

Cultural Metaphores of Expatriate Experiences

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Abstract

Cultural metaphors which were expressed by expatriate managers are the base of this research. By the help of them, it becomes possible to compare managers' thoughts on expatriate experiences in different host cultures. Sample group of the research includes 20 South Korean expatriate managers, who work and live in Turkey and USA. The reason in order to select managers as participants for this research is their roles and importance of the managers during expatriation and their affects on organizations' future and managerial decisions. The thoughts of the managers were gained by the metaphors that they used for explaining the expatriate experience. The metaphors used by these managers were categorized, analyzed and interpreted by their meanings. According to the results, even national cultures of Turkey and South Korea are similar; the expatriate managers in Turkey look less adapted to the host culture. On the other hand national cultures of USA and South Korea are different but the expatriate managers in USA look more adapted to the host culture.

Introduction

In the literature, Richardson and McKenna (2002) researched about academics' expatriate experiences by using metaphors to understand their motivation to go overseas and experience of expatriation. Explorer, refugee, mercenary, architect, outsider, tightrope walker and student are the explaining symbols of the expatriates experiences and motivation sources. Similarly, in this research, expatriate managers were chosen to gain their view point about being in a foreign culture. The goal of this paper is to reach expatriate managers' thoughts about their expatriate experiences in a new culture. Metaphors were used as a mean to reach their thoughts. In this context, a comparison between two host cultures is developed at the end of the study.

Conceptual Framework

Culture affects the expatriates and their working process in host countries (Schroath and Korth, 1989). The culture word is an important concept because the main subject of the research is thoughts of the expatriates about being in a host culture. Culture reflects the characteristics and values of the individuals (Schuler and Rogovsky, 1998). It includes values, assumptions, beliefs and provides differentiating one community from the others (Hofstede, 1991). Also it is the mental programs of the societies (Hofstede, 1980).

Elango (2003) explains being different on cultures as a high distance between two cultures and being similar on cultures as a low distance. High or low distance is determined by the scores of Hofstede (1980). Mendehall and Oddou (1985) underline the importance of cultural similarities and add the hardness of adaptation to some cultures. For instance, the expatriates from western can have some troubles to adapt themselves to the Indian, Pakistan, Liberia, Far East, Middle East, North and East Africa countries. In this context, it is better to

work and live in a similar culture but sometimes it might be impossible due to organizational and managerial targets and projects. For that reason, this point has been discussed in this study to clarify thoughts of expatriates about being in host cultures which are similar and different to the home culture.

Expatriation means people, who work and live out of their home country (Baruch and Altman, 2002) and generally work for an organizational or a managerial assignment (Lund and Barker, 2004) in the countries, which they are not the citizens of there (Tahir and Ismail, 2007). Furthermore, they are assigned by their home organizations (Caligiuri, 2000) for a temporary project and at the end of this progress they repatriate in their home organization and country (Benson and Pattie, 2009).

Expatriate managers' ideas about being in a host culture are obtained with a metaphorical view. It is common and increases in management to use metaphors to understand particular concepts (Morgan, 1997). Morgan (1983) underlines the role of metaphor as creating meaning by understanding one phenomenon through another in a way that encourages people to understand what is common. Metaphorical expressions create a relationship between self and the others. The word metaphor can be explained as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Using metaphors is a kind of trip from the less known to the most known, from known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract, from the objective to the subjective and from the general to the specific (Alpaslan, 2007).

Cultural Metaphors

The research is based on 3 countries which ones South Korea, Turkey and USA. The cultural metaphors are compared and interpreted. The metaphorical data of the research had been gained from the expatriate managers. Reaching to the participants had been done with trace method (Hornby ve Symon, 1994). The data collecting method was the interviews (Seidman, 1998). Because of the busy schedules of the expatriate managers electronic interviews (by emails) (Chen ve Hinton, 1999) were used to get metaphors. The content analysis was the analyzing method of the data as well. Content analyzing method had been applied for qualitative analyzing, categorizing and interpreting (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Holsti, 1969; Luborsky, 1994). Main restrictions of the research are time and financial facilities. Due to these obstructs this research consist of only 3 sample countries.

The question that had been asked to the South Korean managers is "Which metaphor/s can be used for explaining "expatriation in a foreign culture"?". For the subject of the research it was needed to explain thoughts with symbols and images named metaphors. All metaphorical explaining had been investigated and analyzed according their meaning. After analyzing step, they had been categorized, compared and interpreted by using content analyzing method. Metaphorical view is the base of this research because in this study it is aimed to reach subconscious of the participants for understanding their approach to the host culture.

The metaphors, which were expressed by South Korean managers of Turkey are "*Sometimes friend, sometimes foreign, not western not oriental, a new life, we newly born together, gifts from heaven, a luxury menu in a restaurant, soccer game, being a Pioneer, harmony, having so many chances to select, country of my hearth*". The metaphors from USA about being in a new culture are "*Exciting but stressful, never anticipate what happens, variation about everything, all over the world becoming one country for sharing their cultures, we are the one, global friends, God created human being to live together and everywhere, adoptive parents, when in Rome, do as Romas do, my second home*".

