Malleable Mindset and Cultural Contact: A Multi-Factorial Approach to the International Experience

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INTRODUCTION

People living and working abroad are brought into intimate contact with differences in culture, language and social practice. Individuals interact with and react to these differences in a variety of ways. Often the initial response of individuals to contact with different cultures is one of alienation: in the words of A. E. Housman, "I, a stranger and afraid, in a world I never made." Many individuals find the experience educational and rewarding, which shows that attitudes change as connections with the new culture are achieved. What are the determinants of such outcomes? What factors of the individual or situation facilitate accommodation, adaptation, and success in an international experience?

Based on a study of over 100 individuals who have lived and worked away from their home country, this article presents a multi-factorial model of the international work experience. We identify four clusters of factors that influence the performance and subjective experience of individuals in international settings. First, people bring their own individual attitudes, experiences, and personalities to the encounter. One key factor here is a person's global mindset – a cognitive construct of individual beliefs and attitudes to the international experience. Second, there are cultural factors arising from the practices and attitudes prevalent in the home culture and in the destination culture. Third are identity factors relating to the social role or identity that individuals construct in interacting with the community around them. Finally, there are factors specific to the context or situation of a given individual or experience, such as the kind of job held or the person's family circumstances.

Taking a multi-dimensional approach to the international experience, we describe how individual, cultural, identity, and situational factors affect a person's performance on the job and satisfaction with the international experience – two key determinants of success. Of central importance are personalities, attitudes, and prior experiences with other cultures – the elements that make up the global mindset. Prior research has shown that mindsets are malleable (Guy & Beaman 2003) and that individuals change and adapt to the intercultural experience over time, indicating that the process is dynamic: attitudes affect the interpretation of experience, but are also changed by experience. It is hoped that our multi-factorial model can be a tool for understanding the ac-culturation process and for the predictive modeling of successful international experiences.

BACKGROUND

With respect to ethnicity, culture, and language, approaches to the international experience can be treated in terms of a cognitive construct called the Global Mindset (Perlmutter 1964, Sullivan 2002, Guy & Beaman 2003 & 2004) (see Figure 1). An individual's Global Mindset is the mental construct that one calls upon when encountering cultural newness. It varies among individuals along a spectrum of acceptance and engagement. One region of this spectrum can be characterized as involving a stance of "self-affirmation," coupled with minimal acceptance of differences between individuals and cultures; this we refer to as an "Ethnocentric" mindset. Another stance is one of acceptance and engagement with the new culture, which we refer to as a "Polycentric" mindset. And finally, a third stance involves relativizing and generalizing across several cultures, relating each newly encountered culture to a system of beliefs and values that are conceived as universal; this we term the "Geocentric" mindset.
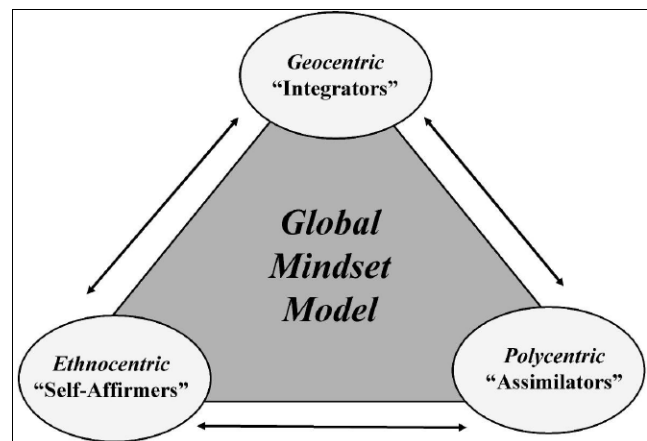

Figure 1. Global Mindset Model.

As noted above, mindsets are products of the interaction of personality with experience, and hence, they are necessarily malleable. Our own previous research has shown that ethnocentricity declines with the time elapsed

after the end of an international professional experience (Guy & Beaman 2003). In this, mindset may be distinguished from personality traits, which presumably have a more permanent quality. Also, mindset is an interface with the world, serving several purposes, one of which is the individual's own comfort. Thus, an interesting question arises: How does mindset affect one's behavior in the world, notably in situations that involve intensive contact with peoples from different cultures?

