

## EXPATRIATION AFTER THE TERROR ATTACK: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY FROM HR PERSPECTIVE

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Expatriates, Bangladesh,  
Terror attack, 'Holey  
Artisan Bakery', Qualitative  
approach

#### Article History:

Received  
2020-12-15

Received in revised form  
2021-02-22

Received in revised form  
2021-03-06

Accepted  
2021-03-24

DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.22146/jlo.62247>

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction and Main Objective:** This study attempted to explain the anxieties from the insights of expatriates and their views related to international assignments in Bangladesh after the Holey Artisan attack in 2016, this study also discusses the immediate and current status of expatriation in Bangladesh. **Background Problems:** The host countries' environment plays an important role in accomplishing any overseas assignment. Bangladesh with its ethnicity of warm hospitality has always been an ideal place for expatriates from both novel and similar cultures and environments. Conversely, the recent incidents of terror attacks, notably the major attack at 'Holey Artisan Bakery' in 2016 have changed many calculations. **Research Method:** This qualitative research is a combination of narrative situational analysis and longitudinal study. Primary data was collected through interviews. **Findings/Results:** Research findings revealed some aftermaths of the attack related to the actions taken by the authority of the state. And how this incident hampered the assignments and work-life balance of the expatriates. **Novelty:** This particular study contributes to the existing literature of international human resource management with the tools and technics of effective crisis management from the real-life experiences of the expatriates. **Conclusion:** This study suggests that this is high time for organizations to work on their people and culture management strategies to increase interfaith, intercultural, and multiracial harmony.

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## 1. Introduction

Along with the local investment, the potential success of any emerging economy to a great extent depends on international investments, successful global collaborations and foreign aids. At the same time, global collaboration and support from international communities help business organizations to design better and sustainable strategies, achieve operational excellence, transfer technology, knowledge and leadership. Where, the operation, market orientations and even the employment have become matters of free geographical boundaries or margins; globalization is creating huge opportunities for overseas jobs; international assignments and expatriation (Brewster and Harris, 1999).

Due to the fact of internationalization of businesses and increasing concerns related to implementing the 'best practice' in the subsidiaries and partner organizations; it has become a common practice for various multinational companies, international joint ventures and even for the local companies to build and maintain global partnerships. Nevertheless, the success of international projects critically depends on the host country, its economic condition, culture, natural resources, manpower, political situation, market size, environment, safety, etc.

In the literature of international human resource management expatriation has been explained as an essential foundation to become global leaders (Black, et al., 1999) as during these varieties of international assignments; an employee gets a prospect to experience the comprehensive conditions of international business, its challenges, opportunities, and actions. It is also a process

of transferring leadership and core organizational values to the region.

With previous experience, expertise and well premeditated international assignments; even within a short period of time expatriates can gain a good hold over the subject matter and contribute to organizational survival and competitive growth. Sometimes they even play a significant role to develop the conditions and relations between the host and parent countries, in the course of working as an agent of development partners.

Day by day the purposes and the nature of these kinds of international assignments are becoming more and more challenging and intricate (Mayerhofer, et al., 2004). It becomes more difficult when the host country faces any threat of terrorism and foreign delegates are the main target of the militants.

Bangladesh, a South Asian lower-middle-income- developing country, which gained independence in 1971 after nine months 'liberation war; the country and its people know the value of peace, love, secularism and hospitality. Bangladesh has been a perfect place for expatriates from both novel and similar cultures. However, this recent incident of extremism and terror attack at 'Holey Artisan Bakery' in 2016 has changed more than a few calculations regarding its image and put a question mark on the country's security measures for the foreign delegates and expatriates. Although the attack was on some targeted people (mostly non-Muslim foreigners), it was a major blow to Bangladesh's overall security system, as well as a major plot to tarnish the country's image in the international arena. The attack could have had far-reaching negative effects on the country's business, trade, international investment and

development sector. Consequently, this incident had created a negative perception towards expatriation in Bangladesh as the main target of these attacks were the foreigners.

