

Communication Patterns, Host Receptivity, and Psychological Health in the Process of Cross-cultural Adaptation: A Study of Korean and Indonesian Expatriate Workers

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The present study examined the communication patterns and the adaptation experiences of Korean expatriates in Indonesia, and Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. Based on Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, six hypotheses were developed linking four key factors: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity and psychological health. Numeric data was collected in a questionnaire survey among Korean expatriates living in Indonesia and Indonesian expatriates living in South Korea. As predicted, the results indicate that expatriates with higher levels of host communication competence and more active engagements in interpersonal communication with host nationals experience greater psychological health. The results further show the perceived receptivity of the host environment influencing the adaptive experiences of both groups.

Keywords: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, psychological health, host receptivity, Korean expatriates, Indonesian expatriates

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Introduction

The business environment is increasingly global. Because of the strategic importance of global markets and the management of subsidiaries, many companies dispatch their employees across borders. As temporary sojourners, expatriate workers immerse themselves and navigate an unfamiliar cultural environment in order to accomplish an assigned job with the intent of eventual return. The benefits of a successful international assignment include increased international business in the global marketplace as well as individual career progress through developing talent, extending networks, and increasing confidence. The inability to adjust to a foreign cultural environment, rather than a lack of technical competence, has been noted as the major contributing factor for ineffective performance and even premature return (Stroh et al., 2005). When expatriate managers perform poorly but remain in their international assignment, this can have negative ramifications on the organization's performance, reputation, and relationships (Harzing, 1995).

For these reasons, expatriate adjustment has been extensively researched over the past few decades. Numerous studies have identified specific factors that promote expatriate adjustment, including individual job, organizational and situational issues (e.g., Malek et al., 2015), personality traits (e.g., Shaffer et al., 2006), spousal or family adjustment (e.g., Trompeter et al., 2016), culture novelty (e.g., Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010), cultural intelligence (e.g., Guðmundsdóttir, 2015), previous experience (Takeuchi et al., 2005), and training (e.g., Okpara, 2016).

Along with these factors, Black and his associates proposed a conceptual model to examine the process and mechanisms of expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1991). The model categorized three types of predictors of expatriate adjustment: individual characteristics (demographic characteristics and prior international experience), the context (spouse or family adjustment and cultural novelty), and job-related

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factors (job role clarity and greater role discretion). The model identifies three distinct dimensions of adjustment: (1) work adjustment: adjustment to job responsibilities and supervision and successful accomplishment of work goals; (2) interaction adjustment: adjustment to socializing and maintaining successful relationships with host nationals in a host country; and (3) general life adjustment: adjustment to the general environment, such as housing and food.

Even though the above-described studies and conceptual model offer useful information on many of the specific issues of practical concern, they are largely descriptive in approach without seeking to explain the sojourner adjustment phenomenon from a systematic theoretical perspective. Thus, the present study seeks to add clarity and depth to the current theoretical understanding of expatriate adjustment. We do so by employing Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Incorporating macro- and micro-level factors into a single, comprehensive communication framework, Kim's theory offers a multidimensional and multifaceted account of the cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon in which an individual's ability to communicate and engage with local people in the host country is explained as a key factor driving his/her successful adaptation.

Whereas most of the previous studies are on North American and European expatriates, this study investigates the adaptation experiences of two groups of Asian expatriates, South Koreans and Indonesians, residing in each other's home countries. Since the Indonesian-Korean strategic partnership agreement in 2006, Indonesia has emerged as an important economic and diplomatic partner for the Korean government (Indonesia-Korea Partnership, 2017). At the time of this study, approximately 2,000 Korean companies and 9,000 Korean employees were working in Indonesia (KOTRA, 2018), compared to 47,000 Indonesians residing in South Korea. Amongst them, 33,961 are Indonesian migrant workers, 1,524 are students, and the rest are mixed including married, professionals, and others (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Indonesia, 2018).

Theory and Hypotheses

Grounded in an open systems perspective, Kim's (2001) Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation brings together and consolidates several previously separate and divergent approaches into a comprehensive conceptual frame to explain cross-cultural adaptation phenomena. By placing adaptation at the intersection of the person and the environment, Kim defines cross-cultural adaptation as "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (Kim, 2001, p.31).

Kim's theory offers a multidimensional structural model (See Figure 1) to address the question: 'Why do some settlers adapt faster than others?' or 'Given the same length of time, why do some settlers attain a higher level of adaptation?' The structural model identifies key factors that may facilitate or impede the adaptation process in a culturally different environment. Emphasizing the centrality of communication as the core of cross-cultural adaptation, the theory posits that the individual adapts to the host environment through various communication activities, ranging from intrapersonal (or personal) to social (interpersonal/mass communication), which are identified as the dimension of personal communication, or *host communication competence* (Dimension 1) and *host social communication* (Dimension 2).

