Uncovering Types of Cultural Adjustment Experienced by Faculty Members and Their Adjustment Strategies in Winayaka Business School Indonesia

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Abstract

For decades, higher education institutions in Indonesia have benefitted from having their faculty graduate from overseas universities to improve their quality. The abundance of scholarship programs seems to support this interest. By using a phenomenological approach, we explore the experience of faculty members in an Indonesian business school in adjusting back home after their PhD study. The business school encourages its faculty members to have a master's or a PhD degree from an overseas university. It can be expected that upon returning home after quite a long time living abroad, they may find difficulties to adjust back from the host country's culture to the home country's culture, usually called as reverse culture shock. In addition, the shock may occur especially because they are also expected to occupy certain institutional functions or roles. The sample involves returnees who had completed their PhD study within the last 10 years. Phenomenology is used as the approach in order to obtain the subjective experience of returnees and explore the complexities (the breadth and depth) of their cultural adjustment. Five types of adjustment were spotted: Personal Life Adjustment, Occupational Responsibility Adjustment, Organizational Culture Adjustment, Adjustment in Contributing to the Organization, and Cultural Dimension Adjustment. The analysis also discovered several strategies that returnees had used to cope with those adjustments. Suggestions are made to help returnees adjust with the current condition of the organization.

Keywords: Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Dimension, Indonesian, Repatriation, Reverse Culture Shock.

Introduction

Higher education has become a new tendency for Indonesian scholar to fulfill basic requirement to enhance their competencies in talent competition recently. Some scholars decided to get a job after they graduated, some of them were directly taking their master shortly after they graduated in bachelor's degree, and some of them still in hesitancy between career and education. One of the business school in Bandung, Winayaka Business School[1], is one of the organizations which develops itself to excel in education to develop and to disseminate knowledge in the fields of business and management. Under policy of the government, most of the faculty members were attracted to have further education, especially doctoral degree. They were choosing to study abroad instead of local university. Countries they were addressing most are United States, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. Length of study abroad period is normally about 2-4 years, sometimes it takes more than four years. After they had finished their study, they were returning to Winayaka Business School, which considered as returnees. Upon returning, those returnees may experience differences between home and host country. As they re-migrate to the origin country, returnees formed by the culture of the host state and acquire host culture traits. Whether returnees were aware or not, some changes applied compared to what they were before which encompass their perception, sense of values, beliefs, attitudes, behavioral patterns, and custom and identity (Naito, 2016). Implicitly, they brought a new working culture from the destination country of study to the organization they have been assigned to, Winayaka Business School, as an unrealized leverage on the organization. Their knowledge of the host culture was increasing during abroad, potentially, they experience shock and cultural readjustment, for these scenarios, the readjustment might be difficult and takes time. Because of that situation, some questions arise to discover whether there was a disparity on those who had

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[1] In regard to keep the data confidential, all the naming of person, place, project, and organization will be disguised under pseudonym starting this page and forward.

adjusted with the culture while living abroad and when they were returning back how difficult the adjustment? What adjustment did they make?

On the other hand, an organizational role might have needed to help the returnees. Organization should at least consider to the intentions and condition of returnees, in order to relieve challenges and difficulties returnees faced, and also as a respond to the possibility that they have adjusted themselves with a different culture (Naito, 2016). Given that reverse culture shock is real, an observation of this phenomenon might be conducted in order to understand what actually happened to the returnees when they were returning home in a way to interpret the problem they may face during the readjusting time and to recognize whether the transition was smooth or not. This study is expected to understand breadth and depth of cultural adjustment that have been experienced by the returnees, including the challenges of returning home; propose programs to help returnees in coping with cultural adjustment.

