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Cross-Cultural Impression Management: a Cultural Knowledge Audit Model

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Abstract

Aim: Many people moving into a new culture for work or study do so without prior cross-cultural training, yet successful cultural adaptation has important ramifications. This paper focused on cross-cultural impression management as an element of cultural adaptation. Does cultural adaptation begin by paying strong attention to nonverbal cues in a host culture?

How is that attention converted into knowledge, and how do people use such knowledge management during impression management within the new culture?

Design/Methodology: The method was qualitative. Ten international students at an English university were recruited. All originated outside the European Union. Each took part in a one-hour structured interview. The transcripts were analysed through thematic analysis.

Findings: International students adopted cross cultural impression management strategies in order to enhance successful adaptation to the new host culture. Students consciously processed knowledge about nonverbal behaviour norms through everyday interactions. They audited knowledge deficits by detecting differences between the host norms and their home culture's norms. The motives for this included desiring to maximise rewards from situations.

Research implications/limitations: The findings imply that being in a new culture makes people 'high self monitors'. They are more aware than usual about their own and others' nonverbal behaviours. The findings tell us about how cultural adaptation begins.

Originality/Value: This appears to be the first in-depth qualitative research examining cross-cultural impression management by international students and deducing implications for expatriates.



Cross-Cultural Impression Management: a Cultural Knowledge Audit Model

The recent surge of global business organizations has led to an increase in the use of expatriate employees (Caligiuri, 2000, Bolino, 2007 & Okpara & Kabongo, 2011). With this in mind, the failure of expatriate employees is a widespread problem faced by global organizations (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985 & Wil-Harzing & Christensen, 2004). It has been suggested that approximately 10 to 80% of expatriates sent on foreign assignments return home prematurely (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011). One reason for this wide range is that failure rates differ amongst host countries (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004). An example of this has been provided by Shay and Tracey (1997). They found that up to 40 percent of US expatriates assigned to a developed country returned home prematurely, whereas the figure was 70% for those expatriates assigned to a developing country.

Such findings have been explained in a number of ways. One explanation is that there are important differences between expatriates' home and host cultures, in terms of their communication practices (Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998). Another explanation is that expatriates inadequately adapt to their host culture, which can result in poor work performance and personal problems (Tung, 1988, Black, 1988). Wu (2008) discussed 'Culture Shock' as something that exacerbates expatriates' failure to adapt to the new culture. Wu discussed cultural adaptation as something that involves adjusting to unfamiliar cultural situations, norms and values. Expatriate failure has financial ramifications, as well as consequences for workplace productivity in other branches of the global organization (Copeland & Griggs, 1985). Vogel, Van Vuuren and Millard (2008) estimated that the financial implications, per single expatriate assignment failure, can be up to one million US dollars. Cross-cultural training is an effective solution to this problem (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001, Waxin

& Pannaccio, 2005 & Littrell *et al.*, 2006). Unfortunately, cross-cultural training is available to only a minority of expatriates (Brewster & Pickard, 1994). For example, Ashamalla (1998) reports that, in the US alone, only 30 to 45% of firms offer cross-cultural training to managers sent on expatriate assignments. For most expatriates, therefore, adaptation to a new culture happens organically, through everyday social interactions after they arrive in the host country.

An important and under-researched aspect of cultural adaptation is cross-cultural impression management (Kamau, 2009). Cross-cultural impression management concerns the strategic manipulation of one's nonverbal behaviour to fit with the norms of a host culture. These norms are called 'display rules' (Ekman, 1972). The overarching question of this research is: how do expatriates compile knowledge about the nonverbal norms of their new cultural environment and how do everyday social interactions between expatriates and the host population contribute to this?