Therefore, the government with its supreme priority took all essential counter-terrorism measures to ensure the security of the country, its people, and the citizens of other countries living in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, very little was known regarding the immediate reactions of the expatriates and their families who were living in Bangladesh at that time, their evaluation on the efforts of the Bangladesh government and whether they had to face any problem staying in Bangladesh after this incident. In this study authors focused on the effect of the Holey Artisan Attack on foreign delegates and expatriates working in Bangladesh.

This study aims to enlighten the literature of international human resource management in the context of challenges, anxieties from the insights from the expatriates after a major terror attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Additionally, the study also tried to answer the question such as how the expatriates are currently working in Bangladesh and their views related to international assignments in Bangladesh in the present circumstances.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Background Analysis- 'Holey Artisan Attack'

July 1, 2016, was a regular night of the month of holy Ramadan. For the Muslims, Ramadan is one of the most important time for self-improvement and heightened devotion. It is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and considered as the month of blessings, mercy

and salvation from sins; through the observance of a whole month of fasting, Muslims urge for mercy and peace. On that night everything was going as usual, after the iftar people were taking a rest or performing Taraweeh prayer. At around 9:20 pm (local time), a group of militants stormed a popular restaurant named Holey Artisan Bakery in a filmy style and took around thirty people, hostage in the café (Bdnews24.com, 2016).

Holey Artisan Bakery, the restaurant located in Gulshan 2, Dhaka is a sister concern of Izumi was a very popular gathering place among the foreigners. Dhaka's high-class area Gulshan is a diplomatic zone. Nevertheless, the attackers knew that very well, they targeted the place so that they can get the attention of the government and international media immediately.

A total number of twenty-nine were killed, extremists brutally killed twenty-two hostages among them eighteen were foreigners and four Bangladeshis (including three guests and bakery staff); on the other hand, two police officers and five extremists were also killed during the operation for retrieval of the control (M. Billah, 2017; BBC News, 2016a; The Daily Star, 2016a, Bdnews24.com, 2016) and at least fifty were injured; at Holey Artisan Bakery.

The government gave its supreme priority to rescue the hostages and regain control over the situation. The major operation was conducted by the Bangladesh Army; it was named 'Operation Thunderbolt'. However, different defender forces, i.e., Para-Commando Battalion, Bangladesh Air force, Bangladesh Navy SWADS, Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), Bangladesh Ansar, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), SWAT, Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense, Bangladesh police, Armed Police Battalion, Special branch, and

Detective Branch took part in the operation. Bangladeshi forces stormed the restaurant the next morning around 10 am to end the ten-hour standoff. Thirteen hostages, including three foreigners, were rescued.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS) and Al Qaeda simultaneously announced the responsibility for the attack (The Daily Star, 2016b; Khan, 2016). Later on, the government denied the claims (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). Some still argued that the style of the attackers bears the seal of IS (Khan, 2016). The government pointed the finger at local groups and even denied the presence of ISIL in Bangladesh.

When officially the nationalities of the victims, who were senselessly and brutally murdered on that night, were revealed it confirmed that among twenty, nine victims were Italian, seven were Japanese, three were Bangladeshi and one was an Indian (The Daily Star, 2016c). In the meantime, the US State Department claimed that one of those victims was a US citizen; however, they did not give any further details about that victim (The Daily Star, 2016c). In the meantime, the United States of America and the United Kingdom issued alerts to their citizens (The Daily Star, 2016b).

It was quite clear that the main target of this attack was non-Muslims, foreigners, or expatriates. Reports said that most of the Italian victims were working in the garment industry (BBC News, 2016a; BBC News, 2016b). Though the government of Bangladesh has been very concerned on the subject of ensuring the security of foreigners; the incident of

Holey Artisan Bakery put a question mark on its efforts and has created a negative perception of towards expatriation in Bangladesh; the expatriates were in a dilemma incident e.g. What should they do? Whether they should continue the job in Bangladesh or not? What will happen to the security measurements after the incident? This research tried to explain their views, apprehensions while working in Bangladesh after the incidents.