The purpose of this article is to investigate how Global Mindset is involved in the experience of living and working abroad. Intercultural contact can obviously occur in many other ways, as a tourist, through contact with immigrants to one's own country, or through exposure to cultural products such as film, music, literature, or through overt study. But, living abroad for an extended period, with the specific purpose of working, typically places an individual in close and continuous engagement with the new locale, demanding constant exercise of the Global Mindset and the practices and skills associated with dealing with a "foreign" culture.

The experience of living and working abroad is, of course, multifaceted, involving many interactions that could be affected by the individual's mindset. We focus here on two elements of the experience: first, how people working abroad perform overall in the work setting – i.e., what level of success they accomplish – and second, how they deal with linguistic differences – i.e., what level of acquisition and retention of the new language they achieve. We believe that a person's global mindset is a factor in both of these outcomes. Specifically, it seems likely that an engaging stance towards other cultures should incline a person to be more comfortable in an international setting, to be more likely to acquire and retain the local language, and to achieve more successful outcomes. Crucially, however, language acquisition and workplace success are necessarily affected by many factors. Therefore, in this study we take a multifactorial approach, treating mindset as one of a set of potential influences on the outcomes of international work experiences.

THE STUDY

To investigate these issues, we designed a survey covering a number of aspects of the international work experience. Our questionnaire comprised 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 the persons' subjective evaluation of the assignment – addressing whether they found it educational, frustrating, etc., (2) specific 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.

Sample

The sample comprised 100 individuals working in several fields; the largest group is in the field of human resource systems, and another subset was comprised of professors or students with international academic experiences. Since we targeted individuals with substantial international experience, our results must not be construed as representative of the general public; rather, they are indicative of an experienced international hi-tech population. Figure 2 shows the demographics of the sample.

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. Sample Demographics.

Research Questions

For the present article, we focus on two general research questions. First, we sought an overall assessment of the international experience in terms of its success or failure, and how it is affected by mindset and other factors. The literature on international work often reports high failure rates on international assignments: up to 10 percent for Australian companies, 14 percent for Japanese companies, and shockingly, 76 percent for U.S. companies (Ferraro 2002). The reasons for these "failure" rates are varied. The key question becomes: how should success or failure be evaluated? The individual may be unable to adapt to the new physical or cultural environment or lack the linguistic, social or technical skills required for the position. The position definition may be unclear, or there may be a lack of clarity around the objectives of the assignment. There may not be sufficient support from the family, or the spouse may be unable to adapt to the international situation. The individual may lack the maturity or motivation for foreign work or may have an overly narrow or parochial perspective when working in other cultures. Consequently, as we have noted, the most promising approach to the issue is a multifactorial one, which sees success as a function of a number of independent variables.

The second research question addressed here is an individual's progress in acquiring one of the most important elements of the new community: its language. We see mindset as a key factor, but as with success, it appears likely that language acquisition is also influenced by multiple factors. Consequently we proceeded in parallel with these two topics to investigate the effects of mindset, personality, situation, and culture on success and language acquisition.

The Outcomes

Our research interest focuses primarily on two outcomes from the international experience: the degree to which individuals are "successful" and the extent to which they learn

the local language. Based on questions from our survey, we designed two composite metrics for success and language acquisition to serve as the dependent variables.
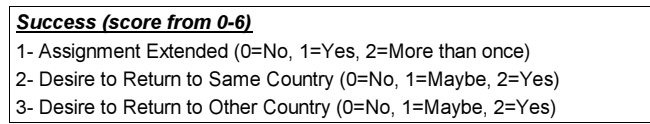

Success (score from 0-6)
1- Assignment Extended (0=No, 1=Yes, 2=More than once)
2- Desire to Return to Same Country (0=No, 1=Maybe, 2=Yes)
3- Desire to Return to Other Country (0=No, 1=Maybe, 2=Yes)

Figure 3. Success Measure.

