What Makes Hotel Expatriates Remain in Their Overseas Assignments: A Grounded Theory Study

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In this study the researcher uses a qualitative research design to discover what makes hotel expatriates remain in their overseas assignments. In-depth interviews, participant observations, and personal documents are used as data collection methods. Four hotel expatriates are recruited as participants of the study. The collected interview transcripts and fieldnotes are further analyzed through the use of grounded theory. Five selective codes found as the dominant themes in this study are hotel expatriates' : (a) personality characteristics, (b) motivations to work overseas, (c) challenges derived from overseas assignments, (d) competencies, and (e) roles/identities in overseas assignments. These five main themes are further analyzed and concluded with a coherent theory that explains why hotel expatriates remain in their assignments. Key Words: Hotel, Expatriate, Personal Characteristic, Motivation, and Competence.

In today's global business world, an increasing number of employees travel and work for international assignments. Employees who participate in international assignments are commonly called expatriates. Many international hotel chains (IHCs) have sent their employees overseas to maintain corporate standards, fill skills gaps, and transfer technology and corporate culture in their worldwide properties (Lomax, 2001). Although hotel expatriates may live and work in popular tourist destinations or major cities around the world and receive attractive compensation packages, lives of hotel expatriates are not always full of glamour and excitement. They may be assigned to underdeveloped or still-developing countries, where cultures, living standards, and business practices significantly differ from those of their home countries. Failure to make cultural adjustment may result in expatriates' incompletion of their international assignments and returning to their home countries prematurely.

In previous studies across different industries researchers have reported expatriate's assignment incompletion rates of approximately 25 to 40 percent (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroch, 1999; Forster, 1997; Harrison, 1994). The incompletion of overseas assignments has cost multinational corporations between $50,000 and $150,000 financially to reassign and remunerate their expatriates (Feng & Pearson, 1999; Shay & Tracey, 1997). Other costs may include lost sales and a fragile corporate image to international corporations. For expatriates themselves, they may return to their home country with low self-esteem and become less confident for future assignments. Therefore, understanding what keeps hotel expatriates remaining in their overseas assignment is an essential component of recruitment and retention strategies for IHCs.

Many studies across various industries have been conducted to identify variables related to expatriate failure, performance evaluation, and repatriation as well as examine causal or predictive relationships among variables (Brewster, 1995; Hogan & Shelton,

1998; Lee & Liu, 2006; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1999; Teagarden & Gordon, 1995; Tung, 1981). However, in this study the researcher aimed to use a qualitative approach to explore what makes hotel expatriates stay in their international assignments. In order to provide a holistic insight into hotel expatriates' international experiences from their own perspectives, four preliminary research questions were developed:

- *How do hotel expatriates characterize their early lives, educational backgrounds, and personalities? How do these personal characteristics relate to their careers in the hotel industry?*
- *What motivate hotel expatriates to work overseas? What motivate them to continue working overseas?*
- *How do overseas assignments affect hotel expatriates values, beliefs, families, and social lives? How do they cope with the challenges derived from their overseas assignment?*
- *What do hotel expatriates learn from their overseas assignments? How do they see themselves in the overseas assignments?*

One of the key purposes of this research from business organizations' perspectives is to provide relevant information based on empirical data so that IHCs can implement in expatriates' recruitment and retention. Another key purpose is that novice hotel expatriates can refer the research findings as their guidance to help them remain on their overseas assignments. In addition, the research findings may assist hospitality educators in designing relevant curricula and help students develop competencies for their careers as hotel expatriates.

Research Methods and Designs

In this study the researcher adapted a qualitative research design in order to gain rich descriptions of hotel expatriates' feelings, meanings and interpretations given to their international assignments. Qualitative research concentrates on understanding and explaining individuals' behaviors through collecting, analyzing, and interpreting their own words, actions, and records (Berg, 2004).

Research Context

In this study the researcher tried to answer the question of how hotel expatriates cope with cultural differences in their overseas assignments. Accordingly, it is important to identify the significance of the cultural differences between hotel expatriates' home countries and the countries where they were assigned. Based on Hofstede's (1980) study of national culture in 50 countries, Chinese culture has significant characteristics distinguishing it from Western culture in four dimensions—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. Therefore, this researcher chose to select Western hotel expatriates who have working experience in the Greater China Area (GCA) as research participants. The GCA usually referring to China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, is one of the most popular travel

destinations in Northeast Asia, according to a report in 2003 by the World Tourism Organization (WTO). As tourism and business travels continue to grow in the area, IHCs have targeted the GCA to expand their operations in the global market.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher had worked with hotel expatriates for several years in her home country, Taiwan. She was an executive assistant of a hotel general manager, who is an expatriate from Europe. In this role, the researcher came in contact with many other hotel managers that are also expatriates from other western countries. She has kept in close contact with her expatriate ex-colleagues, and this provided access to the network of hotel expatriates in the region. The researcher has now lived and worked in the United States for more than six years. Her personal experience of transitioning from Chinese culture to Western culture stimulated her curiosity about those Western hotel expatriates whom she had worked with in Taiwan.