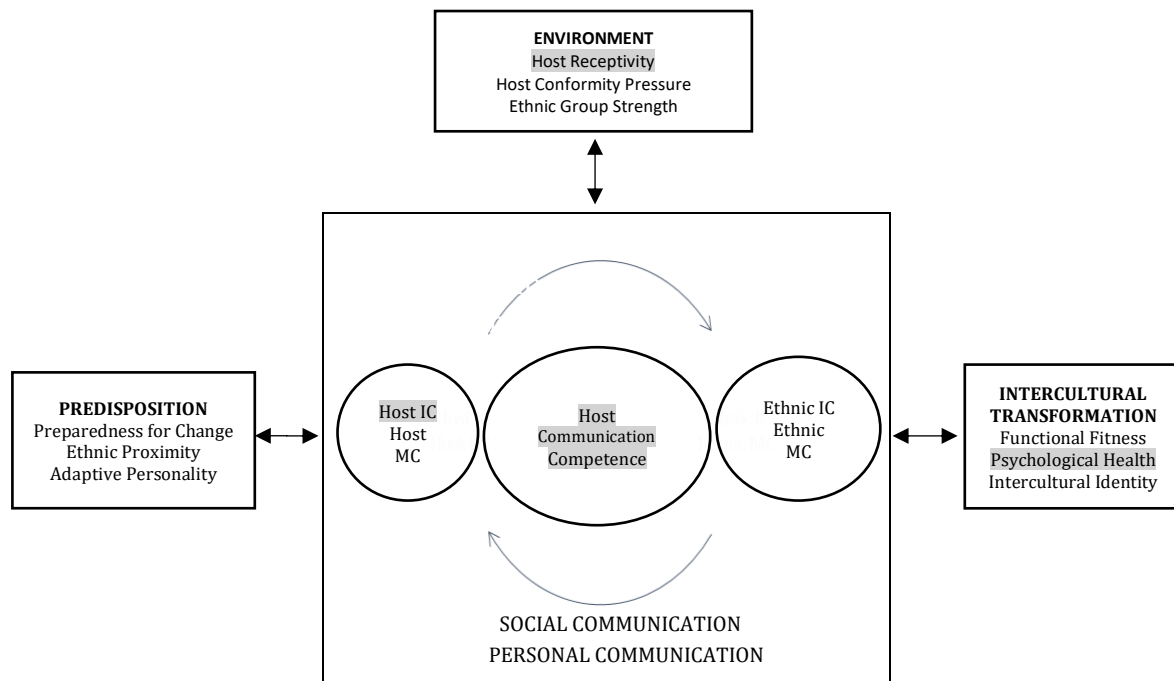
Kim (2001) describes *host communication competence* as the overall capacity of the stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the host communication system. It consists of the cognitive, affective, and operational (or behavioral) capabilities of an individual, which is deemed as the very engine that makes it possible for an individual to move forward along the adaptive path. *Host communication competence* is inseparably linked with *host social communication* (Dimension 2), which is the degree of engagement in the host social communication system through interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host environment. *Ethnic social communication* (Dimension 3) involves interpersonal and mass communication with coethnics in the host society. There are three key conditions to the *host environment* (Dimension 4): *host receptivity*, *host conformity pressure*, and *ethnic group*

strength. The theory also identifies the individual's *predisposition* (Dimension 5), comprised of three key characteristics prior to their resettlement in the host society: *preparedness* for the new environment, *ethnic proximity* (or distance), and *adaptive personality*.

The theory explains that these five dimensions of factors influence one another and, together, they facilitate or impede *intercultural transformation* (Dimension 6), the overall adaptive change taking place within individuals over time. The three key facets of the overall adaptive change taking place in individuals over time: increased *functional fitness*, *psychological health*, and *intercultural identity*.

Figure 1.

Y. Y. Kim's Structural Model: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation



IC: Interpersonal Communication; MC: Mass Communication

Source: Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 87.

The theoretical relationships among key constructs are presented in 21 theorems (See Kim, 2001, pp. 91-92). As highlighted in Figure 1, the present study examines five of these theorems addressing the four factors investigated: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity, and psychological health.

Theorem 1: The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.

Theorem 3: The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).

Theorem 5: The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation' (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).

Theorem 7: The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host communication competence.

Theorem 8: The greater the host receptivity and host conformity pressure, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.

Based on these five theorems identifying the interrelationships between the four factors examined in this study, the following six research hypotheses were proposed.

H1: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.

H2: The host interpersonal communication of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.

H3: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host interpersonal communication.

H4: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host communication competence.

H5: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host interpersonal communication.

H6: The perceived host receptivity of expatriate workers is positively related to psychological health.

Methods

The six research hypotheses have been tested based on the survey data collected between September and December 2018. A standardized and self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect numerical data from two expatriate groups: Korean expatriates in Indonesia and Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. The questionnaire survey was followed by one-on-one personal phone interviews in order to provide in-depth, qualitative insight into host environmental factors vis-à-vis individual adaptation experiences within the two groups. The theoretically driven observations arising from the structure and standardized survey (outsider's view) were strengthened by the in-depth personal interviews that yielded information on the practical aspects of participatory experience in the field (insider's view). This integrative methodology allows for a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process.

The Survey

The targeted number of participants was approximately 100 from each group for the study. To recruit the participants, a combination of the convenience sampling method and the snowball sampling technique was used. Due to the inaccessibility and/or difficulties in obtaining cooperation with eligible respondents as a result of their tight work schedules, this method was a practical alternative to probability-based sampling. While providing incentives might have improved the participation in the current study, due to budget constraints, no incentives were provided. Korean participants were recruited with the assistance of the Korean Expatriate Association and managers of two companies with whom the first author had prior personal contacts. In addition, respondents who completed the survey were asked to name additional potential participants. A total 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 86 (57.3%) were completed and returned. Ten of the returned questionnaires were removed due to excessive unanswered questions, and the remaining 76 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

In the absence of a comprehensive list of Indonesian expatriates residing in South Korea, the first author contacted three organizations: The Indonesia Student Association in Korea, The Korea Muslim Federation Busan Branch, and the Asian-Korea Center in Seoul. Questionnaires were distributed in person and via email depending on accessibility to the organizations and the preferences of the participants. In the case that authors were allowed to visit a meeting of organization, the questionnaires were administered and collected in person. If participants preferred email delivery, the questionnaires

were distributed and collected using email. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 84 (56%) were completed and returned. Of the 84 questionnaires from Indonesians, 3 were excluded due to excessive unanswered questions, and the remaining 81 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

The Participants

The 76 Korean participants' ages ranged from 25 to 71 ($M = 44.17$, $SD = 11.00$). Most of them (65, 85.5%) were male and 59 (77.6%) of them were married. Most had earned at least one college degree: 61 undergraduate (80.3%), 13 graduate (17.1%), along with 2 high school (2.6%). The Korean participants' lengths of residence in Indonesia ranged from one month to 45 years ($M = 14.09$, $SD = 9.65$). Regarding prior intercultural experience, 18 (28.6%) had lived in a foreign country or countries while 45 (71.4%) had no experience at all. In terms of prior training experience, 25 (39.1%) had received training while 39 (60.9%) had not received any training prior to their international assignment.

