Mindset and Identity in the Globalizing Future

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Abstract

The sweeping trends in human affairs collectively known as globalization entail accelerating rates of international and intercultural contact. As international travel, global economic expansion, and multicultural communicative integration via technological advances like the Internet all increase, more and more individuals are brought into extensive contact with 'foreign' places, cultures, languages, and people. Hence the future of the human condition will involve increasing and intensifying experiences of the Other(s). Awareness of 'Otherness' raises questions of culture, identity, and global mindset. We investigate these issues in connection with an empirical study of individuals with international work experiences.

The experience of Otherness in international work settings is colored by a complex array of factors. An individual's cultural background, incorporating the belief systems and norms of the home country, will form a basis for the interpretation of other cultures. Each person also formulates a set of attitudes, values, and assumptions about other cultures that constitute his or her 'global mindset'. The formation of individual identity in interaction with the communities of practice in which the subject participates will affect their reaction to and practice in the international setting. And the context in which the international work experience occurs will materially affect an individual's performance.

Based on a study of 100 individuals working in international settings, we propose a multidimensional model for understanding the evolution of global mindset and identity and the integration of Otherness in international work settings.

Keywords: Global Mindset, Identity, International Work Experience, Culture

Introduction

Contact with other peoples and other cultures has always been a feature of human experience, especially in times of conquest, exploration and colonization. But in a world of increasing and accelerating globalization, this becomes an ever more urgent and imminent reality for a growing number of people. Contact with goods, cultural products, individuals, and information from other countries is a daily event for many people, and will be so for many more in the near future. Travelling, working, and even living abroad has become a regular feature of the experience or expectations of many. The obvious question that arises is, how do people experience and react to this intensified contact with Others? When people do live and work abroad, what aspects of increasing cultural contact have the greatest impact on the satisfaction, success, or other outcomes of an international work experience? How does an individual's identity and sense of community affect their experience in an international setting?

There are clearly many facets of our experiences with other cultures, as well as our interpretations of these experiences. We focus here on one type of experience -- international work experiences -- and on one facet of our processing of experience -- the cognitive processes that define an individual's "global mindset", that is, the constellation of values, beliefs, attitudes and orientations concerning other nationalities, cultures, places and peoples. We assume that cross-cultural and international experiences are filtered through and interpreted by an individual's global mindset, and that these mindsets, in turn, form and affect one's reactions and behavior in an international setting.

Reactions to Otherness, and global mindset, are fundamentally related to questions of identity and identity construction. We assume, following Wenger (1998), that individuals formulate their identities with reference to the communities in which they participate, and construct and perform those identities through practice. What, then, do they do when they come into contact with different communities with different practices? Individuals will confront this issue acutely when working internationally. Such an experience threatens the basis of the old identity and provides the stimulus for a reformulation of practice and a renegotiation of identity. We propose that individuals' responses to such occasions are mediated through their global mindsets.

Since identities are formulated against a background of community, it follows that what we may informally call the culture of the community is one of the elements that affects the construction of the individual's mindset. The culture of a group incorporates values, beliefs and cognitive constructs, including attitudes toward other groups and definitions of what it means to be an insider or an outsider, an Other.

It should be noted that a crucial feature of this process of experience and response to Otherness is that it is inherently dynamic. Experience, practice, and even culture all are mutable in important respects. Since global mindset is the construct of culture and experience through which people interpret the world outside their national community, it follows that mindsets are also dynamic. Our findings reported in an earlier study (Guy & Beaman 2003) indicated that mindsets are malleable, inasmuch as they are cognitive systems in which beliefs, values, assumptions, etc. interact with and are formed by experience.

Background

The issues addressed here range across the boundaries of several traditional disciplines: anthropology, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. Consequently the current study takes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing together a broad spectrum of concepts in a way that has not previously been done in current research. In this section we take a brief look at relevant literature on culture, mindset, community, and identity and discuss how these four concepts are interdependent in providing a holistic view of the process of acculturation and assimilation in an international setting.

