

# Building Your Self: A Sensemaking Approach To Expatriates' Adjustment To Ethical Challenges<sup>1</sup>

Nuno Guimarães-Costa<sup>a</sup>, Miguel Pina E Cunha<sup>b</sup> and Arménio Rego<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>ICN Business School Nancy – Metz

CEREFIGE

13 rue Michel Ney

54000 Nancy, France

Tel: +33 (0) 3 83 17 37 91

[nuno.guimaraes-dacosta@icn-groupe.fr](mailto:nuno.guimaraes-dacosta@icn-groupe.fr)

<sup>b</sup>NOVA School of Business and Economics

Rua Marquês de Fronteira, 20

1099-038 Lisboa; Portugal

Tel: +351-212 822 725

Fax: +351-213 873 973

[mpc@novasbe.pt](mailto:mpc@novasbe.pt)

<sup>c</sup>Universidade de Aveiro

Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial

3810-193 Aveiro; Portugal

and

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), UNIDE

Avenida das Forças Armadas

1649-026 Lisboa

[armenio.rego@ua.pt](mailto:armenio.rego@ua.pt)

## Abstract

We explore how Western European expatriates in sub-Saharan African countries manage ethical challenges while attempting to adjust to their assignments. From the qualitative analysis of interviews with 52 expatriates in 10 sub-Saharan countries emerged a framework of expatriates' behaviour and response to ethical challenges. According to this framework, expatriates are liminal individuals undergoing a sensemaking process whenever they are faced with an ethical challenge. Attitudes are not only justified by the meaning that is ascribed to events but are also legitimized by an idea of future, or intended identity. The boundaries imposed by this intended identity comprise context- and identity-related variables. We extend the role of identity construction in the processes of sensemaking to include expatriates' intended future selves.

**Keywords:** expatriates' adjustment; ethics; sensemaking; identity; liminality; Africa.

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## Introduction

The process by which expatriates adjust to their countries of assignment has been extensively scrutinized in academia. Early attempts to define determinants of expatriates' effectiveness (Newman et al., 1978) were extended by theoretical and empirical contributions concerning adjustment dimensions (Black et al., 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999). Specific variables, such as family support (Lazarova et al., 2010), personality traits (Selmer, 2001), and cultural differences (Van Vianen, de Pater, Kristof-Brown, and Johnson, 2004), were detailed in order to assess their impact on adjustment. The very relevance of adjustment *vis-à-vis* other measures, such as effectiveness (Mol et al., 2005; Shay, and Tracey, 2009), career building (Selmer, 1999), or performance (Kraimer et al., 2001), has been subject to discussion.

Ethics and ethical decision-making in an international context have been discussed in a parallel stream of literature, with very few exceptions (e.g.: Reynolds, 2003). The emergence of ethical conflicts as a result of the global economic integration has increased scholarly interest in normative approaches to how expatriates should make decisions and resolve ethics-related issues (Brenkert, 1998; Hamilton and Knouse, 2001; McDevitt et al., 2007). These have been complemented with empirical research about specific ethical challenges in particular geographies (Haley, 2003; Pedigo and Marshall, 2009) and by cross-cultural studies focused on ethical characteristics (Nyaw and Ng, 1994; Robertson et al., 2002; Watson and Weaver, 2003).

However, recent scandals related to how ethical conflicts were managed by expatriates and their organizations (Dann and Haddow, 2007; Brenkert, 2009), as well as the perceived (Harzing, 2002) high rate of early termination of expatriates' assignments (Takeuchi et al., 2005) call our attention to an existing gap in the literature: although both literatures have significantly advanced our knowledge about expatriates' adjustment processes and the ethical conflicts they are bound to experience, the consideration of the effects of specific ethical conflicts in any of the adjustment dimensions in terms of the overall capacity of expatriates to adjust and be sustainably effective has been too limited.

In order to address this gap, we interviewed 52 expatriates from the European Union working in sub-Saharan Africa who were immersed in what was considered by them to be an ethically challenging context or situation while they were in the process of adjusting to their international assignment. We conducted a reflexive qualitative analysis (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007) between the data and existing literature that brought to the surface the relevant dimensions and the corresponding dynamics leading to the final attitude of the expatriate. As a consequence, our approach to understand the expatriates' adjustment in the context of ethical challenges hinges on four main bodies of research: expatriates' adjustment, liminality, sensemaking, and identity.

We have organized our paper as follows. First, we review the literature that emerged from the analytical process as relevant to support our understanding of the process of adjustment in case of ethical challenges. Second, we introduce and explain the method we used in the research, namely the data gathering and qualitative analysis process that was adopted. Third, we leverage on the data analysis to detail our findings, namely the relevant components in the process of adjustment in the case of ethical challenges, including what we will call the *intended identity*. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings in terms of their potential for advancing theory, which we then present in the form of propositions for later consolidation, possibly recurring to the use of quantitative methods.

## Literature Review

### Expatriates' adjustment.

Expatriates' adjustment refers to the individuals' feeling of comfort with the new setting (Black and Gregersen, 1991), the most common dimensions being the work, interactional, and general ones (Black et al., 1991; Mendenhall et al., 2008). Lazarova et al. (2010) asserted that

expatriates must also adjust to their new family role. Adjustment depends on individuals' (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2009; Ramsey, 2005), organizational (e.g., Selmer, 2010; Tung, 1998) and other contextual (e.g., Andreason, 2008) characteristics and factors.

Expatriates' adjustment is crucial for their performance (Mol et al., 2005). However, cases such as those of Union Carbide's plant in India (Trotter et al., 1989) or of Shell in Nigeria (Wheeler, Fabig, and Boeler, 2002) suggest that when the full meaning and implications of adjustment, including ethical-related ones, are disregarded, long-term effectiveness or performance can be seriously diminished. Differences between the ethical conceptions of expatriates and those of locals may be a source of misunderstanding and conflict, with negative impact upon trust and cooperative efforts between expatriates and local people and within cross-cultural teams (Camiah and Hollinshead, 2003).

### **Liminality**

As sojourners sent to foreign locations by their employers, expatriates no longer enjoy a cultural tradition to which they are heirs, yet they try to adapt to an equally robust albeit strange cultural context (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). In transition between these two cultural and ethical frameworks, expatriates find themselves in a liminal situation.

Liminality is a term borrowed from anthropology, where it was first used by Arnold van Gennep (1908/1960) to mark the transitions "from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (1908/1960: 3). In the context of management and organizational studies, the concept of liminality has been applied to such different situations as external consultants (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), temporary workers (Garsten, 1999), interim managers (Inkson et al., 2001), organizational learning (Tempest and Starkey, 2004) and celebrations (Rosen, 1988). Liminality has also allowed for new perspectives on management and organizational history (Phillips, 2010), legal ambiguity in organizations (Cunha and Cabral-Cardoso, 2006), and identity in organizational settings (Beech, 2011).

These transitions are made between two clearly defined and stable conditions (Shields, 2006), such as in the case of the cultural and ethical frameworks faced by expatriates. Liminal situations are thus characterized by their transitional nature and their ambiguity: while the rules belonging to the old situation no longer apply, the new situation has not yet imposed its own rules. "In betwixt and between" (Turner, 1969: 95) two distinct situations, individuals are in a blurred condition in which elements of the old and the new contexts blend to create a temporary third one. This situation is endured until the transition is complete and the individuals are fully integrated in the new condition.

Expatriates then potentially become liminal *personae* (Turner, 1969), in between social structures. This state of suspension (Tempest, 2007) excludes them from rigid social requirements, often conferring on them a degree of freedom and permissiveness that is not granted to either home- or host-country's nationals while in their own countries (Garsten, 1999).

### **Sensemaking**

People enter a process of sensemaking "when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world" (Weick et al., 2005: 409). In such situations, the restoration of a sense of normality becomes fundamental to proceed with action. Consequently, people search for cues in past events, constantly comparing them with the present situation in order to invest it with meaning. When a meaning is ascribed to the challenge, they have a plausible idea (Weick, 1995) about what happened so they are prepared to decide what to do.

However, reality does not halt for expatriates while they decide. Reality is on-going (Weick, 1995), which renders any cause-effect string impossible to isolate from any other. Expatriates faced with ethical challenges are not able to distance themselves from the events in order to analyze the

situation. Instead, they are forced to act *while* experimenting that and other emerging challenges, and their responses – or actions – will become part of the reality they will have to face in any of the co-emerging events. Actions feed back on reality, “the course of which remains vague prospectively, but clearer in retrospect.” (Weick, 1995: p.51). In this sense, reality is being enacted (Clegg et al., 2005) not only by the context or by the other actors, but by the expatriates themselves.

A crucial characteristic of the sensemaking process, including the emerging actions, is its social nature (Corley and Gioia, 2004). Host-country nationals' (HCN) attitudes and behaviours influence the meanings ascribed by expatriates to sudden ethical challenges, and these meanings in turn shape expatriates' actions; as such, expatriates' actions are contingent on HCN's conduct. The social facet becomes even more important because the process of identity construction, itself at the basis of sensemaking (Pratt, 2000), contains an important social element: by acting in accordance with others' conduct and expectations, and with the image they wish others to have of them, expatriates are also forming their own identity.

### **Identity**

The *self* plays an important role in the definition of one's identity. An individual's self-concept shapes her or his expectations concerning the surrounding context and serves as a filter when s/he is confronted with outside stimuli (Markus and Nurius, 1986) or challenges, whereas the self-knowledge “not only provides a set of interpretative frameworks for making sense of past behaviour, [but] also provides the means-ends patterns for new behaviour” (1986: 955), thus linking the idea about the self with preparedness to entail a specific action given a particular challenge.

Individuals' self-conception as well as other's response to one's performance in a given role are dynamic (Mead, 1934) and result from a constant interpretative interaction between actors (Burke, 1980). Together, they form a person's identity. As a consequence, as we mentioned above, identity is a process that is continuously enacted in a social context; which renders the individual only partially responsible for his/her own identity. The other actors involved in the social setting complete the picture by providing a reflection of the image projected by the person (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991).

Identity is strongly related with motivation (Foote, 1951). By defining a specific objective “as calling for performance of a particular act” (Foote, 1951: 15) (to reach a desired identity or to adopt proper attitudes to maintain it, for instance) it helps the individual to direct her or his behaviour toward its achievement. Thus, actions are explained by identity because they emerge from it, but at the same time actions explain that identity given their implications (Stryker, 1968). Since identities provide meanings to each other (Burke, 1980) – for example, that of an honest businessperson in relation to a business counterpart – the position of a given identity in this relational space of several identities-actors creates the background of possible behaviours or actions. Expatriates that identify themselves as honest businesspeople act according to the mutually (between the expatriates and all other actors involved) accorded meaning of the concept *honest businesspeople*. In a reflexive way, those actions confirm and explain (next to the expatriates and all other actors involved) the expatriates' identity of *honest businesspeople*.