In this study, the researcher was the primary research instrument in this study. The human instrument is an important part of qualitative research. Some quantitative researchers may argue that using a human instrument raises the issue of subjectivity. Glesne (1998) emphasized that any research activities such as deciding research topics, selecting frames of interpretation involve with subjectivity. However, by recognizing subjectivity, researchers can monitor it for more trustworthy research. Throughout this research, the researcher was constantly aware of subjectivity and sought to detect and understand any personal biases, prejudices, viewpoints, or preconceptions.

Sampling

The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to recruit hotel expatriate participants. During the initial recruitment stage, the researcher contacted one of her former hotel expatriate colleagues and asked if he would participate in the study. After he had agreed to participate, she asked if he would refer any hotel expatriates in the GCA from his network to her. One hotel expatriate was referred. The researcher contacted her Taiwanese ex-colleagues who were still working in the hotel industry and asked them if they could refer any expatriates. Two of her ex-colleagues referred four hotel expatriates. Among six potential research participants, the researcher discovered that one hotel expatriate was a Chinese American, and another no longer worked in the hotel industry. Therefore, they were excluded in the study. A total of four hotel expatriates were recruited in this study. Internal Review Board approval was granted for the study, and informed consent was provided by the participants. Confidentiality of hotel expatriates' identities was assured by the use of pseudonyms. The demographic information of the participants was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Hotel Expatriate Participants

Participants / Background	Julian	Leon	Marco	Simon
Origin	Austria	Germany	Italy	Austria
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	45	66	45	58
Education	Bachelor's Degree	Apprenticeship & Bachelor's Degree	MBA	Apprenticeship Certificate
Marital status	Married	Divorced	Married	Married
Direct family members	0	0	3 daughters	1 son
No of countries worked	10	24	14	9
Years worked in the industry	23 years	46 years	23 years	43 years

Data Collection

The researcher used in-depth interviews, participant observations, and personal documents for data collections of the study. Glesne (1998) mentioned that the practice of relying on multiple methods commonly called triangulation helps ensure the validity and reliability of qualitative studies. Among three methods, in-depth interview was the primary data collection method in the study. An in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol was used to ensure that all participants provided information regarding their expatriate experience. The researcher interviewed all participants in English in the GCA where they worked for their overseas assignments. Each interview lasted approximately one and an half hours and was recorded by digital devices. The researcher hired a graduate student whose native language is English to transcribe the recorded interviews into verbatim written records, the accuracy of which was verified by comparing the tapes with the transcripts by the researcher.

The second data collection method, participant observations, was used to support the data gathered from the in-depth interview. Glesne (1998) emphasized that participant observations provide the opportunity for researchers to trust their participants by learning firsthand how the actions of participants correspond to their words. In participant observations, researchers act primarily as observers but have some interactions with studied participants (Spradley, 1980). In this study, hotel lobbies and expatriate offices where the participants worked were observed. These observations helped researchers in this study become acquainted with hotel expatriates' working environments. In addition, the participants' interactions with their employees and local communities were observed. Brief notes were taken during each observation, and detailed fieldnotes were later developed.

The third data collection method was personal documents. Personal documents including diaries, letters, pictures, records, and memorabilia can be used to incorporate into individuals' experience and behaviors (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This study used photographs, provided by participants, as personal documents to supplement the data

source. Photographs record memorable moments such as family events, social gatherings, celebration of newborns, and other special moments of human lives. Reviewing these pictures helps hotel expatriate participants recall and make meaning of what they experienced during their overseas assignments. Participants were inquired to give brief descriptions of the photos they provided.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was used to conduct the data analysis in this study. Grounded theory, also called constant comparison method is a qualitative data analysis procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which involves a three-step process—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In the study, interviews transcriptions, participant observation fieldnotes, and photograph documents were read and reread in order to find commonalities (open codes). Categories (axial codes) were created for each recurrent topic and were used as the basis for analyzing new data that were either classified into an existing category or used to modify or create new categories. Relationships among and between categories were explored and analyzed in order to identify underlying themes (selective codes). At final, researcher concluded a theoretical assertion based on the discovered main themes.

Like validity and reliability to a quantitative study, trustworthiness is of the utmost importance when conducting qualitative research. Qualitative researchers use trustworthiness to ensure if their work meets the criteria of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). In this study, trustworthiness was constantly reviewed during the research design as well as during data collection in this study. The study utilized in-depth interviews, participant observation, and photographs to triangulate the findings. In addition, trustworthiness of the study was established through the use of peer debriefings and member checks. Peer debriefings were accomplished by sharing the data and ongoing data analysis with colleagues. Member checks involved two participants who were asked to provide feedback during data analysis, interpretation, and the formulation of the coherent theory. This served to ensure that the essence of participants' experiences was adequately described.

Research Findings

Based on the grounded theory, open codes, axial codes, and selective codes were developed in the study. The grounded theory data analysis map is shown in Figure 1. There were 71 open codes found in this study. These conceptual accounts were refined, based on their attributes and relationships to one another and combined into similar categories—36 axial codes. From axial codes, five selective codes as the dominant themes in this study were integrated, including expatriates' personal characteristics, motivations to become hotel expatriates, competencies, challenges derived from overseas assignments, and roles/identities in their overseas assignments. Based on the five dominant themes, a coherent theory was developed for this study.