The 81 Indonesian participants consisted of 43 expatriates working at companies in Korea and 38 students. All 38 Indonesian students were government workers in Indonesia who were working in agencies and companies in Korea while attending university as part of a government exchange program. This warranted the inclusion of this group of students into the category of expatriates. Their ages ranged from 19 to 40 ($M = 27$, $SD = 4.81$), with 45 (55.5%) male and 55 (67.9%) married. The educational degrees they had earned consisted of 35 undergraduate (43.3%), 16 graduate (19.8%), and 29 high school (35.9%). The lengths of residence in Korea ranged from one month to 12 years and eight months ($M = 2.42$ years, $SD = 2.08$).

Regarding the Indonesian participants' prior intercultural experience, 17 (24.6%) had lived in a foreign country or countries, while 52 (75.4%) had no experience in a foreign country at all. About one-third of them, 20 (30.3%) had received training prior to their assignment in South Korea.

The Questionnaire and Measurement Scales

An original version of the questionnaire was initially developed and pilot-tested between May and August 2018. The wording of the questionnaire was refined based on comments and suggestions from the pilot study participants. For Korean participants, the questionnaire was first written in English and translated into Korean by a Korean-American bilingual interpreter. The Korean questionnaire was then back-translated by the bilingual interpreter. For the Indonesian version, the questionnaire was translated into the Indonesian language ("*Bahasa Indonesia*") by an Indonesian bilingual interpreter. The Indonesian version of questionnaire was also back-translated by the bilingual interpreter. Both English and Korean versions were given to the Korean participants, and they were asked to choose between them. All the participants chose the Korean version. Both English and Indonesian versions were also given to the Indonesian participants, and all the participants chose the Indonesian version.

The four theoretical constructs examined in the present analysis (host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host receptivity, and psychological health) were mostly operationalized into five-point Likert-type scales.

Host Communication Competence

Kim's theory (2001) identifies three dimensions of this construct: cognitive, affective, and operational. Each of these dimensions was assessed in the present study. To assess the cognitive dimension of host communication competence, respondents were asked to assess their *knowledge of host culture*. A five Likert-type scale was used (1 = not at all; 5 = completely): (1) "I understand Indonesian/Korean) cultural norms"; (2) "I understand Indonesian/Korean cultural values"; (3) "I understand how Indonesians/Koreans communicate nonverbally, such as through facial expression and body language"; (4) "I understand how most Indonesians/Koreans express themselves verbally; and (5) "I understand Indonesian/Korean ways of thinking." A reliability test of the five-item scale yielded a

Cronbach's alpha of .91 for both the Koreans and the Indonesians, suggesting a high level of internal consistency.

The affective dimension of host communication competence was measured with a five-point Likert-type scale of *adaptation motivation* (1= not at all; 5= very much). The five items were: (1) "How interested are you in understanding the way people behave and think?"; (2) "How interested are you in making friends with Indonesian/Korean people?"; (3) "How interested are you in knowing about the current political, economic, and social situations and issues of Indonesian/Korean people?"; (4) "How interested are you in learning Indonesian/Korean language?"; (5) "How interested are you in adapting to Indonesian/ culture?" The combined five-item scale yielded the Cronbach's alpha of .86 for the Koreans and .89 for the Indonesians.

The operational dimension of host communication competence was assessed by the *behavioral competence scale*, comprised of eight five-point Likert-type scale items (1 = totally disagree; 5=totally agree). The scale measured the participants' self-assessments of their effectiveness in communicating with and relating to local people in the host culture: (1) "I am able to avoid misunderstanding with Indonesians/Koreans"; (2) "I am able to achieve what I hope to achieve in my interactions with Indonesians/Koreans"; (3) "My communication usually flows smoothly when interacting with Indonesians/Koreans"; (4) "I can get my point across easily when I communicate with Indonesians/Koreans"; (5) "I am flexible enough to handle any unexpected situations when interacting with Indonesians/Koreans"; (6) "I have difficulty establishing personal relationships with Indonesians/Koreans"; (7) "I feel awkward and unnatural when I communicate with Indonesians/Koreans"; (8) "I find interactions with Indonesians/Koreans challenging." Because the last item did not highly correlate with the rest of the items, this item was dropped from the scale to improve reliability. The reliability tests yielded an alpha of .91 for the Koreans and .71 for the Indonesians.

Interpersonal Communication

Host and ethnic interpersonal communication were measured by the participant's interpersonal ties with host nationals as well as co-ethnics/other groups and the degree of intimacy of their informal and formal social relationships. The participants were asked to indicate the percentages of people with whom they had relationships in each group (e.g., Indonesians, Koreans, and others) and the corresponding levels of closeness (casual acquaintances, casual friends, close friends). The reliability test for *host interpersonal communication* yielded an alpha coefficient of .76 for the Koreans and .90 for the Indonesians. For *Ethnic interpersonal communication*, the alpha coefficients were .74 for the Koreans and .86 for the Indonesians.

Perceived Host Receptivity

The perceived host receptivity was assessed by seven five-point Likert-type scale items (1=totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). The seven items measured respondents' perceptions of the attitude of host nationals toward them. Items were: (1) "Indonesian/Korean people accept me into their society"; (2) "Indonesian/Korean people discriminate against me"; (3) "Indonesian/ Korean people have a positive attitude toward me"; (4) "Indonesian/Korean people see me and my country favorably"; (5) "Indonesian/Korean people are genuinely interested in associating with me"; (6) "Indonesian/Korean people are indifferent to me"; (7) "Indonesian/Korean people are rude to me." The combined seven-item scale has yielded Cronbach's alphas of .88 for the Koreans and .77 for the Indonesians.

