

INVESTIGATING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE OF INDONESIAN'S EXPATRIATES

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the importance of cultural intelligence and the possibility to propose several recommendations to improve the expatriates' performance. This study used a qualitative research method by conducting an in-depth interview with the informants. 11 informants are willing to participate in this research. All the informants are Indonesian expatriates who work in various countries in diverse working environments. Based on the depth interview, it was found that the biggest challenge for Indonesia Expatriates is stigma among the International people toward Indonesia, the language barrier, and the reluctant to speak up their mind. Result also shown that all informants have Cultural Intelligence (CQ). The biggest challenge among Indonesian expatriates is the false perception toward Indonesians in international countries as poorly educated people due to the high number of immigrant workers from Indonesia. the language barrier also one of the significant problems in the international assignment. Moreover, Indonesians tend to shy to speak up their opinion. Results also shown that all informants have possessed Cultural Intelligence (CQ). On the metacognitive dimension of CQ, all of the informants know exactly how they acquire and stated the preparation beforehand was very important to start the interaction. Informants can be considered have the cognitive factor of CQ by showing the ability to sense something wrong in the new cultural situation, have knowledge to overcome the unexpected situation in a new culture and possess general knowledge regarding the local culture whether there are similarities with Indonesian culture. Motivation of CQ of the informants are from their interest to learn people and culture from different countries, achieving good performance, having good interaction with co-workers, supervisors and great social life. Furthermore, all informants answered they can adapt by changing their body language or speech to fit with people from a different culture, means they have the behavioral dimension of CQ.*

Key Words: *Cultural Intelligence, Indonesian Expatriates, Expatriate Challenge, International Human Resource.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Globalization has enlarged the demand for human resources who can adapt to the different cultural workplace. A global organization needs to have an appropriate strategy to attract the international workforce due to the increasing number of international business activities, which is by assigning the employees to undertake the international job away from their home countries. However, international assignment presents significant challenges such as cultural diversity although international companies have developed internationally qualified human resources. As stated by Dowling (2008) the complexities in international operations are ignored by several companies and it leads to business failure in the international area.

Once an individual join in the international setting, there will be a deviation from the existing behavior to adjust the new cultural (Harzing, 1995, 2009; Harzing & Christensen, 2004). Expatriates face both work and non-work including cultural differences which test their capability to function effectively in their new circumstances. They will be tested along with their effort to reach the new cultural value orientation. (Molinsky, 2007). Even Hofstede (2001), Adler (2002), Avril and Magnini (2007), and Selmer (2010) showed that each of expatriates has a barrier in language as well, how to function well, and comprehend host country in terms of cultural and situational context.

Indonesian professional workers working abroad called expatriate are quite low in number, in fact laborers are very numerous and Indonesia is among of the five highest contributors to migrant workers in South East Asian region. Hence, the issue of Indonesian expatriates is relatively uncommon to be the center of attention international human resources study and almost ignored. While expatriate in Indonesia is not non-existent, although the number is small but it is believed to continue to grow along with the more open access to information technology, the increasing needs for international labor, and of course the globalization. It is understandable there is very few studies about Indonesian expatriates globally, especially investigating about the cultural perspective. Thus, this research is very important to

investigate further in understanding the experience of Indonesian expatriates abroad, how their cultural intelligence, how they adjust themselves to increase job performance. It is hoped that the result will enrich the knowledge about cultural intelligence specifically for the effective international assignment among Indonesian expatriate.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A. Expatriate

According to Richardson & Mallon (2015), an expatriate is a label to explain international job assignments conducted by a multinational company. Expatriate can be defined as a person appointed by the company to place for international assignment minimum for 6 months. Professional work in multinational corporations (MNC), transnational corporations (TNCs), and multinational organizations (MNOs) are classified as part of the expatriate coverage.