Success – In order to avoid conflicting, subjective interpretations as to what constitutes "success," we sought a relatively objective measure: simply, was the individual's assignment extended or not, and would they like to return for another assignment to the same or another country? The rationale for this approach is the assumption that an individual who was not being successful would unlikely stay on for additional time, nor would they be likely have a desire to return to a situation in which they were not experiencing success. Using the relevant items in our survey, this measure creates a scale from zero to six as seen in Figure 3. For purposes of the analysis, we took the top two levels on this scale as constituting "success."
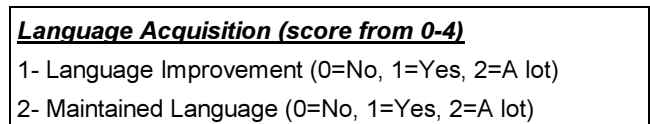

Language Acquisition (score from 0-4)

1- Language Improvement (0=No, 1=Yes, 2=A lot)

2- Maintained Language (0=No, 1=Yes, 2=A lot)

Figure 4. Language Acquisition Measure.

Language Acquisition – To measure an individual's degree of language acquisition, we used two self-assessment responses asking individuals to evaluate whether their foreign language skills had improved during the assignment and whether they had maintained their language skills after returning home. This creates a scale from zero to four as seen in Figure 4, of which, once again, we took the top two as indicating successful language acquisition for the multivariate analysis.
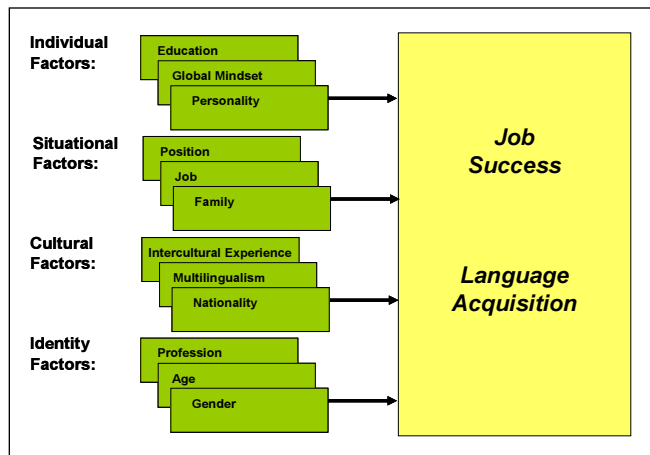

Figure 5. Multi-factorial Model of International Success

The Factors

In previous work (Guy & Beaman 2004), we proposed a Multidimensional Model of International Experience (depicted in Figure 5) comprising four groups of factors – individual, situational, cultural and identity factors – that affect the success of an international assignment and an individual's language acquisition. These factors serve as the independent variables in our investigation.
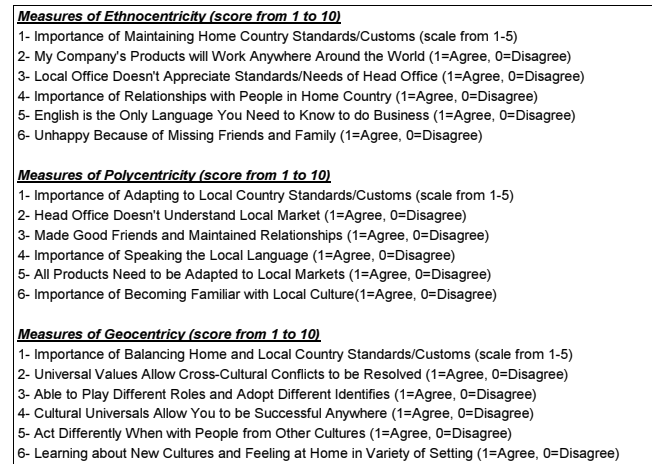

Measures of Ethnocentricity (score from 1 to 10)
1- Importance of Maintaining Home Country Standards/Customs (scale from 1-5)
2- My Company's Products will Work Anywhere Around the World (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
3- Local Office Doesn't Appreciate Standards/Needs of Head Office (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
4- Importance of Relationships with People in Home Country (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
5- English is the Only Language You Need to Know to do Business (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
6- Unhappy Because of Missing Friends and Family (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)

Measures of Polycentricity (score from 1 to 10)
1- Importance of Adapting to Local Country Standards/Customs (scale from 1-5)
2- Head Office Doesn't Understand Local Market (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
3- Made Good Friends and Maintained Relationships (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
4- Importance of Speaking the Local Language (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
5- All Products Need to be Adapted to Local Markets (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
6- Importance of Becoming Familiar with Local Culture(1=Agree, 0=Disagree)

Measures of Geocentricy (score from 1 to 10)
1- Importance of Balancing Home and Local Country Standards/Customs (scale from 1-5)
2- Universal Values Allow Cross-Cultural Conflicts to be Resolved (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
3- Able to Play Different Roles and Adopt Different Identifies (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
4- Cultural Universals Allow You to be Successful Anywhere (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
5- Act Differently When with People from Other Cultures (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)
6- Learning about New Cultures and Feeling at Home in Variety of Setting (1=Agree, 0=Disagree)

Figure 6. Global Mindset Measure.