In the below, these metaphors have been interpreted according their meaning. After analyzing that, they had been categorized and interpreted in the Table 1. It provides comparing two host cultures' metaphors.

Table 1: South Korean Managers' Expatriate Metaphors

TURKEY		USA	
Metaphors	Meaning Analysis	Metaphors	Meaning Analysis
<i>Sometimes friend, sometimes foreign</i>	Ambiguity Paradox Dilemma Understanding Cognizing	<i>Exciting but stressful</i>	Ambiguity Control Intermeddling Understanding
<i>Not western not oriental</i>	Receiving Analyzing	<i>Never anticipate what happens</i>	Guess Resolve Exciting
<i>A new life, we newly born together</i>	Begin Innovation Invention Exploration Exciting Hope	<i>Variation about everything</i>	
<i>Gifts from heaven</i>	Expectation Enjoy Like	<i>All over the world becoming one country for sharing their cultures</i>	Combine Integration Collective body Converge
<i>A luxury menu in a restaurant</i>	Effort	<i>We are the one</i>	Share Coordination Harmony
<i>Soccer game</i>	Competition Labor Struggle Open a new road Conquest Victory	<i>Global friends</i>	
<i>Being a Pioneer</i>		<i>God created human being to live together and everywhere</i>	
<i>Harmony</i>	Accord Integration Adjustment Synergy Mixing	<i>Adoptive Parents</i>	Orientation Belonging Going along with Looking like Integration Harmony
<i>Having so many chances to select</i>	Benefit Profit by an opportunity Selection Exerting	<i>When in Rome, so as Romas do</i>	
<i>Country of my hearth</i>	Love Loyalty Allegiance	<i>My second home</i>	Love Commitment Family

Interpretation of Metaphors by Expatriates in Turkey:

- Korean managers in Turkey feel a kind of uncertainty for the expatriation progress in a new culture.
- There are many differences between the expectations and realities concerning host culture.
- Expatriation means a new begin and life. Also it looks full with surprises for them.
- A new working and living experience in a host culture means to have competition all the time and struggle to be successful.
- Home and host cultures look to be integrated easily. It can be evaluated as a revolution time and managers are the pioneers.

- The host culture is sometimes very familiar but sometimes looks completely different.
- There is an expectation to be in a similar culture to South Korean culture but because of differences they have dilemma and paradoxes.
- It is the time of new experiences and they feel excited.

Interpretation of Metaphors by Expatriates in USA:

- Korean managers in USA feel themselves integrated with the new culture.
- Cultural differences between home and host countries can be evaluated as richness not a problem.
- New culture looks familiar.
- The host culture is accepted as a new home.
- They underline the altering and ambiguity of the new life.
- It looks necessary to behave according to the host culture to make life easier in the host country.
- The progress of adaptation and integration to the new culture is evaluated very difficult.
- It sounds meaningful about sharing cultures for them.

As a result, there is a significant difference between the thoughts of South Korean managers of Turkey and USA about living in a host culture. The differences on thoughts had been reached by obtaining metaphors which reflect the subconscious of the participants and symbolize their approach to the host culture. Even Turkish and South Korean cultures have low distance according to the Hofstede (2011), South Korean expatriate managers look low adapted. On the other hand, national cultures of USA and South Korea have high distance (Hofstede, 2011) but expatriate managers in USA look more adapted and integrated with their host culture.

South Korean managers of the Turkey have some thoughts summarized by the keywords such as **paradox, dilemma, innovation, exploration, competition, struggle, integration, synergy, benefit, selection, loyalty**. These words represent how they feel and think about being in a new culture as expatriates. They do not look adapted very well; even Turkish and South Korean cultures are accepted similar. On the other hand, metaphors of South Korean managers in USA have some thoughts presented by the keywords such as **ambiguity, control, integration, collective body, orientation, belonging, commitment**. It shows that managers in USA are more adapted than managers in Turkey. Because they have more messages like being collective, sharing, going native and enjoying. The managers in Turkey enjoy this progress but look less adapted because of individualist approaches and feeling different. They find Turkish culture exciting and interesting but cannot feel integrated well.

Conclusion

As a result, it is not possible to say expatriates can be more comfortable in the similar cultures to their home cultures and cannot be adapted very fast and easily in different cultures from their home countries. It depends on personal approaches and perceptions. On the other hand, this study underlines the importance of metaphors as a mean for managerial researches. With a short and clear question, the thoughts of managers could be obtained by the help of them. This research contents only one organization's managers and they come from same backgrounds and organizational cultures. This subject can be extended and researched in more organizations and countries. It provides to see main view of the approaches and perceptions about being in a new culture as expatriates.

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