Expatriate plays significant roles in the organizations' competitive advantage. The success of international placement desires an effective human resource system and as well as people who are competitive globally. The human point is the prominent factor in the process of an international assignment, since 'the human resource' is the real representation of the organization and conduct the assigned task. Thus, this person who so-called 'expatriate', must conduct his or her job effectively in a foreign location. Mostly the process of international assignment does not necessarily only about the geographic and functional transfer, there are possibilities expatriate will face obstacles in culture and mindset (Fish, Bhanugopan, & Cogin, 2008).

One of the main problems in the cross-cultural human resource department objectives is cultural incompatibility (Hofstede, 2001; Selmer, 2010; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997; Ward, 1996). The majority of organizations do not have appropriate human resources to fulfill the increasing demand for international placement. Organizations need to find expatriates who can work well in multinational conditions and quickly adjusting themselves in multiple cultures. (Carmel & Nicholson, 2005; Rao, 2004).

B. Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural intelligence (CQ) has been linked the outcome of expatriate. CQ is an individual ability to have an effective job across multicultural situation, and a high CQ person is believed to be more capable in adapting to a different culture than people with low CQ. This would lead to a better performance during an international assignment (Aditi and Avery, 2009; Ang and Van Dyne, 2008; Ang et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2008).

Earley & Ang (2003) stated that cultural intelligence is the ability in adapting the new cultural situation effectively, the intelligence in an intercultural setting. Cultural intelligence (CQ) can be considered as the capabilities that relate to cultural diversity context, based on the multiple intelligences theory (Sternberg & Detterman, 1986). CQ consists of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (Ang et al., 2007).

The meta-cognitive of CQ refers to the intellectual capability to comprehend cultural knowledge. Second, the cognitive of CQ refers to the general and the structure of cultural knowledge. Next, the motivational of CQ refers to the competency of an individual to manage his or her energy to learn and function in multicultural conditions. The last factor of CQ is behavioral, it refers to the ability of individuals to demonstrate the proper action to interact in a diverse cultural situation. CQ is one of the intelligence forms which describe the coping action in a new cultural and diversity situation (Ang & Inkpen, 2008).

Kim et al (2006) believe that a person will have a better adjustment to both work and the non-work environment in the host country when possessing a higher level of CQ, it may indicate that individuals obtain more proper emotional and informational support within the environment. According to Sawhney (2008), the strategic value of CQ is very important for an organization to leverage the cultural difference which will lead to a competitive advantage, therefore both organizations and individuals should concern about the CQ. It is also posited by Templer et al (2006), motivational of CQ has a positive relationship on the sociocultural adjustment such as general living condition adjustment, work adjustment, and host-country national interactional adjustment.

Earley and Ang (2003) highlighted the four important components of CQ, as follow:

- Metacognitive CQ: The awareness and capability to make planning for multicultural interaction.
- Cognitive CQ: The comprehension of whether cultures are similar and different.
- Motivational CQ: Interest, drive, and confidence to adapt to the diverse cultural situation
- Behavioral CQ: The competency to adapt behavior when relating and working in inter-culturally (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008; Earley and Ang, 2003).

C. Indonesian Culture

Indonesia is an Asian country with a population of about 210 million. About 90 percent of Indonesia people are Muslims, thus Islamic values are dominant in this country. Therefore, Islamic culture is part of most daily life for

Indonesians. It is in line with the fact that Indonesian culture has been ranked as clearly more masculine (Hofstede, 1984).

Indonesia has its own national and official language, it is called Bahasa Indonesia, which is similar to Malay. Although, Indonesia consist of various dialect, however, Bahasa Indonesia is used to unify the multiethnic in Indonesia. (Suutari et al, 2002).

According to Mulder (1994), Indonesians are frequently classified as peace-loving, generous, and hospitable. Based on GLOBE studies (2020), Indonesians have a relatively high human orientation dimension, which means that Indonesians concern to others, caring and kind to others. Indonesians tend to prioritize the needs of others than persona. Furthermore, Indonesians are also relatively low assertive. They are not too confrontational and aggressive in their relationship with others.