Implicit to these arguments is the idea of future possibilities. As a continuous process, identity construction is anchored in past events, is reflected in present acts, but is also connected to the future by means of intended and non-intended future selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). An individual's acts or behaviour is as much explained by past decisions and situations as it is by future intentions, desires, or fears. The idea of identity as motivation can thus be re-framed to include this perspective of becoming (Chia, 2002). Today's identity is then a bracketed abstraction from a continuum that emerged from the past and is evolving into a possible preferred future.

## **Existing gaps**

The reading of the four literatures brings to the surface existing gaps that legitimize new theoretical approaches to the problem of expatriates' adjustment in the case of ethics-related challenges. Although the case of ethical challenges faced by managers in an international context has been explored by academics concerned with cross-cultural ethics (Buller et al., 2000), expatriates' behaviour when faced with adjustment demands considered to be unethical remains to be understood.

Although liminality is a new addition to organization studies, the case of expatriates as organizational members experiencing a transition between two cultural and ethical frameworks has not been addressed, even though theirs is a liminal experience that can be clarified using a liminal perspective.

Concurrently, while the literature on sensemaking is able to describe the transition between meaning ascription and action, including suggesting the variables involved in the process, it is less effective in explaining why expatriates may ascribe different meanings to the same ethical challenges, or may react differently to the same ascribed meaning.

The role of identity in the process of sensemaking is very well identified when it refers to meaning ascription and the individual's interpretation about what is happening (Weick, 1995). However, the relationship between the chosen course and the future self, i.e., the expatriate's intended identity in the future, has been less explored.

## **The case for expatriates in sub-Saharan Africa**

The case of European expatriates in the ethically-challenging contexts of sub-Saharan Africa provides an adequate empirical platform to explore the existing gaps in the combined literature and thus contribute to our investigation question of how expatriates deal with ethical challenges while making efforts to adjust.

We interviewed EU expatriates in sub-Saharan Africa to analyze the challenges and ensuing efforts to adapt to contexts that present relevant differences when compared with those to which expatriates are accustomed. We are interested in Africa for several reasons. First, Africa is largely a blind spot in organizational theory, and this should be corrected. Second, we are regular visitors to Africa as academics, a condition that created a natural interest. Third, the continent is an ideal spot to study cultural and ethical clashes, given the reasons that we elaborate below. We are aware that "Africa" is too short a label for so much diversity. We accept this criticism but as explained below, there is reason to study ethical adjustment of Westerners in this part of the world.

Our choice of Western European expatriates in sub-Saharan countries is explained by our interest to empirically advance research on the ethical component of expatriates' adjustment. We based our initial decision on the fact that according to the 2011 World Bank's Doing Business report, "In Sub-Saharan Africa (...) entrepreneurs have it hardest and property protections are weakest across the 9 areas of business regulation included in this year's ranking on the ease of doing business" (2010:3). Business practices in sub-Saharan countries are characterized by "a combination of factors such as political instability, corruption, poor infrastructure and low purchasing power" (Kamoche, 2002: 994), which is then reflected in the fact of Botswana being the best positioned sub-Saharan country with a score of only 5.8 (where 0 indicates highly corrupt and 10 is very clean) in the perception of corruption index computed by Transparency International (2010). So-called "extreme cases", those that introduce contrasting features that are usually present in more nuanced ways, "facilitate theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts" (Pratt et al., 2006).

## Method

We asked interviewees for vivid accounts of past episodes as they recalled them during the interview (Silverman, 1993), providing first hand interpretation of events. These accounts, or interpretations, became the source of our analysis, and the basis for the first-order concepts, themes, and components that eventually allowed us to develop a theory about expatriates' adjustment in ethically challenging situations. Throughout the theory building process, we used a reflexive approach (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009) that allowed us to travel between the data and existing organizational literature while refining the emergent codes and categories.

### Data collection

Our data come from 52 semi-structured interviews conducted with expatriates in ten different countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the interviews were collected on site, during visits to the region. All expatriates had been sent to their assignments by their companies, which had local subsidiaries in the host-country. To honor the promise of confidentiality we use pseudonyms.

The purpose of the interviews was to collect reports of past experiences in sub-Saharan countries. These experiences should specifically concern ethical challenges, as defined by the interviewees. They were asked to focus on a past episode in which they had experienced an ethical challenge, and subsequently asked about the reason for classifying the episode as an ethical challenge. This strategy not only minimized the unintended introduction of bias by the researchers (Locke, 2001), since no definition of ethical challenge was given to the interviewees, but also provided us with a grounded conceptualization of the scope of ethical behaviours (as perceived by expatriates). The open questions elicited the details of the ethical challenge as well as the efforts taken to overcome them.

To select expatriates we used a purposive sample, “where the aim is not to establish a representative sample but rather to identify key informants whose context-specific knowledge and expertise regarding the issues relevant to the research are significant and information-rich” (Johnson et al., 2007: 25). As such, we used different snow-balling strategies, such as contacting the human resources managers of large EU companies operating in Africa, asking previous interviewees for advice on other expatriates who could share their experiences with us, and asking local contacts to arrange for meetings with local expatriates. By making clear the purpose of our research to those responsible for arranging interviewees, we minimized the chances that those interviewed had little to say concerning ethical challenges, and thus enriched our data.

Selected expatriates come from such different industries as banking, construction, management consultancy, hotels, law, oil, food and beverages, telecommunications, education, electronics, and government. They are in different stages of their careers and hold different positions in their companies, from general manager to machine operator. Some had their families with them abroad, while others did not. For some, this was their first work experience while others had previous experience as expatriates. This diversity increased the scope of perspectives in perceiving and dealing with ethical challenges, thus allowing us to “enhance the generalizability of our findings by gathering input from a wide range of respondents” (Carsten et al., 2010: 547). Our sample shared a minimum tenure in the host-country of six months and the willingness to be in an international career.

The interviews were arranged around five topics concerning ethics and the expatriates' capacity to adapt to them: demographic and functional qualification of interviewees (age, position, industry, length of expatriation, country of expatriation); host-country (main differences, people, business, government, institutions); ethical challenge (identification, justification, actors involved, strategies involved, outcomes); overall assignment (challenges, overall evaluation); and present situation (lessons learnt, future prospects).

The use of topics instead of fixed questions conferred a degree of flexibility that allowed us to easily adapt to the respondents' answers and at the same time make sure that all relevant issues referring to the “what”, “who”, “how”, “when”, and “why” concerning actors and situations were covered during the interview (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Interviews ranged in length from 20 to 90 minutes. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others via Skype. The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission for later transcription. Although we told all interviewees that we were prepared to sign non-disclosure agreements only a few actually demanded one.

## **Data analysis**

Following the recommendations of Bruton et al. (2009), we transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after collecting them. This allowed us to add supplementary notes to enrich the data, including comments about our impressions during the interview (Locke, 2001). The transcription process also helped us to become acquainted with the available data, which in turn increased our awareness of the first emerging patterns at a very early stage, facilitating the coding process that followed.

We imported the transcriptions to ATLAS.ti, a software designed for qualitative analysis. This software facilitated the organization and handling of data, namely the identification of relevant quotes, the creation of codes, the identification of interrelations between codes, and subsequent emergence of categories and patterns that took us to the development of new knowledge. Since interviews were being imported and analyzed in ATLAS.ti as they were collected and transcribed, we were able to continuously refine, adapt, and test our coding process, the adherence of the emergent patterns to newly entered data, and the degree and extent of saturation of each category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/1999).

**Pre-stage of coding.** Following the example of Johnson and colleagues (2007), we started our analysis of data with the theoretical frameworks of expatriate's adjustment (Black et al., 1991) and liminality in mind. As such, we read all interviews in search of quotations that related actual expatriates' efforts to adjust to the host-country with the theoretical dimensions of adjustment to work, to HCN, and to general aspects. Quotations concerning expatriates' organizations, their jobs, their business partners, or their business accomplishments were coded as “dimension - work”. Quotations that referred to locals and the expatriates' interaction with them were coded as “dimension - HCN”. Finally, quotations that referred to such things as language, local routines, food habits, dress codes, or the weather, were coded as “dimension - general”. To distinguish between the three dimensions we used direct references made by the expatriates or, when no reference was made, we inferred the relationship from the context. This pre-stage of coding allowed us to confirm that expatriates were indeed embroiled in a process of adjustment as described by expatriates' adjustment literature (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Kraimer et al., 2001; Shaffer et al., 1999), which meant that the ethical challenges described by expatriates occurred in a context of adjustment. We needed this confirmation to make sure that our intention of researching the processes of adjustment in cases of ethical challenges was feasible with the data gathered.

We then searched the interviews for liminality, in order to support our initial idea that expatriates were liminal personae. We re-read the interviews having in mind ambiguity, transition, and blurriness. A pattern soon emerged in which we were able to identify liminal actors, liminal spaces, and liminal instances. The first referred not only to expatriates but also to people that conferred a liminal characteristic on a given situation its. The second referred to actual spaces in which action was performed. Airports were classified as liminal spaces of departure and/or arrival; hotels and guesthouses were classified as liminal spaces of living. Liminal instances referred to the situation that triggered liminality. We were able to distinguish several types of situations, including distance, organization, time, as well as culture and ethics. After this pre-stage, we were able to confirm the explanation that expatriates were indeed liminal individuals experiencing a liminal situation in different liminal spaces.

**First stage of coding.** We paced our subsequent analysis in successive iterations between data and existing literature (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Clark et al., 2010), which thus became the theoretical foundations of our framework. In this stage, we isolated the quotations referring to the ethical challenges that were perceived and identified as such by the expatriates during the interviews. We re-read and processed the data in its entirety so that in the end of this stage we were able to identify not only all instances in which expatriates perceived that an ethical issue was at stake, but also the adjustment dimension in which it occurred. We used different *in vivo* codes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/1999), retrieved directly from the quotations as well as other abstract codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) that we later combined under the category “ethics”. Below is an illustration of this stage, retrieved from Wendy's interview:

*“(...) concerning the mining department, [nepotism] is a huge obstacle... we cannot get rid of any person because the company, as many others, is never acting 100% within the law... For instance, we have people working here that still have their work contract in Europe because they still don't have a work visa. This is illegal, but this can take as long as a year. And this situation is quite normal... but if anyone decides to complain to the authorities we are fined and we lose this opportunity.”*

When we first read this quotation, in the pre-stage of coding, we coded it as “dimension - work”; then, at this first stage we coded the same quotation as “ethics - situation”. As a result, we obtained an ethical instance that occurred in the context of this expatriate's effort to adjust to the work dimension.