1. Literature Review

Impression Management

Impression management involves formulating and presenting favourable images of the self to others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The aim of impression management is to influence others' perceptions of the self. Impression management can involve manipulating nonverbal cues as part of a defined strategy. Jones and Pittman (1982) categorized impression management into five strategies. One strategy is self-promotion, which involves subtly emphasising one's current and previous achievements to give the impression that one is an adept, efficient person. Ingratiation is a strategy involving flattering others and acting deferentially so as to give the impression that one is likeable. The strategy of exemplification involves going above and beyond the requirements of one's job or responsibilities so as to

appear commendable. Intimidation is a strategy involving the use of coercive tactics so as to give the impression that one is a danger or threat to others. Finally, the strategy of supplication involves appearing needy so as to give the impression that one is non-threatening or deserves attention. There are a number of sub-strategies within each of these five categories (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995).

Cross Cultural Impression Management

Ambady and Rosenthal (1992) described the five strategies as the primary bases for impression formation in everyday life. By adopting impression management strategies, people enhance others' perceptions of their likability, competence and attractiveness (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). However, the success of a given impression management strategy depends on the cultural environment because particular strategies are appropriate in some cultures but not others (Kamau, 2009). This is due to culture-specific display rules about what kind of nonverbal behaviour is appropriate (Ekman, 1972). Cross-cultural impression management involves adapting the conveyed self-image to suit a different cultural environment (Gangstead & Snyder, 1986, 2000).

Impression management involves manipulating nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, smiling, eye contact, physical proximity and touching (DePaulo, 1992). Wiseman and Hammer (1977) discussed the importance of adaptation to the communication norms of a host culture. For example, the amount of eye contact, the type of hand gestures and the tone of the voice during communication, varies from culture to culture. Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) likewise emphasised the need for adaptation to both verbal and nonverbal behavioural cues. They argued that a lack of adaptation to these cues hinders cultural adaptation. Successful adaptation to a host culture is discussed as a primary goal for expatriates (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Cross-cultural impression management is a key part of cultural

adaptation by expatriates (Kamau, 2009). Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) discuss this process as something that is deployed strategically.

Impression Management Strategies

Impression management begins with 'impression construction' (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Successful impression management involves monitoring and controlling one's nonverbal behaviours, in line with what is appropriate within a given social environment (Snyder, 1974). In order to determine what is appropriate, paying attention to others' nonverbal behaviour is important. Snyder showed that there are individual differences in people's ability to monitor their own and others' nonverbal behaviour. Snyder defined high self-monitors as people who are attentive to social cues. Applied to a cross-cultural context, we hypothesised that a high degree of self monitoring is paramount to cultural adaptation. We explored the amount of attention that people in a new country pay to others' nonverbal behaviour in everyday social interactions. Kamau's (2009) knowledge audit model tells us that individuals moving to a new culture *need* to process information about the host culture's nonverbal behaviour norms. Kamau's model also suggests that knowledge management is key to successful cross-cultural impression management. In line with this, we wanted to explore how people in a new country convert information gauged from everyday social interactions into a cultural knowledge base. According to the knowledge audit model, individuals need to determine whether there is a deficit between their initial knowledge and the knowledge that is needed for impression management in the new culture. This led us to explore whether cultural adaptation constitutes processing information about the differences between the nonverbal cues one sees in a host culture and the nonverbal cues normative of one's home culture.

Impression Management Rewards

What motivates people to engage cross-cultural impression management? Impression motivation is something that precedes impression construction (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). People decide *why* they want to impression manage. People who are high self monitors are known to be driven by the ultimate aim of maximizing rewards and minimizing punishments (Schlenker, 1980). Therefore, one motive for cross-cultural impression management could be the desire to reap social rewards in the new environment. For example, people who have moved to a new culture might pay strong attention to nonverbal cues with the specific aim of maximizing rewards. A reward could be gaining interactional responses from host citizens, such as in terms of approval, friendship or power status (Schlenker, 1980, & Selmer, 2006). Richardson and McKenna (2006) suggested that deficits in cultural knowledge hinder the ability of people in a new culture to interact and relate with the local citizens. Another motive for cross-cultural impression management could be the desire for success in work or study settings. Impression management in workplace settings is often motivated by desires concerning career goals for progression or promotion (Judge & Bretz, 1994, Wayne & Lidden, 1995, Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002). The outcomes of cross-cultural impression management can likewise include increased productivity in the workplace, career progress and overall wellbeing (Gardener & Martinko, 1988, Gaudagno & Cialdini, 2007). In the case of expatriates, we should find evidence of people mimicking nonverbal behaviours that reap rewards in a host culture and terminating nonverbal behaviours that do not. We should also find evidence of expatriates being consciously aware of these motives. Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) suggested that individuals strategically target an audience who will provide rewards. We should therefore find evidence of people who have moved to a new culture seeking those social situations with the greatest potential for rewards and avoiding social situations with the potential for 'punishment'.