The Individualism score of Indonesians are relatively low, it means that Indonesians are considered as collectivist. It demonstrates that Indonesians are loyal to their group or society, critical decisions are made by groups and members of group/society are highly interdependent towards the group. (GLOBE, 2020). Next, Indonesians have a relatively high-performance orientation score (GLOBE, 2020). It shows that Indonesians value high standards, excellence, and performance improvement.

3. RESEARCH METHODS:

This study used a qualitative research method by conducting an in-depth interview with the informants. 11 informants are willing to participate in this research. All the informants are Indonesian expatriates who work in various countries in diverse working environments. To generate thorough information from informants, communication is built through Google Form and Social Media Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. The in-depth interview was undertaken for almost one month (April – May 2020). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data analysis should comprise of data reduction, data display, conclusion, and verification.

This study aims to analyze cultural intelligence among the Indonesians Expatriates and the possibilities to propose several recommendations to improve the expatriates' performance.

4. THE RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of Informants

The Characteristics of informants in this study can be viewed in the table below.

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

Previous Country of Work		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Qatar	1	9,1
Malaysia	2	18,2
Indonesia	5	45,4
USA	1	9,1
New Zealand	1	9,1
Oman	1	9,1
Total	11	100
Current Country of Work		
UAE	1	9,1
Malaysia	3	27,3
Belgium	1	9,1
Qatar	4	36,3
Brunei Darussalam	2	18,2
Total	11	100
Years of Experienced in Multicultural Environment		
Above 10 years	3	27,2
5 - 10 years	4	36,4
Below 5 years	4	36,4
Total	11	100
Educational Background		
Master Degree	6	54,5

Bachelor	5	45,5
Total	11	100
Gender		
Male	7	63,6
Female	4	36,4
Total	11	100
Type of Industry		
Oil, Gas, and Mining	8	72,7
Construction	1	9,1
Food and Beverage	1	9,1
Beauty	1	9,1
Total	11	100

Source: Processed Data (2020)

Based on table 1, it can be seen the majority of informants previously worked in Indonesia and the rest are varied like Malaysia, Qatar, USA, New Zealand, and Oman. While the current country of work for informants in this study was dominated by Qatar (36,3%) and followed by Malaysia (27,3%) at the second-highest number. Table 1 also demonstrated there are 27,2 % of all informants have worked for more than 10 years in multicultural environments. Furthermore, most of the informants are Master's Degree (54,5%), although the percentage is only slightly different from the Bachelor's Degree (45,5%). Meanwhile, the number of male informants are higher than female (36,4%).

B. In-Depth Interview

➤ **Challenges as the Indonesian Expatriates**

The 11 informants were questioned about the challenges they faced as Indonesian expatriates. Most of them said that the greatest challenge is the different treatment they received compared with other expatriates. One of the informants who work in Qatar even mentioned that the common knowledge among people in Qatar, Indonesia is considered as a third-world country. The fact that a massive number of unskilled migrant laborers from Indonesia work in Qatar, Malaysia, and UAE also added a poor perception towards Indonesia.

”Some people still think that we are poorly educated, the reason is that most Indonesian migrant workers are mostly low-skilled and works in the domestic sector”. (Informant-9)

Those countries think workers from Indonesia are poorly educated and not professional thus it is no wonder that Indonesian expatriates receive lower salary packages than others. Three of the informants said, this treatment sometimes makes them feel as if the second class community and affect their self-esteem.

“In the region, I'm currently working, Indonesian is considered as third-country nationals which relate to salary package”. (Informant-1).

Another challenge as Indonesian expatriates is the language barrier. Language is quite challenging because English is not their first language. With language, accent and style also become a challenge in the working place.

Next, two informants reported that personality issue is a challenge as Indonesian expatriate. Most Indonesians are not used to speak up their opinion, tend to avoid friction with other colleagues when giving their opinion.