## 2.2. The Current Landscape

Bangladesh with its ethnicity and tradition of very warm hospitality has always been an ideal place for expatriates not only from any similar culture but also for people from the diverse or novel environment and culture. But overnight this incident changed more than a few calculations related to expatriation in Bangladesh. Through these types of attacks, terrorist groups try to give a clear message of their intention and try to get maximum attention from the media for example 9/11 attack attackers targeted the powerful icons of the US economy, which makes Al Qaeda as a center of attention for the world media overnight.

In the case of this well-planned Holey Artisan attack, the attackers were quite successful to get the attention of the world media but somehow, they underestimated the strategic mapping of the government and law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh. On July 16th, 2016, 15 days after the attack police arrested three people including an acting pro-vice-chancellor of one of the top private universities, his relative and the manager of that building where the attackers were staying nearly for two months before

the attack. They were arrested from Bashundhara Residential Area, Dhaka; for renting out a flat to the militants (The Daily Star, 2016d; Dhaka Tribune, 2016b). Police suspected that attackers drafted their plan at that place.

On July 26th 9 militants were killed and 2 were arrested in Kallyanpur, Dhaka in an operation named 'Storm 26', The police confirmed that the operation was conducted to find the masterminds of the Holey Artisan attack (The Daily Star, 2016e). The Government and Bangladesh Police continued the investigation with top priority and many others were arrested later for being involved in the attack.

A trial began on December 3rd, 2018, and ended on November 17th, 2019. Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka court sentences seven to hang till death and fine them 50,000 BDT each (Tipu, et. al., 2020).

### 3. Research Method

As the study is exploratory and narrative in nature with less knowledge regarding the significance, depth of this decisive stipulation and incident so researchers found it more appropriate to employ the qualitative approach for the study. Besides, researchers found a greater scope in support of using qualitative research for deeper understanding (Moore, 2000; Silverman, 1999) of the critical consequences and insights of the incident. This qualitative study is basically a combination of narrative situational analysis and longitudinal study. In the first phase, a total number of twenty-two expatriates working in different organizations were interviewed from August 2016 to January 2017. At that time, the authors tried to collect the expatriates' views and their immediate responses to that

particular situation, in that sense, the first phase can be labeled as situational analysis. Complying with the concept of Hendricks, Blanken and Adriaans (1992) that the snowball sampling technique provides advantages to the qualitative and explorative studies, the informants were selected via the snowball sampling technique.

Primary data for the research were collected in the course of qualitative interviews (Seidman, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005), mostly in-depth interview sessions. As the situation was complex and some of the respondents were not comfortable sharing their exact views at the first interview, therefore, seventeen respondents were interviewed twice. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, none of the interview sessions were recorded. However, notes were taken cautiously during the interviews.

In the second phase of the research, the authors collected the data from the same group of respondents from April 2020 to September 2020. However, this time only sixteen expatriates were interviewed, among the rest six respondents four were unreachable as they returned to their countries and not available on emails and other social networking sites, one was transferred to another country and due to the COVID-19 situation in 2020, he could not manage time for the interview session. And the other two lost their interest in the research so did not participate in the second phase yet she permits us to use her interview data collected in the first phase.

For the secondary data, researchers had to depend on local and international newspaper articles greatly as scholarly articles on the incident were not available.

Table 1: Details of Data collection

Particulars	Initial Interview (2016-2017)	Second Phase Interview (2020)
Number of respondents	22	16
Mode of interview	Direct or Face-to-face interviews	Telephone and Online: email, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom
Type of interview	In-depth, open-ended and semi-structured	Semi-structured