Hoffman Cultural Adaptability Inventory (HCAI)
1- Inter-Cultural Liking (12 questions on a scale from 1-5)
2- Risk-Taking (12 questions on a scale from 1-5)
3- Amiability (12 questions on a scale from 1-5)
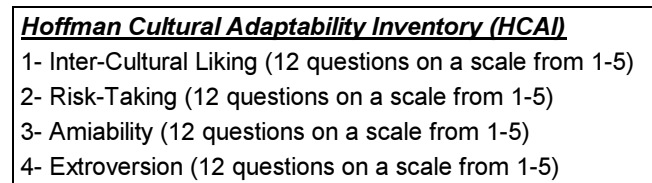4- Extroversion (12 questions on a scale from 1-5)

Figure 7. Personality Measure.

Individual Factors – The individual factors that we investigated are Global Mindset, defined in terms of three scales of Ethnocentricity, Polycentricity and Geocentricity, as described above, and a set of Personality characteristics based on the work of Hoffman 2001. Figure 6 shows the questions used to determine an individual's Global Mindset, and Figure 7 shows four dimensions of personality based on Hoffman's Cultural Adaptability Inventory (HCAI). HCAI is intended to assess personality traits that are predictors of cultural adaptability, and hence, aptitude for international work. It comprises four subscales: Intercultural Liking, Amiability, Extraversion and Risk-Taking.

Situational Factors – The situation or context in which the international experience is based has a profound effect on an individual's motivation, which, in turn, can impact the success of the assignment. Individuals may have personal circumstances and family ties that facilitate or hinder their performance in different situations. Hence, one situational factor we investigated is whether the individual had family who accompanied them on the assignment, or whether the family stayed behind, or whether they had no family at all. Similarly, the nature of the job to be performed and the extent of local contact required varied based on the role the

individual is asked to perform. The second situation factor we evaluated was impact on the individual's success of the type of job held, such as academic positions, technical jobs, sales and marketing jobs or executive positions.

Cultural Factors – As Hofstede (1980, 2001, 2003), Moore (2003), and others have demonstrated, individuals' cultural backgrounds and exposure to other cultures affect their perception of the world around them and hence their interactions with others. We chose three cultural factors to investigate: national background, number of years of international experience, and multilingualism – or number of languages spoken.

Identity Factors – The fourth group of factors we investigated relate to the construction and performance of identity as a product of the interface between the individual and the community. We look at age, gender and educational background.

Multivariate Model.

To model the effects of these various factors on the two dependent variables, we conducted a multivariate analysis using the maximum likelihood method. This is a method for developing a quantitative model of multiple influences on a given outcome, which has several desirable characteristics for present purposes; two of these are that, first, the method easily accommodates data with real-world distributional characteristics such as missing values and imbalanced datasets, and second, it assigns a specific value to the effect of independent variable on the outcome which can be used to compare effects across variables. The model treats the outcomes, in our case, either job success or successful language acquisition and maintenance, as probabilistic functions of the various factors investigated. Each factor is assigned a weight or partial probability reflecting its contribution to a given outcome. When these factor weights are close to one, they indicate a strongly favorable effect on success or language acquisition. When close to zero, they indicate strongly disfavoring effects. A value close to .5 indicates neutrality – a factor that neither promotes nor inhibits success or language acquisition. As a corollary, when an independent variable shows all of its related values close to .5, that variable is not a good predictor. Thus in Table 1, our Ethnocentricity measure, with both of its factor weights close to .5 (.48 for Low Ethnocentricity and .55 for High), does not predict success or failure very well, while Geocentricity, with low levels weakly disfavoring success at .46, but the highest levels showing extreme favorability to success at .90, is a good predictor.