“We always overthinking, cannot become outspoken, as we always consider the impact of our words and action before we do it, we do not want to offend anybody else. In fact, in the professional world, we are valued by our ability to find ideas, communicate them in clear articulation and execute it even if it considered offensive action to others”. (Informant-11)

➤ **Cultural Intelligence Dimension**

The questions were created based on the four components of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) (Earley and Ang, 2003) which consist of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral.

• **Metacognitive of Cultural Intelligence**

Based on Ang et al (2007), the metacognitive of cultural intelligence reflects the mental capability to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. It consists of awareness and the ability to plan for multicultural interaction (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008). All the informants were asked about their plan to start the interaction in a new culture.

All of the informants stated the preparation beforehand was very important to start the interaction. They tried to find out related information from Indonesian fellows who have stayed earlier about the host culture and strategies to adapt. It is also important to search for more information about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Besides that, information was gathered through the internet, books, and observing the local custom from neighbors as well as colleagues.

“Understanding the values, beliefs, and traditions in the host country. Each part of the world varies considerably from the rest in many aspects such as climate, food habits, living style, and so on. The internet has made life easier in giving me access to information regarding the social-cultural and culinary habits. I start learning about this country as much as I can before be arriving”. (Informant-9).

Five of all informants believed that understanding the local values, beliefs, and traditions in a host country is very critical to start the interaction. When someone understands the local culture, the interaction will be built easier. Specifically, for the working purpose, trying to understand the organizational culture, communication style in the organization, and leadership style are considerably important to have smooth interaction in the working place.

- **Cognitive of Cultural Intelligence**

The cognitive of cultural intelligence represents the general knowledge and knowledge structures about culture (Ang et al, 2007). There are three questions were asked to investigate the cognitive dimension among the informants. The first question was asked their ability to sense something wrong in the new cultural situation. Next is about their knowledge to overcome the unexpected situation while working in a new culture. The last question was asked about their general knowledge regarding the local culture whether there are similarities with Indonesian culture. All the informants agreed that sometimes they can immediately sense there is something wrong by observing the situation through body language and people responded. If it feels odd and there is no clue which action or statement is considerably strange from the local perspective, one of the informants mentioned that she will directly ask the local on how to act properly. Another informant added that he mostly relies on someone trusted to teach him more about the new culture. Furthermore, all informants fully aware of the cultural shock if they do not have general knowledge regarding the local culture. Therefore, being flexible, an open mind and the efforts to understand the local culture should be conducted continuously because there always be new things that can be learned.

“I find someone that I can trust and teach me to understand more on the new culture”. (Informant-4).

In response to the second question about the unexpected situation, while working in a new culture, all informants gave various answers. The majority of informants explained that they will try to learn the situation carefully, find out the root of the problem, and stay calm before taking any actions. Another informant thought it is best if he can ask questions privately and nicely to the related person about the situation. Then, three of respondents explained that they often consult with their supervisors if encounter the unexpected situation, analyzing the situation by referring the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in the office. As much as possible, do not feel offended and have a clear mind. It is better to be aware that there will be some circumstances beyond our power and take those as an important lesson for future action.

“We have SOP, following the SOP then won’t be any problem”.(Informant-3)

The last question was asking about general knowledge regarding the local culture whether there are similarities with Indonesian culture. Seven informants have a great understanding of the local culture and find resemblances with Indonesian culture. Especially for those who stay in countries like Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, UAE, and Qatar which have strong Islamic culture like Indonesia. However, Indonesia is not as strong as those countries in implementing the Islamic culture, therefore some differences need adjustment. Added by one of the informants, although a person cannot fully comprehend a new culture, nonetheless, that person can learn and gradually adjust the way he or she lives without changing the personality. Adjusting to a new culture does not necessarily change the personality but rather enriching it to be a better individual.

- **Motivational of Cultural Intelligence**

Motivational can be presented by interest, drive, and confidence to adapt to multicultural situations (Ang et al, 2007). There are two questions to represent the motivational dimension of cultural intelligence. The first question is about the motivation possessed by Indonesian expatriates to have successful adaptation in a multicultural situation. The last question is about the confidence of Indonesian expatriates in dealing with people from different backgrounds and the reason that makes them confident.