The reading and re-reading involved in the described coding process brought to our attention the existence of a possible pattern of behaviour adopted by expatriates when facing ethical challenges. As such, we started to tentatively code some neighboring quotations with labels such as “surprise”, “sensing”, “comparison”, “learning”, “understanding”, or “results”. These codes led us to question whether we could compare the emerging pattern to that referred to as sensemaking by the organizational literature. To confirm our impression and prepare the second stage of the coding process, we went back to the literature about sensemaking.

**Second stage of coding.** The joint reading of literature and the previously selected quotes allowed us to further support our suspicion that in case of ethical challenges – which emerge as surprises, novelties, ambiguities, discontinuities, or mere differences – expatriates enter a process that involves “the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action” (Thomas et al., 1993: 240), being commonly referred to as sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Consequently, and in order not only to fully confirm this similarity to sensemaking, but also and fundamentally, to explore how this similarity was made operational by expatriates, i.e., what were the specificities of the sensemaking process that emerged from our data, we re-read and re-analyzed the interviews. At this second stage of coding, we reviewed the quotations associated with the category “ethics” and carefully analyzed the neighboring quotations in order to code them with sensemaking-related labels: these became our first-order concepts and were based on the available data, the reported interpretations made by expatriates about how they dealt with ethical challenges. Below is an illustration of this stage, retrieved from Brad's interview:

*“(...) and concerning [security], this is no different from many of the big cities around the world. Luanda is not São Paulo yet; it is not New York yet. Provided you drive around with your car locked... I had no problems at all!”*

This quotation was found next to a description of security and safety problems in Luanda coded as “ethics – situation”. At this stage we coded it as “expatriates establish comparisons with well-known paradigms” and kept a note about how this could relate with the need to search for cues in a context of meaning ascription (Weick et al., 2005).



**Creation of themes and dimensions.** Having concluded that the similarity between our interviewees' testimonies and the process of sensemaking was a promising theoretical path to understand expatriates' adjustment to ethical challenges, we decided to increase the level of abstraction of our analysis. We did this by grouping the first-order concepts into 27 themes by means of a constant comparison between quotations and respective codes, as suggested by Orona (1997). Contrary to the concepts, which were based on the data, themes were of a higher level of abstraction that sought to capture the common, theoretically significant, aspects of the former. During our second stage of coding, we identified several quotations in which expatriates referred to learning. These were grouped in three first-order concepts according to the reported ways of learning (for example, "learning emerges by osmosis" as one informant put it), which later in the process were all grouped under the theme "Learning".

This was not a straightforward process, though. It involved a constant interaction with the data in order to verify each theme's consistency across all of the interviews. As such, each time a theme emerged, we would go back to the data to confirm its groundedness, a process that ended only when we verified that the first-order concepts saturated the theme. Extending our previous example, when "Learning" emerged as an adequate theme to aggregate the first-order concepts related with the different ways expatriates learned, we went back to the interviews in search of other possible ways of learning. We closed the theme only when we concluded that expatriates' references could all be included in only those three ways. However, if another had emerged, it would have been included in the theme in order to provide an extended explanation about the emergent phenomenon of, in this case, learning.

We ended this stage by re-examining the existing relationships between the 27 themes, in search of added simplification that could later be beneficial to our purpose of explaining an observed phenomenon. As a result, we ended with 13 themes: novelties; surprises; establish comparisons; sensing; learning; understanding; labelling; context; identity construction; adoption of local practices; rejection of local practices; outcomes of continuity; outcomes of disruption. Table 1 includes quotations that support the 13 themes.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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## Findings

In order to have a simpler perspective over the phenomenon, themes were organized into more general dimensions (Clark et al., 2010), the six dimensions depicted on Figure 1 having emerged. These are the *perception of challenges*, or triggers of action, the *scanning for meaning*, or explanatory cues, the *meaning ascription*, and the *response*, which is compared to a sensemaking process engaged by expatriates. We add a dimension, called *intended identity*, that is the key to explain the observable response and subsequent outcome. *Outcomes* is the last dimension of the process. Each of these components is supported by different themes (central part of the figure), which were drawn from the first-order concepts (left part of the figure).

Grounded in data retrieved from live interviews, this structure is an instrumental abstraction of reality that serves the purposes of explanation and clarity. Indeed, interviewed expatriates were far from experiencing such an organized sequence of events. New challenges were likely to emerge before an adequate response was given to a prior one, which would have to incorporate ever new elements retrieved from the overall context. Identity issues were present throughout the whole process, affecting each of its steps. The connection between components is not always clearly delineated or synchronized: scanning in fact precedes meaning ascription, but there is no such clear division in an individual's mind when s/he is undergoing the process. However, while recognizing

the complexities of the process, we detail each of its components and supporting themes individually.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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### **Perception of Challenges (triggers of action)**

Two main levels of anticipation emerged from our research: *novelties* and *surprises*. These can occur at any of the expatriates' adjustment dimensions – work, interaction with HCN, and general – and become the triggers of the sensemaking process that leads to the expatriates' responses to ethical challenges.

**Novelties.** When assigned to a new location, expatriates search for information about the host-country. Knowledge can be as basic as reflected in the reply of Oswald, when he was asked whether he knew Uganda: “*well, I know it has gorillas and that it used to have Idi Amin; beyond that, I don't know much more*”. But it can also be extensive and thorough, as in the case of Salvador, who before moving to Cape Verde as an expatriate had travelled there several times. In this last case, many of the challenges that this expatriate had to face had been anticipated and thus came as no surprise. He asserts that “*it was relatively simpler than arriving there for the first time and being confronted with another way of living*”, even if he recognizes that “*as expected, there is always a difference between moving to a place or visiting that place, these are different situations*”.

Being anticipated does not necessarily mean lower complexity when compared with one's norm. While some challenges can be perceived as less different, such as those stemming from two reportedly similar judicial systems, others are more different and potentially more complex. An episode reported by Elliot, manager of a European hotel in an African capital, illustrates how complexity, measured as the scope and extent of the consequences, can increase even when the challenge is anticipated. Worried about the delay of more than 72 hours in receiving the mandatory advanced payment concerning the stay for 10 days of a large political delegation in his hotel (which was in preparation of national elections), the manager was forced to demand the payment in strong words. Before settling the problem, the manager had to face a difficult five-hour discussion. In his own terms: “*It was a very difficult situation, I can say it was a very difficult situation. Difficult because I was white (...) then, here it is very easy to argue that I was making assumptions [about the absence of payment] because I could not have people from this or that political party in my house, because I was playing according to whomever's political intentions [...] I had to be very firm, to take a firm stance, you see. And show that we were right. Only then, after lots of diplomacy and after things getting really hot, which included physical threats and all, I was able to settle things and solve everything with the leader of the political group*”. Although lack of payment is anticipated, which justifies the advanced pay rule, the challenge was complex because it involved a political party in a period of political tension in the host-country, and could have had serious consequences for the manager as well as for the hotel.

Ambiguity, both in terms of the situation itself and the correct attitude to adopt, can also become a source of complexity. Joseph puts it clearly: “*there is lots of corruption there... and either you play along as if it was a joke and you face it as... [he hesitates] you just don't take it seriously. Because if you take it seriously... some times you have to take it seriously, others not...*” The uncertainty regarding the classification of the event – joke or not – and the corresponding attitude – take it seriously or not – are due to the perceived ambiguity of some ethical challenges and increase their complexity, even if they do not come as a surprise.

**Surprises.** For as much information as one collects, “*someone that comes from Europe probably is not expecting such an advanced infrastructure in Africa*”, as noted by Jeremy when he recalled the moment he arrived in South Africa as an expatriate. Yet, this same manager was also surprised by “*at the same time, an extreme opposed situation in which poverty compares only to the*

*worst cases in the whole world*". This unexpected situation presents unanticipated challenges that have to be dealt with in order for expatriates to be able to continue to perform the tasks they were assigned to, and thus restore a sense of normality.

Events can be perceived as surprises because they were not foreseeable at the moment. These often refer to occasions in which expatriates were robbed or witnessed some violent, unexpected situation, such as when Chester was gun-pointed but managed to lock the car and escape, or when Mack watched from his window as two men physically assaulted a third one. Although unexpected when they occurred, these events are perceived as somehow predictable, as can be inferred from the words of Chester: "*Generally, people prefer to rob those driving with their windows open, or at the phone with the windows open, stopped in the middle of the traffic, with their doors unlocked. I mean, these are safety measures that we, by nature, should have!*". However, expatriates can also be faced with situations that are not only unforeseeable but also completely new for them. Rose recalled a casual conversation – which she classified as particularly impressive – between two local co-workers: "*she [the hotel employee] was having her hair done at someone's home and there was a fight between neighborhoods, and one of those guys was killed... so, the others, to avenge the killing started invading several other houses and killing whomever they found. You see, compared with our country... well, what can I say? They were telling this story as if it was completely normal, the most normal thing that could happen to anyone. And that is my greatest shock!*"

As in the case of novelties, surprises can also emerge from ambiguous situations. Peter referred to such a case when he recalled: "*what shocks me the most here is... regardless of the people with whom I speak, or what I say or present, even if they say yes [...] you might have everything in the end of the day, but in the next day everything can be back to zero.*" Here, uncertainty concerning the outcome of a conversation triggers a sensemaking mechanism directed at understanding what to expect and what to do next.

### **Scanning for meaning**

In both cases – events perceived either as novelties or as surprises – expatriates start a process to make sense of what is happening, in order to restore a sense of normality that will allow them to proceed with their activity. This process is constantly shaped by the emergence of newer challenges, in a context in which "*the last law that is today in place [...] will be completely different tomorrow*", and expatriates have to "*be always prepared for a completely radical change*" (interview with Mary).

The data collected allowed us to establish two different tactics expatriates use to scan for meaning: by *establishing comparisons* and by *building reality subjectively*. These two tactics are used interchangeably and complement each other to facilitate the emergence of meaning.

**Establish comparisons.** Expatriates appear to be resourceful when it comes to establishing comparisons. When Brad mentions that in terms of safety and violence, Luanda "*is no different from many of the big cities around the world. Luanda is not São Paulo yet; it is not New York yet. Provided you drive around with your car locked...*" he is searching for meaning in the space provided by present and existing subjects. However, previous experiences are often used as comparisons.

Spatial and temporal coordinates are often supplemented by comparisons with previously formed expectations ("*since I went there with expectations even lower than what I eventually found in reality, I end up by feeling some... how can I say this... some comfort in what I came to know*", Brad's interview) or fictionalized optimal situations.

**Build reality subjectively.** Meaning is not only sought among past and present experiences, be these real or ideal. Expatriates often recur to metaphors to apprehend reality. Roy reflects about their apparently endless efforts to overcome the many hurdles imposed by local authorities: "*This keeps reminding me of what a teacher once told us; that business here, mostly and above all,*

*business, should be taken as a 100 meter race*". In this case, the relevant elements to retain from the metaphor are the intensive preparation and efforts needed to be successful in a 100 meter race, the short duration of the decisive event, and the high probability of failure associated with it.

