

The Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training on Chinese Expatriates Assignments in Mncs in Myanmar

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Abstract

Multinational enterprises employ expatriates to perform foreign assignments in host countries. Expatriates face several challenges when they work in foreign nations due to a need for more proficiency in the local language and communication issues. The effectiveness of MNCs mainly depends on expatriates' performance. There are several Chinese expatriates in Myanmar, and cultural differences can create challenges. This study focuses on analyzing the impact of cross-cultural training on expatriates' assignments using qualitative research methods. Data are collected using interviews and analyzed by content analysis method. The findings show that language problem is a critical issue for all expatriates, and providing cross-cultural training, including language and cultural orientation, can lead to adapting to the host country's culture and developing positive communication with local people. This study suggests providing cross-cultural training for expatriates' effective performance.

Keywords: Cross-cultural training, Expatriates' assignment, Multinational companies, Myanmar.

1. Introduction

Tahir and Ertek (2018) highlighted that expatriate development is a significant issue for multinational corporations (MNCs). Prakash Modak (2020) emphasized that expatriates play a crucial role in MNCs, bringing technical knowledge and management skills to the host country. Waxin and Panaccio (2005) found that providing sufficient and comprehensive cross-cultural training (CCT) can accelerate expatriate adjustment to a new culture. Shen and Lang (2009) discovered that adequate CCT helps prevent premature repatriation, minimizes performance and adjustment issues, and improves interactions with host country nationals (HCNs). Host country human resource management needs to deliver CCT because the local staff understands the host country's conditions and environment. For Chinese expatriate managers facing cultural challenges in Myanmar, mutual respect and trust-building with locals through active measures are suggested to bridge cultural differences (Hung & Min, 2020).

As a developing country in ASEAN, most Chinese companies invest in mining, oil and gas, agriculture, and energy enterprises in Myanmar. With the growth of foreign investment, many foreign workers settle and work in MNCs in Myanmar. Chinese expatriates working in MNCs may need help settling into local Myanmar culture due to cultural differences and language issues. Previous authors mentioned the role of cross-cultural training for effective cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates and improving performance at MNCs. However, there still needs to be a study expressing how cross-cultural

training impacts expatriates' performance in Myanmar. Thus, this study proposes to analyze the outcome of practical cross-cultural training on Chinese expatriates' performance.

2. Literature Review

Cheema (2012) proved that comprehensive and multidimensional CCT training is needed to be more effective and improve expatriates' work and adaptation. The critical factors which the training practices, methods, and training topics must cover are (1) to cover the current problems that the expatriates are facing, (2) the training topics are preferably close to simulated real experience, (3) sharing with other expatriates (4) an entry-level CCT program which covers challenges and issues and (5) the expatriates who have adapted to the culture involving in it as instructors. Phiri and Pillay (2015) conducted the orientation process training for a new employee; it can reduce the costs and anxiety of learning the job, reduce the turnover rate when employee feel that they are valued, it saves time in teaching the employee as initial orientation, to develop the positive attitudes, job expectations, and satisfaction.

An expatriate with difficulty adapting to a new culture may leave earlier for the host country, and the cost for an MNC company is considerable. To make it effective, MNCs' leaders must select suitable candidates, and a more extended training plan and well-designed quality CCT program have to deliver to be successful in international assignments (Cheema, 2012). According to the training effectiveness model developed by (Bhagat & Prien, 1992), the three main attributes impact both training effectiveness and individual success in international assignments, job-specific, and organizational strategy and culture. CCT can help develop intercultural communication competence skills and reduce the effects of culture shock to be more adaptable and acceptable to the host culture. The CCT program should focus on the trainee, not the trainer or the training methods. Predeparture training, overseas on-the-job training, host cultural awareness training, and language programs should be included in CCT. It can help the expatriates to enhance their ability to manage the reduction of pressure and uncertainty in new environments, work performance, and general living issues (Phiri & Pillay, 2015).