2. Aims/Hypotheses Development

This study sampled international students as a good example of people who have recently moved countries. They compare to expatriates in that they move for a set period and with a set objective. In line with Kamau's (2009) knowledge audit model, firstly, we hypothesised that high 'self-monitors' are the most proficient at processing information about the nonverbal behavioural norms of the new culture. We also hypothesised that high self monitors are most likely of all expatriates to determine whether there is a deficit between their initial cultural knowledge about the host culture (obtained prior to arrival) and the actual knowledge needed for impression management in the host culture. Secondly, in line with the knowledge audit model, we hypothesised that the process is to be consciously aimed at forming a cultural knowledge base. In line with this, we wanted to find out whether participants transform information processed from everyday social interactions into a cultural knowledge base. We hypothesised that this knowledge management has impression management motives. Finally, we envisaged that the sample would show an awareness of the rewards and potential 'punishments' associated with such knowledge management and impression management.

3. Methodology

3a. Data Collection

A qualitative design was used. Participants were interviewed individually and transcripts underwent thematic analysis. The sample recruited constituted international students from outside the European Union studying at a university in England. The rationale for this was that, in the UK, the category 'international students' refers to those students who are not EU citizens. Additionally, we rationalized that cultural differences between the UK and non-EU nations are more substantial than cultural differences between the UK and EU nations. The participants we were recruited via opportunity sampling. This involved displaying posters across campus and placing an advertisement on the university's portal.

3b. Sample Size and Profile

Participating international students were nine males and one female. The sample comprised: one Indian, three Nigerians, one Hong Kong national, one Indonesian, one French-American, one Malaysian and two Saudi Arabians.

3c. Measurements

Each participant was interviewed individually. Their demographic information was recorded via a questionnaire. This included information about age, gender and course of study. The interviewer used a sheet of paper with 30 set interview questions devised by the researchers. Apparatus constituted an mp3 recorder. Sample questions used by the interviewer included *'What did you know about England before you came?'* *'Have your facial expressions changed since you arrived in England?'* and *'Would you say you have adapted your body language since you arrived in England?'* Neutral prompts were utilized, where needed. These prompts encouraged the participant to elaborate on their answer, such as by requesting examples. Name codes (e.g. 'Student A') were used to identify recordings/transcripts in order to protect the students' anonymity and maintain confidentiality. A standardized debrief form was presented to each participant when the interview ended.

3d. Results/Analysis

Audio recordings of all interviews were transcribed. After transcription and familiarisation with all the interview data, the method we used to analyze the transcripts was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This qualitative analysis method is one that allows researchers to extract commonly occurring themes across all interview transcripts, in relation to the research questions.

The emerging patterns from the thematic analysis will now be discussed. Patterns were categorized under sub-themes about the students' adaptations in terms

of language, facial expressions and gestures. These will be discussed in the context of overarching themes in section 4 below, when we address our first research question: how do expatriates compile knowledge about the nonverbal norms of their new cultural environment? We will do likewise with our second research question: how do everyday social interactions between expatriates and the host population contribute to this? We will discuss evidence of cross-cultural impression management, knowledge management concerning display rules and the recognition of the rewards of studying in the UK.