FINDINGS
Success.

First, let us consider the results for the success score. For purposes of this analysis, we treated people who had one of the top two values on our success measure as being successful. So, the question was: What set of characteristics and circumstances were associated with achieving or failing to achieve success?

	High	(n)	Med	(n)	Low	(n)
Global Mindset						
Ethnocentric	.55	(25)			.48	(75)
Polycentric	.57	(22)			.48	(78)
Geocentric*	.90	(7)			.46	(93)
Personality						
Intercultural-Liking	.47	(43)			.52	(57)
Amiability**	.95	(10)	.45	(54)	.38	(36)
Extroversion	.28	(13)	.68	(52)	.32	(35)
Risk-Taking	.54	(58)			.45	(42)

Table 1. Individual Factors and Success.

The results for the individual characteristics appear in Table 1. As we just saw, Ethnocentricity and Polycentricity turn out to be relatively weak predictors of success, but highly Geocentric subjects had a very high rate of success. The personality measures also have a mixed record as predictors: Intercultural liking and Risk-taking are very weak predictors, but Amiability shows a strong effect: the more amiable a subject is, the more likely they are to have experienced success on an international work assignment. And the Extraversion scale shows an interesting nonlinear result: it is people with a balance between introversion and extraversion who are most likely to be successful. This result was not unexpected: although Hoffman suggests that Extraversion is directly favorable to intercultural accommodation, we believed that highly extraverted people might well be very frustrated living abroad, especially if they don't know the local language, whereas someone who is more self-contained might be more resilient at enduring the initial isolation of the stranger in a strange land.

	No	(n)	Yes	(n)	No Family	(n)
Family Accompaniment***	.32	(32)	.44	(44)	.81	(24)
		(n)				
Job Type						
Academic	.19	(11)				
Sales/Marketing	.37	(6)				
Human Resources	.49	(43)				
Executive	.52	(13)				
Finance/Accounting	.58	(11)				
Technical	.73	(16)				

Table 2. Situational Factors and Success.

Among the situational factors, shown in Table 2, family situation is a very strong predictor of success. Those with no family are significantly more likely to be successful. Presumably, single individuals don't have all the concerns of family and hence are freer to focus exclusively on their work assignment. For obvious reasons, among those with family, much better outcomes are achieved when the family accompanies the worker on the international assignment than when the family stays behind. Those individuals with families who stayed behind lack immediate family support and may well place a stronger focus on returning home – working against local engagement.

Another strong predictor is the type of job the subject holds. The least favorable score is found for academics (professors and students who lived abroad), but this may simply be an artifact of how we defined success. Academics tend to go abroad for fixed academic terms, so extension is not usu-

ally a possibility, thus guaranteeing lower scores for this category. For the non-academic jobs, the results are quite revealing: the least success is found among sales and marketing positions, which are the ones that require the most intimate contact with the local language and culture. By contrast, the greatest levels of success were found among people who held technical jobs: these people are typically traveling to conduct a specific task, using a specific skill, which does not involve much contact with locals outside the workplace. The remaining job types, finance, human resources professionals, and executives, fall in the middle on the success measure, and these are jobs for which interaction with the local culture is likely to be varied and assignment-specific. These results suggest that success is harder to achieve when the job requires a greater level of cultural and linguistic assimilation or accommodation.

	USA	(n)	Other Country	(n)
National Background**	.27	(49)	.72	(51)
	Number of Years			
	<= 5	(n)	> 5	(n)
International Experience***	.39	(67)	.71	(33)
	Number of Languages Spoken			
	1	(n)	>1	(n)
Multilingualism	.58	(25)	.47	(75)

Table 3. Cultural Factors and Success.

Among the cultural factors investigated, shown in Table 3, the first is national background. For purposes of the present study, we contrasted Americans, who constituted half of our subjects, with all other nationalities. The results showed that other nationalities were significantly more likely to achieve success working abroad than the Americans were. This is no doubt indicative of the relative ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony of the United States. In a large and dominant country like the United States, familiarity with other nations and cultures can be a relatively rare part of people's personal experience. The "Ugly American," ethnocentric and insensitive to local difference, is a common cultural stereotype. Our findings corroborate the other research cited above, which has shown high failure rates for international assignments for Americans, but lower rates for other nationalities.