Prakash Modak (2020) learned that cross-cultural training (CCT) is an educative or learning process of intercultural during expatriation in diverse cultures. The components included in CCT are cultural orientation, language and social skills development, and communication. There have three purposes for conducting CCT; predetermination, coping capacity, and realistic expectations when working and living in a different cultural environment in the host country. The effectiveness of CCT can be measured by skill development, performance, and adjustment. The five CCT programs are area studies, cultural assimilator, language training, sensitivity training, and field experience. Prakash Modak (2020) concluded that CCT programs conducted by host country nationals are more effective. Providing more CCT programs, more job satisfaction, then higher performance of the expatriates. A lack of CCT may cause severe failure during international assignments (Nas, 2011). The expatriates' performance can be developed by providing effective CCT by MNCs and will help expatriates to improve their information about the host country's culture.

The success of expatriates in international assignments depends on their ability to adjust to the host country's culture. However, MNCs need more emphasis on CCT due to budget constraints, lack of expertise, and time limitations, leading to expatriate failure. The failure of expatriate assignments has profound implications, including high financial costs, performance issues, and early departure from the host country (Yang, 2011). Expatriates experience culture shock, characterized by stress and anxiety in a new environment, with challenges including communication, dress, and ethics (Rajasekar & Renand, 2013).

3. Methodology

The qualitative research method is used to analyze the effectiveness of cross-cultural training on Chinese expatriates' assignments at MNCs in Myanmar. The data are collected using interviews. The respondents are Chinese expatriates working at MNCs with at least three years of working experience. The purposive sampling method uses a judgmental approach to select a sample. The interview questions are developed based on previous research findings and the workplace culture of Myanmar. Five Chinese expatriates working at MNCs in Yangon, Myanmar, actively participated in the interview section. Before conducting the interview, the researcher sent an informed consent letter to get approval and agreement on participation. All of the data are confidential and used for educational purposes. The collected data are analyzed using content analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

Five respondents were male expatriates, and only one female expatriate participated in the interview section. Most respondents work in the telecom sector with different positions, such as solution manager, outsourcing manager, HR director, and general manager positions. The first interview question is, "Have you encountered challenges communicating with individuals from different cultural backgrounds?" The respondents thoughtfully pointed out the language barrier as the primary concern of cross-cultural adaptation. When Chinese expatriates first site at multinational companies, they communicate with local staff and government officers. Chinese expatriates need to understand the local language to understand the local community cultures, workplace norms, and communication. The language barrier is a critical issue of misunderstanding in the workplace.

The second interview question is, "How do you think cross-cultural training can improve intercultural communication skills and contribute to developing cultural sensitivity?" The respondents agreed with the statement of improving intercultural communication through cross-cultural training. Chinese expatriates accept cross-cultural training, including language and cultural adaptation, as a vital aspect of settling and working in foreign countries. Local language proficiency becomes a significant issue to communicate and work with local people, and lack of language proficiency brings communication problems. Moreover, expatriates pointed out that cross-cultural training based on scenarios and project-based while employment at MNCs abroad can lead them to understand more about local culture and build positive communication with local people.

The final interview question is, "Have you been able to apply the skills and knowledge gained from cross-cultural training in real-life situations?" Expatriates can achieve team harmony and balance workplace culture to maintain organizational benefits and quality of outcomes. As a result of cross-cultural training, language proficiency helps communicate with local subordinates and understand cultural values, norms, and team building. Understanding local culture and proficiency in the local language help to become influential leaders. Prakash Modak (2020) summarized the importance of CCT as the critical learning process to adapt to new cultures and improve performance. Expatriates can apply learning skills and language at MNCs to improve business performance and productivity. According to Phiri and Pillay (2015), orientation training, including local language and culture, helps expatriates to commute effectively with local staff. Moreover, proficiency in the local language reduces relationship issues and promotes expatriates' assignments.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

To be concluded, the current study pointed out the vital role of cross-cultural training for expatriates to adapt host country's culture, understand local circumstances, and communicate with local people. Lack of language is a critical issue for expatriates and a central disturbance to their performance. MNCs should provide cross-cultural training programs for expatriates before settling at MNCs. This study targeted only Chinese expatriates working at MNCs in Myanmar; other foreign expatriates are limited. This study implied the qualitative method only and collected data using interviews. Thus, further studies should use another research method to show evidence whether the impact of cross-cultural training on expatriates' assignments.

6. References

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