

Working Abroad: A Qualitative Study On Cultural Adjustments And Difficulties While Working With Other Cultures

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding about how United States employees interact with cultural rules and norms while working in another culture as well as how the abroad experience affects employees when they return to the United States. More specifically, this research was done to gain a deeper understanding of experiences and tactics used by abroad business travelers while working with individuals from other cultures. Ten individuals were chosen to participate in this study; all were from international businesses in the Midwest. All participants were chosen because they had significant experience with traveling abroad for business. A qualitative approach was used in which individuals were interviewed to uncover their personal experiences. The researcher used the Constant Comparative Analysis to determine themes that evolved from the interviews. A total of seven themes were discovered: Interactions were successful on both ends; There was a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of learning on both sides; The big thing is creating relationships; It's trying to figure out the reason why; There is no such thing as too much preparation; I walked away from that experience with my eyes a little wider open; and you realize different views regarding the United States.

INTRODUCTION

As organizations are beginning to globalize and participate in international business, understanding other cultures becomes increasingly essential. Globalization can be defined as the close integration of the countries and peoples of the world and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge and people across borders (Eisenberg, Goodall & Trethewey, 2007). Looking further, what happens to an organization in one part of the world will ultimately affect the same organization in other parts of the world (Taylor, 2000). Due to the increase in corporate globalization, organizations need to be able to adapt to other cultures. According to Taylor (2000), "today, successful organizations must operate in a global marketplace" (p. 278).

Looking beyond the concept of globalization, many organizations are becoming involved in international business and travel. This concept is paralleled with the difficulty of culture shock and being able to work and communicate with those from another cultural environment. Changes in globalization, "from improved travel and increased tourism, to the rise of the internet, to the increasingly global economy, to the emergence of international terrorism, to the international expansion of the communication discipline, make meeting these challenges increasingly salient and pressing" (Levine, Park & Kim, 2007, p. 206). Participating in international business and understanding globalization is a new way for organizations to grow and improve their success. Understanding the way businesses work together cross culturally is important to making international communications successful. The purpose of this research is to increase our understanding about how United States employees interact with cultural rules and norms while working in another culture as well as how the abroad experience affects employees when they return to United States. Although a significant amount of research has been done on cross-cultural training, little has been done on how employees effectively communicate both when in that culture and when returning from their trip abroad.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review will examine whether or not organizations are providing training to employees working abroad and how this effects business interactions and employers post-immersion work experience. An overview of cross-cultural training and its effects of overseas business interactions will be explained. In addition, uncertainty reduction theory will be defined and an explanation will be provided regarding how making international employees aware of cultural differences helps adjust their doubts when entering another culture.

Cross Cultural Training

Traveling to another country and experiencing culture shock can be very difficult. Doing so while trying to have successful business interactions can make that process even more challenging. The process of sending and receiving messages between people whose cultural background leads them to interpret verbal and nonverbal signs differently, or intercultural communication, needs to be considered when making successful business interactions (Bovee, Thill & Schatzman, 2003). While preparing employees for an abroad situation, organizations seem to provide very little training (Albrecht, 2000). If training is provided, it tends to be as little as discussing with those who have traveled in the past, reading brochures, or books on the country they are planning to visit and website references (Albrecht).

Employees who are ready to experience work abroad have been effective employees in the United States and their managers feel as if they are ready for an overseas assignment. Once arriving abroad, quite a few fail and return early while many others are not effective and productive in their assignments due to problems in adapting to a different culture (Eschbach, 1996). Again, few are provided with cross-cultural training when preparing to this assignment abroad. According to Eschbach, cross cultural training is advocated as having a positive influence on the employees' development of skills, relational, perceptual and self-maintenance. This facilitates the adjustment to the new cultural environment and produces a more effective job performance.

The most common ways of smooth cultural adjustment are: emotional stability, sociability, need for cognition, need for structure, and tolerance of ambiguity, and expectations, in addition to family adjustment, time in the assignment, cognitive ability, previous foreign experience and training adequacy (Caligiuri, 1995). Providing cross-cultural training can facilitate these factors. Cross-cultural training does reduce the severity of culture shock and, in turn, causes the employee to become effective and productive in the assignment (Eschbach, 1996).