4. Discussion

Evidence of students' awareness of host cultural knowledge

Students reported possessing some cultural knowledge about England prior to arriving. That knowledge was primarily obtained from media sources including the internet and films. Hafitah, Tahir and Ismail (2007) highlight the benefits of holding such prior knowledge, including the amelioration of culture shock and the enhancement of expatriates' understanding of interactions with citizens of the new culture. Tung (1998) stated that enhanced cultural knowledge assists in successful adaptation. However, Weinman (1984) described the cultural information obtained from media sources as information subject to misinterpretation. This was evident when one Saudi Arabian student was discussing difficulties in interactions between expatriates and host citizens: *'...I heard in the media if people are interested they come together and talk...but in reality it is nothing like that...'* (Student G, Lines 37-39).

Empirical research (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002, Molinsky, Krabbenhoft & Choi, 2005) provides support for the above assumption that cultural knowledge obtained before arriving in a new country is not enough for impression management. We deduce from Selmer, Chiu and Shenkar (2007) that the time spent in a new

culture, cultural exposure or familiarity, are what impact on knowledge acquisition and successful adaptation to cultural norms. This knowledge includes emotion norms and norms about nonverbal behaviour recognition (i.e. gestural meanings). All the same, Jun, Gentry and Hun (2001) argue that gaining information from media sources is a less risky method of gaining cultural knowledge, resulting in more certainty when interacting and communicating with host citizens.

Evidence of students' awareness of host cultural knowledge deficits

Students displayed awareness about cultural knowledge deficits concerning the host country. They implied that it was important to address those deficits, to enhance successful cultural adaptation. This provides initial support for Snyder's (1974) concept of high self-monitoring. The evidence suggests that people in a new country engage in high monitoring of their own and others' nonverbal behaviour. In line with Kamau's (2009) model, the findings suggested that the process is a conscious knowledge gathering process. There was some indication that impression management strategies were deployed by students in order to receive the rewards associated with adapting nonverbal behaviour in a way concordant with the local culture: *'...I lower or mimic their accent so they can understand me...'* (Student F, Lines 214-217). At the same time, the student reported the rewards of a foreign accent: *'...most of the time people assume I don't speak English because of the way I look... sometimes it can be a good thing because the police have stopped me and I say 'Sorry, no English' and they just let me go...'* (Student F, Lines 240-241). Students recognised the potential for change in accent over time, discussing the difficulties and whether the rewards outweigh these difficulties. They reported continuing in their attempts to successfully adapt their accent. One student from Hong Kong said: *'I know that it is difficult and may take 5-10 years... that it is not easy, I will try to*

overcome this...I will still learn one by one...' (Student D, Lines 213-216). One Nigerian student said *'...My accent is changing periodically...in a year's time it will be ok...'* (Student E, Line 133), providing additional support for the idea that cross-cultural impression management is a conscious, goal-oriented process.

Strategies deployed by students to rectify deficits

There was evidence that the students analysed their cultural knowledge to identify knowledge deficits: *'...when I talk to somebody and I see how his facial expression... how it should be... copying them and do as they do to be good for communication...'* (Student H, Line 87-88). There was also evidence that students sought situations which enrich their knowledge base vis-a-vis the host culture. One French-American student said *'...I would have appreciated being more with English people... I came here to meet English people...'* (Student J, Lines 162-163). This implies that contact with the host population was sought as an opportunity to gain more knowledge about English cultural norms. However, achieving that contact was sometimes difficult. One Saudi Arabian student said *'...it is difficult to be friends with them... what the international students are looking for is to live with people here in England and to get the accent and the language...people here do not do that'* (Student H, Lines 173; 205-208). An alternative strategy deployed to rectify cultural knowledge deficits included specifically seeking out people to imitate. This was evident in one Nigerian student's response: *'...I try and imitate the most vital ones...There are some that are much better...I have to copy those to adapt to the system...'* (Student E, Lines 159-163). The 'vital ones' could mean, for instance, locals who are involved in teaching or management. One explanation for this can be deduced from Schlenker (1980), who posited that individuals feel motivated to impression manage when targets are perceived as powerful, high status or likeable.