Adding to the multitude of possible meanings, scanning is also based on impressions or unverified assumptions about reality, which, as we discuss below, is strongly connected with the idea of identity construction. Expatriates build these comparisons based on assumptions such as the existence of widespread corruption to conclude that some lawyers must also be corrupt (Anthony's interview).

### **Meaning Ascription**

As we have just seen, expatriates scan space and time dimensions until they are able to ascribe meaning to novel or surprising situations. Although sequentiality is used only for simplification, we were able to isolate a pattern in meaning ascription from our analysis of the interviews. This entails *learning, understanding, and labelling*.

**Learning.** Expatriates actively seek learning opportunities. The need to know is illustrated by the following quote, from the interview with Kevin: *"In first six months you adapt to the country, the language, the habits, even the laws. We have to know! These six months are pure learning, however we also have to work, so we are overburdened in these first six months. This overburden is to develop your daily activity plus absorb and learn as much as you can"*.

Expatriates often refer to the obstacles they had to overcome as a learning *"opportunity, because [they are] sure that every time they return to [their home-countries] things are seen in a very different perspective"* (interview with John). *"Cultural shock and cultural diversity are very good things because we all learn from it, isn't it? We learn from little and from big things!"* (interview with Richard)

In the process of learning, expatriates often search for support that can clarify the meaning of the challenging situation. This support is sought from people who know the context, including other expatriates, which tend to follow the same routines (according to Johnson: *"Friday night [all expatriates] go out to have dinner in the same restaurant where [...] most expatriates meet, you see. Then Saturday, beach; Sunday, beach. And they all do this month after month after month."*) or, occasionally, host-country nationals.

In fact, expatriates' exposure to the context and the multitude of challenges they have to endure transforms almost any event into a learning opportunity, such that part of the expatriates' capacity to ascribe meaning to situations comes from vicarious learning, as recognized by Susan when she mentions that *"your stance must be 'I come here to help', not to teach. 'I come here to learn', to share"*.

**Understanding.** During the interviews, expatriates recognized that what they had learned led them to better understand the surrounding context. This is the case of Kevin, who after learning how the legal system actually worked, understood that his was not a sustainable approach in such a context if he wanted to continue serving his customers. He recognises that *"today I don't [use the unofficial channels] because I have learned more. [...] How do I do it? For my own defense, I learned that, professionally I know the procedures and I know the law, so I just instruct the processes"* and the customer does the rest.

Although this transformation of learning into knowledge can be seen as commonsensical, expatriates value the increased understanding because it allows them to improve their integration in the host-country and provides them with timely responses to incoming challenges. According to Jeremy, *"the first challenge an expatriate faces when he arrives in any country is to understand his own framing. Beyond the challenges of his company and of his company's context, he has to understand and to frame himself into the society, in all its aspects: from language, to cultural aspects, the behaviours – how to behave in a certain society"*.

This extended understanding of the context is instrumental in ascribing meaning to situations, which emerges only when expatriates are able to name it. This is what we call *labelling*, in sensemaking terms.

**Labelling.** The learning process provides expatriates with meanings for facts, attitudes, and assumptions about reality. If we recall the episode between Elliot and the large political delegation hosted in his hotel we find all important elements of the process of meaning ascription. The trigger, as we mentioned before, was a delay in the mandatory advanced payment. The manager tried to scan for meaning in the regulations as well as in previous patterns of behaviour. He states, “*we can accept delays when you have a reservation for, say, 10 or 12 days. We can accommodate a delay up to 24 or even 72 hours. After that, if you still haven't your payment guaranteed, then things become a bit more complex*”. He reveals having understood what was going on when he justifies the “*4 or 5 hours of tension and pressure*” not “*with the fulfilment [of the rule] but with an assumption [by the representative of the political group] based on past events. You see, based on the path this country did and still does in treating the wounds [of a recent civil war] that emerged in that moment*”. After understanding the event, Elliot can name it not as an attempt to avoid payment but instead as a political question based on past events. Having had the capacity to name what was happening, this manager could then act accordingly.

### **Intended Identity**

Responses to ethical challenges reflect not only what an individual was or is, but also what s/he intends to be in the future. This future identity is thus anticipated and embedded in present attitudes, which, in turn, limit the possibilities of future outcomes to those within the preferred boundaries of an intended identity. The intended identity is thus defined by the expatriates' immersion in a *context* while continuously *constructing their identities*. These factors often emerge to legitimize attitudes and behaviours adopted by expatriates.

**Context.** When expatriates are offered a new assignment they form expectations about it, which then accompanies them through the whole venture and serves as a referent to assess it, as we have illustrated above with the case of Brad. These expectations are often used as a filter to perceive the situational context in which the expatriate is immersed. The persistent lack of reliable information about housing and driving arrangements before and upon arrival in Africa implied that Susan lower her expectations about the host-country nationals' capacity to honor their promises on time. Consequently, locals were perceived as “*lying compulsively [in order to] test people's capacity, to test how far they are available to go*”, which eventually led to an adaptive behaviour that entailed “*trying to perceive what's at stake, what is important, define clear priorities, what it is that [she] want[ed], where do[es] she want to go. [...] knowing that they are like this.*” In Susan's words: “*Well, someone who understands this, who has a mental structure... a discipline... can reach what ever he wants*”.

Expatriates' attitudes are also shaped by the reasons that took them to accept the foreign assignment. Expatriates mentioned reasons such as financial incentives, added experience, added challenges, increase in quality of life. These reasons, or intentions, influence the expatriates' actions during their tenure. For instance, Fred's main purpose in Mozambique was “*to help however we can, which is always not enough*”, therefore he perceived poverty and child misery as an ethical challenge, and in order to cope with it he “*spoke with Portuguese people [he] knew there, and [he] created an initiative at an orphanage. Basically [they] offered a meal to a state orphanage.*”

The relative position of expatriates concerning the ethical question also influences the process, as can be inferred from the opinion of Joseph. Working for a large multinational, he enjoys enough power to set the rules and avoid being pressured. However, he recognizes that “*if the company is smaller, they have no other option: 'you don't want this?, Well, I'll get someone else who does!' As simple as that.*” He further justifies his capacity to face the imposing challenge by observing that his company “*provides integrated systems [...] Therefore, that is an added value to*

*the customer, and he knows that. So we have an advantage in there, we have some safety, but it is very tough*". This power position allows Joseph to re-frame the ethical question, dismissing its disruptive potential.

**Identity construction.** Expatriates' responses to our interviews reflect a process of identity construction. This process permeated all instances of adjustment to ethical challenges. The following components of identity construction emerged from the interviews: personal history, self-image, future self, and image.

Expatriates often recur to past experiences to make sense of what is happening, as we have seen above. Chester recognizes this influence of past experiences in dealing with ethical challenges when he says: *"Those who were in other countries, countries outside Africa, find this [social differences and extensive poverty] a strange situation. But if they have never left this [country], that would be a more than normal situation. It would be perfectly normal, without problem, without any problem!"* As such, perceptions about present, the way expatriates see and assess the world – thus, expatriates' actions – also depends on their past history. Here, the fact of being abroad allows for a different perception about reality, including ethical challenges: from normal to *"very violent shock"* (Chester's interview).

Expatriates responses reflect their self-images, their personal answer to the question "who am I?" When Ford says "a lawyer is a lawyer because he enjoys Law and the practice of Law, and therefore does not open a business such as rent-a-car or any other kind of business", he is defining himself within the boundaries of what is commonly perceived as a being a lawyer, and therefore binds his perceptions and actions to that of a lawyer. As we shall see below, this self-definition legitimizes his behaviour when he decides to keep his practice even if it is illegal. The creation of these self-images provides the context for an individual definition of proper ethical behaviour. However, this is not a straightforward process, as can be illustrated by the answer of Rose when she is questioned about her opinion about the moral standards of her customers: *"that's the not allowed question! That's the forbidden question... At a personal level... all this goes against my values [...] I am a salesperson, I mean, this is a way of living, and our professional ethics leads us to address everything in another way."* By providing this answer, Rose is revealing that the self-image construction is grounded in more than one possibility – spanning from the individual to the social stages – and these can conceal a constructive conflict concerning the definitions of self, as we shall discuss below.

The same constructive conflict can be found when expatriates project themselves into the future, referring to their future selves to answer the question "who shall I be?" Whereas some can project themselves into the future, as Peter, who intends to remain in his new host country *"in the mid-term, as long as my girlfriend manages to come to join me"*, others, like Brad say that *"concerning corruption, [he] would never be available to such activity"*, and if he were pressured toward accepting it, that would mean his *"resignation from [the company]"*, thus refusing any kind of unethical behaviour. These examples illustrate that when faced with an ethical challenge, expatriates analyze their intended future selves to ascribe it a meaning and build their responses accordingly.

According to our analysis of the interviews, expatriates' projected image and its eventual reflection back on them not only influences attitudes but also contributes to a better understanding of the surrounding context, including impending ethical challenges, thus indirectly shaping responses. The case of Chester illustrates how expatriates are aware of the images that are projected onto others and their consequences; how images are internalized by expatriates; and how they manage their projected images in accordance with what they want to see reflected upon themselves (which, in turn, should match the self-concept). While describing his difficulty in managing a team of local employees, who show some contempt because he is non-African and white, Chester says that *"not everybody is accepted, or well accepted, because of being white"*. He reveals awareness about the image of a white person compared to locals, and at the same time he uses that knowledge

as a means to understand locals' behaviour. The image of a “white manager in Africa” is finally internalized by Chester when he realizes that employees “*would almost fight to gain a superior status*” next to him, because “*if they were with [him], they knew they were safeguarded against certain situations*”. Chester then tries to manage the perceived image (as a white manager) in order to align it with an intended identity as a congenial and friendly, *albeit* white, manager. But by doing so, he is shaping his response to the ethical challenge.

## Response

The complex interplay between the components of the process of adjustment in case of ethical challenges leads to a response. Expatriates *do* something; they act upon the ethical challenge in order to proceed with their activities. From the data collected through the interviews we were able to classify the responses according to the relationship between expatriates' actions and local practices: *adoption of local practices* and *rejection of local practices*.

**Adoption of local practices.** In spite of responding in line with local practices, a close analysis reveals that expatriates do so differently. Some make active efforts to appreciate the foundations of local behaviour, and therefore their actions reflect that understanding. This is the case of Jack. After a two-year discussion with the tax authorities in which several million dollars worth of taxes were under dispute, the manager contemplated “*paying [to a broker] something over Christmas [in exchange] for an agreement in which [he] would get a favorable report*”. Jack was not very comfortable with it because he had learned that “*there was another company that, when faced with the same problem, had solved it with 80,000 dollars. But [he figured] the problem was so big that the amount would not be enough*”.

