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Experiential approach towards the development of cultural intelligence: Perceptions of International (civil servant) expatriates,,

Emri   Burim Alili
Program i magjistraturës   MA Administratë Publike 3+2
Fakulteti   Administratë Publike dhe Shkenca Politike
Universiteti   Universiteti i Evropës Juglindore

Mentor,   Kandidat,

Doc. Dr. Memet Memeti   Burim Alili (ID 112193)

UNIVERSITETI I EJL
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FACULTY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

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List of Abbreviations

CQ – Cultural intelligence

CQS – Cultural Intelligence Scale

IPA – Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Abstract

With the international business environment becoming increasingly globalized and culturally complex, the current study discusses cultural intelligence as one of the most important capabilities that global managers working across multiple cultures should develop. Cultural intelligence regarded as individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008) is claimed to be of developmental nature (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). However, since the previous literature has not properly addressed the process of developing cultural intelligence, there is a lack of knowledge how individuals actually develop their cultural intelligence. For this reason, this study aims at exploring and understanding International civil servants' perceptions on their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments. The research findings are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on cultural intelligence.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the research was carried out by applying interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) based on the qualitative methodology. Five International Civil Servants having been on more than one long-term international assignment took part in the research. The data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews in order to explore the International civil servants' experiences in developing their effectiveness in culturally different settings. Afterwards, the data were analyzed based on the procedure suggested by IPA.

The research findings depict International civil servants ' development of cultural intelligence as a continuous process of experiential learning triggered by cultural novelty and a necessity to adjust to new circumstances in order to be effective. Cultural intelligence is increased through iterative learning from experience which takes place over time. The findings also suggest treating development of cultural intelligence as a highly individual process depending on unique circumstances. Finally, in the long-run individual's cultural intelligence evolves into sustainable personal growth known as global mindset.

On the basis of the research findings, this study contributes to the knowledge of cultural intelligence by increasing the understanding of the practical process of developing cultural intelligence and proving the developmental nature of cultural intelligence. Additionally, it raises the awareness of individuals' cultural biases which might hinder effective behavior abroad. Finally, this study draws attention to the differentiation between cultural and geographical distance, especially important in Europe.

Not only do the findings of this research contribute to the knowledge of cultural intelligence, but also raise some practical implications and some new ideas for future research.

1. Introduction

Mobility in global market has a different momentum; changing jobs and locations, even working on distance has never been easier. In the last years cultural intelligence has gained importance in overcoming challenges related to the cultural differences in the global environment. Cultural intelligence is an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). *'Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves.'*

T.Schwartz 1992;

1990s discourse in the context of organizational cultures was marked by the research, findings, and various studies that focused on cultural dimensions. The notion of cultural dimensions came to live with Geert Hofstede and his famous study with IBM. Building on this moment many scholars including Fons Trompenaars and Edward T. Hall developed models that would aim to explain the differences in dichotomies among people coming from different cultures. Although these studies served as solid point in understanding the differences in staff behaviours and aimed to provide an overall score of nations among these dimensions, little was captured on how people would understand and develop the skills to manage these situations.

With an ever-increasing degree of globalization, culturally intelligent global managers are high in demand. For organizations they are a great asset through which organization have a competitive advantage. These are the individuals who do not only possess the technical competences necessary to fulfil their roles, but also are also culturally literate and able to lead effectively across cultures. It has become one of the essential abilities which contemporary leaders should develop to be able to lead in the situations defined by cultural diversity. Development of cultural intelligence is determined as a process of increasing the individual's capability to handle situations involving cross-cultural aspects over time. Among different ways of enhancing cultural intelligence, international experience is considered to be the most powerful developmental means. Therefore, international assignments provide a unique context for developing as well enhancing cultural intelligence.

In this context staff is expected to acquire skills which enable them to deal with cultural differences and to control those creating a common framework of understanding different cultures and developing a range of universal behaviours applicable in culturally diverse situations is the key of cultural intelligence. For this reason, cultural intelligence is regarded as one of the most important assets needed among

international civil servants. It explains why some individuals are able to deal with culturally diverse situations more effectively than others. Additionally, cultural intelligence is the main determinant defining the international civil servant's success in an international assignment.

Some suggest that the organizations which aim at reaching competitive advantage through effective global leadership should be more interested in developing culturally intelligent managers. Instead, the organisations prefer focusing on International civil servants' performance abroad.

Due to the limited attention towards a more holistic training of international civil servants, organizations mainly offer conventional cultural training approaches such as cognitive training methods focusing on culture-specific knowledge. However, due to the basic nature, the traditional training methods are not able to prepare adequately contemporary staff for the complex international assignments in diverse environments; even more often this step of the preparation is skipped because of the lack of time or/and underestimation of cultural differences. Therefore, international civil servants commonly rely on their experiences as the main and only source of learning in order to shape the patterns of behaviour which support the development of cultural intelligence.

Considering the importance of cultural intelligence in a global leadership context, there is very little research on how International civil servants actually increase their effectiveness on international assignments over time. Because of this, the development of cultural intelligence deserves to get more attention.