Based on the in depth-interview with all informants, there are five informants described their motivation to have a successful adaptation to the multicultural situation is because of their interest to learn people and culture from different countries. It is intriguing to identify different perspectives, rules, norms, stories, and values from various countries. Most of the informants also reported that achieving good performance, having good interaction with co-workers, supervisors and great social life have motivated them to have successful adaptation. Another interesting reason from one of the informants mentioned that she is glad to have successful adaptation based on the lesson learned from The Holy Qur'an (QS) 49:13, which says "*humankind has been created into different tribes and nations so that you may know one another.*" (Informant-7).

The second question explored the confidence of Indonesian expatriates when dealing with people from different backgrounds. Altogether, informants are confident with themselves. All of the informants have previous international experiences that boost their confidence. Three of the informants have stayed for more than 10 years as an expatriate. Hence, they have sufficient reason to be confident to deal with people from a mixed background. According to one of the informants, she is confident because basically, we are just the same, we are all human. If we can understand the needs and wants from others and vice versa. Thus, nothing is to be afraid, as long as we have an open mind, continuous learning, and treat them nicely.

- **Behavioral of Cultural Intelligence**

Behavioral is one of the dimensions of cultural intelligence. It refers to the ability to adapt behavior when relating and working inter-culturally (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008; Earley and Ang, 2003). The question for this dimension asked about the ability to change body language, speech style, or expression to suit people from different backgrounds. Generally, all informants answered they can adapt by changing their body language or speech to fit with people from a different culture. However, it cannot be done instantly, it takes a certain time to familiarize and transform into new behavior. A person needs to learn fast, quickly adjust, and even sometimes it is acceptable to imitate from local people.

Three of the informants reported that adapting to a new culture does not automatically change their personality. They stressed the importance of being themselves. According to them, adapting behavior is situationally, sometimes it is conducted to show respect to the local culture or to socialize. If it is compulsory and decided by the office, either agree or not, it must be followed. The best strategy is to avoid prejudice and stereotypes, respect, and communicate wisely about our culture until reaching mutual understanding.

5. DISCUSSION:

The biggest challenge among Indonesian expatriates is the stigma toward Indonesians in international countries as poorly educated people due to the high number of immigrant workers from Indonesia. It is reasonable, because Indonesia is one of the highest contributors of labor workers globally and majority of the informants live in the largest destination countries for migrant workers in Indonesia such as Malaysia and Middle East countries.

Language barrier also one of the significant problems in the international assignment for Indonesia expatriates. All of the informants have sufficient English language proficiency as required by the company, and there is no doubt about that. However, there are certain phrases or terms of the English language which have been mixed with the local language and specific for certain country, that is needed to learn more such as English jargon in Malaysia is different with original English from UK. When they have another placement in different country, they find the similar difficulties. Hence, it is critical for the Indonesian expatriate to join cultural orientation which include learn about the local language before having a new placement.

It was found that all the informants have possessed Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which consists of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational support, and behavior. On the metacognitive dimension, all of the informants know exactly how they acquire and stated the preparation beforehand was very important to start the interaction. Based on Ang et al (2007), the metacognitive of cultural intelligence reflects the mental capability to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. It consists of awareness and the ability to plan for multicultural interaction (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008). They tried to find out related information from the experienced Indonesian fellows, search for more information about acceptable, unacceptable behavior through the internet, books, and observing the local custom from neighbors as well as colleagues.

The cognitive of cultural intelligence represents the general knowledge and knowledge structures about culture (Ang et al, 2007). Informants can be considered have the cognitive factor of cultural intelligence. They have

the ability to sense something wrong in the new cultural situation, have knowledge to overcome the unexpected situation while working in a new culture and possess general knowledge regarding the local culture whether there are similarities with Indonesian culture. They can immediately sense there is something wrong by observing the situation through body language and people responded. Moreover, all informants fully aware of the cultural shock if they do not have general knowledge regarding the local culture.