Theories of Reverse Culture Shock

Gaw (2000) agrees that reverse culture shock experience can be problematic, since there is a spectrum of opinion as to the types and severity of problems experienced by returnees. Problem scopes that emerge to be related with reverse culture shock have been identified by empirical studies. Reverse culture shock is similar in definition to culture shock, but the adjustment process focuses on the difficulties of re-adapting and re-adjusting to one's own home culture after one has sojourned or lived in another cultural environment. Previous studies from Black (1992) have found that repatriation adjustment as difficult as the original expatriation adjustment, even sometimes it went more difficult than the original expatriation. Black added that the readjustment process was not that different with how the person adjust with the host country after moved from the home country. Still, repatriation adjustment is a valuable different phenomenon in some cases, and it is decent to investigate more regarding the experience to find the significance the phenomenon. Another suggestion is about expectations that related to life, it is also affecting the process of readjustment. As a result, the readjustment may be assumed to be successful when their expectations are realized. Therefore, a desire to return possibly affects the readjustment, if returnees' expectation were matched with the current situation and reality, the adjustment possibly went smooth as well (Naito, 2016). As far as the researcher is concerned, it has not been a program or designated system that ensured the reverse cultural adjustment were going smooth. This study also to trace how far the returnee adjust with the current home culture, the magnitude of the shock during the readjustment, how the organization should respond that condition, and how the returnee influenced by the host culture and how it affected the organization.

Methods

The researcher applied semi-structured interview to collect data for this study and analyzed data by using qualitative data coding method. Data was collected by interviewing 7 faculty members who have been studying abroad for the last 10 years. These samples were representing those who returning back to Winayaka Business School with various characteristic. Data collection were considered sufficient by the researcher since the adjustment found saturated. The semi-structured interview aimed to know what returnee felt or think when they were returning and subjectively reveals respondents experience which considered as reverse culture shock phenomenon. Based on semi-structured interviews, researcher obtained various statements that exposed returnees returning experiences as data (Open Coding), processed into qualitative data coding method where researcher highlighted several key words that mentioned by respondents (Axial Coding), and categorized the data into several categories as the main issue that need to be interpreted (Selective Coding).

Results and Discussion

This study has summarized respondent answer in general in order to map respondents' condition when they were returning back to the organization. To keep the confidentiality of respondents, researcher label all respondents into these codes; A1 (Country B), B2 (Country B), C3 (Country B), D4 (Country A), E5 (Country C), F6 (Country C), and G7 (Country A).There are five types of adjustment that returnee did when they were returning back to Winayaka Business School: personal life adjustment, occupational

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responsibility adjustment, organizational culture adjustment, adjustment in contributing to the organization, and cultural dimension adjustment. For every single adjustment that returnees had done, there were strategies performed. These strategies were applied in order to deal with difficulties and challenges in current cultural adjustment. On personal life adjustment strategies applied by returnee are self-reflection (B2) openness (D4), work-life balanced (F6), changing behavior (G7); adjustment of occupational responsibility coped with individual awareness (B2), determine focus (C3), self-enforcement (E5); returnees also were doing ambidexterity approach (A1), avoid conflict (B2), anticipation (D4), adaptive (F6), self-enforcement (G7) to overcome the difficulties of organizational cultural adjustment; while there were also difficulties when returnees were returning to the organization that be surmounted by initiative (A1), small-step (E5), knowledge adjustment and autonomy seeking (F6), self-development (G7); last adjustment is cultural dimension adjustment which solved by self-actualization (D4), persuading others (E5), mutual respect (F6), cultural blend (F6), hierarchical respect (G7), and engage in politics (B2).

