

The Guidance of Expatriate Websites on Culture:

An Investigation on 47 Countries' Expatriate Websites

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Abstract

Expatriates need to be supported culturally to reduce culture shock and increase adjustment. Doing cultural preparation for overseas assignment can support cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates. In this paper, it is aimed to attract the attention of practitioners and academics into the expatriate websites' role on cultural preparation as a new means. The research has been done on the most popular expatriate websites of 47 countries. The existence of cultural information is the indicator of websites' guidance on national culture. Total guidance percentage of the all participated countries is %27. According to the results, most of the websites do not have enough cultural information to guide expatriates before overseas experiences.

Introduction

Increasing of globalization causes mobilization of human resources of the companies. Numerous companies assign their human resources to work in a foreign country for a temporary period. As a result of today's international business, expatriates are often influenced by the culture because they firstly face with the culture of the new country. Increasing of the expatriates causes some of the international companies to need to train their assigned employees on culture of the new workplace. Expatriates, whom organizations do not provide any cross-cultural training program, choose two ways such as researching on their own or not to do any cultural preparation. Current studies suggest expatriates to have some basic information about culture of the host country for to not live culture shock, conflict, failure or repatriate earlier. Expatriate websites can be thought as a new means to learn about culture of the new country. It seems that expatriate websites have a high potential to guide expatriates on host culture and support them to prepare culturally to the new experience. The current situation of them has been wondered about their role on guidance culturally.

Literature Review

As a collective programming of the mind (Hofstede, 1980), culture has an important role on shaping work-related values, attitudes and behaviors of the individuals of various societies (Brown and Ataalla, 2002). The effects of the culture for individuals continue to attract the attention of many researches. A growing literature focuses on the relationship between culture and expatriation; particularly how the culture affects expatriates is one of the discussed issues. In particularly, national culture which is defined as values, beliefs, and assumptions learned in early childhood that differentiates one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1991) is one of the most important dimensions during expatriation period.

Being unfamiliar with the cultural realities of the host country makes expatriates not only unhappy living abroad but also liability to the organization. Various problems including

diminished performance can be presented by expatriate assignment and adjustment problem. When expatriates feel culture shock, it causes them to experience non-adjustment and expatriation failure (Hutchings, 2005). It is claimed that the success of the assignment can be influenced by expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). In addition to be successful, the length of staying in host country is related with being adapted to the host culture (Kim ve Slocum, 2008). According to Black (1988) and Caligiuri (1997) the cross-cultural adjustment can affect the performance.

Firms acknowledge the importance of cross-cultural differences but do not know ways to address relationship between facets of cultures and organizational practices (Hendry, 1992). Cross-cultural training makes expatriate candidates more familiar to the new culture and leads them to learn about appropriate behaviors within the host culture (Webb and Wrigth, 1996). According Shim and Paprock (2002), as an ironic situation, cross-cultural trainings are not provided by most corporate leaders for employees and they have some doubt on effectiveness of training to expatriates.

The employees, who are not supported by any corporate training on culture of the new country, can try to have basic information about host culture by researching individually. Research on internet is the first and easiest way to have some idea about new culture. At that time, the role of the expatriate websites becomes more significant. When the statement of "expatriate websites" is searched on Google, it is possible to reach 2.610 results. The reason of the increasing popularity of the websites is including expatriation issues. For that reason, these websites as a new means can be research by academics to have more idea about their guidance, role and functions on cultural preparation.

Research Design

In this paper, it is investigated that the guidance of expatriate websites about leading, directing and informing expatriates on host countries' national culture. The research has been done on the most popular expatriate websites of the 47 countries. The classified countries' websites are reached from the "Transition Abroad" (2012) website. In particular; it is aimed to examine the cultural guidance of the expatriate websites. Main question of the research is, "Do expatriate websites include cultural information?" Firstly, it was searched that the existence of a link named culture (or a related name) which leads visitors directly to reach cultural information of the target country. Then, what kind of cultural information the mentioned link includes was investigated.

Setting

This research is framed by investigating on the expatriate websites and getting qualitative and quantitative data from them. The frequency about existence of culture guide provides qualitative findings. The content of the culture links and cultural issues which are gotten from websites provides qualitative findings. The sample of the research is the most popular expatriate websites of the 47 countries.

Methods

This study is a descriptive research that investigates the expatriate websites' guidance on culture. Secondary data was gained from expatriate websites as online sources. The data collection method is document investigation (Bailey, 1982) as a practical way to get idea about expatriate websites' functions on guiding about national culture. As a recorded human communication (Babbie, 2004), the secondary data was analyzed with content analyzing method (Holsti, 1969; Luborsky, 1994). The existence of cultural links and content of them are researched.

Discussion

The employees, who are not supported by any cross-cultural training organized by their own companies, need to do preparation culturally of the new country by themselves. At that time, they search some tools to have information on culture of host country. The principal objectives of this study are to attract the attention of practitioners and academics to the expatriate websites as a new means on cultural preparation, and to provide an insight into the guidance of them for expatriates.