Culture

While many approaches to culture abound, the most prominent as regards international work experience is the work of Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001) and his associates. Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another. This stresses that culture is (1) a collective, not an individual attribute, (2) not directly visible but manifested in behaviors, and (3) common to some, but not all people" (Hofstede 2001). Based on extensive empirical surveys, Hofstede proposes an analytical classification of cultures along a number of major dimensions, involving aspects such as tolerance for ambiguity, the importance attached to integration in the group, and expectations regarding equal or unequal distribution of power. Importantly for our purposes, Hofstede identifies significant differences among national cultures on attitudes and beliefs related to work.

Mindset

Numerous studies have attempted to classify individual predispositions toward a particular way of approaching an international experience according to different "mental models," "orientations," "cognitive maps," "frames of reference," and so on. The model we use draws on the work of Perlmutter (1969) and Sullivan (2001), which develops a three-way typology of "global mindset," distinguishing ethnocentric, polycentric and geocentric orientations. Our own earlier research (Guy & Beaman 2003) showed that the ability for individuals to accommodate in a foreign community is associated with their global mindset. In summary, an "ethnocentric" mindset takes the home country as the basis for beliefs and evaluations, to the point of assuming national superiority; a "polycentric" mindset entails accommodation or assimilation with the contact culture, sometimes to the extent of "going native"; and a "geocentric" orientation implicitly assumes that a universal set of values governs human interaction, downplaying the importance of cultural difference.

With respect to international work experiences, Sullivan claims that an individual's global mindset is directly related to his or her effectiveness depending on the nature of the job. In his view, ethnocentric individuals tend to excel in environments that call for significant standardization of methodology or technology, while polycentric individuals thrive in situations that require considerable sensitivity to local conditions, and geocentric individuals excel in positions that require identifying commonalities and integrating different approaches.

The Sullivan trichotomy seems to us to reflect an analytical minimum of distinctly different strategies towards the experience of the "Other": the "ethnocentric" strategy is self-affirming, asserting the values and practices of the home culture; the "polycentric" strategy is assimilationist, accommodating to and valorizing the new culture; and, the "geocentric" strategy is integrationist, seeking to incorporate diverse cultural experiences into a universal viewpoint. In view of the diversity of human intercultural experience, we see individual mindsets not as discrete categories in a typology, but rather as regions in a continuum.

Community

Extending our previous work with global mindsets, the present study emphasizes the paired concepts of 'community' and 'identity.' Our approach to community relies on the concept of communities of practice, which are groups of people who share information, insight, experience, and attitudes about an area of common interest (Wenger 1998). There are three basic characteristics: (1) mutual engagement, meaning participants in the community interact or are potentially available for interaction; (2) a joint enterprise, meaning the participants share a common interest or activity; and (3) a shared repertoire, meaning the community develops knowledge, terminology, and techniques for conducting their joint enterprise and negotiating meaning.

Pierre Bourdieu (1972) uses the concept of 'practice' to counter purely structuralist accounts of culture by describing culture as 'generated' from an underlying structure based on class and power

relations. Etienne Wenger (1998) uses the concept of the community of practice to enunciate a cross-disciplinary approach to a theory of learning that lies at the intersection of philosophy, social sciences, and the humanities. Wenger claims that social practice is the fundamental way in which we learn and become who we are – in fact, such inter- and intra-group actions form the basis of all learning. For Wenger, practice is defined as an emergent structure, neither inherently stable nor randomly changeable, that enables shared meaning, learned over time through experience, with distinct boundaries demarcating participation and non-participation in the community of practice.

Identity

The concept of identity is intricately entwined with – and in fact cannot be separated from – the concept of community: according to Wenger, "in everyday life it is difficult – and largely unnecessary – to tell exactly where the sphere of the individual ends and the sphere of the collective begins" (1998:146). Rather, the concept of identity narrows the focus to an understanding of the self and the role of self in social structures and interactions. For Wenger, the very definition of self (i.e., individuality) can only be understood in terms of the practices of the social communities in which one participates. In fact, non-

participation (of, e.g., outsiders, peripheral participants, marginalized members) is a central aspect that helps to define identity. Identity is learned and negotiated experience, defined through ongoing, pervasive and evolving participation and reification in multiple communities.