Source: Authors, from respondents' profile and interview data analy

Table 2: Respondents' profile and interview mode and frequency

SL	Respondent Code	Sex	Industry	Mode of First Phase Interview		Mode of Second Phase Interview
				Initial Interview	Second Interview	Online Interview
1	Respondent_RMG_M01	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Unreachable
2	Respondent_RMG_M02	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	Not Required	Email
3	Respondent_RMG_M03	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Email
4	Respondent_RMG_M04	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	Telephone Interview	Email
5	Respondent_RMG_M05	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Email
6	Respondent_RMG_M06	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	Telephone Interview	Unreachable
7	Respondent_RMG_M07	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	Telephone Interview	Email and Skype Interview
8	Respondent_RMG_M08	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Email
9	Respondent_RMG_M09	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Unreachable
10	Respondent_RMG_M10	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Zoom Interview
11	Respondent_RMG_M11	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Email
12	Respondent_RMG_M12	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Zoom Interview
13	Respondent_RMG_F01	Male	RMG	In-depth Interview	Not Required	Unreachable
14	Respondent_RMG_F01	Female	RMG	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Did not participate
15	Respondent_Edu_F01	Female	Education	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	WhatsApp Interview
16	Respondent_Edu_M01	Male	Education	In-depth Interview	Not Required	Email and Skype Interview
17	Respondent_Edu_M01	Male	Education	In-depth Interview	Telephone Interview	Email
18	Respondent_NGO_F01	Female	NGO	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Email
19	Respondent_NGO_F01	Female	NGO	In-depth Interview	Not Required	Email
20	Respondent_NGO_M01	Male	NGO	In-depth Interview	In-depth Interview	Unreachable
21	Respondent_NGO_M02	Male	NGO	In-depth Interview	Telephone Interview	Email
22	Respondent_NGO_M02	Male	NGO	In-depth Interview	Not Required	Email

Source: Authors, from respondents' profile and interview data analysis

#### 4. Findings and Analysis: Impact of the Attack on Expatriation

Foreign investment and global collaborations play important role in creating new employment opportunities, develop capacity and productivity for the economy of any developing country. It helps to design, produce and deliver better products, services and solutions. Collaborations are considered as the key to sustainable benefits therefore, the number of global collaborations is increasing day by day. Global investors, multinational companies, transnational enterprises, international regulatory organizations and international NGOs try to design effective design expansion plans considering the host countries' economic and political situation. While implementing the expansion process global companies need to transfer global values and leadership style along with the production and delivery standards. Therefore, they send expatriates with long or short-term business assignments.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of human resource management, the main purpose of expatriation or international assignments is to ensure the 'best practice' in the subsidiary and partner organizations, transfer technology, leadership and knowledge. As global leaders, expatriates help to make certain positive changes in managerial practices. They ensure the best organizational working environment and create a better impact to meet international standards.

For some other important aspects, i.e., install organizational culture, standardized business functions, establish direct control, socialization, globalization, network

building, develop management talent, create global leaders and knowledge transfer (Minbaeva, and Michailova, 2004; Bonache, and Brewster, 2001; Bender and Fish, 2000; Downes, and Thomas, 2000; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000) are closely related to the international assignments. A significant number of studies have also been conducted to examine different aspects related to expatriation; e.g., expatriate selection (Caligiuri, 2000), training (Lee and Croker, 2006; Black and Gregersen, 2000), compensation (McNulty, 2016; Bonache, and Fernandez, 1997). Researchers have also tried to conceptualize the succession of expatriates' careers considering it as a form of dynamic international career (McNulty and Vance, 2017). Adjustments to international assignments (Bhatti, et al., 2014; Herman and Tetrick, 2009; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009; Aryee and Stone, 1996), adjustments for women expatriates (Joshi, Caligiuri and Lazarove, 1999), the consequences of adjustments (Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen, 2003) have also been a center of attention of various researchers, as the accomplishment of an international assignment greatly depends on the successful adjustment at the host country, its nature and working environment. Some issues, e.g., expatriate management (Black and Gregersen, 1999) their job satisfaction (Birdseye, 1990) and job burnout (Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006) significantly contributed to the literature of international human resource management to understand the dimensions of overseas assignments.

From a host country's perspective expatriates help to transform the human capital of the host country. Bangladesh also welcomes expatriates and admires their

contribution. According to a report of a local newspaper Bangla Tribune and data collected from the immigration department sources, Sarwar (2018) nearly 86,000 citizens of 44 countries are legally working at over one thousand local and multinational companies in Bangladesh and over the time the number is also increasing.