According to the findings of the research, two main characteristics of the websites were explored. As a feature of the first characteristic, some of the websites have a separated link (named culture or a related name) which includes cultural information of the host countries such as people, general life, food, music, literature, architecture, language, life, dance, sports etc. The culture guide of the expatriate websites were named differently like *cross-culture, business culture, work culture, culture and people, culture and adaptation, culture and religion, cultural advise, culture shock, cultural differences and culture*.

According to the second characteristic of the websites, there is no link named culture (or a related name), just have some explanations about life in the host country. The mentioned part includes scattered and deficient cultural information or there is no information on culture. The expatriate websites which have second format can cause dissatisfaction in visitors who are searching for cultural information of the host country. Scattered and deficient information on culture can cause visitors to need to surf on the website more, lose time and reach limited information.

The expatriate websites of the 47 countries were investigated in details. The frequency of the having or not a cultural guide is shared in the table below. Australia (19), United Kingdom (17) and France (17) have the largest numbers of the expatriate websites. The minimum numbers of the websites are from Venezuela (2), Peru (4) and Ecuador (4). The highest percentages of the existence of the culture guide on the websites are observed in Brazil (%40), Netherlands (%40), Australia (%42), Peru (%50), Singapore (%50) and Venezuela (%50) but the number of the expatriate websites of Peru is 4 and Venezuela is only 2. For that reason, the cultural guidance effectiveness of Australia and Singapore can be underlined to be highest.

The frequency table of the research is for attracting the attention into the guidance of the expatriate websites on culture. The results indicate that most of the websites do not have enough cultural information to guide expatriates before overseas experiences. Total guidance percentage of the all participated countries is %27. Despite this, design of the some websites looks well-enough to guide expatriates on culture. This situation points out the potential of the all expatriate websites on cultural guidance. For instance, one website from Egypt has much information on culture for living and working abroad. It gives considerable information such as *suggestions for successful living, customs, contemporary society, social acceptable behaviors, reducing stress of adaptation*.

“When moving to a new country to live for an extended period of time, it is important to learn as much as possible about the country’s culture, society, people, religions and customs. This knowledge will help you to understand the new country better and acclimatization will take place much quicker as you feel more comfortable in the new surroundings” (Livinginegypt, 2012).

The quote shared above is an example of a cultural guidance from an expatriate website. The information on this characteristic can cause expatriates to be ready more for a

living and working experience in a new culture. It can support expatriates to feel less cultural shock and more adjustment. As a result of this paper, the guidance of the expatriate websites is not well-enough as expected before. Their potential on preparing to new culture individually should be realized and their guidance should be developed and increased.

Conclusion

As a memory of an expatriate manager, he had been assigned for an overseas project for 4 years almost 15 years ago. The problem was he did not know anything about the country he would go. He searched and he only could find some information in the embassy of this country. When he went to the host country, he realized that the information he got from embassy had been lost its currency and he did not know anything about the new home. This story points out the efficiency of internet about obtaining updated information.

As a result of the technology, surfing on internet is the first way when people need to learn updated information. Expatriate websites are taken attention as a new means for researching host culture individually. It must be underlined that expatriate websites have an increasing power on guiding expatriates and particularly providing information to them whom organization do not organize a cross-cultural training before expatriation. On the other hand, many of the expatriate websites can have some missions like meeting up, forums etc. But expatriate websites should be used more effectively for supporting expatriates' adjustment to the host country. Finally, this paper is just a calling attention to the potential of the expatriate websites. Their roles, functions, efficiency and effects can be conducted research by more academics from different aspects on the context of expatriation and culture.

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Attachment

Table 1: Cultural Guidance of Expatriate Websites

<i>COUNTRIES</i>	<i>Culture Guide on website</i>	<i>No Culture Guide</i>	<i>Total</i>
Argentina	2	10	12
Australia	3	16	19
Austria	5	7	12
Belgium	5	9	14
Brazil	2	3	5
Canada	4	9	13
Chile	1	4	5
China	1	14	15
Costa Rica	2	4	6
Czech Republic	3	6	9
Denmark	1	5	6
Ecuador	1	3	4
Egypt	5	2	7
France	4	13	17
Germany	3	8	11
Greece	1	9	10
Hungary	1	6	7
India	2	4	6
Indonesia	3	11	14
Ireland	1	9	10
Italy	4	8	12
Japan	3	10	13
Kuwait	3	4	7
Malaysia	2	13	15

Mexico	2	8	10
Netherlands	2	3	5
New Zealand	2	7	9
Panama	1	7	8
Peru	2	2	4
Philippines	2	11	13
Poland	3	5	8
Portugal	3	9	12
Russia	3	5	8
Saudi Arabia	2	5	7
Singapore	7	7	14
South Africa	2	7	9
South Korea	2	7	9
Spain	3	10	13
Sweden	1	4	5
Switzerland	4	10	14
Taiwan	2	8	10
Thailand	3	8	11
Turkey	2	5	7
United Arab Emirates	2	8	10
United Kingdom	3	14	17
United States	2	8	10
Venezuela	1	1	2