A Multi-Dimensional Model of International Work Experiences

Given the analytical considerations just discussed, it becomes apparent that international work experiences are affected by multiple factors having to do with the individual, the work assignment, and the surrounding circumstances. These factors color the ways in which an individual interprets, performs, and responds to working abroad. They may be summarized in terms of four distinct types: individual factors, situational factors, cultural factors, and identity factors. The overall multidimensional nature of the international experience that we envision is represented by the model in Figure 1. In this section, we briefly describe the four dimensions, and in the next section we exemplify each with some of the results from our empirical study of 100 individuals with international work experiences.
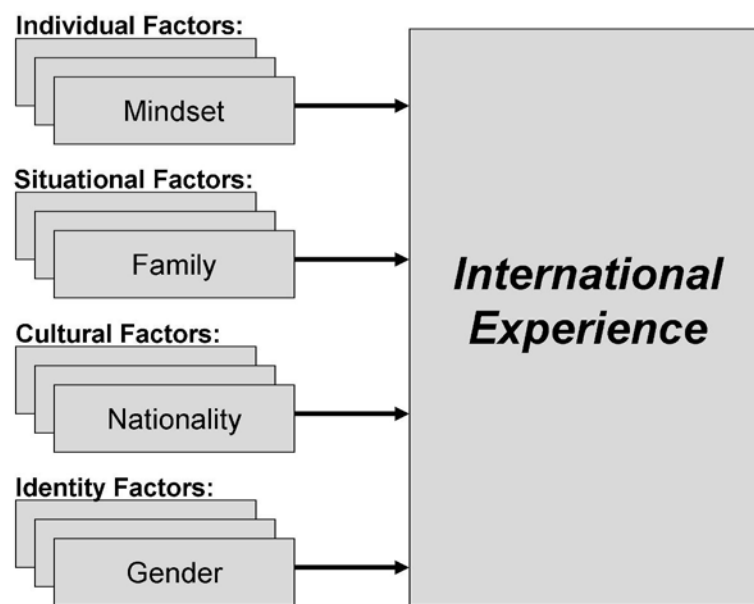
Figure 1
Multidimensional Model of International Experience.

Individual Factors

A basic premise of our work is that individuals have different capacities for dealing with international experiences. The cognitive construct of global mindset summarizes the overall orientation of an individual towards international contact. We present below examples of how the subjects in our survey

with different mindsets performed differently in their international assignments. But note that other individual factors are involved. Our previous work showed that personality traits, seen here as more permanent aspects of the individual's mental and emotional makeup, also affect international work (Guy & Beaman 2003), as do other individual

factors, such as prior foreign language study and prior experience living abroad.

Situational Factors

It is clearly not the case that any individual can perform any job in any country equally well, nor even that someone would perform equally well in a given job regardless of their circumstances at any given moment. Some situations, and some points in our lives, lend themselves better to living and working abroad than others. One situational factor that we report on in the next section is family status. Regardless of their personal propensities for intercultural experiences, individuals may have family ties that facilitate or hinder their performance in an international setting. The circumstances surrounding a particular job can also vary: more or less support from home may be available, performance of the job may be facilitated or impeded by the political or economic circumstances of the host country at the time of the international work, and so on.

Cultural Factors

As we have noted, the research on culture and work by Hofstede and others suggests significant collective differences between nations. We expect this to have ramifications for international work, in several respects. First, the cultural and linguistic difference between country of origin and country of destination should impact the level of difficulty an individual experiences in adapting to the new setting: a Frenchman in Brussels or a Canadian in Seattle should experience less culture shock than an American in Japan. But in addition, the nature of national culture may well impact global mindsets, personality norms, and identity construction. What are considered 'typical' behaviors and attitudes, and 'commonsense' beliefs in one country may be atypical or strange in another. As an example of this type of factor, we examine below some differences between the nationality groups in our sample.

Identity Factors

Finally, the fourth group of factors are those relating to the construction and performance of identity. We treat this as analytically separate from the individual factors discussed above because identity is a product of the interface between the individual and the community. As Wenger observes in the comment quoted previously, identity construction is negotiated between the individual and the community. Hence the social identities of the respondents in our survey -- their gender identities, job titles and status, and membership in communities of practice -- depend on the interaction between their selves as individual subjects and the reference groups in which they live. In the next section, we exemplify this type of factor with results on gender, distinguishing the male and female respondents to our survey.

