisis Stage

For expats, living in Thailand can be interesting and exciting but also very frustrating when they realize what the cultural differences are. The lack of understanding by local cultures and needs, which leads to a less-than-desirable interaction on both sides. They face the challenge of understanding and functioning

within a new environment while keeping their own identity. Oberg (1960) describes that the expats will have aggressive attitude towards the host country and developing stereotypes after honeymoon period is over. The responses below support this finding:

"Working on complex problems while dealing with such a change was not easy and at times demanding."

"People are much more relaxed, sometimes too relax, almost lazy. Not much rules and regulations."

"I found there was a lot of caution on dealing with foreigners in the same company and more comfort in sticking together as Thais even if they knew their decision was not the best one."

"Thai's can be less direct and straightforward in their communication. Always maintaining politeness, which is sometimes counterproductive"

"In the office colleagues were doing what is been asked to do. They never asked why? Personal priorities came first than work priorities."

"I also found them at times having their own agenda despite collective agreement, protective of their public face and in men especially a feeling of pride and almost a sense of unearned entitlement."

Recent expats experience culture shock related to their adjustment to Thailand frequently involving anxiety and stressors that may lead to social, and psychological problems. It provides the impression that they are different to the other people from the new culture. The diversity is now seen from the negative perspective. By this time, the frustration is obvious and results in exaggerating the differences. Those differences are transformed into obstacles that seem to be insurmountable and avoid ones to fully participate in everyday life. It is a crisis phase without the help of the company to address expectations and differences in their perceptions and making cultural transitions, that is typically considered symptoms of culture shock may persist and negatively impact to their successful adjustment.

Step 3: The Stage of Development of a Positive Attitude

In the recovery stage the individuals start dealing with their emotions and create a positive attitude towards the surrounding people and environment of the host country (Oberg 1960). Adaptation seems to be a combination of several aspects, which

are connected to both individual satisfaction and attitude as well as to interaction with the environment. A general desire to adapt to the culture seems to exist. Most expats are eager to establish change to Thai society but not change the identity of themselves. The following quotes support this finding:

"I feel that I have to change to some degree in order to adjust to Thai work habits and in order to become a part of the team in the office."

"To a certain level I have adjusted to Thai work habits."

"I feel that I have to adapt as much as feasible. I believe it very important to adapt to my host country but I am unwilling to adapt my working style too much."

"That time I didn't think I had to change until my wife suggested me."

"To be effective and work in a new environment I adapted to the local habits"

"I adapt it as much as feasible. I believe it very important to adapt to my host country but I am unwilling to adapt my working style too much."

"I had to change my approach not myself. I was employed as a foreigner to meet objectives. I therefore under the Thai office environment had to meet these objective even if the approach to do so was not as direct as in Europe."

"I am Swiss and will always be, but I admire and respect the local culture and society an made several friends"

"Have Sanook and not take everything too seriously."

"The entire time I made it in my mind perfectly clear that I am the one who needs to adapt and not the other way around."

Step 4: The Stage of Adjustment

The final phase of the adaptation model is adjustment, if the expats get through it. The culture shock are gone and the expatriates are able to perform their job in the most effective way (Marx 1999). Expats have to be aware of the value conflicts that they will encounter and willing to change their attitudes about the new culture by identifying the benefits of living in a new country instead of complaining about their experience of feeling treated as inferior and about the differences from their home country. Once the adjustment to the general environment is dealt with adequately, the expats can form satisfactory relationships and friendships, but the nature of the foreign

country's cultural social relations must still be understood. The expats found positive aspects to report:

"It was wonderful country. I am quite enjoy working in Thailand."

"Despite the rough beginning, we now love being here."

"At the end, I really enjoy life and work here."

"I am quite enjoy working with the team here."

"I was very happy to accept I was the foreigner and in society I should adapt myself to enjoy living happily in the country. I felt privileged to be a guest in the country and allowed to work and live here."

In this case learning the local language is not part of important factor for them because in the office environment people are able to speak English so they don't really need to use Thai much. So even for the expats who have been working in Thailand several years but it seems to have a focus on learning the local language seriously. They feel that they just need to learn some important phases that are regularly used is good enough. However, it is noted that non-verbal expressions of the communication caused more problems than the language barrier. Such non-verbal expression can cause misunderstanding and confusions both in social interaction and work related discussion.

Thai Way

There are Thai-ways of working that expats might find it difficult to handle. This finding is in line with study that constructive criticism is not a Thai concept. Thai people regard themselves primarily as part of a group with hierarchical level and respect for authority. Thais like to live in harmony and avoid any confrontation or conflict. Thais try to find a way of reaching goals without confrontation and look for compromise in difficult situations that keeps relationships intact. Few Thais can tolerate raised voices and expression of frustration or anger. So it might not be that easy for expats to understand and accept this behaviour. Most of the time, expats learn to understand that it is the Thai way but they are having difficulties accepting it. Almost all respondents agreed that Thais are not confrontation and lack of direct communication as can be seen from the following responses:

"Thailand was marked by an excessive avoidance of confrontation and lack of direct communication."

"Culturally I found most Thais non confrontation, not individually decisive (collectively decisive though) and not comfortable and open about working with foreigners."

"Thais wish to avoid confrontation. They believe keeping problems from the boss is a good strategy to minimize conflict."

"The staff made a mistake and I talked to him the way Europeans do to one another. He seemed ok but later I knew that he wasn't ok but he just didn't say anything during our discussion. Thais are not straightforward at this point."

"They are not as straightforward and harsh as Germans can be sometimes, keeping criticism to themselves."

"Thai's can be less direct and straightforward in their communication. Always maintaining politeness, which is sometimes counter productive."

"How to deal with conflicts like the Thais as the European way doesn't work very well here."