Nonverbal behavioural cues

It was apparent that students processed information about the differences between nonverbal cues normative of the host culture and nonverbal cues normative of their home culture. They used it in everyday interactions: *'I move my hands more now... In Indonesia it is very taboo....hand gestures from my culture are very very rude...I have changed...I move my hands, my fingers...'* (Student F, lines 159-161). One Indian student recited having adapted their laughing style to fit in line with the host culture. *'...I now control my laughing because I used to laugh uncontrollably...it didn't look nice...'* (Student A, Lines 155-156).

Differences between the home and host culture norms concerning nonverbal gestures was highlighted in one Nigerian student's response: *'...the gestures are different and the expressions are really different...'* (Student G, Lines 132-135). One Saudi Arabian student suggested: *'...they use more actions ...'* (Student I, Line 173) and *'... when you talk to the English, they act...'* (Student I, line 182). In order to rectify these deficits and comply with the host nonverbal norms, one French-American student recalled *'I do more non-verbal communication so people can see what I mean'* (Student J, lines 233). Deficits concerning accent were commonly referred to by students: *'My accent has changed...if I spoke the way I did in Nigeria I might find it difficult to be understood...I find doing this was the best way to interact with others...'* (Participant C, Lines 91-93). This suggests awareness of the rewards of adapting particular nonverbal behaviours and the importance of rectifying such deficits. This idea is further explained by Molinsky, Krabbenhoft and Choi (2005) who state that appropriate cultural interpersonal skills are crucial to successfully managing social situations in a foreign country. Existing research has shown that effective communication skills significantly contribute to successful cultural adaptation for expatriates (Gudykunst, Wiseman & Hammer, 1977, Ruben & Kealy, 1979). Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) likewise highlighted the ramifications of expatriates' failure to adapt to local communication norms. These include the failure impacting upon primary facets of expatriates' lives, within both personal and organizational settings.

Other examples of home and host cultural norm differences concerned pace. Some discussed the slower walking pace in the host country. This was evident from the response of one student from Hong Kong: *'...When I came here I thought why people are walking so slowly'*. Despite the differences between home and host norms, the student adapted their pace to match the local norms *'...now I think I have adapted to the culture and am walking more slowly...'* (Student D, Lines 145-146). Others discussed the pace as faster than their home norms: *'In my place you do not walk as fast as you do here... that is one of the changes I have found and also what has changed in me as well...I have been walking slowly in Nigeria but I find here if you walk that slow then that person may overtake you...so for you to cope you have to... walk the same pace as them...'* (Student C, Lines 100-101). The fact that such 'trivial' aspects of nonverbal norms are analysed is consistent with our prediction that people in a new culture engage in high levels of self monitoring.

Cultural knowledge deficits concerning dress were also discussed. One Nigerian student said: *'...We have our native dress...I came here with three... I can't remember when I last wore them...'* (Participant G, Lines 120-121). One Malaysian student reported the rationale for adapting to norms about dress: *'I have done it to adapt into the group...for me to be in that group I should adapt myself so they do not feel awkward...It's just like a barrier...'* (Student B, Lines 255-262). One Nigerian student said: *'...you have to dress as though if someone sees you ...and thinks yes he looks responsible...they are less likely to think that I will spoil the economy of the country...'* (Student E, Lines 167-169). This supports Entwistle (2000) who discussed dressing as a strategy in impression management, whereby the way individuals dress becomes a visual expression of their intentions and values. Peluchette, Karl and Rust (2006) indicated the implications of dress within business settings. They found that MBA students who strategically managed their work attire reported having a

positive impact within the workplace setting, such as by gaining respect from others and achieving higher credibility.