Empirical Findings

In order to investigate the effect of these dimensions on the international work experience, we designed a study to collect from subjects who had worked internationally data on the nature and outcome of the experience and their reactions to it. We developed a questionnaire on international work experiences, composed of 123 questions covering personal demographics and a broad range of information about the international assignment which we have grouped into five categories: (1) questions about subjects' evaluation of the assignment – addressing whether they found it educational, frustrating, etc; (2) objective questions about the work experience, such as the duration of stay and whether it was extended, (3) questions about the individuals' use of foreign languages, (4) questions about their memberships in various home and host culture groups, and (5) various attitudinal questions such as the importance attached to making local friendships or to having home management support during the international experience. The data are all drawn from self-reports, and must be interpreted in that light.

Sample

The sample comprised 100 individuals working primarily in the field of human resource information systems. We targeted individuals with substantial international experience; consequently, our results cannot be construed as representative of the general population, but rather as indicative of an experienced international high-tech population. As Figure 2 shows, half the respondents came from the United States, 38% from Europe and Canada, and the remaining 11% from the rest of the world, including Asia/Pacific, Latin America, and Africa. The sample included people with a range of experience levels: over half had more than three years experience working abroad, but about a quarter had less than six months experience. Four percent were under 30 years old, 58% between 30 and 50, and 38% over 50. Seventy-three percent were male and 27% female, demonstrating a relatively large proportion of women in comparison with previous studies that have shown less than 15% females in international work (Tung 1998). Twenty-seven percent were single, while 73% were married or partnered. The respondents were fairly evenly distributed by level of education.

Nationality	N	%
United States	50	50.0%
Canada	10	10.0%
Europe	28	28.0%
Latin America	3	3.0%
Asia Pacific	8	8.0%
Africa	1	1.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Destination	N	%
United States	15	15.0%
Europe	54	54.0%
Latin America	7	7.0%
Asia Pacific	20	20.0%
Africa	3	3.0%
Middle East	1	1.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Intl Experience	N	%
< 6 months	23	23.0%
6-12 months	10	10.0%
1-2 years	16	16.0%
3-5 years	18	18.0%
> 5 years	33	33.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Education	N	%
Some College	8	8.0%
Bachelors Degree	34	34.0%
Masters Degree	48	48.0%
Advanced Degree	10	10.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Age Group	N	%
Under 30	4	4.0%
30-39 years	33	33.0%
40-49 years	25	25.0%
Over 50	38	38.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Gender	N	%
Male	73	73.0%
Female	27	27.0%
TOTAL	100	100.0%

Note: n=100

Figure 2
Population Demographics

Individual Factors: Global Mindset

To illustrate the role of individual factors in the interpretation of international work experiences, we present in Figure 3 some of the results related to global mindset. Using subjects' answers to 18 questions, we created three scales for ethnocentricity, polycentricity, and geocentricity. People with high ethnocentricity scores, for example, tended to say they missed family and friends while working abroad and placed greater emphasis on maintaining relationships with people at home. Polycentric individuals generally agreed with statements about the importance of adapting to the local country ways of doing things and speaking the local language. Geocentric individuals believed in the importance of balancing home and local country needs, the existence of universal values in resolving cross cultural conflicts, and their own ability to play different roles and adopt different identities based on the cultural context.

Measures	Ethno	Poly	Geo
ASSIGNMENT:			
Enjoyable			
Rewarding			
Frustrating			0.318
Educational		0.257	
EXPERIENCE:			
Amount of Experience		0.165	
Duration of Stay		0.216	-0.214
Stay Extended			
Time Since Completed			
LANGUAGE:			
Linguistic Accommodation		0.196	
Prior Language Ability			0.172
Language Improvement	-0.169		
Language Maintained		0.209	
MEMBERSHIP:			
Home Comm/Social Orgs		-0.196	
Home Prof/Acad Orgs	0.181	-0.230	
Global Comm/Social Orgs			
Global Prof/Acad Orgs			
ATTITUDE:			
Local Language		0.306	
Local Friendships	-0.201		-0.238
Home Management Support			0.219
Spousal Support			

Note: p<.05 (r=.164); p<.01 (r=.230); p<.005 (r=.254); n=100

Figure 3
Individual Factors: Global Mindset (significant coefficients of correlation).