Psychological Health

The construct, *psychological health*, was assessed by six items pertaining to the overall sense of well-being (or lack of it) the participants were experiencing in the host environment: (1) "In general, how satisfied are you with your present life in Indonesia/Korea?"; (2) "In general, how comfortable do you feel living in Indonesia/Korea?"; (3) "How rewarding is your life in Indonesia/Korea?"; (4) "How satisfied are you with the attitudes of Indonesian/Korean people toward you?"; (5) "How satisfied are you with your relationships with Indonesian/Korean people?"; (6) "How satisfied are you with your

experiences in Indonesian/Korean culture?" The combined six-item scale has yielded Cronbach's alphas of .87 for the Koreans and .83 for the Indonesians.

The Interviews

The questionnaire survey was followed by in-depth one-on-one interviews with both Korean and Indonesian participants. 15 Koreans and 15 Indonesians were selected from survey respondents based on age and experience. We tried to maximize probability of balancing potential interviewees as best as possible from larger group of people for this study in terms of age distribution and years of experience distribution.

For the Korean group, the age cohorts were divided into three different levels such as low (25-40 years old), middle (41-50 years old), and high (51+ years old). The length of experience was also divided into three levels: low (1 month -10 years), medium (11 years-20 years), and high (21+years). For Indonesian groups, the age was divided into low (19-25 years old), middle (26- 35 years old), and high (36+ years old). We selected 15 interviews from each group so that the chosen interviewees could represent the whole range of ages of each group. Additionally, interviewees were selected to try to represent the range of experience level as best as possible.

All interviews were conducted by the first author in their phone, using an internet phone service. The Korean interviewees were interviewed in Korean. The interviews took approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour each, and they were recorded with interviewees' consent.

In beginning the interview, the first author shared his personal experience of working overseas as an expatriate manager to help build rapport and trust. With a shared understanding of expatriation and a sense of emotional connectedness, the interviewees were willing to openly share their opinions and impressions of Indonesian people and society. Additionally, using the Korean language enabled the interview to run more smoothly and also allowed the respondents to express nuanced and authentic answers.

It is not completely clear whether or not there was an interviewer effect due to the interviewer sharing the same ethnic origin and using the same language (i.e., Korean). The authors believe that overall the interviews ran smoothly, and the interviewees were comfortable answering the questions. Moreover, the interviewer's status as a faculty researcher from the U.S. positioned him as an "outsider," and he had no prior personal relationship with the interviewees. As mentioned previously, the interviews were conducted over the phone which poses fewer negative effects since visual cues, such as race or facial expressions, cannot be observed and so do not affect the response (Groves & Kahn, 1979). Additionally, the interview questions did not address sensitive topics such as opinions on Korean people, racial issues, or politics. These types of questions could have potentially prompted respondents to give socially desirable responses.

Finally, for interview data analysis, multiple coders were used to avoid culturally biased interpretations. Two American faculty members who work in the same department as the first author were invited to code and interpret the interviewees' transcribed verbal responses. As experienced researchers who understand the communication study and have no preconceived opinions on Asian cultures pertaining to this study, they were able to show an impartial and objective attitude towards the data. After their initial analyses, the coders cross-referenced their results with the other coders. If any disagreements arose, they engaged in discussions to resolve the differences. Coders checked for alternative explanations and verified more literature sources to finalize the analysis. For example, coders discussed the need to be cautious around interpreting "lack of multi-tasking skill" and "a slow-paced work style" as incompetence. Another concept that was up for debate was "putting individual business first over company", with the final decision to not code it as a lack of loyalty to the organizations.

The Indonesian interviews, however, were conducted in English. It would have been desirable to recruit an Indonesian interviewer to conduct the interviews, but using English in these interviews was deemed a reasonable alternative, given time and budget constraints as well as the fact that most Indonesian interviewees possessed strong English skills.

The interview questions were originally written in English. Interview questions for the Koreans were translated into Korean and the Korean version was back-translated into English by a bilingual Korean. Open-ended questions were used to solicit the interviewee's thoughts on the topics corresponding with each of the four main research variables: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health.

Accordingly, the open-ended questions addressed issues pertaining to each variable: (a) observations of differences and difficulty in communicating with local people and coping strategies (host communication competence) (e.g., "Are there any difference between working with Koreans/Indonesians and working with Indonesians/Koreans?"; "Have you ever experienced difficulties in communicating with Korean/Indonesian people in and outside of the work environment?"); (b) experiences of interacting with local people (host interpersonal communication (e.g., "Of all your daily conversations (at work or outside work), approximately what percentage of them do you have with Koreans/Indonesians? "What kinds of socializing do you do with Koreans/Indonesians"); (c) perceptions of the host environment such as local people's attitudes and treatment toward the interviewee and toward fellow country men and women (host receptivity) (e.g., "What was one of your first impressions about Korea/Indonesia and Koreans/Indonesians upon arriving in this country?" "What do you think about the attitude of Koreans/Indonesians toward foreigners in general?"); and (d) pleasant and unpleasant life experiences in the host country (psychological health) (e.g., "What are some of the positive/unpleasant experiences you have had while living in Korea (Indonesia) so far?" "Overall, how are you feeling about your present life in Korea (Indonesia) in regard to your experiences interacting with Koreans (Indonesians) in and outside work?" "If you have another chance to work overseas in the future, would you like to come back to Korea (Indonesia) again?").

Follow-up questions were extensively used to delve into each topical area such as, "if there are, can you tell us what they are?"; "if no, would you elaborate more on that?"; and "if yes, why do you think so? Please tell me your specific experience."

Results

The numeric data collected from the questionnaire survey was analyzed in two stages: (a) descriptive analysis to examine the distribution of data on the key research variables; and (b) statistical tests of the six research hypotheses. The textual data obtained from the one-on-one interviews were analyzed to provide the expatriates' own narratives that illustrated the theoretical relationships in each of the hypotheses. All questions and responses to open-ended questions of interviews were transcribed in their entirety.