Ma's (1999) research has shown that many employees in United States global corporations fail to complete the full term of their overseas assignments or have marginal performance during overseas assignment because of cultural adjustment problems. This can cause quite a problem especially when a business matter has to be taken care of while abroad. Perhaps providing more extensive training will help to reduce the challenges employees face when working cross-culturally.

There are many aspects to consider when planning on sending employees to work abroad. First, one needs to consider language barriers when sending their employees to a country where English is not the primary language. The organization may try to provide various language courses or tips; however, Inman (1985) found that "in spite of corporate efforts to provide language instruction to international working employees, English continues as the dominant international business" (p. 248). This becomes positive for organizations in the United States; however, it is still important to provide language based courses to those employees going to work abroad.

Another thing to consider is the importance of communication styles in different cultures. Communication differences and cross-cultural factors clearly create the potential for increased communication problems (Giri, 2006). If there is indeed successful training done, employees who work abroad seem to be fairly successful; however, there is still a difference in communicative styles that has to be addressed. Individuals' own communicative styles should be assessed and they need to understand their own communicative profile (Inman, 1985). This will give employees working abroad a more positive outlook on themselves as well as an increased tolerance for differences in others (Inman). Stressing communication style differences can make or break a business interaction. Employees going abroad are more effective in understanding cultural communication differences when receiving cross-cultural training (Inman).

Looking at cultural interaction, Rosswurm and Bayerlein (2005) found that "even though excellent project management systems, tools and reporting structures were in place, levels of cultural understanding within the project team and senior leadership varied so greatly that they were causing problems" (p. 16). Intercultural miscommunication seems to occur most often when the people communicating with each other have different perspectives on what counts as competence (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn & Ganesh, 2004). Caligiuri (1995) found that the factor that would push the employees to terminate their work abroad was the need for social support. Creating a way to adjust to another culture while socially interacting with those from that particular culture would improve adjustment. People are growing closer to each other; "understanding the culture and the communication styles of different people has become a vital issue" (Giri, 2006, p. 129). If companies provide information on intercultural communication and how to more effectively work with and understand those from another culture, cross-cultural employees will work better together.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

When immersed in another culture, many people experience uncertainty. Having to work while under these circumstances may create challenges for individuals who have never experienced culture shock before. Because the employees are uncomfortable, they may change their actions to make the situation more bearable, or less uncertain.

This experience can be explained through Uncertainty Reduction Theory. Uncertainty Reduction Theory assumes that when strangers meet their primary concern is reducing uncertainty and increasing predictability (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 2003). The theory examines the way we reduce uncertainty.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory was developed by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese. The theory has a “series of axioms (universal truths that do not require proof) and theorems (propositions assumed to be true) that describe the relationships between uncertainty and several communication factors” (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 2003, p. 192). A situation where uncertainty could occur can range from an interaction with a cashier to interactions with foreigners. One concern in these cases is the uncertainty to predict others’ behaviors (Infante, Rancer & Womack). If one can predict others’ behaviors, they could choose how to behave themselves (Infante, Rancer & Womack).

Berger and Calabrese stated that the need to reduce uncertainty provides a convincing explanation for social behavior in developing relationships (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 2003). Many scholars have focused research about this theory regarding interpersonal relationships and others have broadened the focus to consider uncertainty about situations and events (Roloff & Brown, 2006). The theory can be compared to working in an international business engagement. There is indeed uncertainty about experiencing a working abroad situation. These scholars suggest that the “desire to reduce uncertainty and implement control is the driving mechanism behind need for social support in reducing this anxiety” (Roloff & Brown, p. 10). Uncertainty, or, the lack of confidence about causes and their effects of the alleged situation, is the cognitive response that occurs when one does not know how and why events are occurring (Roloff & Brown). Being immersed into another culture while unprepared may cause that person to feel the need for social support. If the social support is not there, confusion and uncertainty about the culture may create significant cultural shock.

Cross-cultural training before sending employees to work abroad could be one way to reduce uncertainty. Reducing uncertainty appears to be especially agreeable to cross cultural training which emphasizes an understanding of cultural differences in values and business practices (Hammer & Martin, 1992). Reducing this anxiety before heading abroad to work causes employees to be more agreeable to changes and more work oriented (Hammer & Martin). If organizations focused more on reducing anxiety and uncertainty, employees may have a better chance of having successful business interactions both while abroad and when returning to the United States.