As we have noted before, expatriates are aware of the unethical content of some challenges they face (indeed, they were the ones to classify the events as unethical, as we describe in the methods section). When they are unable to sympathize with the reasons supporting the challenge, some expatriates choose to redefine the problem or mitigate the real consequences in order to be able to act according to local practices. Brad refers to a solution in which it was necessary to “*accept that [the context] is like it is, and so plans and projects in [the host-country] have to include all those factors [...] all those costs were accounted for.*” Others, however, try to change locals' behaviours even if they are compelled to act according to the local practices. Frank actively “*tries to have an ethical conduct as correct as possible*”, however he recognizes that when “*we are playing against several competitors... if we are not aware of [the local practices] we don't exist. It goes against our personal beliefs. I, personally try to do everything to avoid a situation of active [corruption]. I try, obviously, but sometimes it is difficult. There are lots of people involved in this business. Sometimes it is difficult*”.

However, expatriates can choose to withdraw from the problem, seeking refuge in ignorance or resignation. According with the data we collected, when challenges stem from the general context or from the interaction with locals – in cases such as insecurity, violence, or poverty – expatriates often choose to ignore the event. Alex says “*I look but I don't see, I mean, it shocks me to see that: the open sewers, rotten water [...] I prefer to look but not see. I mean, I have to see, I have to protect myself and to analyze [the situation], but I try not to think a lot about it when it concerns people... and I try to take it less heartedly, mainly, I smooth situations a bit, to avoid this horrific situation, this is not pretty, not good*”. So, this expatriate consciously ignores the context to be able to participate in it.

An alternative strategy also adopted by expatriates is to accept the unethical events with resignation. Joe regrets the existence of a black market in São Tomé and Príncipe, “*however it is the only way to make things available.*” He continues, saying that, “*this is a system deeply rooted in people's habits and there is no way to avoid this situation; you have to pay all and everyone in order to get what is needed for companies to survive*”. Often, expatriates revert to humor in order to lower the perceived severity of the situation. Well aware of the overwhelming social disparities in

the country, John still laughs when he recalls his sense of satisfaction as he witnessed several luxury cars falling from a cargo ship, right in front of their “immensely wealthy” and anxious future owners, during the unloading operations: “*in that moment that was one situation in which we really wanted to laugh, but we could not laugh.*”

On several occasions, expatriates are convinced that they have solved the ethical challenge by simply outsourcing the associated behaviour. In spite of being considered “part of the business”, the use of brokers – or “*people whose business is to arrange business opportunities to win certain positions*” (Frank's interview) and in turn receive a success fee or a percentage of the deal – is recognized as a practice to “*avoid being corrupted*”, in the words of Paul. This expatriate goes further: “*I am being honest... [this practice is used] to avoid corrupting the company structure... and basically our employees, because the sales activity is very aggressive in a country such as this. I take the sales activity out of the company. So, I have sales people outside the company that gets the contracts, and I just don't want to know more! They get me the contracts, I give them a fee, which is a success fee.*” In these cases, expatriates pass to locals the need to act according local rules, thus keeping themselves apart from the situation.

**Rejection of local practices.** Despite the profusion of strategies enacted to cope with local practices, there are instances in which local practices are rejected. Wendy challenged police officers to fine her, thus refusing to pay them bribes. Zoe refused to pay and “*opened the suitcase and started putting on clothes until the lady officer lost her temper with [her]*” even if her colleague decided to bribe the same airport officer in order to be allowed on the plane with excess luggage. These attitudes are often accompanied by loud protests against local practices deemed as unethical. Wendy “*already [had] several conversations with people here, telling them 'if we ask them: fine me! We are loading them with work'*” and strongly believes that “*if one starts doing it, if ten start doing it, if 20 start doing it, we are also contributing to the end of this corruption*”. In this case, not only does the expatriate clearly states her/his opposition but s/he also tries to encourage locals to change their attitudes to align with the expatriate's own ethical values. Conversely, Zoe quietly decided that if she were forced to return to the place where she previously worked, “*it wouldn't be for a long time*”.

In Ford's situation, he chooses to circumvent the local rule that forbids foreigners from becoming practicing lawyers by introducing himself as “*consultant, jurist, or rarely, [he] say[s] [he is] a foreign lawyer and that [he is] here temporarily to support a client.*”

## Outcomes

Finally, an outcome emerges from the process of adjustment in face of ethical challenges. Outcomes can favor continuity of the expatriate in her or his foreign assignment or, conversely, they can lead to the expatriate's exit.

**Outcomes of continuity.** One of the two options open to expatriates is to remain in the host-country. In this case, a sense of normality is returned to their activity, at least concerning the particular ethical challenge to which they have responded. Ford recognizes that “*we [lawyers] also depend of these [bribing] schemes because after all we have no alternative*”. In this case, the expatriate admits to “*work a little bit as a clandestine*”, “*in a completely grey area*”. As a consequence of the “*huge difficulties in taking care of [business] issues or solve [...] customer's issues through the, let's say, normal channels*”, expatriates have to act in accordance with local demands, which “*is a common practice in all activity sectors*”.

However, expatriates can resist the pressure to adjust by seeking a compromise between local practices and their own ethical principles. Wendy's response to the strategic pressure of keeping a less than qualified but externally imposed top manager is a good illustration. She managed to “*move [the top manager] from a position that was critical to the company to another position that was not critical [...] without firing [the top manager]*”. The creation of this new



position in the company led to an outcome in which the expatriate kept her own ethical principles while she managed to continue in the host-country and respect its local practices.

As we said before, this is not a linear and unequivocal process. Instead, the outcomes emerging from the chosen responses have consequences that feed-back the continuous process of adjustment to newer ethical challenges. The first time he flew to Africa, Jim was held in the airport for six hours because he replied affirmatively when he was asked if he was in the country to work. Since work visas are hard to get, the temporary use of visitors visas is common between expatriates, yet it is illegal. Although authorities know about this, they turn a blind eye if one answers that s/he is there as a visitor and not as a worker. The knowledge that stemmed from the outcome of this challenge – to be held “for six hours, while a police officer repeatedly asked for money, threatening us with refusal of entry” – was later transformed into adapted behaviour: *“when I arrive at the airport, I never say that I am there to work, I always arrange an excuse... something like a meeting, or paying a visit to someone. Otherwise, I would not be able to enter”*.

**Outcomes of disruption.** When expatriates decide to oppose local practices on ethical grounds they are likely to suffer immediate negative consequences. That was the case of Wendy when she and her husband were heavily fined and forced to return to the city and spoil a weekend at the beach because they refused to pay a bribe to a police officer. The same may happen when, although attempts are made, expatriates are not successful in coping with local rules. Alex saw his driving licence confiscated because when he *“tried to solve the issue on the spot”* he *“was not able to do it, [he] was not plain enough, [he] just suggested”*

Ultimately, expatriates may decide to leave the host-country. In the case of Oswald, he decided to abandon the assignment and leave Uganda because *“the way of working, the way of... corruption, etc., all this is a bit difficult to accept at first. The funny thing is that eventually you accept, but there is a moment you can't stand it anymore. Those two years in Uganda were more than enough.”*

### **Do expatriates become ethically (un)adjusted?**

After experiencing an ethical challenge, expatriates search for and ascribe a meaning to what is occurring. From the complex interaction between context, experience, and the constant construction of identity, which influences the way events are perceived and understood, emerges a response or attitude. The resulting outcome can favor continuity or, instead, contribute to the expatriates' return to the home-country. While we can conclude that this last outcome means that expatriates were not able to adjust to the host-country reality, the opposite conclusion (expatriates were able to adjust) cannot be made concerning the former outcome.

While Jack, when asked if he felt adjusted, replied *“Yes. [...] Now, I think that [if you stay here for] a long time, it changes your values”*, Frank replied *“Some people change when they are below the Equator [...] I'm the same person anywhere in the world. [...] No... Here, I'm the same person as in the whole world; I've to adapt to the circumstances and there are limits that I would not cross, obviously, certain limits...”*. Both expatriates consider themselves as well-adjusted, however Jack has no qualms in adopting the local practices, including moral values, which he finds *“all the same [compared with the home-country]”* concerning corruption, whereas Frank prefers a compromise between local practices and his own ethical values.

Consequently, the process of adjustment in face of ethical challenges can create unadjusted expatriates, adjusted yet unethical expatriates, and adjusted and ethical expatriates.

### **A framework of expatriates' response to ethical challenges**

According to our findings, expatriates' behaviour follows a sensemaking process in which the future self plays an important role, i.e., when faced with an ethical challenge, expatriates not only search for a meaning but also reflect about their selves in the future before committing to a response. Identity construction thus plays the dual role of supporting the assessment of what is

occurring (who the expatriate is justifies her/his perceptions) *and* legitimizing the response (who the expatriate wishes to become justifies her/his actions). Implicit to these roles is the notion of identity becoming, in line with the concept of liminality and the liminal condition of expatriates. The resulting outcomes reflect the expatriates' intended identity, which can be aligned with the rejection of local practices, the adoption of local practices, or the compromise between local practices and behaviour deemed as ethical by expatriates.

Figure 2 offers a dynamic representation of the data structure presented in Figure 1. It portrays the processual relationships between the different components of what we call here a framework of expatriates' response to ethical challenges, as suggested by our findings. Moreover, it elicits the recursive nature of the process. The identified direct relationships mark the point of contact between a particular variable pertaining to the intended identity and a specific component of the sensemaking process. A single variable can have more than one direct relationship, meaning that it directly influences the sensemaking process in more than one way. The other elements of the process are subject to the indirect influence of that variable.

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INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE  
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The graphic representation depicts sensemaking as central to expatriates' behaviour. As we mentioned in the beginning of this paper, sensemaking is an extensively discussed topic in the literature; however, the expatriates' case explicitly brings to the fore some particular aspects of sensemaking, while allowing an extended explanatory perspective that goes beyond past events and present conditions to include conceptions of future possibilities as a justification of expatriates' responses.

Our findings confirm the purpose and groundedness predicted by the sensemaking literature in terms of restoration of activity (Weick, 1995) and identity (Pratt, 2000). However, they also illustrate the complex recursiveness that encompasses the whole process, which, in our framework, is captured by the double ended arrows. In fact, ethical challenges do not occur in a linear sequence, one appearing only after a solution to the previous has been found. Instead, ethical questions can emerge at any time, while expatriates try to adjust to work, to HCN, and to general challenges. Moreover, the subsequent stages that lead to the preferred action in the sensemaking process must co-exist with concurrent efforts to solve other emerging questions: different stages of distinct sensemaking processes can occur simultaneously at any given moment. Complex recursiveness is thus the result of cross feedback between co-occurring processes. For instance, a meaning that is ascribed to a particular ethical challenge can serve as a cue in the scanning for meaning stage concerning any other question. Concurrently, an action that results from a given sensemaking process can provide meaning to a competing ethical question.