Figure 1. The grounded theory data analysis map
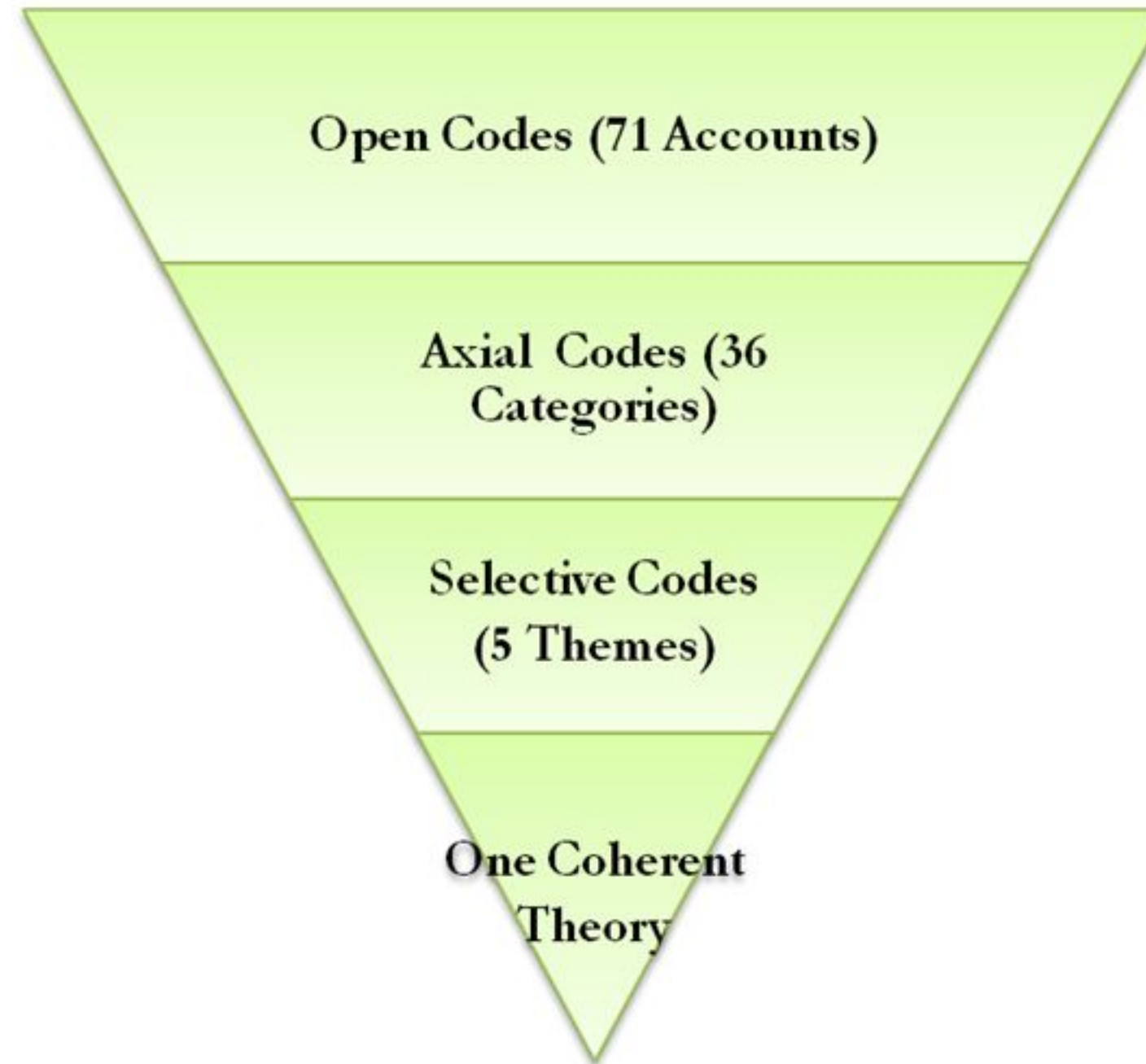
Theme I: Personal Characteristics – *A hand-on and people person who devoted to the hotel career with perseverance and an open mind*

Participants in this study were found to be very hands-on to actively involve themselves in hotel operations. Leon who was a general manager did not like to sit in his office but preferred to walk around the hotel property, observe his employees' performance, assist his staff if they encountered any operational problem, and take care of hotel customers. When Leon was a student in the apprentice school in Germany, he shared: "I was never [clearing throat] a very good student [sniff]. I, uh, don't like to sit, uh, in the bench and listen to instruction. I'm uh, very operational. I like to be in the kitchen."