Hammer and Martin (1992) show that intensive training was effective in several ways. It produced high levels of both uncertainty reduction and anxiety reduction, which while working abroad, can be very helpful. In addition, overseas managers who received training to better cope with employees coming into their company were better prepared to cope with their cultural adjustments (Hammer & Martin). A cultural program that focuses on reducing uncertainty can not only help employees have a better feeling before going abroad but increase success while working abroad and help with reverse culture shock upon returning to the United States.

There is indeed an extensive amount of research on cross-cultural training; however, only some studies are focused on culture shock when entering a working abroad experience and very little is on how employees are when returning to the United States. More research needs to be directed towards how training before leaving to work abroad can not only help employees work more effectively when in another country, but how to continue that success when returning to their corporation in the United States. Reverse culture shock can create difficult behaviors after re-entry such as cultural, emotional or behavioral (Sicola, 2005). If organizations were to provide ideas to improve the communication difficulties and barriers when returning from an abroad experience, the transition could improve.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research will explore the way organizations prepare employees to successfully communicate with other cultures, work effectively while in that culture and be able to work well upon returning to the United States. The following research questions will ground this study:

RQ 1: How do participants describe their abroad experiences?

RQ 2: What strategies do participants employ to navigate their work abroad experiences?

RQ 3: How do participants describe their post-abroad work abroad experiences?

METHOD

This research was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research describes observations in predominantly nonnumerical terms (Reinard, 2001). After reviewing the data, the researcher is able to actively create meaning out of raw materials (Esterberg, 2002). Most qualitative research in the communication field tends to describe or interpret communication exchanges (Reinard, 2001). In this study, data was collected through interviews from

individuals' who have worked within international organizations and have experienced communication exchanges both within organizations and between various cultures.

Participants

Ten participants were interviewed for this research, one was female and nine were male. All participants interviewed worked with one of four international organizations located in the upper Midwest. The participants traveled to a number of countries for their careers including: West Africa, India, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, United Kingdom, the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Dubai, Brazil, Argentina, Caribbean, St. Croix, Puerto Rico, Martinique, Portugal, Holland, France, Germany, Spain, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway and Chili.

The interviews focused on the overall experiences, challenges, preparation and post-immersion experiences of abroad business travelers. The interviews occurred between the researcher and the employee who had traveled abroad for the organization that they work for. Because this study required that participants were to have traveled internationally for their career, the researcher chose interviewees who fit that criterion.

Measurement

The method for this research was interviews. An interview is valuable because it can generate more information about a given topic and explore possible reasons behind communication (Reinard, 2001). Interviews were specifically important to this study for they allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' business traveling experiences. A semi-structured interview was conducted. The objective of a semi-structured interview is to explore a topic more openly, thus allowing interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words (Esterberg, 2002). As Patton explains (1990), we interview people to "try to move beyond our own experiences and ideas to really understand the other person's point of view" (p. 324).

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher will ask basic questions about the topic of conversation; however, the interviewee's responses ultimately shape the structure of the interview (Esterberg, 2002). The researcher also followed up with probing questions in order to try to reach a deeper understanding. Probing questions request elaboration and an explanation from the answer given to the researcher (Esterberg, 2002). Some researchers believe that the interview should be more like a "real" conversation, with interviewer and interviewee both participating (Reinharz, 1992). In order to gain a true understanding of the communication experiences international business employees had experiences, the researcher shaped the interview to be conversational.

Procedures

Upon IRB approval, the researcher contacted the interviewees through email. Interviewees were chosen because they had experience with international business travel. All ten individuals contacted were very willing to participate and were eager to share their experiences. Five of the interviews were conducted face to face; three at participants' businesses and two at individuals' homes and five interviews were conducted over the phone. Upon the start of the interview, participants were presented with a voluntary consent form were the researcher was able to answer any questions that the interviewees had. The consent form included the consent for audio recording the interview. The audio recordings used were solely for data analysis and were destroyed following the completion of data analysis. All ten interviews lasted twenty to thirty minutes.