Awareness of the rewards of adopting cross cultural impression management strategies

Benefits associated with deploying cross-cultural impression management strategies include enhancing the likelihood of desirable outcomes. One Malaysian student reported: *'...Whenever I meet people I tend to smile more instead of when I was back there...I tend to look around some more trying to greet people as well and then they will greet me back... I am sure of that...'* (Student B, Lines 214-215). One Indian student reported *'...When I started to use more facial expressions I get more responses...'* (Student A, Line 310) *'...I always greet people with smiles... that thing I have learnt from here'* (Student A, 156-157). Students recognised that such nonverbal behaviour results in interactional responses from people in the host culture. Goffman (1959) discusses conscious use of strategic nonverbal behaviours as something that helps convey impressions about the self to others. A further desirable outcome included being understood by the host culture: *'...when you do this...it is good communication and then they understand... this has more benefits...'* (Student H, Lines 153-155). An additional desirable outcome was gaining assistance in achieving targeted goals: *'...if you do not submit yourself you do not get what you want... by continually submitting yourself you will learn from these people and impact this knowledge obtained onto the next generation...'* (Student E, Lines 146-150).

Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) support these assumptions, suggesting that impression management strategies assist in the successful cultural adaptation of expatriates. Likewise, Giacalone and Beard (1994) postulated that expatriates deploy impression management strategies so as to create the desirable image of acting in a culturally consistent manner. They discussed this as something which facilitates satisfying interaction experiences for both expatriates and host culture citizens.

Support for this was provided by one Saudi Arabian student: *'When you move your hands, you seem friendly and have interest for the conversation...you appear to be funny, I want to be this way and for it to be a habit; just like the English people do...'* *'...You have to act a certain way like a funny face and smiling...'* (Student I, lines 232-241).

What could be the expected overarching reward for cross-cultural impression management by international students? Students recognised that adopting successful cross-cultural impression management strategies could lead to prosperous academic achievements. This was evident from discussions about the benefits of completing a degree in the UK, in terms of career progression and recognised value worldwide: *'...A UK degree has a very good international market...'* (Student A, Line 4). One Saudi Arabian student reported: *'When I go home and speak in English I want to prove that I was in the UK'* (Participant I, lines 220-222). There was also some evidence that another overarching motivate for cross-cultural impression management by international students is the benefits for knowledge-transfer within organizational settings after graduation. Various researchers provide examples of such benefits. They include boosts in work performance (Liu & Shaffer, 2005) and enhanced business corporation's global success (Hocking, Brown & Harzing, 2007).

Based on Kamau's model (2009), we expected that knowledge management concerning host cultural norms should be central to successful cross-cultural impression management. There was evidence that students continually converted the obtained information from everyday social interactions into a cultural knowledge base. For example, one Nigerian student said: *'...if you spend some time learning about the local culture; looking at what people do and why they do this, then you will not get into trouble with anyone...'* (Student G, Lines 281-282). Trouble could mean cultural misunderstandings. For their cultural knowledge base, students seemed to have acquired knowledge primarily through interactions with locals: *'...In England if you don't hang around other people you won't get any facts...'* (Student E, Lines 30-

31). Examples of the awareness of cultural display rules were described by the students. This included understanding that displaying nonverbal expressions in a certain way could be perceived as unresponsive, rude or withdrawn by the host locals. Students recognised that they would not benefit from the associated rewards by breaking local nonverbal norms: *'...when you are speaking and you never smile...people would think every time you are boring and not smile...it will allow other people to assist you in one aspect of life or another...'* (Student E, Lines 77-80).

Evidence of students' awareness of cultural boundaries

Likewise, students reported their awareness of certain cultural boundaries, in the sense of nonverbal behaviours that were deemed acceptable by students whilst in the host culture. For example one student reported *'As long as you do not cross any boundaries then you can feel free to do what you want...'* (Student G, Lines 232-233). One Nigerian student said: *'...You can't come to a new country that you have never been before and dress radically...'* (Student E, Lines 166-167). This supports DePaulo (1992), who discussed the relevance of culture for nonverbal cues. For instance, some students described the culture in England as individualistic. One French-American student stating: *'I would say very individualistic...'* (Student J, Line 57) and *'... people here value their privacy a lot...'* (Student G, Lines 283-285).