A second cultural factor is the subject's prior intercultural, international experience. The results showed that the more total experience people have, the more likely they are to be successful in another assignment, and this result was highly significant. Thus, we surmise that either intercultural adaptability is something one gets better at with practice, or else people who are good at it keep seeking more international work experiences.

Finally, among the cultural factors, contrary to common belief, multilingualism appears to be a poor predictor of success. This shows that merely possessing the communicative tools is not as important as how one uses them. In fact, based on our personal experience managing expatriate workers, some of the most successful were those with no prior language ability. It may be that these individuals were

the most motivated to learn the language and customs of their host country.

	Male	(n)	Female	(n)
Gender*	.46	(73)	.61	(27)
	< 50	**(n)**	**>=50**	**(n)**
Age*	.37	(62)	.70	(38)

Table 4. Identity Factors and Success.

The last set of factors, given in Table 4, deal with individual identity and the social negotiation of that identity with the community. For job success, we looked at two of these, gender and age. Female subjects were more likely to succeed than men, which may reflect gender differentiation in the social practice of accommodation. In addition, older subjects (people above the age of 50) had greater success than younger ones; this result is subject to several interpretations. It may be that having broader life experiences facilitates accommodation in international settings, but it is also possible that this is related to family situation: older subjects may have fewer family complications, such as children in school that could conflict with working abroad.

Thus, to summarize, the best candidates for success in international assignments are older people from countries other than the U.S., who are amiable and geocentric in mindset, who have no family, and who already have considerable international experience. Women are better candidates than men, and if the candidate has a family, it improves the chances of success for the family to accompany her or him.

Language Acquisition.

Next, we look at the factors that favored foreign language acquisition. The dependent variable here was defined as having high ratings for improving one's ability in the local language while abroad, and retaining it after returning. Some people live and work abroad and return with nothing more than what has been described as "taxi-cab French" – or German or Japanese or whatever the case may be. Others with comparable times abroad become fluent in the new language. What factors contribute to language acquisition and retention in an international work setting?

	High	(n)	Med	(n)	Low	(n)
Global Mindset						
Ethnocentric*	.10	(10)	.68	(61)	.31	(29)
Polycentric***	.64	(56)			.32	(44)
Geocentric	.53	(82)			.37	(18)
Personality						
Intercultural-Liking*	.67	(43)			.37	(57)
Amiability*	.62	(64)			.30	(36)
Extroversion	.64	(87)			.48	(13)
Risk-Taking*	.39	(58)			.64	(42)

Table 5. Individual Factors and Language Acquisition

Global Mindset has some substantial and predictable effects on language acquisition, as seen in Table 5. Most significant is the effect of Polycentricity, which strongly polarizes the subjects in our population: those who are highly

polycentric have considerably higher probabilities of acquiring and retaining the local language than those who are low on this mindset factor. Second is Ethnocentricity: as expected, highly ethnocentric people are ineffective language learners, but somewhat surprisingly, those with middle levels of Ethnocentricity favor language acquisition more than those with lower levels. This may be an interaction effect: subjects with low Ethnocentricity tend to be higher on Polycentricity and Geocentricity, and those favorable factors may be absorbing any positive propensity associated with low scores on Ethnocentricity. Geocentricity, by itself, is a weak predictor, but it goes in the expected direction, such that low Geocentricity disfavors language acquisition. The relative weakness of this as a predictor may be due to the fact that the geocentrics in our sample have relatively shorter stays in any one place, but visit more places; this would give them less time to learn a local language than the longer-staying polycentrics.

Among the personality factors, high levels of Intercultural Liking, Amiability and Extraversion all strongly favor linguistic success. Appreciation for other cultures and strong social skills are necessary components for successful language learning. Risk-Taking, however, gives an unexpected result: those with a weaker disposition to take risks are the more successful at language learning in this study. This may be due to the nature of international work: people with a low tolerance for Risk-Taking might be disinclined to even accept a job overseas unless they had some confidence in or commitment to acquiring the local language to facilitate their time of residency in a foreign locale.