Coherence between the different stages of the co-occurring sensemaking processes is assured by the prominence of a future identity – which we will discuss in detail next – that is desired or intended by expatriates: the perception of challenges, the manner in which meaning is searched for and ascribed, and the corresponding actions are focused on in an intended future identity that eventually emerges from the overall process.

**Intended identity.** This future or *intended identity* plays a central role in explaining the passage between “meaning ascription” and “response”. In Figure 2, the components of the intended identity are represented by the interchangeable top and bottom parts of the main rectangle. These are the expatriates' situational *context*, including their relative position to the event, and expatriates' *identity construction*. The limits imposed by the intended identity permeate the whole process. Context and identity construction aggregate the variables that, according to our findings, are used by expatriates to justify their attitudes in accordance to their ideas of self in the future. If expatriates act outside such boundaries, they risk being perceived differently from their intended image, which

is reflected in their identity by means of changes of the self. Conversely, acting within the boundaries of an intended identity means that actions reflect an anticipation of a future identity that aligns the reflected image with the idea of future self.

Before detailing the relationships we found between the elements of the intended identity and the components of the emerging sensemaking processes – i.e., how the former justify or explain responses and outcomes – we should note that these are not only interdependent (each one influencing and shaping the others) but also dynamic: the context evolves with expatriates' perceptions, which in turn are shaped by it; and both the expatriate's self-concept and her or his intended image concur for the permanent construction of her or his identity. The framework of expatriates' response to ethical challenges can thus be compared to a process of constant evolution and change supported by a sensemaking process and justified by the prospect of a future self and the demands of an evolving context.

### **Toward an Intended Identity**

As portrayed in Figure 2, there is a reflexive interaction between the components of the sensemaking process and variables included in the intended identity because not only does the intended identity influence the process of sensemaking and legitimize action, it is in turn influenced and legitimized by the process. Recursiveness at this level reinforces the idea of becoming that we introduced above when referring to identity.

As such, expatriates *become* while in the transition between two bracketed abstractions of a continuous flux (Chia, 1999) of context and identity construction or, as we mention in the beginning, they undergo a liminal situation. This, as we have seen above, opens a space of permissiveness and experimentation that widens the opportunity of responses when facing impending challenges, namely ethical challenges. Although our findings support the assertion of liminality, we did not probe our data about the resulting consequences. As such, further research could be conducted to test the effects of liminal conditions on responses to ethical challenges faced by adjusting expatriates.

We now detail the suggested relationships between each variable and the components of the sensemaking process endured by expatriates when they face ethical challenges.

#### **Context**

Based on our findings, expatriates justify their responses, thus legitimizing the resulting outcomes, with what we define as *context*. For our purposes, context results from the interplay between expectations, perceptions, and intentions, given the expatriates' social and professional position.

**Expectations.** Our findings suggest that the expectations expatriates form before the international assignment become a source of reference when they search for meanings after a disruptive event, i.e., *expectations* directly influence *scanning for meaning*. These expectations can be high, which means that the framework of reference is replete with positive images about the future possibilities; or they can be low, in which case the framework of reference is characterized by fewer positive perspectives about the future (Norem and Cantor, 1986).

Meeting expectations means that the previously held idea corresponds to what is found by expatriates. If the situation found by expatriates is above expectations, this means that they were expecting to find worse conditions and fiercer challenges, irrespective of the previously held convictions (high or low). Conversely, if the situation is below expectations, then expatriates were anticipating better conditions and smoother challenges compared with what they eventually found. Different expectations provide different meanings to events when these occur, and so are likely to give place to responses that vary in terms of adaptation to local practices.

From these, we introduce our first proposition:

*P1: If conditions and challenges are above expectations, expatriates ascribe positive meanings to local practices when compared with expectations, and thus are more likely to conform with them than otherwise, because of the direct influence expectations exert on scanning for meaning.*

**Intentions.** The perceived reality is shaped by intentions, which direct individuals' attention to a selected and specific target (Garcia, 1971). Intentions thus filter and classify the perceived events according to their contribution to the desired outcome. Our findings show that events within the scope of an intention are more noticed in comparison with those outside. This means that expatriates have a greater concern with those events, or ethical challenges, that are related to their own intentions – either favorably or negatively – neglecting or ignoring those that are less related.

Intentions are aligned with local practices when the actions required to pursue them are within the scope of acceptance of the local context. In this case, the actions preferred by expatriates to attain their objectives (intentions) are in accordance with the actions that are locally accepted as normal. Conversely, when the necessary actions are less considered as normal or are disregarded locally, the corresponding intentions become misaligned with local practices.

Consequently, our second proposition becomes:

*P2: If intentions are aligned with local practices, it is more likely that expatriates find challenges less taxing ethically because of the direct relationship between intentions and perception of challenges.*

**Perception of context.** Expatriates' perceptions about reality, as opposed to the reality they must face, work like a filter through which they retrieve the necessary cues to understand and ascribe meaning (Weick, 1995) to impending ethical challenges, and respond to them. Consequently, *perceptions* have a direct influence on *scanning for meaning* as conveyors of reality and providers of meanings.

The perceived reality is thus the source of meanings available to expatriates. According to our findings, when expatriates are faced with a new perceived reality, they have the capacity to choose whether to accept it or not, whether to take that *reality* as legitimate or not. Their responses to the impending ethical challenges reflect their decision about the acceptability and legitimacy of the provided meanings.

Based on the previous arguments, our third proposition becomes:

*P3: If expatriates accept as legitimate what they perceive as reality they are more likely to respond in accordance to local practices, because of the direct influence perceptions of context exert on scanning for meaning.*

**Relative position.** Perceptions about reality depend on the perspective, or subjective evaluation, of the beholder. As our findings demonstrate, expatriates' position within organizations defines what and how they see or perceive as reality, thus allowing for different degrees of sensitivity concerning emergent ethical challenges that arise. The position within the organization allows for a different perspective and perception over events, superior positions enjoying a broader view of the impacts and consequences of the impending challenges (Krackhardt, 1990). Different perceptions of events will forcibly trigger different reference frameworks in which meaning is searched for and ascribed, thus leading to different responses and different outcomes.

Thus, the fourth proposition becomes:

*P4a: If expatriates enjoy a position that implies the protection of the company's interests, they are more likely to act according to local practices, because of the direct influence exerted by social position and power on perception of challenge.*

Concurrently, our findings also suggest that different positions within society or the organization also confer different frameworks of reference that become providers of meanings in the face of ethical challenges. Most relevant in defining expatriates' position is their relative power within the organization or with external parties. Power plays an important role in circumscribing the relevant meanings in accordance with the expatriates' beliefs and the intended outcome. As such, we extend proposition 4 to include:

*P4b: If expatriates enjoy a powerful position in the organization or the community, they are more likely to choose the relevant meanings in accordance with their own beliefs and ultimate preferred outcome because of the direct influence of social position and power on scanning for meaning.*

### **Identity construction**

Identity, or the complex interaction between current self image, future self, and reflected image, is grounded in particular personal histories. This definition complies with our findings. With context, identity construction is used by expatriates as a means to legitimize their actions.

**Personal history.** Our findings show that, as any other individuals, expatriates use previous experiences to accumulate knowledge. This personal history, part of the process of identity construction in which previous challenges are given meaning and named before being stored in memory, helps the expatriate to recognize and name emerging events. Naming is important because it establishes meaning from the outset (Weick et al., 2005), allowing expatriates to anticipate challenges and consequences. Expatriates' capacity to mitigate the effect of both novelties and surprises then influences their capacity to act according to their wishes or instead, according to situational constraints.

Our fifth proposition is:

*P5a: More experienced expatriates are more likely to act according to their own motivations in terms of local practices since they are less surprised when confronted with ethical challenges, because personal history directly relates with perception of challenges.*

Additionally, past history provides a set of meanings that facilitate interpretation, even if events emerge as surprises or novelties and have not been anticipated. As such, our fifth proposition should be extended to include:

*P5b: More experienced expatriates are more likely to act according to their own motivations in terms of local practices since they have a larger set of meanings to facilitate interpretation, because personal history directly relates with scanning for meaning.*

**Self-image.** The answer to the question “who am I?” shapes perceptions such that reality can fit the idea of self (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). The resulting framework of reference provides the possible classification of events within the context of the self, including their ethical content: events become ethical challenges or not according to the expatriates' self-image. However, this classification depends of the extent to which the self-image accommodates local practices. Meanings and resulting response are a consequence of this alignment. As such, our sixth proposition becomes:

*P6a: If expatriates' self-image conforms with local practices, events that result from local practices are less likely to be considered as ethically challenging since they are within the scope of the idea of self, eventually leading to according behaviour, because self-image exerts a direct influence over perceptions of challenges.*

By limiting the framework of reference, self-image is not only influencing the perceptions about impending challenges but also constraining the pool of meanings available for expatriates'

interpretation, independently of the ethical charge perceived previously. As such, we extend our sixth proposition to include:

*P6b: If the framework of reference provided by the self-image conforms with local practices, meanings and solutions are more likely to be in line with local practices, which increases probability of adoption of local practices, because self-image is directly related with scanning for meaning.*

Different and conflicting roles can lead to different identities (Burke, 1980). However, the co-existence of multiple identities can lead to inner conflicts at the level of the self. As illustrated by our findings, expatriates can act according to the expectations of a given role (i.e., a particular reflected image) even if that goes against their personal beliefs. In what seems to be a reverse sensemaking process, expatriates act first, then ascribe a meaning to that action, and finally try to justify it based on a set of possible justifications. Repetition of the act becomes possible because expatriates change their idea of self in those situations (Sparks and Guthrie, 1998), aligning it with the reflected image, and thus stabilizing the intended identity.

In this case, adopted practices become aligned with those that correspond to the intended identity. This can either conform to local practices, thus facilitating the adoption of according attitudes, or be against them. From this, we extend proposition 6 to include:

*P6c: If the chosen identity that emerges from conflicting identities conforms with local practices, then the adoption of local practices is more likely because self image has a direct influence over response.*

**Future self.** The effect of expatriates' future selves on the sensemaking process is similar to that of the self-image, but projected into the future. As such, the main question at this level is not "what am I?" but instead "what will I be?" Consequently, propositions 7a, 7b, and 7c are similar to the previous ones, although these include a perspective concerning the future.