Table 1: Types of Adjustment Experienced by Returnees

No	Types of Adjustment	Description	Strategies
1	Personal Life Adjustment (Family, Social, etc)	Personal life adjustment is one of the difficulties encountered by returnees in a sense of adjusting with returnees' personal life. The adjustment is common to families or societies for the returnees since they were returning to the home country.	Self-reflection, Openness, Work-life Balanced, and Changing Behavior
2	Occupational Responsibility Adjustment (Multitasking Job)	Occupational responsibility adjustment is an issue where returnees have to deal with their new occupational responsibilities such as managerial things which was different with their research knowledges that had been studied abroad.	Individual Awareness, Determine Focus, and Self-Enforcement
3	Adjust with Organizational Culture (Rhythm, Workload, Pace, etc)	Organization Culture adjustment occurs when returnees have to fit their culture as an individual with culture of the organization and the working style.	Self-adapted / Ambidexterity, Avoid Conflict, Anticipate, Adaptive, Self-enforcement
4	Desire to contribute to the organization after returned	The process where returnee were returned and tried to contribute to the organization.	Initiative, Small-step Contribution, Knowledge Adjustment, Self-development
5	Cultural Dimension in term of Power Distance, Individualism, and Long-term Orientation	Disparity of cultural dimension between host and home country culture when it was affecting returnee perception regarding the application of culture holistically.	Engage in politics, Self-actualization, Persuading Others, Mutual Respect, Hierarchical Respect

a. Personal Life Adjustment

In interpreting Personal Life Adjustment as a challenge, some respondents have their own strategies. Those strategies are Self-reflection, Openness, Work-life Balanced, and Changing Behavior. B2 come up with **self-reflection** in order to have more time with his family by reducing his working hours.

> *"I tried to become a less work-a-holic than I was before. I spend more time for my family, I put more attention for them after returned to Winayaka Business School." –(B2)*

Furthermore, D4 had the situation where she **opens to any advice** and listen to her family members that remind about there were things she needs to adjust in order to cope with the culture.

> *"I had the epiphany when my sister said 'You're no longer abroad, you're in your home country now. You have to follow the rules here.'. Now's the time I compromise others." –(D4)*

Also, **changing behavior** in order to adapt and to have a work-life balance was applied by F6 after he returned to the organization back then.

> *"What can I do, what I can change, I change. Change my self-routine, everything. Work, mindset, life balance." –(F6)*

Along with it, G7 showed the similar respond toward this challenge and how he applied the strategies in his personal life.

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> *"Abroad, I was used to orderliness. While here, I couldn't find that. Even so, I keep trying to be more in order and more discipline. That was the change of mindset." –(G7)*

b. Occupational Responsibility Adjustment

C3 determined her **focus** in order to cope with this challenge. Focus means selecting one thing to be optimized. C3 had known well her role in the organization. Although C3 admitted that she found it difficult to optimize her responsibility as a PhD researcher, however she decided to focus on her managerial tasks.

> *"Being a PhD and a manager are two things that require different abilities. PhD ideally needs space to splash the work and lecture, meanwhile, a manager has to complete the to-do-list, has less space of work freedom, and also responsible to stakeholders." –(C3)*

Unlike C3, B2 judged when returnees were returning back, whether it fits returnees' competences or not, they must be **aware** of all the demands, responsibilities, and also consequences of the existing work in the organization. Aware means comprehend the situation of the organization right after they re-joined the organization, because when organization was about to developed, there were more demands and responsibilities given to returnees.

> *"Not just teaching, writing research, publications, and community service, but at the time in the organization we must have the value of organizational awareness and understand that there were many individuals were having interests." –(B2)*

E5 also regards that task and duty between a PhD researcher and organization manager were a unity that must be combined whether they were capable or not. He considered that there have to be **self-enforcement** as an individual in regard to confront with these challenges.

> *"Here, we must be able to do institutional development, teaching tasks, research, and devotion must walk everything. For multitasking issue, I do not know if training would be necessary. I think we had considered each other as an adult, so we must adjust independently. I still struggle for this." –(E5)*

c. Organizational Culture Adjustment

Interpretation of A1's strategy to align with organization culture was to **manage the perception** or orientation, discern every single of organizational strategy and then how to align with the strategy in different context. The purpose is being equally adapted in the use of several orientations.