	No	(n)	Yes	(n)	No Family	(n)
Family Accompaniment	.31	(32)	.46	(44)	.79	(24)

Table 6. Situational Factors and Language Acquisition.

In the situational factors in Table 6, the family situation is influential for language, just as it was for success. Again, not having a family strongly favors language acquisition, presumably because the family serves as a little linguistic island of home country usage, whereas the unattached expatriate is more likely to integrate with local social networks and use the local language in the process. However, being alone is not sufficient by itself to promote this outcome, because expatriates whose families stayed behind are the worst at language acquisition. Perhaps they spend their spare time on the phone to the children and/or spouse back home.

	USA	(n)	Large Country	(n)	Small Country	(n)
National Background	.54	(49)	.35	(37)	.74	(14)
	<= 2	(n)	Number of Years 3 - 5	(n)	> 5	(n)
International Experience	.54	(49)	.60	(18)	.39	(33)
	1	(n)	Number of Languages Spoken 2	(n)	> 2	(n)
Multilingualism***	.25	(25)	.44	(33)	.70	(42)

Table 7. Cultural Factors and Language Acquisition.

Turning now to cultural factors in Table 7, national background presents an interesting picture. Persons from smaller country backgrounds are far and away the most likely to succeed at learning and maintaining languages. In our sample, these included subjects from Finland, Singapore, and the Netherlands. It appears that people from less dominant countries are more accustomed to the notion that their language will not necessarily provide an adequate basis for achieving communication wherever they go, while those from larger and more powerful countries like the U.S., Great Britain and France tend towards a linguistically hegemonic ideology. But interestingly, among our subjects, U.S. citizens did better than other large country subjects at language acquisition.

Next, the subjects' total international experience also influences language acquisition, in an interesting way: peak success is achieved among people with three to five years experience, while those with more than five years disfavor linguistic achievement. Such people have typically had several overseas experiences, and it may be that they come to see local languages as ephemeral aspects of their internationalism.

Finally, the number of languages a person already speaks has a highly significant, although unsurprising, effect: the more languages you know, the better you are at learning and retaining another one.

	Male	(n)	Female	(n)				
Gender*	.63	(73)	.20	(27)				
	HS	(n)	BA	(n)	MA	(n)	PhD	(n)
Education*	.12	(8)	.37	(34)	.56	(48)	.89	(10)
	< 40	(n)	40 - 49	(n)	> 50	(n)		
Age	.49	(37)	.55	(25)	.47	(38)		

Table 8. Identity Factors and Language Acquisition.

Lastly, we investigated three identity factors bearing on language acquisition, shown in Table 8. A surprising result was found for gender: males were better language acquirers than females in this study, which contradicts some other results bearing on this issue. Education has a strong and straightforwardly linear effect: the higher the educational level of a subject, the more likely they are to learn a new language on their international assignment. And finally, age appears to be an insignificant factor in language acquisition, which will be a relief to anyone who thought they were too old to take up a foreign language!

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, when one lives and works abroad, a person is subject to multiple pulls, demands, desires and allegiances. The individual brings to the situation their own personality and mindset; they are embedded in a particular situation with its own characteristics; and they are simultaneously engaged in constructing a new identity for themselves under new circumstances and with new reference frames, even as they go about doing the work they came to do. In the midst of this jumble, they perform their activities and live their lives. Do they perform successfully, and relate

well to the job and the country in which they live? Do they learn the local language and develop some cultural accommodation to differences? And, how are they transformed as a result these experiences?

The answers to these questions depend on a variety of factors, some of which have been identified here. Among these, several general themes emerge. One is flexibility: those who are more amiable and have a positive disposition towards the international experience tend to be more successful overall and better at language learning. Another is experience and maturity: greater success and better language acquisition are achieved by those who have more international experience, know more languages, have higher education and are beyond their earliest youth. And finally, personal circumstances are important; for both dependent variables, family situation is a limiting factor: people without family ties appear to be more readily accommodating, and for those with a family, the support and companionship of that family facilitates both success and language acquisition. Overall, the results from our study confirm that accommodation to other cultures is a complex multi-dimensional function driven by many factors. Crucially, there is a malleable component to individual performance: although multiple factors influence the situation, people get better at intercultural accommodation with learning and experience.

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Note:
* p < .1
** p < .05
*** p < .01

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