After transcription, the verbatim data was grouped into common categories based on the salient themes emerged when themes or patterns are repeated throughout the transcript. The author organized these themes manually into the categories of communication difficulties, interpersonal contact and communication, and perceptions of host environment. Finally, both authors cross-checked the categories of the themes and verified the interpretation of the results by comparing them to one another. For each group, if around 10 out of 15 cases from interviewees' responses are repeated, we presented them as predominant responses in each relevant theme in the interview results.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis examined the distribution of data on the key research variables in terms of the means and standard deviations pertaining to the Koreans, the Indonesians, and the overall sample, as well as t-test results comparing the two groups' means.

Host Communication Competence

The three measures of host communication competence include *knowledge of the host culture* ("cognitive dimension"), *adaptation motivation* ("affective dimension"), and *operational competence*

(“operational dimension”). The overall means for all participants (both Koreans and Indonesians) are: 3.38 ($SD = .78$) on *knowledge of the host culture*, 3.66 ($SD = .77$) on *adaptation motivation*, and 3.53 ($SD = .66$) on *operational competence*.

When comparing for their respective means, the Koreans show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score ($M = 3.59, SD = .72$) than the Indonesians ($M = 3.17, SD = .77$) ($t = 3.48, df = 151; p < .01$) in the level of the *knowledge of host culture*. On *adaptation motivation*, the Koreans show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score ($M = 3.79, SD = .66$) than the Indonesians ($M = 3.53, SD = .84$) ($t = 2.14, df = 153; p < .05$). On *operational competence*, the Koreans also show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score ($M = 3.87, SD = .64$) than the Indonesians ($M = 3.22, SD = .51$) ($t = 7.04, df = 153; p < .01$). These findings suggest that the Korean expatriates are slightly more knowledgeable about and motivated to adapt to Indonesian culture as well as more capable of interacting with Indonesian people than the Indonesian expatriates are with Korean culture and people.

Host Interpersonal Communication

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall means score of *host interpersonal communication* is 25.89 ($SD = 16.65$). In comparing respective mean scores, the Korean expatriates are found to be significantly more involved with host nationals than their Indonesian counterparts. The Korean expatriates report 31.25 Indonesian friends ($SD = 15.88$) while Indonesian expatriates report an average of 21.24 Korean friends ($SD = 15.98$). Each of these mean differences is statistically significant ($t = 3.76, df = 142, p < .01$).

Ethnic Interpersonal Communication

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall mean score of *ethnic interpersonal communication* is 59.85 ($SD = 19.88$). In comparing respective mean scores, the Korean expatriates are more likely to be engaged in relationships with co-ethnics (i.e., other Koreans) than their Indonesian counterparts. The Koreans expatriates report 64.02 Korean friends ($SD = 16.54$) while Indonesian expatriates report an average of 56.22 Indonesian friends ($SD = 21.85$). Each of these mean differences is statistically significant ($t = 2.39, df = 142, p < .05$).

Perceived Host Receptivity

For the combined sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, the overall mean score was 3.61 ($SD = .64$). In comparing respective means scores, the Korean expatriates show a slightly higher and statistically significant mean score ($M = 3.94, SD = .60$) than their Indonesian counterparts ($M = 3.33, SD = .53$) ($t = 6.34, df = 137; p < .01$).

Psychological Health

For the entire sample, the mean score of psychological health is 3.40 ($SD = .69$). Although the Korean expatriates' mean score is slightly higher than that of the Indonesians, the difference is statistically insignificant (M [Koreans] = 3.45, $SD = .67$; M [Indonesians] = 3.36 ($SD = .71$); $t = .76, df = 139; p > .05$).

Hypothesis Testing

The six hypotheses regarding the culture-general aspect of cross-cultural adaptation were tested first on the entire data set that combined the data collected from both Korean and Indonesian participants. This test was followed by a separate test for each of the two groups. Three correlation analyses have been conducted to test the hypothesized interrelationships between the four theoretical constructs: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health. The first analysis is based on the entire sample of both Korean and Indonesian participants, and the result of this analysis is summarized in Table 1. Two additional correlation analyses have been carried out by separating the Korean data from the Indonesian

data, as shown in Table 1a and Table 1b.

Table 1

Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Entire sample

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	153	3.38	.78	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	155	3.66	.77	.63**	-					
3. Operational competence	155	3.53	.66	.61**	.49**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	145	25.89	16.65	.31**	.25**	.44**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	145	59.85	19.88	-.12	-.09	-.07	-.58**	-		
6. Psychological health	141	3.40	.69	.31**	.45**	.34**	.25**	-.19**	-	
7. Host receptivity	139	3.61	.64	.30**	.31**	.60**	.28**	.01	.45**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1a

Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Koreans

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	76	3.59	.72	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	76	3.79	.66	.70**	-					
3. Operational competence	76	3.87	.64	.70**	.58**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	67	31.25	15.88	.38**	.34**	.39**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	67	64.02	16.54	-.36**	-.31**	-.34**	-.89**	-		
6. Psychological health	65	3.45	.67	.48**	.56**	.33**	.25**	-.31**	-	
7. Host receptivity	65	3.94	.60	.29**	.37**	.55**	.18	-.21*	.52**	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1bSimple Correlation Coefficients (*r*) between Research Variables for Indonesians

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge of host culture	77	3.17	.77	-						
2. Adaptive motivation	79	3.53	.84	.56**	-					
3. Operational competence	79	3.22	.51	.44**	.41**	-				
4. Host interpersonal communication	78	21.24	15.98	.16	.12	.32**	-			
5. Ethnic interpersonal communication	78	56.22	21.85	-.08	-.03	-.09	-.55**	-		
6. Psychological health	76	3.36	.71	.15	.37**	.40**	.25*	-.14	-	
7. Host receptivity	74	3.33	.53	.16	.22*	.39**	.15	-.01	.45*	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ **Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis posits that the host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health. Consistent with this theoretical prediction, the result of the correlational analysis clearly supports this hypothesis. *Psychological health* is positively related to *knowledge of host culture* (cognitive dimension) ($r = .31, p < .01$), to *adaptation motivation* (affective dimension) ($r = .45, p < .01$), and to *operational competence* (operational dimension) ($r = .34, p < .01$). These culture-general findings suggest that the higher the level of understanding of the host culture's communication systems, norms and values, the more likely expatriate workers are to have a greater level of *psychological health*. It also suggests that expatriates who have strong motivation as well as behavioral skills, such as communicating and relating to local people, tend to experience greater psychological health in their host environment.