As Figure 3 indicates, the three different mindsets are associated with different results and reactions to the international experience. For ethnocentricity there are significant negative correlations with language improvement and attitudes towards forming local friendships -- that is, the more ethnocentric a person is, the less likely they are to improve their language skills in the host country and the less importance they attach to forming local friendships while working abroad. On the other hand, ethnocentricity is positively correlated with belonging to home country professional organizations. These results are consistent with the idea that ethnocentricity denotes a focus on home country properties and people. We see the converse with polycentricity, which is associated with an enthusiastic adoption of host-country practices.

Polycentricity is associated with staying longer abroad and finding the overseas experience educational; linguistically it correlates with higher scores on linguistic accommodation, with maintaining the language after leaving the host country, and with a strongly positive attitude towards learning the host country language. In terms of group membership, polycentricity is negatively correlated with affiliation with groups in the home country of all sorts.

Finally, the last column in Figure 3 shows the significant correlations for geocentricity, the internationalist or universalist orientation. The geocentric mindset shows a somewhat surprising set of correlations. For one, geocentricity is associated with with shorter stays, finding the international experience frustrating, and with attaching less importance to forming local friendships; we interpret these results as indicating that geocentrically oriented individuals are seeking multiple international experiences, so that any given one of them is likely to be less satisfying because it has a particular rather than a universal character. On the other hand, the geocentrics' commitment to internationalism is indicated linguistically by their stronger language ability prior to the overseas work assignment.

Situational Factors: Family

The next factor we looked at was the individual's family situation, that is those who had family accompany them on the international assignment, those whose family did not accompany them, and those who reported having no immediate family. As shown by the results in Figure 4, individuals with family accompanying them and those with no family were significantly more satisfied and more likely to stay longer on the overseas assignment than those with family who stayed behind. Individuals with no family reported more successful assignments than individuals with family. From these results, we surmise that leaving the family behind can have an

adverse effect on the overall success and duration of the international experience and that individuals with no family considerations may find it easier to adapt to international work. But note also that family status has no effect on language ability, accommodation, or maintenance.

Measures	Family Went n=44	Family DidntGo n=32	No Family n=24
ASSIGNMENT:			
Satisfying	4.6	4.1	4.5
Successful	2.2	2.0	2.6
Frustrating			
Educational			
EXPERIENCE:			
Amount of Experience			
Duration of Stay	3.8	2.1	2.7
Stay Extended			
Time Since Completed	2.5	3.4	3.3
LANGUAGE:			
Linguistic Accommodation		No	
Prior Language Ability		Significant	
Language Improvement		Differences	
Language Maintained			
MEMBERSHIP:			
No of Comm/Social Orgs	1.8	1.3	0.8
No of Prof/Acad Orgs	1.4	1.5	0.6
Global Comm/Social Orgs			
Global Prof/Acad Orgs			
ATTITUDE:			
Local Language			
Local Friendships	4.5	4.4	4.8
Home Management Support			
Spousal Support			

Note: All significant at p<.05 level and most at p<.01 by t-test.

Figure 4
Situational Factors: Family (significant differences in mean scores).

Individuals with family, regardless of whether they accompanied or stayed behind, were significantly more likely to participate in a larger number of community, social, and professional organizations than individuals with no family. Conversely, individuals with no family felt it was much more important to develop local friendships than those with family. We surmise this may be because those with family are probably older and have developed more connections; younger people are more likely to be going to clubs or social events (furthering their personal life) rather than to community groups and professional organizations (furthering careers and family life).

Cultural Factors: Nationality

The cultural factor we looked at for the present study was the nationality of the individual. As a first approximation we contrasted Americans and non-Americans, primarily because we did not have a sufficient number of any non-American nationality to achieve significant results. We were also interested in pursuing the findings of previous studies that have indicated Americans have a higher failure rate in international work than other nationalities.