Participants were also found to like to meet people, work with people, and make friends from all over the world. They stated:

> I am a people person. I like things with people, I decided either to be a doctor or to become a hotel manager; both have to do with people. (Julian) Uh, I know when I worked [in the hotel], this has to do with people most of the time. That means, uhm, it is in both ways for the customers and for the associates. (Julian)

> You live a life that you meet a lot of people, you meet thousands and hundreds of thousands of people, and you might have a fantastic relationship. (Marco)

So to me, all every weekend, there're always activities. We always arrange every weekend two parties for the four weeks leading to Christmas [sigh]. My goodness, you know, heavy drinking and socializing. (Simon)

Devotion to the hotel industry was another key personal trait found in this study. Participants spent extended hours working in the hotel for many years and yet still enjoyed doing it very much. They noted:

You don't do this [working in the hotel] as a 9 to 5 job, but you do it really because you want to do it. You want to look beyond, uh, beyond the frontiers. (Marco)

And just for your information, today, until now, I did not have a time to eat. I did not [have] breakfast; I did not [have] lunch, until now. Because all people they want to see you, and I want to make sure that I don't miss a lot of uhm, opportunities. And you may believe that and until today, the last time my meeting was last night at 9 o'clock. But, Thank God, I take vitamins [laugh]. (Marco)

Many of my friends, say you are 66 years old, why don't you retire, and I simply say what shall I do then? You know, if I have nothing to do, you know, I wouldn't know what to do with myself. This entire industry which I am creating or the hotel which I manage, it's my entire life. If you take this away from me, I wouldn't know how to live. To sit either at home, and do absolutely nothing, I think it would be a nightmare [laugh]. (Leon)

So a lot of dropouts [from hotel schools], because a lot of people say that you know, this is not my kind of cup of tea to work many hours. For the people who know they want to do it, they stick to it, they're happy. I have not [had] one day where I'm not happy in my work 'cause it's what I like to do. (Julian)

You become married to the job. And once a hotelier, you're always a hotelier. I think we couldn't work in any other industry. Once you're there, you're there [in the hotel] forever until you die, you know, or retire. I don't know what other job I would have liked to do, you know. (Simon)

Another characteristics found in the participants was being persevering. They worked very hard for this industry that they loved very much. They added:

This master cooks they are known to be very, very tough people to work for. So, uh, they were not very educated but they're very harsh in their training methods. And I remember clearly that many evenings, I came home crying on my mother's shoulder and would say you know, I can't stand it anymore. I think it is because of my mother uh, encouraging me and uh, telling me you have chosen it because you like cooking.

Therefore, let not this one person discourage you from it. Today, after forty six years in the business, I still can say it was the most fantastic decision I ever made to work in this industry. (Leon)

None of these gentlemen or my peer colleagues would never ever come to this part [Asia] and take this job that we are doing. Uh, because the uhm, benefits which one has financially or living wise, brings with it also a lot of pain so to speak. Uh, first of all, the long hour working, none of our European colleagues would ever, ever accept the working time of what we are producing here [China]. (Leon)

Since it was not the first time for us [overseas assignment]. So we have these challenges. We had them in the Middle East; we had them in South Africa; we had them in China. Once you accept it, there were good times also. (Simon)

The participants were found to be open-minded towards their expatriation assignments and local cultures. Participants emphasized that having an open heart to understand the local culture was the key to be successful in overseas assignments. They shared:

The expat himself has to make a decision if he wants to know this [local culture] or not. You know, if he says 'No, I'm not interested in the culture where I live.' I think, uhm, he will make a mistake because he will not understand where he is, you know. If you know where, you know, certain decisions come from because of Taoism or Confucius or what other traditions in this country. In the family life, you know, you can understand your staff much better and why they are making decision, what are the pressures of these people, you know. (Julian)

The assignment to come to China, uhm, was again not a question of will I like it there or what is China. I simply said, okay, let me see what the country can offer, or what can I do to make it success to the assignment I have been assigned to. Uhm, so there was never any question what it is. (Leon)

The blacks [native people] themselves are extremely wonderful people if you come to know them. Uh, they are, once you are able to understand their culture, and I'm grateful that in earlier years, I attended classes too, although in part I do still, uh, attending classes to understand the culture of the blacks. (Leon)

Theme II: Motivations – *To expand views of the world by learning different cultures and gaining more experience from their overseas assignments*

Participants in the study decided to accept their overseas appointments based on non-financial related causes which also motivate them to remain in their overseas assignment. Julian chose to become a hotel expatriate soon after he finished his education because he liked to travel, and travel expanded his horizon. He said, "Being in different environments, in my point of view, it keeps you fresh in your mind. If you change every three years, you can look for new things; you come to a new environment." Julian concluded that his motivation to become an expatriate was: "So, I think that uh, for me, it confirmed what I thought when I chose to go into this business, is that I can broaden my view." Simon acknowledged the same motivation with Julian, "The most important I think is that your horizon is much wider. You open your horizon much further and then if you live in Europe only."

Being able to learn different cultures from overseas assignment was another main motivation for participants to work overseas. Julian shared: "For me, this [working overseas] was one way to see other countries and learn the cultures of other countries. Every single experience gave me something to learn and to think about." Leon was also motivated by the free lessons that his overseas assignments provided. He shared, "Having had the chance without spending a single cent to learn so much about the world makes me uh, extremely fortunate." He also shared that one should not take a job only for the financial benefit: "If you look at what you are doing only as a job, which at the end of month pays you whatever salaries. Then, you are at the wrong place. You should not be in the hospitality industry."

Gaining experiences from many of their overseas assignments kept participants motivated to work as expatriates. Participants believed that they could utilize those experiences they learned for their next assignment or even for their life lessons. Julian remarked, "You have a big spectrum of experience that you can draw from. And some of it you can transfer and some of it you can't." Similar motivation was found in Simon's experience. Simon observed: "You learn out of every cultural experience you go through, right. The learning process you go through, you can gain out of it in the future."