Hypothesis 1 is also supported when tested for each group of participants. For Korean expatriates, all three dimensions of host communication competence are found to be positively and significantly associated with psychological health. The correlation coefficient relating to *psychological health* is .48 ($p < .01$) for *knowledge of the host culture*, .56 ($p < .01$) for *adaptation motivation*, and .33 ($p < .01$) for *operational competence*. For Indonesian expatriates, however, only two of the three host communication competence measures, *adaptation motivation* and *operational competence*, are statistically significant in their respective association with *psychological health* (r [adaptation motivation] = .37, $p < .01$; r [operational competence] = .40, $p < .01$). The cognitive measure, *knowledge of the host culture*, is also positively associated with *psychological health*, but less strongly ($r = .15, p > .05$). Compared to their Korean counterparts in Indonesia, Indonesian expatriates in South Korea seem less in need of cognitive knowledge of their host culture in order to facilitate their psychological health.

The interview data provides more specific insights for these statistical results. Almost all interviewees from both groups report that cultural differences in work style and verbal communication behavior are a major factor in influencing their psychological health. One Korean interviewee, for example, comments on the laid-back attitude of Indonesians towards work as a particular challenge: "To achieve a certain goal, Koreans are going to complete our task by the deadline. However, Indonesians just work and if time is up, they go home even though the task is not completed."

Another source of psychological challenge reported by a number of Korean interviewees is cultural differences in communication style. One Korean interviewee describes this difference as follows: “While Koreans communicate in a straightforward manner. . . They [Indonesians] tend to beat around the bush. . . Indonesians rarely speak out when problems take place.” A number of Korean interviewees also point to Indonesian’s face saving in the case of being criticized in public. One Korean interviewee reports: “If you correct an Indonesian worker’s mistakes, it will embarrass them, hurt their pride and they will lose face badly. . . So, I am attentive to this issue.” The same cultural differences are also seen by Indonesians as an important source of psychological challenge. A number of Indonesian interviewees made comments that Korean workers are very disciplined and fast-paced in their work. One Indonesian interviewee observes: “. . . Pali-pali [fast] work style of Koreans. . . they can’t see how slow Indonesians are. . . Koreans cannot stand to look somebody take a rest. . . they think you should do it now.”

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis states that host interpersonal communication is positively associated with expatriate workers’ psychological health. As predicted, the results of the correlational analysis clearly support this hypothesis. For both groups, correlational analysis reveals that there is a positive and statistically significant association between *host interpersonal communication* and *psychological health* (r [both groups] = .25, $p < .01$; r [Koreans] = .25, $p < .05$; r [Indonesians] = .25, $p < .05$).

The interview findings clearly reinforce the statistical findings with relation to Hypothesis 2. Inside and outside work, both Korean and Indonesian interviewees have interpersonal ties with host nationals. Most interviewees in both groups report that the relationships they have with host nationals contribute to a comfortable and positive feeling about life. One Korean interviewee describes his experiences of having close relationships with Indonesians as follows: “I go to celebrate Indonesian staff’s marriages, house-warming parties and corporate dinners. . . When talking with Indonesian friends, sharing personal feelings and issues is the same as with Korean friends.”

Comparatively, Indonesian interviewees have relatively limited interactions and personal relationships with host nationals. One Indonesian interviewee reports: “I would say only a 5% of my daily interaction outside the work. . . I don’t really hangout any Koreans. . . I only socialized with the locals when I have like [*sic*] events from work. . . My children go to nursery. . . I have relationship with other teachers and parents. . . not many socializing. . . only like [*sic*] the group for parents in nursery. . .” Yet, they still express that these relationships are a positive factor in their life in Korea. One Indonesian interviewee, for example, comments as follows: “We play badminton and play golf. . . we have dinner every week and lunch with friends. . . When we are moving. . . there is a language issue. But. . . someone always come to help.”

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicts the positive association between host communication competence and host interpersonal communication. This hypothesis is confirmed by the correlational analysis showing that all three dimensions of host communication competence are positively and significantly correlated to host interpersonal communication with the correlation coefficient, r [*knowledge of culture*] = .31 ($p < .01$), r [*adaptation motivation*] = .25 ($p < .01$), and r [*operational competence*] = .44 ($p < .01$).

These results are generally replicated when the two groups are analyzed separately. For Korean expatriates, all three dimensions of host communication competence is found to be positively and significantly correlated with host interpersonal communication (r [*knowledge of culture*] = .38, $p < .01$; r [*adaptation motivation*] = .34, $p < .01$; r [*operational competence*] = .39, $p < .01$). Likewise, all three dimensions are positively correlated with *host interpersonal communication* for the Indonesians, although only one dimension, operational competence, is found to be statistically significant (r [*knowledge of culture*] = .16, $p > .05$; r [*adaptation motivation*] = .12, $p > .05$; r [*operational competence*] = .32, $p < .01$).

The above findings are further supported by the interview data. Most interviewees from both groups point to the importance of cultural understanding and strong motivation (host communication

competence) in forming relationships with local people. One Korean interviewee observes such a linkage: “When meeting with Muslims here, it is important to understand and respect Islamic culture....If you understand Islamic culture and are broad-minded, it is a lot easier for you to adapt and build up relationships with local people.” Likewise, one Indonesian interviewee also notes...understanding culture is deeper than speaking a host language...open-mindedness and embracing differences will help you communicate effectively, adjust things and build up meaningful relationships with Korean people.”

Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis posits a positive interrelationship between perceived host receptivity and host communication competence. The correlational analysis shows that host receptivity is positively and significantly correlated to all three dimensions of host communication competence, r [knowledge of culture] = .30 ($p < .01$), r [adaptation motivation] = .31 ($p < .01$), and r [operational competence] = .60 ($p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 is also supported when tested for each group separately. For Koreans, perceived host receptivity is positively and significantly correlated to all three dimensions of host communication competence, r [knowledge of culture] = .29 ($p < .01$), r [adaptation motivation] = .37 ($p < .01$), and r [operational competence] = .55 ($p < .01$). For Indonesian expatriates, two dimensions of host communication competence are positively and significantly correlated to perceived host receptivity, with r [adaptation motivation] = .22 ($p < .01$); r [operational competence] = .39 ($p < .01$). Knowledge of culture is also positively related to perceived host receptivity ($r = .16$) although statistically less than significant ($p > .05$). Comments made by almost all of the interviewees, both Korean and Indonesian, indicate their strong appreciation for local peoples’ welcoming attitudes while emphasizing the importance of understanding and being motivated to adapt to host culture. In the words of one Korean interviewee: “Indonesian people are very friendly toward foreigners... We are treated very well here you need to... respect culture and....and broaden your understanding about the religion of Islam, which is a necessity to adapt and to be successful.” “Likewise, an Indonesian interviewee states: “My work experience in Korea is positive... I am really grateful... To work in Korea, you should learn Korean culture and try to understand it.”

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis predicts the positive association between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication. Results of the correlational analysis tend to support this hypothesis, with positive correlation coefficients for both group, with $r = .28$ ($p < .01$). Additionally, the positive correlations between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication are observed when the two groups are tested separately, r [Koreans] = .18, $p > .05$; r [Indonesians] = .15, $p > .05$.

The positive theoretical relationship between perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication is further evidenced in many open-ended comments made during one-on-one interviews. One Korean interviewee, for example, notes that “Indonesians are very open to foreigners...I have been treated well... They are very interested in Korean people and learning Korean culture.” In contrast, some of the comments made by Indonesian interviewees suggest somewhat lower levels of perceived host receptivity and host interpersonal communication from Koreans. One Indonesian interviewee describes his experiences with Koreans in this way: “I really want to build a friendship with some people, but they [Koreans] never see me the same way as Koreans...Some of my friends are very delightful though and really are my friends. So, I am thankful for that.”

Hypothesis 6

The sixth hypothesis predicts a positive relationship between perceived host receptivity and psychological health. This hypothesis is confirmed by the positive and significant correlation coefficients obtained from the combined data of all interviewees ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), as well as from the data of Koreans only ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and Indonesians only ($r = .45$, $p < .01$).

This finding is reinforced and illustrated by the interview data. Many Korean interviewees' comments unambiguously point to the highly welcoming attitudes of Indonesians as contributing to the quality of life they are able to experience in Indonesia. As one Korean interviewee describes it: "People here have *jeong* [warm feeling]. When I go to a town and get lost, local people always approach me and try to help...I feel comfortable living here and this is a very positive factor in my life in Indonesia."

In comparison, the Indonesian interviewees' perceptions of Korean people are more mixed. Many of them also point to the advanced social and technological systems in Korea as contributing to the quality of life they experience while living in Korea. One Indonesian interviewee, for example, expresses his positive view of Korea in terms of its advanced technology as well as the people: "Because of the infrastructure, internet, and transportation system, it makes living in Korea convenient compared to life in Indonesia...Very positive impression toward Korean people...I want to be contributing the relationship between two countries." Conversely, a number of Indonesian interviewees offer somewhat critical comments on what they perceive to be a lack of Korean people's understanding and acceptance of Indonesian culture and religion. The following two statements exemplify such comments: "Korea is a homogeneous society, I think Korean society is very exclusive to outsiders compared to Indonesia"; and "During the summer, wearing *Hijab*...I was waiting for the traffic signal to go across the road...an old man and a lady approached me, saying 'Hey miss, why are you wearing this? This is Korea...It is not good here'."

Discussion

This study has investigated the communication patterns, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health of expatriate workers in their cross-cultural adaptation processes. Whereas most of the previous studies examined Western expatriates sojourning in non-Western countries and vice versa, the present study has focused on two non-Western groups of expatriates in two non-Western countries: Indonesian expatriates in South Korea and their South Korean counterparts in Indonesia. Employing six of the 21 theorems in Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, six hypotheses were posed with respect to the interrelationships between host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health.

Theoretical Insight

All six hypotheses have been supported in culture-general analyses of the combined data from both Korean expatriates and Indonesian expatriates, as well as in the culture-specific analyses of each group's data set separately. The study thereby has confirmed the six theorems linking the individual expatriates' host communication competence (comprised of their knowledge, motivation, and operational skills with respect to the host language and culture), active engagement in interpersonal communication with members of the host society, and psychological well-being with respect to their life as expatriates. These findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies of a variety of individuals undergoing cross-cultural adaptation, from long-term resettlers including immigrants and refugees (e.g., Cheah et al., 2011), to short-term sojourners such as international students (e.g., Maruyama, 1998; Zimmerman, 1995) and business expatriates (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003; Kim & Kim, 2007).