*P7a: If expatriates' future selves conform with local practices, events that result from local practices are less likely to be considered as ethically challenging since they are within the scope of the idea of future self, leading to according behaviour, because future self exerts a direct influence over perceptions of challenges.*

*P7b: If the framework of reference provided by the future self conforms with local practices, meanings and solutions are more likely to be in line with local practices, which increases probability of adoption of local practices, because future self is directly related with scanning for meaning*

*P7c: If the chosen future identity that emerges from conflicting future identities conforms with local practices, then the adoption of local practices is more likely because future self has a direct influence over response.*

**Image.** The process of adjustment evolves in a context of identity construction in which the images reflected back to expatriates bring new meanings that become available for them to make sense of emerging ethical challenges. Our findings demonstrate that others' opinions about a particular expatriate are used to further explain reality and justify attitudes. These opinions, or images, can be aligned with local practices, i.e., expatriates are seen as accommodated to the context. Conversely, reflected images can reveal misaligned expatriates. As such, our eighth proposition becomes:

*P8: If reflected images, which provide extended meanings for impending ethical challenges, conform with local practices, expatriates are more likely to adopt local practices in the context of identity construction because image directly influences scanning for meaning.*

## Conclusions

We used a sensemaking perspective to analyze the behaviour of European expatriates in sub-Saharan African countries when they are faced with ethical challenges: the ethical event is the surprise that triggers the process; objective and subjective comparisons are established in the search for meaning; knowledge is transformed into meaning ascription; and the abidance by the local (un)ethical practice is the “associated response” (Thomas et al., 1993: 240) that leads to an outcome.

We extended the expatriates' adjustment literature to include the ethical dimension as a relevant constraint in terms of sustainable effectiveness. The case of expatriates is added to the organizational examples of liminal instances, not only in the sense that expatriates are between two ethical frameworks, but also because they are inherently between two distinct and better defined conditions: those of the home and of the host-country.

### Limitations and future studies

Although the testimonies we collected drew from a wide range of sub-Saharan countries, we did not account for differences between these countries; instead, we focused on the similarities that could help us explain the process of adjustment in the case of ethical challenges. However, we recognize that specific countries may have unique effects upon expatriates given their cultural diversity.

As we mention in the opening of this article, our aim was to collect vivid impressions about events. However, given the sensitivity of the topic, we recognize that some of the interviewees might have occasionally modified their testimonies, namely when describing their own intervention in the events. Further research can rely more heavily on non-disclosure agreements (although we proposed them to all of our interviewees, only a few preferred to sign them) or techniques such as vignettes or third person accounts.

Although we interviewed EU expatriates in sub-Saharan countries in search for a pronounced contrast between ethical and cultural frameworks, we believe it might be equally interesting to analyze the process between regions or countries in which ethical differences are perceived as less pronounced.

### Boundary conditions

Our research is developed in contexts of extreme contrast in cultural and ethical terms. However interesting, we cannot be sure whether our findings and conclusions apply to less radical cases. Although we may guess that an intended identity also plays a relevant role in these cases, we did not explore them in this article.

We focused our attention on the case of expatriates. However, organizations are becoming increasingly creative in the way they expand worldwide. Inpatriates, short-term temporary assignments, global assignments, virtual teams, are all examples of new forms of organizing the global integration of businesses. While these new forms of integration do not diminish the ethical problem, they were not studied here.

As we state in the *methods* section, we did not impose any restriction regarding the definition of ethical or unethical behaviour; instead, we allowed our interviewees to develop their own ideas of ethicality. Consequently, our findings are based not on an exhaustive list of ethical issues but instead on the actions perceived as ethically-challenging by the expatriates we interviewed.

### Implications

We extended the sensemaking approach by introducing the concept of intended identity to legitimize expatriates' attitudes. The intended identity refers to a preferred future instantiation of being in the continuous process of becoming that can be summarized in the following question,

“who do I want to be in the future?” This overall intention legitimizes the actions performed by expatriates.

The intended identity can be explained by the interaction of context-related and identity construction-related variables, as we have seen above. The answer to the question “who do I want to be in the future?” is first grounded on the motives and expectations that encouraged expatriates to accept the overseas assignment: individuals wish to become expatriates because of some factor (motive) and also because they expect something in the future (expectations). Conversely, what they will become depends greatly upon what they are in the present, which in turn defines how the present reality is perceived. The future or intended identity cannot be dissociated from all the previous events and experiences undergone by expatriates in the continuous process of becoming. In fact, personal history partially explains one's self-image in the present and in the future. These interact with the reflected images and with the intended future reflections to create a present and an intended identity, both shaping current actions.

The intended identity can comply with local practices. In this case, the self-image is aligned with the practices required to succeed in a given context and expatriates confirm that image by the reflection stemming from the other actors in the same context. The future identity goes through the same process, such that all the process of identity construction (present and future) is built around local practices and becomes consolidated by means of the identification between the individuals and local context. Consequently, if expatriates face ethical challenges stemming from local practices but their identity is aligned with the adoption of those practices, then they are more likely to adjust and discard ethical concerns.

However, the intended identity can be unaligned with local practices. In this case, the process of identity construction and context-related variables concur to create an intended identity that favors the disregard for local norms. Consequently, when expatriates face ethical challenges they are more likely to sacrifice adjustment in order to keep their moral principles.

A third option, that of ethical adjustment, in which adjustment and ethics are coalesced in such a manner that neither is sacrificed, is still open to expatriates seeking for a sustainable individual and organizational presence overseas. This option implies that the intended identity combines elements of the local reality with those of ethical imperatives, both provided by a self-concept and a reflected image that surpasses the local boundaries to include the global constituencies of an integrated organizational and business reality.

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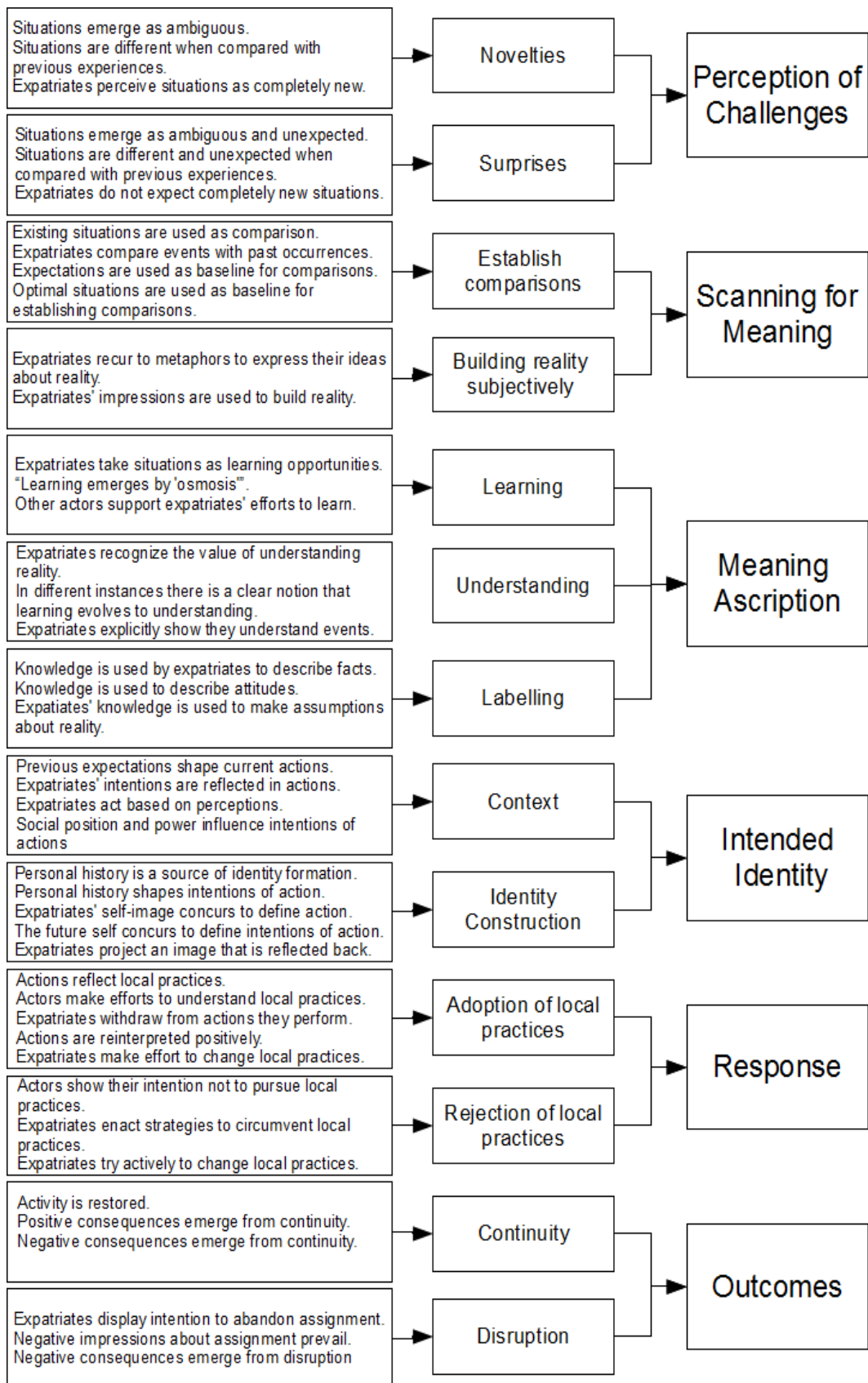
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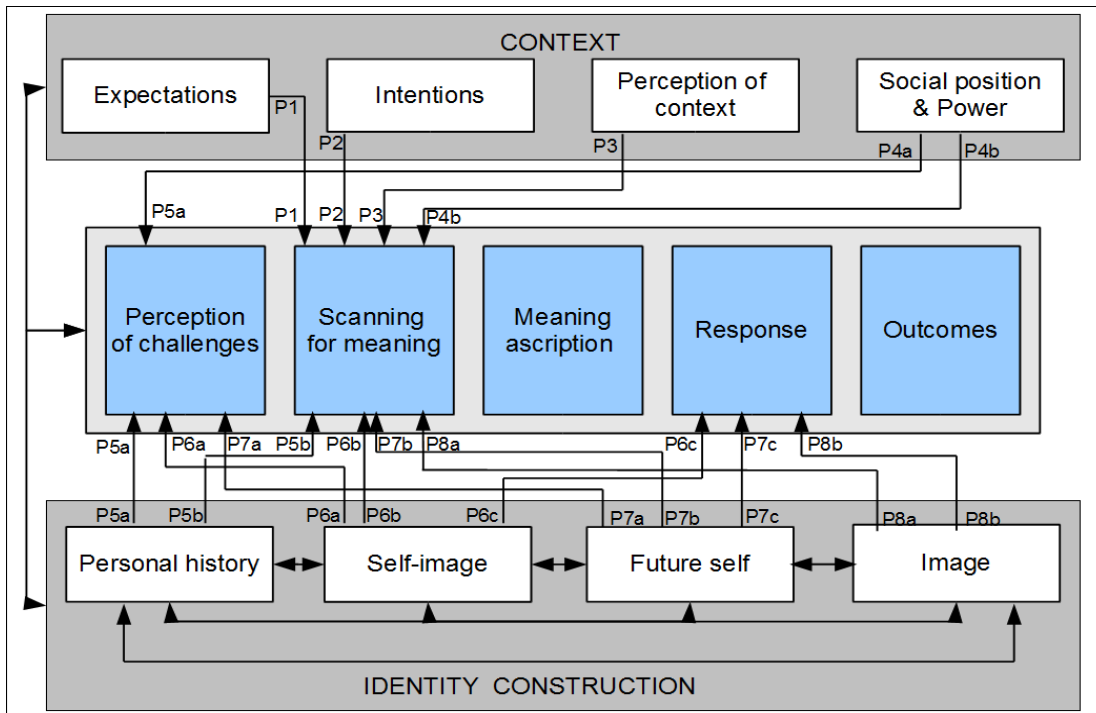
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**Figure 1. Data structure**