Theme III: Challenges – *Cultural/religious differences, language barrier, bureaucratic system, and work family conflict*

Because all participants came from Europe, differences between their own cultures and local cultures in overseas assignments became one of major challenges for them to cope with. Simon found working in Saudi Arabia was very challenging because of the country's unique culture and religion. He noted:

> I wouldn't say worst, but Saudi Arabia I think was difficult. Saudi Arabia was, it was a dull lifestyle, its religion, you know, I mean, the country itself, the restrictions you have to have. Unfortunately, being in a situation work is more difficult, you know. I think I would say Saudi Arabia, I think because it was more difficult.

When Simon first worked in China in 1983, he experienced some culture shocks. He called his challenging experience a "nightmare." He remarked:

> In China you couldn't find anything. I mean, it was very limited, but I mean, there was enough fruits and vegetable. But some things you had to buy, the quality of the meat was, hygiene was total disgusting. [Sigh] So that was our challenge that we had.
>
> I mean, everywhere you go 7 o'clock in the evening everything is closed. You can jump up and down even in this hotel where we stayed, five-star, they call it five-star. No way, no food anymore, 7 o'clock that's it.
>
> I mean, the boys [hotel employees] were hopeless, they were so rude and you know there were big fingernails everywhere, and smoking these days, everyone smoked like a chimney. They disgusted us, completely.

During Julian's overseas assignment in Malaysia, he faced some cultural and religious challenges. He shared:

> You deal with Indians, with Chinese, and with Muslims, and which uhm, in this society is very difficult, for this society themselves, to deal with themselves. And if you are then a westerner, being in this environment, I think it is uh, a difficult assignment to understand.
>
> Also I think for a westerner educated in their religion, to understand the Muslim culture is very difficult. Without "touching", just to understand where it comes from and how this goes about. I tried to study this, read the Koran; I tried to understand where this comes from. And uhm, this was a challenge for me in this country [Malaysia].

The second challenge found in the study is language barrier. None of the participants spoke the local languages so that English became commonly used by expatriates to communicate with local employees during their overseas assignments. Simon was challenged by his non-English-speaking Chinese employees. Marco was also surprised by the small percentage of English speaking Chinese employees when he worked in Taiwan. He experienced a language barrier with his local staff. He observed: "Unfortunately, in Taiwan, English is not spoken. Very, very small percentage, very, very small [speaking English]. So communication with my associates becomes a challenge to me."

Participants were challenged by different bureaucratic systems in their overseas assignments. Simon reported Saudi Arabia had many restrictions, and the business environment was very rigorous, therefore, he felt challenged as a hotel expatriate to work in the country. Simon had a similar experience in his China assignments. He found that the communist government was very bureaucratic to work with by saying, "Very difficult there, most difficult work to work with local people and the government people, right, they were really hard and really communist. Very difficult to work with."

In addition to their long working hours, hotel expatriates sometimes report to their overseas assignments without bringing their families. Therefore, balancing their work and family lives becomes an absolute challenge. In this study, participants were found to sacrifice their family and personal relationship in order to remain devoted to their work in the overseas assignment. Marco, married with three daughters, was engaged most of his time in work, so he felt challenged by the pressure from his family members. He observed:

> My life started to become extremely busy because of the demanding of the job. And because I used to dedicate very little time to my family and therefore I suffer a lot of pressures from my family, a lot of pressures, so my daughters would say 'What is more important? The money or us?' Because I used to earn a lot of money.

> If I could go back again, I would re-do it [overseas assignment], entirely, without one missing there. I would only change one thing. I would not get married [laugh]. It's not because I'm being an arrogant snob. Because my family will suffer, because when you work in this business, this business makes you, and if you want to do it well and successful, you have to neglect your entire life and your entire time. So obviously my family, definitely, has suffered a lot. They start missing me. Sometimes I want to see my children too.

Because working overseas, Simon was suffered from the distanced relationship with his family and relatives in Austria. He observed:

> Surely, you live abroad, you contact your [family] as close as you want, you know. It may be the distance of your work, and secondly, in today's world we are so busy with some other things that uhm, sometimes you know, relationships suffer, you know, even personal relationships or family relationships.

Simon painted a picture of his son's two-year-old birthday party. Simon cherished his only son very much but he struggled to see him every day because of his work. He commented on the picture:

> He means so much to me and my wife. You even cannot explain such a feeling if you do not have children by yourself. He transformed our lives in such an extent that we are still dreaming sometimes and cannot believe that is really through. He brings us so much joy and happiness to our lives. Because I come home late in weekdays and he is usually in bed already. I can only spend more time with him during weekends.

Theme IV: Competencies – *A leader with skills of being adaptive, culturally sensitive, diplomatic, and glocalized*

Competencies focus on observable behaviors that distinguished superior managers from poor managers (Chung-Herrera, Enz, & Lankau, 2003). Participants in this study were found competent with leadership skill, adaptability, cultural sensitivity, diplomacy, and glocalization. Leadership refers to a manager's ability to achieve organizational objectives and work as a member of a team. Leon demonstrated his competence of leadership in his overseas assignments. He emphasized that his success came from the effort of his hotel management team instead of his own effort: "I believe strongly that never, ever can you do something alone. Whatever achievement now to open the hotel, or when the hotel runs, whatever success comes, comes only from the team and not from one individual." Leon also showed the ability to guide his Chinese employees with his global experiences. He added:

> You shall not even think or try to make out of a Chinese colleague a German, but rather to guide and teach the Chinese, you know, to organize themselves in a better way to do their job which you have learned for many, many years in the hospitality industry.