> *"We quickly have to be able to know when we have to become family oriented, innovation oriented, or bureaucracy oriented. For some people, most of them want to listen and adapt, for character is hard to alter as it is formed since the early childhood. But here organization hope to be able to adapt and compromise." –(A1)*

To **Avoid conflict** was one of the adjustments applied to cope with organization culture by B2. There was unmet expectation by B2 when returning back to the organization which allows conflict occurred within the organization.

> *"There were so much pressures between interests which we have to learn on how we perform without engender any conflict." –(B2)*

When returning back to the organization, several organization regulations may not fit with returnees' culture or expectation, D4 tried to **anticipate** the incompatibility of expectations by lower it down.

> *"I am a type that always practice to minimalize expectations, then we won't be disappointed. When coming back here, I encounter a regulation that was hard for me to adjust." –(D4)*

Another strategy is being adaptive. **Adaptive** in this context means being flexible of the real situation in the organization. There were few things that might not in line with expectation, because when faculty members that studied abroad returning to Winayaka Business School, everything started from scratch again, rebuild the competencies needed to run the organization.

> *"When coming back to Indonesia, build again the connection. I change my self-routine, and others stuffs such as work, mindset, and life balance. I needed time to adapt the working rhythm here again." –(F6)*

Another strategy applied in order to keep up with the working culture in the organization is to struggle as the time goes by. **Self-enforcement** along repatriation process necessarily needed for returnees who encounter difficulties when rejoining the organization.

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"By the time there are improvement here in the organization. I tried to enjoy my life, whatever life brings, be positive, and what makes it better is because I had familiar with Winayaka Business School so I understand more." –(G7)

d. Desire to Contribute to the Organization After Returned

Initiative was done in order to contribute to organizational development, especially when there were many things that need to be addressed within the organization. When A1 returned, he mapped problems that exist within the organization and tried to make improvements to the organization.

"About expectation, I felt the 2012 system was severely bad. That's where I start to build a team to prepare the preliminary accreditation. I made the team to make shared vision, do we still want Winayaka Business School to have the same condition after 5 years?" –(A1)

Furthermore, there was a desire for E5 to contribute to the organization by empowering spirit of research-oriented culture, however he realized that such system has not gone well at the moment. Therefore, E5 tried to start doing the **small-step** contribution based on his expertise.

"Me and my lab colleague tried to make or at least pushes to conduct research. If there are more community that arrives, I hope there are critical mass for research." –(E5)

Knowledge adjustment means an adjustment that needed when there was an incompatibility between what had been learned abroad and with the current condition of the organization. F6 experienced an expertise adjustment since the knowledge of what he had learned abroad had not been applied in Indonesia.

"The challenge when I go back is bigger, because the subject that I studied abroad haven't been able to be implemented 100% here, so I have to adjust. Culture adjustment, and more adjustment." –(F6)

G7 tried to contribute with the way he developed himself. G7 looking for an autonomy where he can explore more about the organization as well as his expertise. G7 did **self-development** to be able to run the organization.

"When I was coming back, a bit surprised because there are a lot to fix, especially the system. I feel more suitable to be separated from the headquarter. I asked to be separated and it was approved. Also, we have fast-pace working culture which really fit with my style." –(G7)

e. Cultural Dimension Adjustment

At this point, B2 who came from Country B has tried to **engage in politics** since he jumped from the culture where the dimension of power distance is low, into the high one. On **Power Distance** dimension, Country B scores very low according to Hofstede Insight (2017). B2 has anticipated this by being in harmony with the organization since Indonesian accepting hierarchy procedures where inequalities among power holder and subordinate, hence politics is inevitable.

"The people abroad is nice, supportive, friendly and we learn to be nicer. But since I got back here, senior have greater power than the ones below them in the structure (younger). Because basically human had interest... so yes, we must learn to be political." –(B2)

In line with what B2 stated, D4 also did politics as the strategy for **self-actualization** in the organization. D4 looking for something that individually able to distinguish herself with others. Through **individualism** cultural dimension researcher considered quite far gap between Indonesia and Country A. It is easy for Country A populations to approaching their partner to seeking information. Therefore, self-actualization in the organization is one the thing considered important by D4 to adjust from **individualism** society to Indonesia collectivism cultural dimension.