**Figure 2.** Elements of the intended identity interacting with the sensemaking process



**Table 1**

## Supporting data for the data structure

Themes	Data supporting concepts
Novelties	<p>But... there's lot of corruption there... and you either take it as a joke and... well, you can't take it too seriously. Because, if you take it seriously... some things you have to take seriously, others, not.</p> <p>... the harder the issue the better, more channels are open to solve the problem in other ways, but this is not just here [...] in all countries... I found... the same.</p> <p>Your relationship with other people is normally different. It's a warmer relationship. Much more open. With a greater availability, franker than what we get here [in Europe].</p> <p>The traffic, the shortages... of electricity, shortage of water, the organization, the difficulties in getting your papers... all that is very different when compared with Europe, isn't it? And that was the main difference... Also in terms of accountability, accountability is greater in Europe than here.</p> <p>You cannot talk normally, because you can't risk to look arrogant or that you know more than they do. So, you have to pay much more attention to create... you have to do much more to be accepted when compared with when you arrive in Europe... sometimes, you don't even try.</p>
Surprises	<p>Look, I think that when people go there they have to be blindfolded... they have to forget about Europe, because it is completely different, see! And what shocks you the most is poverty... extreme poverty! Extreme misery!</p> <p>I'm shocked with poverty, they earn a lot less than we do...</p> <p>After dinner, everyday, we gave [the security guards] the rest of our food, a hot meal, for them to eat. But, meanwhile they were robbing us as hell... It's like, in every case here, when you try to help someone, that someone is trying to take more from you!</p> <p>This is what shocks me the most... But we look at this... the open sewer... dirt all over... something we are no longer used to. It's hard for us to understand... what that is.</p> <p>I have people here, close to me, they report to me, they are educated, they know how to behave, they have seven kids or more, and three or four are already dead. And they are 12 brothers and sisters, and five or six already died. And this is something that shocks you, when you arrive here, this is tremendous!</p> <p>I think that is the big difference, and as an expatriate, this is one of those things that... being confronted with those situations, face to face... it's a... it's a violent and shocking confrontation, at the beginning.</p>
Establish comparisons	<p>Normally, what is this corruption thing? Well, in a business process... you convince the people with whom... who decide (...) Probably it's not much different than convincing someone in Europe: be nice, invite your customer for lunch... take him to a fancy restaurant...</p> <p>I think they eventually fail as in any other country (...) I think the average is the same... there are those you can trust, and those you can't.</p> <p>Well, it's very different. Of course, it has huge limitations, but since my expectations were even lower than the reality I eventually found, I felt some... how shall I say this... some comfort in what I found.</p> <p>There's an interesting question here according to that point of view: in spite of the low number of lawyers... we are talking of a population of 12, 13 million people, maybe 14 million, and about 600 lawyers (...)</p> <p>I'll be honest with you, I don't see this, contrary to how the West sees it... people in the West think they can change the world and that the world must be Western.</p> <p>Only a few are really problematic. Some can be mean, they can be whatever, but that's like in any other place (...) If you relax, if you don't bring anything valuable with you, if you don't have [valuable] things... you're just fine, no problem!</p>

<p>Building reality subjectively</p>	<p>And then, there must be different levels of corruption in different companies...</p> <p>Amongst us... corruption amongst us, you mean, lawyers... I don't know... Well, but I'm sure there's some...</p> <p>... with this speech, it seems I'm the last Coke in the desert... There are things we have to learn, and those things only come with time...</p> <p>They look like machines, they do that only because they have been told that's the way of doing that for the last 20 years.</p> <p>This looks like the American far West.</p>
<p>Learning</p>	<p>Today I don't do it because I'm experienced enough.</p> <p>This is a very lengthy process... if we need something from them, we have to wait, we have to insist, and we have to be nice.</p> <p>Here, we have to learn to be more tolerant, but at the same time, you should never show your weaknesses. Otherwise, we're eaten alive.</p> <p>Of course that when this [police officer asking for a bribe] happened to me for the second time, I already knew what to do.</p> <p>It's always important to have a middleman working for you.</p> <p>I was lucky! At the time, I found some nice people there... they became my friends, I still keep in touch with them! And that was really nice, it helped a lot!</p>
<p>Understanding</p>	<p>He took me for a walk and I had no problem... Yet, I would never do that by myself.</p> <p>The first challenge an expatriate has to face is to understand the context... he must understand the community in all its components, including the language, the culture, the habits...</p> <p>My mother is from Angola, so I already knew what to expect, even if Angola is very different.</p> <p>Once you're in, you get very interesting projects... financially, I mean.</p> <p>And basically, this is Uganda's economy: half a dozen (...) robbing the other millions of individuals that live there (...) and convinced they are doing a hell of a good job.</p> <p>... because of the color of my skin, I think I would face tremendous difficulties, I would go through tremendous difficulties if I chose to use the formal channels to solve my clients' needs.</p> <p>... you should never get too personal with them, we have to run away from that.</p> <p>In that day I understood that... I learned more, I learned that we can learn from anyone. And that you shouldn't really think you're better than the rest...</p>
<p>Labelling</p>	<p>Kind of "shut up" or "don't bring me problems, bring me solutions" (...) they were clearly rude to colleagues that were not only older but also more experienced than them. They wanted to stand out!</p> <p>That's in their blood! Sell everything in the street, without any problems... the deal, the easy money. Avoiding hard work... I think that's in those guys' blood.</p> <p>We have to play to their tune if we want them to understand us.</p> <p>The mood today... the mood today is because of the market crises we had here.</p>



Context	<p>It's a financial attraction. I even tell you: technically, there is no added value in being here.</p> <p>Well, we just accept because we wouldn't find any difference if we were working with different suppliers. That's the standard, and we have to work with the standard.</p> <p>I was promoted and they recognize authority, so they started to like me.</p> <p>In financial terms, that was not the reason I went there. I did it for the experience, to know that country.</p> <p>Because here I was able to use everything I learned until now. (...) I passed the message, I mean, I taught them and helped them to grow as people. That was gratifying, very gratifying.</p> <p>And so, if this type of condition doesn't change (...) I have serious concerns about moving in with my wife and kids.</p> <p>Unofficial channels! The problem with the official channels is that they take an eternity...</p>
Identity construction	<p>At times this shocks me... Sometimes, it shocks because we... Those that were in non-African countries, they find this a strange situation. But if they had never left, they would find this pretty normal.</p> <p>At a personal level, this goes all against my values.</p> <p>I can never say I'm a lawyer. I always say I'm a consultant.</p> <p>Because I'm enjoying it... I'm not the kind of person that is saving the world and then starts complaining...</p> <p>When I was working I was very uptight, so I was not with a very pleasant look.</p> <p>I don't intend to return to a country where I worked for many years, where I still have family, but honestly, I don't see myself going back.</p> <p>I would say that each and everyone has the responsibility to go against this, and try to sell quality, a proper work, try to sell results!</p> <p>Before going there and stay there, living there, I was used to go there frequently, so that was not completely strange for me.</p> <p>And if we are trapped in one of those traffic jams then "go home, this land doesn't belong to you!"</p> <p>And I'm here, I accepted this project, I'm enjoying it, but this is not my championship.</p> <p>And so, we shouldn't try to radically change their culture... no, we have to fit to their way of living.</p>
Adoption of local practices	<p>Any attitude that revealed we were not satisfied with delivery times, some lack of patience, would be totally counterproductive. We all know about this problem, so we better accept it.</p> <p>For instance, to invest in some areas, a company has to offer to invest in some others first. First, it has to invest in these other areas because it's in someone's interest that investment in those areas are done.</p> <p>And we try... until the last minute... to delay a definitive answer.</p> <p>But I tried myself to manage this situation, by being humbler, by pulling her up.</p> <p>But you see, someone got to do it, so it was done.</p> <p>But as I always say: don't steal it, because I'm not gonna buy any from you...</p> <p>Well, I tell my customer about the proper paperwork and the steps he has to follow, but then I say "look, you have here five or six people that can help you" (...) That's how I protected myself.</p>

<p>Rejection of local practices</p>	<p>There's a time in which we begin to become a part of that system, otherwise it's worthless.</p> <p>I would tell them that they were not deceiving any other country [by syphoning aid money to politicians' private bank accounts].</p> <p>Obviously, after being fined, I didn't go to the police station, otherwise I would have received the driving licence and avoided the fine.</p> <p>For instance, concerning corruption, I would not be available to intervene in such a context.</p> <p>I had to shout, I had to scream, (...) and only then they understood I was not enjoying it any more.</p>
<p>Outcomes of continuity</p>	<p>We also depend on these schemas... after all, we have no choice.</p> <p>And sometimes it goes well, and other times it goes wrong (... I even lost customers because of that).</p> <p>And that facilitates our lives.</p> <p>I'm telling them they are right but, at the same time, I'm pulling a bit towards our side (...) We say yes but then we delay things a bit. And we haven't had any serious problem.</p> <p>No, I drive whenever I need to.</p>
<p>Outcomes of disruption</p>	<p>Normally, people remain there for about two years, a year or two, and then they don't feel like staying any longer.</p> <p>And this is an African country! I'm very skeptical concerning Africa.</p> <p>And we went back home... and he ruined our weekend.</p> <p>Oh, and as I told you: in the beginning one is surprised, then one gets used to it, but then, not any longer.</p> <p>Sometimes there is some bitterness... deep down...</p> <p>That didn't comfort me at all, I still feel afraid of driving [because of police officers' extortion]</p> <p>He took the driving licence, I obviously tried to do what everybody tries to do, and that works here most of the time, you just try to solve the problem on the spot... but I wasn't able to do it... probably I was not clear enough, I only suggested...</p>