Interview analysis from both phases revealed that, though the government handled the situation very effectively the respondents mentioned that at the initial stage, more specifically the following six months after the attack the expats and their families living here had gone through a hard time. At that time, they were more concerned about the security of their families. As the attackers at 'Holey Artisan Bakery' mainly targeted the non-Muslim foreigners, so the non-Muslim expatriates had to undergo a serious fright of family security. Some said that they were so much worried and wanted to go back to their countries for some time. Some even took leave, went back to their countries with their families and when they found that the situation was under control they came back again.

As the family also plays an important role for successful expatriation and sometimes also influences on acceptance of these types of international assignments (Richardson, 2006) but the anxiety related to insecurity is exceedingly distressing their psychological condition at that time. From the second phase interview analysis respondents confirmed that anxieties hampered their work, family life and work-life balance for a long time. One of the respondents (Respondent\_Edu\_F01) even complained about mental health problems during the first phase of the interview, though, she

overcame the problem quickly but she mentioned that organizations should include employee mental health checkups in the employee regular health checkups.

.....'I know how difficult it was for me; I was very lucky that my organization arranged a psychologist.... with the support of my organization, collages and family.... But not everyone was that much, even some of my friends used to consult with me at that time. Some even used to consult with doctors personally" (Respondent\_Edu\_F01)

In their research Shaffer and Harrison (1998) also mentioned that anxieties may result in unfathomable negative consequences such as psychological withdrawal from the assignment. In the first phase, when we ask the participant about their conditions, two participants (Respondent\_RMG\_M06 and Respondent\_NGO\_M02) at that point mentioned that they had such feelings of psychological withdrawal from their duties. In the second phase, none of among sixteen participants (including Respondent\_NGO\_M02) reported such issues as they mentioned that they feel safe and satisfied with the safety follow-up law enforcement agencies of the Bangladesh government.

During the first phase interview, two respondents (Respondent\_RMG\_M02 and Respondent\_RMG\_M10) blamed the organizations, not the local government for being uncaring to handle the situation more cautiously; in other words, they complained about organizational injustice. Some previous researches such as Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) and Forstenlechner (2010) mentioned that this is a common phenomenon faced by expatriates mostly in the host countries. Another three



respondents from the RMG Industry sector also mentioned that at that time situation expatriation in Bangladesh was more challenging than those of being in some other Asian countries i.e. China, India and Vietnam and some of their colleagues were so desperate that some companies had to offer them more attractive compensation and benefits packages. According to the respondents in Bangladesh's RMG sector, the compensation packages are mostly designed in accordance with the Balance sheet approach. This approach refers to upholding the home country's minimum standard by way of inducement in favor of an expatriate on compensations and benefits issues. Every so often, they have been provided with various additional benefits, other a few services and sufficient support from the Bangladeshi companies for them and their families. As summarized in their statements it can be specified that their job expectations in the context of compensation and benefits, leadership practice, and motivational policies designed by the companies are fairly adequate to meet job expectations.

During the first phase interview session five of the respondents working at RMG and NGO sector company mentioned that their friends and families advised them to work from home so they used to do so for at least the first three months after the attack, the HR teams of their organizations helped with all required support.

The first phase interview data showed that throughout the first two months after the attack most of the respondents (17 among 22 respondents) did not attend any public gathering, they and their families avoided shopping, visiting restaurants during that time. During the second phase interview

session, Respondent\_RMG\_M12 revealed that things were tough for him for the first six months to maintain regular office work, client meetings along with family engagements. Therefore, he had to send his family back to his country in September 2016. Many embassies, for example, the USA and UK immediately issued alerts for their citizens in and around the Gulshan area (The Daily Star, 2016b). And other embassies followed them and also provided travel advisory to their citizens. Some also mentioned that they were now not free to attend any social gatherings, parties and cultural functions due to feelings of uncertainty. Intended for long-term assignments or expatriation, it is very important to know the host country, culture not only for the official purpose but for cultural adjustments (Welch, 2003), psychological attachments, recreations and grater, and excellent diplomacy. However, the processes were disrupted, and it took at least three to six months for things to get normal.