4a. Implications

Supporting our rationale, students obtained the majority of their cultural knowledge about the host nation organically (that is, via social interactions) after arriving in England. The results supported existing literature which discusses cross-cultural impression management as something central to cultural adaptation. Our

results support the idea that individuals determine whether there is a deficit between their initial cultural knowledge and the knowledge needed for impression management within the new culture. Therefore, these findings provide support for Kamau's (2009) audit model and, as hypothesised, students adapted and imitated nonverbal behaviours in order to reap perceived rewards from the new cultural setting. There was also evidence that they terminated nonverbal behaviours that did not reap rewards, thus supporting our assumption that cross-cultural impression management is a conscious, reward-oriented process (Kamau, 2009). This cost-reward perspective is consistent with literature showing that people navigating group situations are motivated to maximise rewards (e.g. Levine & Moreland, 1994, Kamau, in press).

These findings have implications for expatriates in organizational settings, highlighting the awareness of the short and long term benefits of strategic impression management. Ashford and Northcraft (1992) suggest that employees engage in impression management to achieve desirable outcomes from co-workers in supervisory or senior positions. Impression management in organizations can, consequently, result in short and long term positive career progression such as via promotions, pay rises and positive feedback. When the organization is in a new country, impression management consistent with the local culture can benefit expatriates' achievement of career progression and their likeability amongst employees from the host culture.

4b. Further research

This research provides new insight about nonverbal adaptation as a part of cultural adaptation. Few studies have explored this issue. This research provides a synthesis of existing literature on expatriates, impression management and cross-cultural adaptation. It should be noted, as with any other research, that this study is not without its limitations. For example, self reports (in the present study,

participants' interview responses), have limitations (Ogden, 2003). Future research could incorporate observational techniques to supplement self reports. Evidently, there was a notable gender imbalance in the sample recruited. This was largely due to the opportunity sampling strategy adopted. Previous literature suggests that there are significant gender differences in the impression management tactics that people deploy (i.e. Higgins & Snyder, 1989, DuBrin, 1994, Lee et al, 1999). Given the gender imbalance in our study, it was not possible to examine this in-depth, therefore future research should analyse gender differences by recruiting equal numbers of males and females.

We made assumptions about the international students' impression management strategies or goals, but quantitative research is needed to confirm our assumptions using a large, representative sample. Paulhus (1984) discussed impression management as a sub-conscious activity directed towards internal audiences therefore our use of qualitative interviews might not have captured the subconscious aspects of impression management. We hypothesised that knowledge acquisition in cross-cultural impression management is a conscious process. However, considering the point made by Paulhus (1984), future research should explore whether there are aspects of the knowledge acquisition that are sub-conscious.

Our recruitment criteria meant that we sampled students from outside the EU. Future research could include EU students, to investigate whether there are significant cultural differences in nonverbal behaviour norms. This would tell us whether expatriates from inside the EU working in the UK have experiences comparable to expatriates from outside the EU working in the UK. Given the present study's focus on the benefits of impression management in a host culture, future research could use a longitudinal method. Following-up students after the graduate and enter the workplace should inform on the long-term benefits of cross-cultural impression management. Equally, if the students graduate then work in their home countries or a new country, further research should inform on the cultural knowledge transfer benefits of having studied abroad.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study demonstrated the use of cross-cultural impression management in cultural adaptation. We found evidence of cultural knowledge management relevant to nonverbal behaviour norms. People in a new culture are more alert than usual about their own and others' nonverbal behaviour. They engage in high levels of self monitoring. Through everyday social interactions, they audit cultural knowledge deficits relevant to nonverbal behaviour norms. They use this knowledge base in their interactions with locals, updating their nonverbal behaviour in ways that maximise rewards and minimise penalties for breaking local cultural norms. These findings provide support for a knowledge audit model.

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