Measures	USA n=50	Non-USA n=50
MINDSET:		
Ethnocentricy		
Polycentricity		
Geocentricity	7.9	7.4
ASSIGNMENT:		
Satisfying		
Successful		
Frustrating	2.7	2.0
Rewarding	4.4	4.0
EXPERIENCE:		
Amount of Experience	No	
Duration of Stay	Significant	
Stay Extended	Differences	
Time Since Completed		
LANGUAGE:		
Linguistic Accommodation		
Prior Language Ability	1.2	2.8
Language Improvement		
No of Languages Spoken	2.1	2.7
MEMBERSHIP:		
Home Comm/Social Orgs	No	
Home Prof/Acad Orgs	Significant	
Global Comm/Social Orgs	Differences	
Global Prof/Acad Orgs		
ATTITUDE:		
Local TV/Radio	3.7	4.2
Local Friendships		
Home Management Support	4.2	3.6
Spousal Support		

Note: All significant at p<.05 level and most at p<.01 by t-test.

Figure 5
Cultural Factors: Nationality (significant differences in mean scores).

As the results in Figure 5 show, the Americans in our sample tended to be more geocentric than the non-Americans. We suspect that given the dominant position of the United States in today's world, it takes a higher average level of geocentricity for Americans to climb out of the hegemonic gravity well of their home country and get involved in international work. In evaluating their international experiences Americans rated them more frustrating, but also more rewarding. Linguistically the rest of the world surpasses America on number of languages spoken and on language ability prior to their overseas assignment. Finally, Americans attach greater importance to getting support from their employers at home. No significant differences were found for levels of experience or organizational memberships.

Identity Factors: Gender

For a final empirical case, we return to our central focus on mindset and identity through the example of gender. We saw previously some of the main correlations for mindset based on the entire population. But it turns out that mindset is often associated with different results for males and females, suggesting, in Wenger's terms a differential negotiation of meaning associated with these gender identities.

Measures	Ethno	Poly	Geo
ASSIGNMENT:			
Enjoyable			
Rewarding			
Frustrating			0.338
Educational		0.289	
EXPERIENCE:			
Amount of Experience			
Duration of Stay			-0.243
Stay Extended			
Time Since Completed			
LANGUAGE:			
Linguistic Accommodation		0.194	
Prior Language Ability			0.225
Language Improvement	-0.237		
Language Maintained		0.199	
MEMBERSHIP:			
Home Comm/Social Orgs			
Home Prof/Acad Orgs		-0.213	
Global Comm/Social Orgs			
Global Prof/Acad Orgs	0.198		
ATTITUDE:			
Local Language		0.326	
Local Friendships			-0.231
Home Management Support			0.263
Spousal Support			

Note: p<.05 (r=.191); p<.01 (r=.268); p<.005 (r=.292); n=73

Figure 6a.

Identity Factors: Gender – Males
(significant coefficients of correlation)

Measures	Ethno	Poly	Geo
ASSIGNMENT:			
Enjoyable	-0.336		
Rewarding		0.365	
Frustrating			
Educational			0.378
EXPERIENCE:			
Amount of Experience		0.312	
Duration of Stay		0.320	
Stay Extended	-0.314	0.405	
Time Since Completed			
LANGUAGE:			
Linguistic Accommodation			
Prior Language Ability			
Language Improvement			
Language Maintained			
MEMBERSHIP:			
Home Comm/Social Orgs		-0.417	
Home Prof/Acad Orgs			
Global Comm/Social Orgs			
Global Prof/Acad Orgs			
ATTITUDE:			
Local Language			
Local Friendships	-0.343	0.417	
Home Management Support			
Spousal Support			

Note: p<.05 (r=.311); p<.01 (r=.430); p<.005 (r=.471); n=27

Figure 6b.

Identity Factors: Gender – Females
(significant coefficients of correlation)

We begin with the most striking contrast: the results related to language. As shown in Figure 6a, men show the pattern previously seen in Figure 3: geocentricity is associated with better prior language ability, polycentricity with better linguistic accommodation and language maintenance, and ethnocentricity with a poor record of language improvement during the international assignment. But for women (see Figure 6b), linguistic performance does not appear to be linked to mindset; in fact, the women in our population display significantly better linguistic facility overall than the men, regardless of their global mindset. This pattern is repeated in the attitude section of Figure 6: male polycentrics express more favorable attitudes towards learning the local language, while females are not differentiated on this measure by mindset.

In evaluations of the international assignment, a similar gender polarization prevails. Men again show the pattern seen previously in Figure 3, in that geocentricity is associated with finding the assignment frustrating and polycentricity with finding it educational. But in our female population, geocentrics also find it educational, while polycentrics find it rewarding, and ethnocentrics less enjoyable.