Any terror attack has a negative impact on the economy, as the counties which lost their citizens at that attack were the key trade and development partners of Bangladesh, so initially, many experts predicted that there will have to deal with a massive loss in RMG and development sector. Bangladesh was also trying too hard to restore its business prospects and economic growth, so it took all necessary actions to regain the confidence of global investors, its development partners, and the international community. The Authority of the state declared a 'zero tolerance' policy to terrorism and their efforts were also very much visible. As a committed supporter of the global war on terror

government took all measures and tried its best to reinstate the peaceful political order, police and law enforcers were on the highest alert and taking major actions to prevent the extremists, tracking their financing, undertaking many operations to capture and imprison the extremists or terrorists; and of the extremists have been killed in the several operations.

At the same time, most of the organizations provided managerial support and effective advisory related to the assignments. Some respondents mentioned that organizations also provided the work from home and flexible office hour facilities at that hard time. Some companies revised the project timeline with easy targets for the following months after the incident (for long-term target-based projects). Organizations in some cases even shortened project completion time or appointed local project managers to assist the expatriates and reduce their workload.

The study also revealed that the inter-faith dialogues and programs promoting inter-cultural harmony organized by government and non-government organizations, universities and some other cultural and religious organizations helped them to understand the people of Bangladesh. The warm and helpful behavior of local people, emotional support from the local friends and continuous support from law enforcers helped the expatriates to get back the mental strength to work in Bangladesh.

## 5. Conclusion

According to Caligiuri and Cascio, (1998) selection of such candidates with appropriate competencies is another challenge for the

organizations. As companies generally send the most competent employees to demonstrate their technical, managerial and leadership skills. However, companies also expect to get maximum output from these global assignees; as expats cost much higher. As day by day, the demand for expatriations or international assignments is increasing (Bhatti, et al., 2014), complexity and real-life problems related to expatriation also coming into the spotlight. Therefore, researchers have also focused on the family life of expatriates, as families also play an essential role in the expatriates' work-life balance and notably in the success of their assignments. Researchers even tried to find out the influences of the family for international assignees' (Richardson, 2006) emotional or psychological extraction from their assignments (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998) analysis of career from the perception of expatriates and their spouses (Riusala and Suutari, 2000). Most of the companies have their own set of policies and strategies for handling such problems related to expatriation, but need to work on more on it. A large portion of the organizational success in the global marketplace depends on the expats and their leadership styles.

Any terror attack not only presents a serious threat to national security but also slows down the pace of economic development. Terror attacks such as Holey Artisan Attack where foreigners were the main targets create tension among the expatriates. Certainly, it can also have a negative impact on the mental health of the expatriates. Nevertheless, expatriates' perceptions regarding any critical situation such as a terror attack that took place in Dhaka on July 1, 2016 (Billah, 2017; BBC

News, 2016a; Bdnews24.com, 2016; The Daily Star, 2016a) never came under the spotlight of academic discussions. This is a small attempt to discover the fact through an in-depth study.

As the study revealed that the attack had some immediate impacts which created huge tension among all. Expatriates working in Bangladesh were facing several challenges and anxieties concerning self and family security after the major attack at the 'Holey Artisan Bakery', which as a result was essentially hampered their assignments and work-life balance as well. However, through immediate and strategic actions, the authority of the state overcame the situation within a short period of time. At the same time organizations also took necessary steps to motivate the expatriates with managerial support, flexible office hours and work from home facilities and better compensation packages.

## 6. Recommendations

This study also suggests that government, non-government or other institutions and even organizations should encourage the practice such as interfaith dialogue and programs promoting intercultural and multicultural harmony for the expatriates, their families. Departments related to people and culture need to make some more specific strategies to increase the multicultural harmony within the organizations, industries and society. These programs will essentially help the host country and organizations to increase a cooperative culture. These programs will also help the organizations to understand their expatriate employees and facilitate building strong cultural collaboration. Which will eventually

lead towards the effective transfer of knowledge, technology, leadership and value in organizations.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the participants for their time and insight during the study.

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