Data Analysis

The data conducted from the interview was examined for a qualitative analysis. Following the interviews, the researcher reviewed e-mails, field notes and audio recordings. The data was analyzed by determining the ways in which employees are prepared for a working abroad experience and if it makes communication more effective while working in a difference culture and when returning to the United States.

The data was analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Constant Comparative Analysis. The purpose of this procedure is to look past the inevitable biases, prejudices and stereotypical perspectives that researchers bring to their study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By doing so, the researcher made sense of the data collected. The Constant Comparative Analysis helped the researcher sort the data into a set of themes. "A Constant Comparative method allows the researcher to simultaneously code the date and categorize it into developing themes or patterns" (Harter & Krone, 2001, p. 71) These themes, taken together, effectively tell the story of the research participants' experiences, while insuring that the researcher actively engages in illuminating the data, rather than simply "reporting" participants' accounts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The Constant Comparative Analysis helped the researcher develop results without her own bias. The themes that emerged from the Constant Comparative Analysis are displayed in the results.

RESULTS

The interviews resulted in 294 messages. The results presented emerged as categories when the researcher analyzed data using the Constant Comparative Analysis. The statements from international business travelers used in the following three categories represent their direct experiences while working with another culture (Table 1), the navigation tactics used to complete successful interactions (Table 2) and their post immersion experiences that directly relate to their experiences abroad (Table 3). Tables one, two, and three identify the categories that emerged during this study. The names used in this study are pseudonyms of the participants.

Table one describes the experiences that abroad business travelers went through while working within another culture. The messages emerged during analysis to answer research question number one: How do participants describe their abroad business experience?

Table One

Emergent Experiences of Abroad Business Travelers

Experience

Interactions were successful on both ends

There was a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of learning on both sides

The categories emerged with importance in that interviewees expressed their learning experiences while spending significant time working with individuals from other cultures. Participants very consistently noted success in their endeavors due to their adaptation to their situation in another culture.

Interactions were successful on both ends

Participants noted their successes in business interactions while working with another culture. The idea that emerged regarding travelers' successes was, despite the struggle to adjust to another culture, they were still able to be successful in their business transactions. There are many aspects noted by the participants as to why they were indeed successful. A statement noted by Mike was similar to many participants expressing that, "My interactions are very successful; I wouldn't be doing this if they weren't." Participants found specific ways that helped them provide a better experience for both themselves and the people they were working with. Jim mentioned, "I think my work ethic helped the success of the trip." Being focused and hard working was noted by many participants regarding their successes. In addition, understanding the way people work was mentioned continuously as the key way to become successful in business interactions. As Mike put it:

All people have a number of things in common around the world and when whether it's relationships, it's politics, it's money, it's religion; each one of those areas, at an individual level, we all have our own ideas and philosophies. Some of those can be aligned, some of those conflict; so it's maneuvering through those aspects. Those items will come up in any dialogue, or they're the basis of any dialogue. So it's in understanding those things that are really important to be successful.

While participants noted many ways they specifically became successful in their interactions, all in all, understanding how the people of the culture they are working with and how they communicate ultimately leads to success in international business traveling.

There was a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of learning on both sides

One of the popular ideas regarding the experiences of the participants abroad is the ability to adjust and adapt to another lifestyle. Tony notes "You have to be able to adapt to different situations. It's a matter of trying to get to know your customer and just adapt, be ready to adapt to any situation." He expresses the thought many participants found leads to doing well abroad. Max describes his own experience with adjustment:

There was a lot of misunderstanding, a lot of learning on both sides on how to deal effectively with each culture working together. There are definite clashes in cultures and ideas but you have to be flexible.

Even being on time can be a big culture difference and something that business travelers have found they need to adjust to. While working with other cultures it becomes a situation where "we help each other learn" (Kevin). Tony describes his South American experience:

There are certain considerations to take into account, which depends on the location. For example, in South America they don't really care if you're punctual or not. If you have a meeting at 8:00 a.m., you can show up at 8:30 a.m. or 9:30 a.m. and that would be considered on time.

Despite where participants traveled, the adjustment and understanding of another culture does not change the fact that they need to also complete their assignments. Bob said, "That different culture and understanding that different culture needs to adapt what we are there to teach so everyone is on the same page." Again, being able to adapt to that culture and being open to learning new ideas makes the work abroad experience thrive.