Julian understood his responsibility of being a hotel expatriate was to achieve operational goals through leading and motivating his team:

> In China, you are more like a coach, which leads the way. And people would appreciate if you teach and show them things they don't know.

> I think the most important part for me in my experience is that you show people, doesn't matter who you are, uh that you are not somebody aloof floating around as a general manager or foreigner. This doesn't change if you're expat or not. It's a leadership issue, which I think is the most important thing.

Adaptability refers to a manager's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, different working practices, and different cultures (Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Hurn, 2006). This competence is revealed in the responses of hotel expatriates participants in the study. In particular, this competence is evident for participants to remain on their assignments. Simon noted:

> I have worked in so many countries. In order to survive, you have to adapt to first to country, to the religion, and also to the people.

> Sometime it is difficult to live like in the Middle East or South Africa or so. Many of my friends burned out, what they said they couldn't take it. So, that's why I think it's very important, especially in our industry, to adapt, be easy going, and that reflects good patience in China.

The most challenging assignment for Julian was his expatriation in Malaysia because he was challenged by the country's three different ethnic groups - Chinese, Muslin, and Indian. However, because of his ability to adapt to different societies, he was able to accomplish his assignment in Malaysia. His learning experience of adapting to different cultures had further assisted him in making a better adjustment in his overseas assignment in Taiwan:

> Taiwan was not a challenge after Malaysia. So it was uh, actually easier to adapt, easier to understand where you are. But I learned a lot in Malaysia from the Chinese culture because we had Chinese people, and I learned from three cultures in one country which is very good.

Cultural sensitivity refers to a manager's ability to respect and understand local cultures and approach cultural differences with an open mind (Heller, 1980). The participants were also found to equip cultural sensitivity as one of their main competences. Leon shared that approaching cultural differences with an open mind was the key to successful expatriation by noting his experience of working in 24 different countries, "You need a lot of understandings to accept different cultures. To be able to work with your local colleagues, you shall not even think or try to make out of a Chinese colleague a German." Julian emphasized that being able to accept different cultures in the local community helped him understand his local employees better: "You can understand your staff much better. Why they are making decision or not some of these things, or you know, what are pressures for these people."

Leon opined that to be able to satisfy the company's shareholders, especially the local hotel owners and IHCs was very important to a hotel GM. He considered himself as a diplomat between his hotel management company and local hotel owners.

> You have to find the balance between the two [local owners and hotel management company], and sometimes not so easy to uh, balance with the hotel management company, and how to explain to the owners the situation, how to communicate with the owner, who is a Chinese national and believe in his culture. So you need a lot of balancing acts sometimes in order to keep the peace between [them].

Glocalization refers to a manager's ability to think globally and act locally during their overseas assignments (Wind, 1986) which is an important competence for international managers. Hotel expatriate are hired by IHCs in order to maintain corporate management standards in their overseas properties. They need to think globally to reflect corporate management standards and policies as well as act locally to apply approaches that domestic employees will accept and get jobs done efficiently and effectively. Glocalization was a significant competence shared among the participants. Julian stated:

> It's your part of your job description to have a mission, and communicate a mission, and [have] multiple people to, to follow. And uh, so it has nothing to do with the culture or the country. The difference is how do you communicate this and how do you get the people to do the things you want

them to do. Uh, which then has to do with the people's behavior, social structure, uh, way of how they want to learn, how they perceive information, and also the means of communication.

Leon who had many years of hotel experience in 24 different countries emphasized:

> To guide and teach the Chinese, you know, to organize themselves in a better way to do their job which you have learned for many, many years in the hospitality industry

Theme V: Roles/Identities – *A teacher, leader, learner, contributor, and role model*

The last theme found in this study was related to roles and identities that hotel expatriates perceived for themselves during their overseas assignments. This study discovered five perceived identities from the research participants. Leon perceived himself as a teacher among local employees during his overseas assignments. Leon taught his employees how to perform their jobs in a more effective way and to value what they contributed to their jobs. He emphasized:

> I teach my people, uh, to say nobody is more important than the other, the general manager is not more important than the dish washer. And I expect that everybody respects this and uh, does this belief and executes this belief.

Julian considered himself more like a coach among his Chinese employees: "In China you are more like a coach, and people accept that and appreciate if you teach and show them things they don't know."

Identity as a leader was also found among the participants. Julian considered himself a leader in his expatriate assignments and thought that his role as a leader would not change because of the change of his assignments:

> It is the expat's function to find out where does he contribute to the company, as a leader and a general manager. What are your areas which you should look into uh, to give an impact. But this doesn't stop with the country, this is in every, it's your part of your job description to have a mission, and communicate a mission, and multiple people to, to follow. And uh, so it has nothing to do with the culture or the country. The difference is how do you communicate this, and how do you get the people to do the things you want them to do.