"I hate to be equated with others, I must be different with others." –(D4)

Still at the same country and the same tools, Hofstede 6-D Models Comparison, researcher analyzed strategy that G7 applied to overcome the adjustment by highlighted **power distance** cultural dimension between Indonesia and Country A. G7 had shifted from two differences cultural dimension, from the low score dimension of power distance, into the high one. In regard to overcome this hierarchical situation, G7 **respect** the seniority in the organization.

"This is where the generation gap still exists. When I am back here, I adjust to the culture of respect, for example when calling the superior name based on position with "Pak, Prof". There is a hierarchy that I need to respect." –(G7)

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E5 come up with an approach of **persuading others**. There were many cultural effects that brought to Indonesia by E5, one of those was a paradigm of cultural dimension where its people had **long-term orientation** paradigm. When E5 returned to Indonesia, he focused on institutional development and persuade others with research issues.

"In my opinion, research-related discussion here is still lacking. I hope in the future there are more collaboration between various subjects of expertise. The returnees should keep up their research ethos, continue the research culture here if they could." –(E5)

Mutual respect and **cultural blend** become one of the strategy applied by F6 to overcome cultural dimension problem in term **individualism** dimension. F6 thought that there must be mutual respect among individual toward individualistic phenomenon in collectivism environment. F6 also repeatedly shows that he makes efforts to keep up with the home country culture after returning.

"I have become an Indonesian-Country C person with a mixed culture. My culture, is not only Sundanese as Bandung citizen, not only Indonesian. But I have had Country C's culture. There must be the attitude of appreciation in an organization" –(F6)

Conclusions

In its practice, there were different perspectives for those who returning before and after 2013. Those who returned before 2013, experienced how crucial to maintained performance of this organization, while returnees returned after the system improvement era at Winayaka Business School, sensed the challenge of being able to contribute to the organization where there was an acculturation effect of different cultural dimensions from the country where they had studied. The organization cannot treat everyone with the same approach, because the adjustment of every single individual may different depends on the phenomenon they experienced. There were certain moments at a certain time period as well. Therefore, their adjustment may different as well from one returnee to the others. It is essential to have appreciation and respect toward each other where it is aligning with Winayaka Business School values, mutual trust, integrity, innovation, service excellence, and collegiality. Returnees must have organizational awareness and understand that a lot of individuals have their own interest and drawbacks.

Repatriation Preparation to Optimize Returnees

In a way, when the organization were arranging the repatriation process, organization will get more advantage because the returnees might be able to comprehend current perspective of the organization which also utilized returnees' specific skills for the organization in the long run (Naito, 2016). This also supported by returnee's opinion that organization had to prepare the arrival of returnee, responsibility given, and the level of competences. Utilizing the returnee experience is suggested since at that point it can affect the adjustments made by returnees. This suggestion has been validated to returnee that realized Winayaka Business School should react with optimizing returnees' potential.

General Recommendation

The findings of this study might be used for another study that tried to develop or initiate faculty members' repatriation program in Winayaka Business School. Winayaka Business School is suggested to assist individual returnee adjustment specifically by inducting the current situation in the home country since the international exposure can become a turning point in his or her life and career. The longer the absence duration in the home country, the possibility of changes that take place along over the time will be higher, also the more necessary adjustment assistance. For further research, it is suggested to expand the scope of research in order to get a different insight for the organization and get representative data. Another limitation is the common level of individualism for each country. It may obtain different insight if the study collects samples from low levels of individualism countries. Not only Individualism dimension, but the others dimension such as Power Distance, Masculinity, Indulgence, Long-term Orientation, and Uncertainty Avoidance dimension as well.

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