Table two describes the various tactics used by international business travelers to make their trip successful. The tactics conveyed emerged during data analysis to answer research question number two: What strategies do participants employ to navigate their work abroad experiences?

Table Two
Navigation Tactics Conveyed by Business Travelers

Tactics Used
The big thing is creating relationships
It's trying to figure out the reason why
There is no such thing as too much preparation

The big thing is creating relationships

All participants continuously emphasized how essential the establishment of relationships is while working abroad. With every culture, the building of a relationship was the first thing that needed to be done if successful interactions were to occur. This can be observed through Tony's eyes when he said, "Building a relationship is almost more important than the business side of it." Erin shared her experience building relationships in Brazil:

In fact when we went to Brazil, the people there would take us out every night and entertain us. They were such gracious hosts which helped in building the relationship. We got to know them better and we had fun.

Taking the time to develop a trust relationship will get employees "to be open armed; they will then be very engaging and vocal" (Mike). Many participants also explained the difference of business between the United States and other countries. Kevin described his experiences with the Japanese culture:

In Japan, it is all about relationships. In the United States, we decided what to do, we work out the details, decide to do business together and that results in us having a good relationship. In Japan, you need that relationship with someone first and then you are free to do the business. You then develop that relationship further and work out the details with business following that gained trust.

Kevin's description of his experience with other cultures describes many of the same ideas other participants expressed.

Many participants spoke about not only the importance of a relationship development but the effect that it makes. By developing that relationship, the business interactions are able to be completed and they will understand that "you want to help them and work together to create the best result" (Kevin). Max describes his own experiences in Brazil:

After some time, people who have never had that experience can get very frustrated because they don't feel like anything is happening. Whereas what they are really missing is that they need to gain the trust and the confidence and the friendship to make things happen. They used to come in and expect things to happen and that is not the way things work in Brazil.

In order to make business successful a relationship must be developed, trust must be gained and you learn "why things are the way they are" (Bob) within that culture.

It's trying to figure out the reason why

A challenge is brought to business travelers when it comes to the business interactions themselves. They need to take the time to figure out the reason for meeting and then how to convey information clearly to the people of that culture. When working with other countries "we all have a common desire, we just do it differently and in different cultures" (Bob). Tony expresses something that many of the participants also express:

Most of the time when you're doing business, both companies have vested interest in making things go well. You always try to reach a point, in business lingo, a win-win situation, where both parties are happy.

Mike explains it as a "game, he's meeting with them for a reason, they're meeting with him for a reason. It's trying to figure out that reason."

Once that reason is discovered, participants discussed how they used various tactics to get their message across. Many noted how it takes time to get the message across at times but if you make time for that, the interactions will work. Jim explains his own experience:

It took a long time to communicate anything in China. You just realize that when you're there that it just takes a long time and you have to make time for that. I made sure that all my presentations there were very short and to the point. You have to watch that in your presentation if your sentence structure or your language is too complex it will not be understood. I have seen people come over and talk with completed or complicated sentences and I will just tell them that it will not be understood if they do that. So you have to spend a very large amount of time on communication.

By slowing down, many participants found they were indeed successful with their communication with those from other cultures. "You really learn that when you're working with someone in a foreign country to make sure you slow down and explain what you're saying; explain it twice" (Eric). The abroad business travelers all expressed the ways that they discovered the reason behind their interaction, how to successfully convey their information and walk away satisfied.

There is no such thing as too much preparation

It is impossible to know everything before going to another country and when one gets there, "there is always learning" (Mike) and "you always pick up things," (Erin) however; according to all participants, there is a way to be a little bit more prepared. Everyone noted that reading up and speaking to people who had previously traveled to specific countries is essential to making a successful business trip abroad.

The more you can do in terms of research, such as travel guides, is beneficial. I always read up on the countries I visit as much as possible. In my opinion, there is no such thing as too much preparations and that really is the key to success. The more you can research in terms of the cultural differences and the history of the location helps a ton (Tony).

In addition to doing one's own research participants felt speaking to colleagues who had previously traveled helped.

The most helpful thing for me was someone came and spoke to us who had been over there before. They really let me know how to work with the culture and learn a little more about how they work. (Kevin).