Result demonstrated that informants described their motivation to have a successful adaptation to the multicultural situation is because of their interest to learn people and culture from different countries, achieving good performance, having good interaction with co-workers, supervisors and great social life have motivated them to have successful adaptation. As stated by Ang et al (2007), motivational can be presented by interest, drive, and confidence to adapt to multicultural situations. Furthermore, it is found that informants are confident with themselves. All of the informants have previous international experiences that boost their confidence. In fact, three of the informants have stayed for more than 10 years as an expatriates.

Generally, all informants answered they can adapt by changing their body language or speech to fit with people from a different culture. Behavior of cultural intelligence refers to the ability to adapt behavior when relating and working inter-culturally (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008; Earley and Ang, 2003). A person needs to learn fast, quickly adjust, and even sometimes it is acceptable to imitate from local people. Nevertheless, culturally most of Indonesians tend to shy to speak up their opinion. It is suitable with the culture of Indonesian people who has relatively low of assertive and high human-orientation and, which make Indonesia people tend to highly care on others' point of view toward themselves. To be successful in the international assignment, Indonesian expatriates must be able to adjust their behavior. It takes quite some time and process to be able to change behavior.

CQ is very important to have successful international assignment, expatriate should take several actions to strengthen the CQ factors. Expatriate should join pre-departure holistic orientation, training and coaching which relates to cultural sensitivity issues in order to have comprehensive preparations. It is very important to look for support from the company before the international starts, to assist the expatriate in setting the real picture of situation in the destination country. Expatriate needs to understand the work method, leadership style, organizational culture, local culture, local language as well as food and accommodation for proper adjustment. Next, it will be great if expatriate can create action of plan beforehand and develop prior support network, so that the incoming assignment would not create a huge challenge which will impact the job performance.

It should be noted also by the organization has great responsibility to develop CQ for the potential international staff. The successful international assignment of expatriate will lead to organizations' competitive advantage (Fish, Bhanugopan, & Cogin, 2008). Organization requires to provide essential assistance for the expatriate such as orientation, training and coaching relates with culturally sensitivity issue, create harmonious connection with the host country to facilitate and provide proper assistance and guidance for the expatriate especially in the beginning phase of international assignment. It will be a major problem for the expatriate to have successful overseas placement without organizational attention and support.

6. CONCLUSIONS :

CQ is an essential competency for expatriates to have effective job performance. The biggest challenge among Indonesian expatriates is the false perception toward Indonesians in international countries as poorly educated people due to the high number of immigrant workers from Indonesia. the language barrier also one of the significant problems in the international assignment. Moreover, Indonesians tend to shy to speak up their opinion. Results also shown that all informants have possessed Cultural Intelligence (CQ).

On the metacognitive dimension of CQ, all of the informants know exactly how they acquire and stated the preparation beforehand was very important to start the interaction. Informants can be considered have the cognitive factor of CQ by showing the ability to sense something wrong in the new cultural situation, have knowledge to overcome the unexpected situation in a new culture and possess general knowledge regarding the local culture whether there are similarities with Indonesian culture. Motivation of CQ of the informants are from their interest to learn people and culture from different countries, achieving good performance, having good interaction with co-workers, supervisors and great social life. Furthermore, all informants answered they can adapt by changing their body language or speech to fit with people from a different culture, means they have the behavioral dimension of CQ.

CQ is very important to have successful international assignment, both expatriate and organization should take several actions to strengthen the CQ factors. Expatriate should join pre-departure holistic orientation, training and coaching which relates to cultural sensitivity issues look for support from the company before the international starts. While organization requires to provide essential assistance for the expatriate, create harmonious connection with the

host country to facilitate and provide proper assistance and guidance for the expatriate. Due to the significance importance of CQ, the future research should be implemented empirically to explore more on CQ studies.

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