For the other results, the overall correlations in Figure 3 turn out to be a composite of distinct patterns for males and females. In the objective descriptors of the work experience, it is males for whom geocentricity is associated with shorter stays, while the females are the ones for whom ethnocentricity is associated with greater total international experience and longer stays. Female polycentrics are also more likely to have their stay

extended, and female ethnocentrics significantly less likely to extend their stay. Similarly, for group memberships, the negative correlation between polycentricity and membership in home country community and social organizations turns out to be a female result, while the corresponding negative association with home country professional memberships is a male result. And for the results on attitudes, the negative correlation between interest in local friendships and ethnocentricity is found in the females, while the parallel negative correlation with geocentricity is a male phenomenon.

To summarize, it appears that mindset relates to gender in different ways, with different resources being emphasized or different expressions of mindset being utilized in the construction of male and female identities. Linguistic facility is a resource that is positively emphasized for females in general, while in men it is differentiated by mindset; the relative disinterest of polycentrics in home country organizations is expressed for females more in the domain of social organizations, while it is expressed for males in the domain of professional organizations. This pattern of differentiation is so extensive that future work on mindset will have to carefully attend to gender identity.

Discussion: International Work Experiences and Outcomes

What, finally, predicts satisfaction, success, language learning, and other outcomes of an international work experience? Clearly no single factor can give us an answer, for many independent factors affect an individual's reaction to and performance in an international setting. It will not

be possible to select individuals with a particular mindset, or family situation, or national background and be confident that they will adapt and perform well working abroad. Rather, these results indicate that outcomes are affected by a complex function of a number of factors, no one of which is sufficient. The best mindset for a given job will not guarantee a successful experience if situational factors are extremely adverse, for example, nor will the person with best skills and experience for a given job, given the best possible support system, necessarily succeed if they have thoroughly inappropriate attitudes and mindset for the foreign setting. Instead, satisfactory outcomes will depend on the right mix of characteristics of the individual and their cultural background and social identity, along with aspects of their situation.

Conclusions

Living and working away from one's home country is perhaps the most intimate experience a person can have with Otherness in the domain of culture and nationality. How does a person formulate the meaning of such an experience, and how do they interact with and incorporate the experience? This kind of interaction with Otherness involves two simultaneous creative processes: assigning an interpretation to the Other place and culture in the pursuit of understanding, and redefining one's one identity against a new ground. This is an intrinsically multiplex task, with multiple inputs and outcomes.

On the input side, we have identified four central components that we believe to have significant impact. Two of these are things that the individuals bring to the experience: their social identity, and their personal characteristics, such as the constellation of beliefs and attitudes that make up their Global Mindset. But beyond the individual, the international experience will clearly be impacted by specific features of the situation, and by broader cultural aspects of the encounter.

Outcomes, however, are perhaps harder to summarize and measure, and depend on the point of view adopted or the questions asked. From the standpoint of the employer of expatriates, the evaluation may be fairly one-dimensional – did the employee do the job successfully (although even this begs the question of what will be seen as success)? But from the standpoint of the individual, the experience may be the subject of a web of outcomes: feelings about experience, changes in practices, skills (notably language skills), and attitudes, and new ways of seeing oneself. We have, in this study, examined some of the outcomes that strike us as central: the subjects' evaluations of the assignment abroad, their practices with respect to language and social affiliations, their assessments of what was important to making the experience work, and relatively objective measures of the experience such as duration and extensions. But clearly, other elements of the results of international experiences remain to be investigated.

The relationships among these inputs and outcomes, of course, add another order of complexity to the matter. It is unlikely that any such investigation will yield simple unique relationships between a given input and certain outcomes; there will be no single *sine qua non* that predicts success or failure abroad, or tells us who will learn a new language well while overseas, or enjoy the experience more, or participate in local community organizations. Rather, all outcomes will arise from a multifaceted web of inputs.

In the final analysis, this very multidimensionality should not be seen as a problem, but rather, as a key to understanding the international experience. It is precisely through the processing of many experiences in various contexts, and their integration via mindset and identity formation, that subjects construct and attribute meaning.

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