During their overseas assignments, participants also perceived themselves as learners to explore and learn different cultures in different countries. Participants noted:

> For me, this [working overseas] was one way to see other countries and learn the cultures of other countries, and expand my horizon. (Julian)

> I learn a lot from them [his local employees]. I think they can learn some from me, but I think I learn a lot from the local staff in the every country. And uhm, mentality wise, food wise, uh philosophy wise. There's a lot of things you can learn. (Julian)

> I mean learning, you learn out of every cultural experience you go through, right. We all can learn from each other. I think that's one important thing, and you do become more open also, right, and you open up yourself. (Simon)

> I do not want to learn from the expatriates, I want to learn from the locals; I want to get into the culture. To understand the culture to be more successful in life, in your meetings, because you have to make the best you can. (Marco)

Leon traveled to work in many countries. He was always fascinated with the local histories and cultures. He emphasized that there was good and bad in every country where he had worked but each country had something unique to offer. He relayed his experience in South Africa:

> The blacks themselves are extremely wonderful people if you come to know them. Uh, they are, once you are able to understand their culture, and I'm grateful that in earlier years, I attended classes to understand the culture of the blacks.

> It's very interesting to, to learn about it [African culture]. That, itself was interesting. And uhm, my entire 10 years there was a wonderful experience. It was my most beautiful time in my entire career, and especially if you think about it, you know that I didn't like it at all at the beginning.

A role of being a contributor was also found in the study. As a hotel expatriate, Mr. Leon felt proud that he could contribute to the local economy and the development of the foreign country in a very small way. A news clip with a photo from a local newspaper about Leon being appointed as an honorable citizen of a city in China was provided by Leon as a personal document in the study. He was a general manager of an opening hotel in the city at the time. He commented on the news clip:

> [In the award ceremony] I was asked if it would be possible to represent my country I come from. So, in front of 500 people, I sang a German folk song which my secretary translated into Chinese. So, that in itself was a tremendous experience. And I was in the newspaper, in the local newspaper, uh, photographs were made and I was presented with a plaque that I would be a citizen of XXX. That was an achievement!

He also shared: "For the last four years, in this progress of China, it makes me feel somehow proud, that in a very, very, very small fashion I can contribute to the development of this country." Simon added his contributions about changing the mentality of his Chinese employees: "Look what happened in 1983 and now, how many things have changed, right. Look Shanghai, Guangzhou today, you wouldn't recognize it anymore, right."

Because of Leon's seniority in the hotel industry, he perceived himself as a role model to his local staff:

> So, I worked my way all the way up until today. I learned all aspects and every part of the hotel, and I can tell my staff that what you do, I have done myself several, several years ago.

> The general manager is not more important than the dishwasher. And I expect that everybody respects this and uh, does this belief and executes this belief.

> I, uh, don't see one local employee. They are part of the team. Only that they carry different names than my European colleagues"

The Coherent Theory

Based on five discovered main themes in the study, the researcher developed a key assertion as the coherent theory to answer her research questions. The coherent theory was—in the context of the hotel industry, hotel expatriates with specific personality characteristics, motivations, and competencies are capable of coping with derived challenges and remaining overseas while perceiving themselves in different roles and identities.

Discussion

This study captured the lived experiences of four western hotel expatriates working in the GCA. The research findings implied that specific personality characteristics, motivations, and competencies have helped hotel expatriates cope with derived challenges from assignments and make them remain overseas while perceiving themselves in different roles and identities. Further discussions on these findings of personal characteristics, motivations, and competencies of hotel expatriates were as followed.

Personal Characteristics

In this study, the hotel expatriate participants were found to be a hands-on and people person who devoted to the hotel career with perseverance and an open mind. The participants' characteristic of being a people person fits ideally in their hotel career because the industry focuses on a people orientation in nature. In addition, having outgoing, people oriented personalities are more likely to help hotel expatriates interact

effectively with local employees. This implication is supported by Huang, Chi, and Lawler (2005) whom sampled 83 American expatriates in Taiwan from different occupations and found that extrovert expatriates interacted better with local people at work and in daily living activities because they were more willing to speak actively with their native subordinates and colleagues.

This study also found the participants devoted themselves entirely to the hotel career. They were persevering to fulfill their missions and responsibilities in expatriate assignments. This finding is consistent with studies from Caligiuri (2000) and Rolland (2002). They had found that expatriates with high conscientiousness—being responsible, hardworking, persevering are more likely to become leaders who commit to their tasks and complete their assignments. The persevering and devotion characteristics found in the research were evident in keeping hotel expatriates on their overseas assignments.

Having an open mind was also found in the participants as one of their personal characteristics. They were very open to different cultures and were very interested in learning local cultures from local people. Teagarden and Gordon (1995) found that individuals who show openness to a new culture better fit into the environment. In this study, participants' fertile overseas working experiences—more than nine countries over 20-year work experience in the hotel industry were evident in participants' open-minded characteristic.

In addition to the findings from previous studies regarding personal traits of expatriates in different industries, this study discovered a unique personality characteristic of hotel expatriates—being hands-on. Participants in the study didn't like to sit in their offices. They liked to be in the front-line and assist their staff for any operational problems. This character was likely to help hotel expatriates fit well in their career because the industry focuses on operation details and complexity.