Individual Personality

Seven of ten interviewed expats perceive the cultural distance between their home culture and the Thai culture especially the expats from western countries see quite a lot of differences. As they say, a higher degree of adaptation and acceptance is necessary for them in order to integrate. The expats described the fact:

"My preference is to adapt to other cultures traditions and way of thinking. Habits I only pick up when I think they make sense otherwise I learn to work with them but do not pick them up myself."

"Embrace it in all its positive aspects and faults. Be part of it and live it. Enjoy and celebrate the differences. Make it part of your greater self."

All of the expats seem to be well adjusted even they experience problems at work.

Summary of findings

The study found that there is a relation between perception of cultural differences (adjustment) and experience of culture shock (cultural match). It also revealed that non-western expats have a less difficult time adjusting to Thai culture than

western expats. The analysis showed that the expats need time to adjust themselves with the host country.

After learning about the stages and symptoms of culture shock, the expats all had experienced some form of culture shock. The model described their experience adjusting to the new culture. If the expats had known about this model before, they should have been prepared to meet the challenges. The order of the stages could be changed because some of them said their crisis occurred after they had already felt adjusted. Some expats also had crises occurred to them more than once depend on working assignment that they had to do.

The findings suggested the influence of personality variables on experience of culture shock and adjustment. The expats encounter a variety of new and unfamiliar situations, places, and people when they enter Thailand. In addition to difficult times, expats report many positive personal experiences. One western expat mentions that even he had to work hard in the office but his children have good experience here because the cost of living here is so cheap so he can afford to pay for the children activities which he is not sure that he can do in his own country.

The findings of the study suggest that expats do not seem to be aware of the culture shock phenomenon at the time they live through it. This unexpected result enforces the theory that these companies should provide the expats with a pre-departure training program to better prepare them for the obstacles they are going to meet in the host country.

CHAPTER V
RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Practical Implications

After considering all the factors influencing resourcing of the international employees, the next process that has to be taken into consideration for the company is the preparation and training of the expats. This process is also a part of the key factors for success of the international assignment. From the interview, it seems that several companies have underestimated the before departure process of the ten expats interviewed, only one have pass through a short preparation about language and expats assignment. The responsibility for the achievement seems to lie with the expats themselves. They are the ones that have to deal with their changing situation. Before processes the departure of sending expats to another country to run a subsidiary of a multinational organization, the company should include an extensive period of training and preparation to ensure that the expats are familiar with cultural differences, and to reduce the culture shock. Having in mind that companies are spending a huge amount of money on their expats, on average it costs two to three times more than having the same employee working in home country.

The factors influencing the nature of the training depends on the expats and their personal characteristics, the host country's culture and how does the company perceive the assignment in connection with the company's objectives. Having said that and taking into account that the expats are supposed to work in a new country with most of the time totally different culture, a cross-cultural training is considered to be one of the most important parts of the preparation. Culture shock is difficult to avoid when meeting the culture of the host country. However, the cross-cultural training can help the expats to deal with the phenomenon. It easier to understand the new culture and they can try to find the best way to adapt to the new culture. High recommendation for those who are entering a new culture prepare for changes before their departure and get to know resources that will help them to cope and adjust to the new environment. Also,

cross-cultural training could be useful for helping them to learn skills and acquiring cultural knowledge in order to reduce misunderstandings and learn cultural appropriate behaviour.

5.2 Limitations of the study & Recommendations for future research

The study focused on the opinions and experiences of individual expats but it had its limitations regarding given information. It was difficult to get in-depth information in some areas due to the sensitive nature of the information relating to their business. The expats' answers might have been influenced by their spouse and family. Further research should include spouses and other family members migrating together with the expats to study their attitude towards and comparing expatriates coming on their own or coming with the whole family.

Regarding the background of the interviewed expats it seems relevant to point out that all of them were fluent in English and had a rather international background and attitude. Many of them had experience of living in foreign countries and three of them are living with a partner of a different cultural background. Hence, their attitude towards the contact with a foreign culture as well as making friends with host or third country nationals might be different to expats with a less international background. Furthermore, coming to the environment of majority of people in their office have quite good English skills. It already facilitated them to make first contacts with the locals without needing to speak Thai. However, in some area where English skills are less common might be different and might have an influence on the possibilities of more severe culture shock.

Another suggestion for further research, in connection to the investigation of expatriation. Repatriation should be included according to the W-Curve of Intercultural Sojourning because after completing their international assignment successfully the expats return home and then the process of repatriation begins. By this research some more conclusions and comparison can be made. So the organizations should not underestimate the repatriation process because the employees also have to adjust back to their own environment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The interview guide

Introduction: This interview is the part of research in order to study behaviour of expats working in Thailand. How they can manage themselves successful working here though culture shock.

Objective: To investigate the most influencing factor and how well of the process of adaptation with the culture that are useful for new expats who coming to Thailand.

Length of interview: 30-45 minutes approximately.

Interview guide questions

1. General Information

- Have you been working in Asia or other country in Asia beside your home country (in case non-western) before?

- Have you ever been to Thailand before move for working here?

2. First stage experience of cultural differences

- How do you feel when their first got here for a few months?

- What expectations did you have? Any preparation? How?

- Are there differences e.g. in work habits to your former workplaces in other countries?

- Any particular issue that obviously facing in the new office?

3. Attitude

- Do you desire to adapt into local society?

- Do you wish to take over parts of the local culture?

- Do you feel you had to change in order to adjust to Thai work habits and in order to become a part of the team in the office?

4. Culture shock Experience

- Please share the story of the culture shock that you use to experience.

- If look back what would you prepare before come to Thailand in order to know how to handle culture shock experience?

5. How to handle culture shock.

- How do you handle the culture shock situation?

- In which ways do you want to adapt with the new culture?