Participants discovered that preparation is essential before working with other cultures.

Table three describes the experiences abroad business travelers went through following living in another culture. The messages emerged during analysis to answer research question number three: How do participants describe their post work abroad experiences?

Table Three

Post Immersion Experiences Reported by Abroad Business Travelers

Experience

I walked away from that experience with my eyes a little wider open
 You realize different views regarding the United States

I walked away from that experience with my eyes a little wider open

All the participants explained the extensive growth and knowledge gained through their international work experiences. They now "tend to view things a little more differently than before" (Max). Bob expressed how his views have shifted:

When you get exposed to different cultures, different perspectives, different ways of seeing things, it definitely opens your mind to, whoa never thought of it from that perspective before.

Bob also took time to describe how he understands ideas better from other cultures:

It's interesting because when you here things, especially in the news in regards to international situations, you're going – wait a minute, now that makes sense! It makes sense because I have talked to those people and lived with those people.

Not only did the participants walk away from their experiences with their eyes a little wider open but they were able to appreciate other ideas. According to Erin, "it made me appreciate different cultures and what they had to offer." Many participants were grateful simply for the experience to be exposed to another style of living and appreciate the amount of knowledge that is out there.

It is important to really try and learn from other cultures and countries because there really is a tremendous amount of knowledge out there that you can learn from other people (Max).

Being exposed to another style of living and another culture made participants realize there is a lot out there that is unknown and being exposed to that “is very eye opening” (Bob).

You realize different view regarding the United States

Not only does being exposed to another culture open participants’ eyes but they learned a little bit more about their own country. Kevin realized that maybe the United States limits their ideas.

I think one of the things I’ve noticed is that we as Americans have a very limited perspective. We view everything from our own perspective and we feel like that’s the only perspective.

Jim noted that in his experience, “you realize that the world doesn’t revolve around the United States.” Many of the participants agreed with this idea. Some positive light was shown on the United States as well. Max noted that his “appreciation for what we have in the United States has greatly increased.” Mike agreed to that idea when expressing his own experiences.

One of my findings is, how important the United States is and how Americans are to the world. I always hang my head high. We do some silly things at times, we handle some affairs a little incorrectly but everybody looks to the United States as a source of freedom, a source of direction. When you get other places that maybe are not doing so well, it is really important to appreciate what we have.

Despite whether a participant discovered Americans have a limited perspective or if they were a little more grateful that they were American, they learned to be able to adapt to how people around the world viewed the United States.

DISCUSSION

Based on participants’ comments, it becomes obvious that the true success to an international experience is being able to accept the challenge of fully emerging one’s mind and body into another culture. The results of this study help understand the importance of developing relationships while working with individuals from other cultures. In addition, it shows the importance of figuring out the reason for communication differences and adapting to those differences to make a successful business interaction. Finally, the results show us how important an abroad experience is to business travelers’ personal outlook.

Conclusion One

The results of this study indicated that all participants discovered the importance of relationship building while working with individuals from international businesses. The relationship development included building rapport, being considerate and gaining trust. Regardless of the country, to be successful in their business interaction or make the changes they were intended to, participants were forced to accept the challenge of taking significant time to build a relationship. They were able to sacrifice their duties in the beginning in order to really get to know who these people were and understand where they came from. Berger and Calabrese stated that the need to reduce uncertainty provides a convincing explanation for social behavior in developing relationships (Infante, Rancer & Womack, 2003). This relationship building, in turn, did indeed reduced uncertainty of participants and helped them accomplish what they were there to do. As Caligiuri (1995) stated, the factor that employees need to make their work abroad experience a success is that social support. Participants took the time to develop support from those in the visiting country. Giri (2006) explained that being able to understand that culture and the communication styles of different people is vital. Gaining trust and establishing connections with those in other countries allowed participants to successfully accomplish what they were set out to do and became the most important part of their experience.