Motivations

In this study, participants in this study were primarily driven by nonfinancial factors to work overseas and remain in their expatriate assignments. Previous research indicated that the common motives of managers who decide to take international assignments include financial benefits, personal interests, and career advancement (Miller & Cheng, 1978). Financial benefits such as higher salaries, extra incentives, and expatriate fringe benefits and compensation are usually the key motivation for managers to work overseas, especially for European expatriates, because they attempt to escape high taxation levels in Europe (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). In this study, although all participants came from Europe, they were found to be motivated to become expatriates and retain their expatriation by nonfinancial factors. They shared that expanding their views of the world, learning different cultures, and gaining experiences from their assignments were main reasons they remained to be an expatriate. These nonfinancial motivations keep turning expatriates on to working in many different countries and being successful in their overseas assignments. In addition, when expatriates become more senior and facing critical challenges in their overseas assignments, financial related motives may not be significant and strong enough to stimulate them to work overseas persistently.

Competencies

Marx (1999) stated that most international managers were appointed by their companies based on their technical competence without any consideration of their ability to work overseas. However, managers with good performance records in the domestic operation do not necessarily fulfill the responsibilities of their overseas assignments (Marquardt & Engel, 1993). Expatriation is often characterized by high levels of stress because expatriates need to move through the process of relocation and cultural adjustment (Furnham, 1990). Researchers had found that expatriates' inability to cope with the stress from their assignment would likely set off their disengagement with the assignment, which may result in a premature return to their home countries or poor job performance in the current assignment (Caligiuri, 2000; Huang et al., 2005).

There have been many research efforts in establishing management competencies and skills across different industries. The most frequently identified management competencies are adaptability, flexibility, communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and leadership skills (Bueno & Tubbs, 2004; Chung-Herrera et al., 2003; Engholm & Rowland, 1996; Heames & Harvey, 2006; Hurn, 2006; Kriegl, 2000; Whitfield, 1995). In this study, the finding of three competences of hotel expatriates - leadership, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity is consistent with the previous literature. These three competences were evident in helping hotel expatriates make better adjustments in foreign countries and remain in their overseas assignments. In addition, this study uncovered two other important competencies that hotel expatriates equipped to conquer their challenges from overseas assignments. They were diplomacy and glocalization. Participants in this study were competent in being diplomatic among local hotel owners and between local owners and IHCs. With the diplomatic skill, hotel expatriates are more likely to find a balance to meet both IHCs operation standards requirements and needs of local owners, thus maximize the welfare of all parties. How IHCs and local hotel owners satisfy hotel expatriates' performance may determine whether expatriates may remain in their assignments or not.

This study also uncovered the competence of glocalization among participants. Glocalization, a portmanteau of globalization and localization introduced by Wind (1986) is the concept of thinking globally and acting locally. It suggests that the strategy of an international corporation follows a worldwide perspective, but that every detail of the strategy takes into accounts the characteristics and cultural differences of the local country where its subsidiary is located. The participants in this present study had been hired by well-known IHCs to build and maintain corporate management standards in their overseas properties. With the skill of glocalization, hotel expatriates are more likely to think globally - to reflect corporate management standards and policies, and act locally - to apply local approaches that native employees would accept to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively.

This study was an effort to identify unique personal characteristics, motivations, and competencies of hotel expatriates. Based on the finding, this study concluded with a coherent theory—in the context of the hotel industry, hotel expatriates with specific personal characteristics (hands-on, people oriented, devoted to the hotel career, persevering, and open-minded) , motivations (expanding their views to the world, learning different cultures, and gaining experiences from their assignments), and

competencies (adaptability, cultural sensitivity, leadership, diplomacy, and glocalization) are capable of coping with derived challenges (cultural/religious differences, language barrier, bureaucratic system, and work family conflict) and remaining overseas while perceiving themselves in different roles and identities (teacher, leader, learner, contributor, and role model). The results of this study also indicated that participants' personality characteristics were the dominate element that further enhanced the development of their motivations and competencies. However, these three elements, personality traits, motivations, and competencies together are crucial to make hotel expatriates remain in their overseas assignments; no one element can work alone or be omitted.

This study is significant because it provides a broaden insight into hotel expatriates' overseas working experiences. The findings of this study provide useful information about hotel expatriates' personal characteristics, motivations and competencies for IHCs and may further assist them to develop effective human resources practices, such as selection, motivation, training, and retention. From educational institutions' perspectives, hospitality administration programs may design relevant curricula, such as cultural diversity to help students succeed in their future careers in the hotel industry.

Limitation of the Study

Given the nature of qualitative research and the size of the participant sample, the conclusion presented in this study is specific to this unique group of participants. This study does not intend to generalize the findings to a larger population. Accordingly, the conclusion and theory emerging from this study are firmly grounded in the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

This present research studied only the successful experiences of male European hotel expatriates. Thus, three recommendations for future research include: (a) to study hotel expatriates with premature experience and successful experience in order to explore the different personal characteristics between them, (b) to compare male and female hotel expatriates' experiences from their overseas assignments, and (c) to study characteristics of hotel expatriates' from nationalities other than European, and compare to the findings of the present study.

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