Specifically, expatriate studies confirmed that cognitive (i.e., cultural knowledge), motivational (i.e., motivation and self-efficacy in functioning in diverse cultural settings), and behavioral (i.e., adoption of appropriate behaviors during cross-cultural interactions) dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ) are important predictor variables to expatriate work adjustment (e.g., Setti et al., 2020). Expatriates high in cognitive CQ have a greater understanding of cross-cultural differences (Brislin et al., 2006); and are better able to use their cultural knowledge in decision making and strategic thinking to overcome transition problems. This in turn may improve their ability to adjust to the new work environment (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Expatriates high in motivational CQ tends to have confidence in their capabilities and intrinsic motivation to adjust to new workplaces (Palthe, 2004). Expatriates with greater behavioral CQ

can use culturally appropriate expressions in communication, in addition to flexibly adapting their behavior to create comfort zones for the other individuals involved in cross-cultural encounters (Early & Petersen, 2004). This ability facilitates communication with host colleagues and reduces the risk of cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ang et al., 2007), which results in better work adjustment.

Additionally, the network ties with host nationals were found to contribute to expatriate adjustment. Other previous expatriate studies confirmed that building and maintaining relationships with host nationals is a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1991; Caligiuri, 2000; Gregersen and Black, 1992). Numerous studies confirmed that the network ties with host nationals tends to provide expatriates with the support and resources they need in order to adjust (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003; Liu & Shaffer, 2005; Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Particularly, the host interpersonal network ties provide expatriates with “information support”, the information that assists expatriates’ functioning and problem solving in the host country, as well as “emotional support”, which are the emotional resources that help expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation when adjustment difficulties become overwhelming (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003).

In addition, unlike most of the previous studies of expatriates, the present study has examined one of the environmental factors in Kim’s theory, perceived host receptivity. The results show that perceived host receptivity does play a significant role in facilitating expatriates’ experiences in interacting with local people as well as encouraging them to be involved in relationships with them, while also enhancing their psychological well-being and the overall quality of life they experience the host society.

In addition to extending the generalizability of Kim’s theory to the two Asian groups of expatriates living and working in each other’s home country, the present study provides a set of qualitative insights into the specific experiences and observations provided by the Korean and Indonesian expatriates. Such insights have been made possible through an integrative methodology combining a quantitative structured survey (“etic”) with qualitative in-depth personal interviews (“emic”).

In fact, expatriate research clearly confirms that cross-cultural adaptation is an immediate determinant of successful job performance for expatriates (e.g., Hasan & Diallo, 2013; Tucker, et al., 2004; Wang & Tran, 2012; Zakaria et al., 2019). For the newly arrived expatriates, unfamiliar environment creates psychological stress and fatigue, which may be aggravated by the expatriate’s maladjustment. The increasing pressure from these challenges can result in negative attitudes toward the assignment abroad and the host environment, leading to a feeling of dissatisfaction which negatively impacts the expatriate’s relationship with work and impedes their performance (Kraimer et al., 2001; Shih et al., 2010). As Sinangil and Ones (2001) suggested, expatriate adjustment is not an end in itself, but rather a part of a process that allows the expatriate to be able to focus on and carry through the tasks of the job that they have been sent to perform (p. 433). Thus, the more adjusted the expatriate manager is, the more effective they are. As such, multinational organizations should provide support and education for their employees so that they can adjust more smoothly and perform their job functions more effectively.

By offering carefully designed and implemented training programs, multinational organizations can help their employees acquire a sufficient level of host communication competence in all three interrelated dimensions: knowledge about the host culture (cognitive dimension), motivation to adapt to, and engage in, the communication processes of the host society (affective dimension), and the skills to carry out daily communication activities involving members of the host society appropriately and effectively (operational dimension).

Considering the role of host interpersonal ties in expatriates’ adjustment, multinational organizations should educate their employees on how to develop meaningful relationships with host nationals as well as foster social interactions with local colleagues.

Considerations for Future Studies

Future investigations of expatriate adjustment need to address the shortcomings in the present study in terms of sampling and measurement scales. With respect to sampling, we used a relatively small

and non-probability sampling due to difficulties in accessing the two groups of research populations. More time and greater efforts would need to be allocated to secure larger and more representative samples selected through a probability sampling method. Researchers also need to be prepared to devote a sufficient amount of time in order to be able to identify and develop personal contacts in various companies. In this way, research team members can distribute and collect survey questionnaires in person, and conduct on-site one-on-one interviews over an extended period of time.

With respect to the quantitative measurement scales assessing the research variables (three categories of host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, perceived host receptivity, and psychological health) have been found satisfactorily reliable, with the alpha coefficients ranging from .71 to .91. Three of these six scales show the alpha coefficients lower than the commonly accepted level, .80: behavioral competence scale for Indonesians (.71), host interpersonal communication scale for Koreans (.76), and perceived host receptivity for Indonesians (.77). Further efforts are needed to improve the reliabilities of these three scales for greater confidence in drawing conclusions about the theoretical relationships involving the three variables (behavioral competence, host interpersonal communication, and perceived host receptivity).

Even though correlations are reported to be statistically significant, some of our correlation coefficients are moderate or relatively low, which is considered to represent a weak or small association making it one of the weaknesses of the present study. As discussed above, after the measurement scale is improved for greater reliability, these low coefficients could be reexamined in future studies.

In regard to statistical analysis, other than t-test and correlations, more sophisticated statistical analysis could have been conducted to further analyze the relationships among focal theoretical variables; a relatively small sample size, however, did not make this plausible. Future study based on a larger sample size could warrant this type of analysis.

Conclusion

All in all, the findings of this study highlight the centrality of communication in the adaptation process of expatriates in a foreign land. Communication, indeed, is “the very engine” that drives the process in which each expatriate is able to navigate a new and unfamiliar culture and, thereby, shapes the quality of his or her adaptive efforts (Kim, 2001, p. 97).

For individual expatriates, crossing cultural boundaries can be a significant and even transformative event. Life in a foreign land is filled with eye-opening and often stressful experiences that challenge their existing cultural assumptions and expectations. Yet, through new learning and active interpersonal engagements, most expatriates will gain insights into the new environment with which to carry out their daily tasks as expatriate workers. In so doing, they may also find themselves partaking in a journey of personal development—a psychological movement in the direction of a deepened sense of self-efficacy and an expanded perspective on work, culture, and humanity itself in our globalizing world.

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