Conclusion Two

The interviewer asked participants to describe interactions that occurred while in another country and how they were able to engage in successful transactions. Participants needed to take their own ideas, own ways of living, own ideas of culture and learn how to put them on hold to really take in another culture. They put their culture aside to take in and make room for the acceptance of another culture. According to Taylor (2000), successful organizations need to be able to operate in international affairs. Going into an international business abroad situation with an open mind makes this possible. Max noted in his interview, “I have seen other teams really fail miserably because culturally they couldn’t get over the differences. I guess they didn’t gain the trust in the other culture to make something happen successfully.” According to Ma (1999), research has shown that many employees in United

States global corporations fail to complete overseas assignments due to cultural adjustment problems. Participants found that because they did take the time to understand reason and adapt to the cultures they were working in, failure was not an issue. Making time, making room, understanding that there will be frustration trying to figure out how individuals from another culture work, needs to happen to be successful while working with other cultures. Adapting to another culture was imperative to the success and experience of abroad business travelers.

Conclusion Three

No participants noted that their international business experience was negative. It is obvious that all participants gained a more open mind, they gained a larger appreciation, are more grateful for what they have in their own lives and have a different view on the world; all in all, "how do you put a price on that" (Erin)? Research has shown that reverse culture shock can create difficulty when returning back to the United States (Sicola, 2005), however; despite a few difficult days, participants walked away with nothing but positive experiences. The international business experience gave the participants a chance to view the world from a different eye. This increased the meaning of what is really important in life and they see the world "less black and white but grey" (Max). Working with another country is an experience that, no matter the country, changed all the participants' lives.

Limitations

One limitation that the researcher experienced was the variety of countries participants traveled to. Although many answers were not affected by the country visited, the researcher feels answers may have been slightly different if the study focused solely on one country. This could have resulted in more specific data regarding one culture as a whole and how to work successfully with one specific cultural group.

Another limitation of this research was the possibility of researcher bias. While interviewing, the researcher tried to avoid any preconceptions. It would be inaccurate to assume that another researcher doing the same study would produce the same results. It is important to note that the ultimate goal of this research was to gain a deeper understanding and as a result, the researcher tried to gain as much out of this study as she could.

A final limitation of this research is that race, sexuality, class and gender was not taken into account. The results may have come out quite differently if the researcher was to focus on one race or gender, etc.

Future Research

Learning about international business and other cultures is endless. Little research has been done on specific work changes once business travelers return to their company in the United States. With globalization growing so quickly, it may help to learn a little more specifically about how sending employees abroad affects the organization when they return. Research may also be furthered regarding employees who work in another country for more than one year with their families and see the communication patterns change throughout the family's relationship while living in a foreign country. Being able to adapt to other cultures and be successful in a global economy is ever-changing.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this research has been to discover a deeper meaning regarding international business travelers and their experiences. Participants provided the researcher with their insight regarding personal international business experiences. The interviews focused on how they described their experience, the different tactics travelers used to navigate while in another culture and how their life is affected when they return home to the United States.

The data collected from the interviews revealed that relationship building is the most important thing while trying to conduct international business. Employees who take the time to get to know the people they are working with, gain their trust and develop a relationship are successful in their business interactions. The data also revealed the while developing relationships, finding the reason for interaction and accepting differences will also make for successful business interactions. Finally, the fact that an international business trip is a priceless experience emerged from the data. Living in another culture gives business travelers the opportunity to learn things that are impossible to learn from picking up a book.

As our society continues to globalize and grow in international business, it is essential to know that taking the time to build a simple relationship makes a bigger difference than any business interaction that could occur. There is unlimited knowledge out there that travelers need to grasp and the "people in other countries are just phenomenal" (Bob).

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APPENDIX

Interview protocol for *Working Abroad: A Qualitative Study on Cultural Adjustments and Difficulties While Working with Other Cultures*.

Interview Questions

1. What training, if any, did you receive before you went to work abroad?
2. Do you feel like the training helped ease your nerves or anxiety before going abroad?
3. What were your interactions like the first day of work in another culture?
4. How did you interact or act to make yourself more comfortable in the abroad situation?
 - Did this make your interaction more successful?
5. How were business interactions after a few days of working?
6. Do you think the interactions were successful?
 - If yes, what do you think made them successful?
 - If no, what went wrong?
 - How do you think those interaction could have been better?
7. Please describe how you feel the interactions were at the end of your work abroad.
8. How was your work when you returned to the United States?
9. Do you think working abroad changed your work in the United States?
 - If yes, what has changed?
 - If no, why do you think it is the same?
10. Is there anything not covered that you would like to add?