This study focuses on the development of cultural intelligence in the context of international assignments. Cultural intelligence is an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. It is important to note that during this study the terms international civil servant and expatriate will be used. This terms to some degree might be used interchangeably, both referring to International Organization/Business settings. It has become one of the essential abilities which contemporary labour should develop to be able to lead in the situations defined by cultural diversity (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Baruch, 2002; Van Dyne, Ang, & Livermore, 2010). Development of cultural intelligence is determined as a process of increasing the individual's capability to handle situations involving cross-cultural aspects over time. Among different ways of enhancing cultural intelligence, international experience is considered to be the most powerful developmental means, therefore, international assignments provide a unique context for developing cultural intelligence.

The literature reviewed for the purpose of this study did not suggest any evidence on the development of cultural intelligence. Some studies have wrongly considered cultural intelligence as a given ability, thus not addressing the question how cultural intelligence is acquired. Thomas and Inkson (2003)

acknowledge that the development of cultural intelligence is difficult to be depicted in practice, as it requires a considerable amount of time.

Nevertheless, international civil servants' experiences are regarded as the most effective source for developing cultural intelligence. Therefore, addressing the gap in the literature, this study aims at exploring and understanding international civil servants' perceptions about their development of cultural intelligence based on their experiences on multiple long-term international assignments. This implies an exploratory nature of the research.

Even though in the broad meaning, an expatriate is any person residing in a country other than his/her nationality (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013), in the context of international business, expatriates are commonly defined as "employees who are transferred out of their home base into some other area of the firm's international operations" (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008, p. 4). Based on this definition, the current study characterises an expatriate or an international civil servant whose home country is North Macedonia and who is temporarily relocated by his/her to work in a foreign subsidiary.

The research does not aim at applying the findings for the wider population, but rather at gaining an insight how international experiences have altered the individual's level of cultural intelligence. The results of this study aim at contributing to the deeper understanding of development of cultural intelligence.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the research is based on the central research question:

How do international civil servants perceive their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments?

The following sub-questions have been formulated to help answering the main research question:

1. Which factors shape International civil servants' experiences on their international assignments?
2. How do international civil servants perceive learning from experience on multiple long-term international assignments?
3. Which differences do international civil servants perceive between their multiple long-term international assignments?
4. How do international civil servants view themselves after their international long-term assignments?

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the research questions are addressed by qualitative research. The research is conducted by applying interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative research approach which allows exploring international civil servants' experiences in detail

and induces emergence of the patterns from the data. Five international civil servants have been interviewed using a semi-structured interview method in order to find out about their experiences on multiple long-term international assignments. Subsequently, the data were analysed using a standard procedure proposed by IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The research findings are based on the themes deriving from the qualitative data analysis.

This study consists of six chapters. The current chapter – the introduction (Chapter 1) – has briefly outlined the concept of cultural intelligence and its relevance in the global business environment. Furthermore, it has presented the research purpose and research questions which are addressed by carrying out an empirical research. Afterwards, the research design has been introduced.

The literature relevant to the research object is presented and analysed in the literature review part (Chapter 2). First, it depicts the current context of international business. Second, the concepts of cultural intelligence and the development of cultural intelligence are discussed by evaluating the views of different authors. The literature review provides a solid basis for understanding the context and setting the framework for empirical research. The methodological part (Chapter 3) presents the methodology and the processes used to conduct the empirical research in accordance with the nature of the research question. In particular, the research approach and the research method are presented discussing their advantages and disadvantages compared to the other methods. Additionally, sampling, data collection, and data analysis processes are described in this chapter.

The findings part (Chapter 4) displays the results of the research carried out.-It presents the processed data, which is organized in logical order of the themes.

The discussion (Chapter 5) grounds the research findings in the context of the existing literature and answers the research question.

The last part of the thesis, the conclusions (Chapter 6), outlines conclusions of the research, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and practical implications.

2. Literature review

The literature review provides an existing theoretical framework explaining the concept of cultural intelligence and its development. In order to fully exhaust the literature on these topics, first, the current context of international assignments and global leadership is discussed. It is followed by the main body of the literature review which takes a deeper insight into the concept of cultural intelligence: definition of cultural intelligence, its components, importance of developing cultural intelligence, formal

development of cultural intelligence, and development based on experiential learning. Subsequently, the literature review outlines the role of international experience in developing cultural intelligence.

Global leadership context

With an ever-increasing globalisation over the last years, international labour market has become extremely diverse and complex. The degree of complexity is defined by the cultural differences inherent to the work across cultures (Cooper, 2008a). While globalisation makes the world "flatter" by reducing physical distances between the countries, cultural differences seem to be more apparent than ever before (Friedman, 2005). Thomas and Inkson (2003) note that globalisation may generate novel difficulties in a global labour market. As a result, managers working both abroad and in the home country with culturally diverse people are unavoidably confronted with cross-cultural challenges (Li, 2009).

Hofstede and Minkov (2010) define culture as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others" (p.6). It highly influences the development of people's attitudes, beliefs, values, and identities. Culture is recognised as a major factor which can neither be avoided nor ignored when engaging in international environment (Cseh, Davis, & Khilji, 2013). The core part of functioning in a global environment is being in touch with culturally different people (Thomas & Inskon, 2003). People coming from diverse cultural backgrounds have to work together while having different values, attitudes, norms of social interaction, and communication styles (Earley & Ang, 2003; Livermore et al., 2010). This implies culture as the most complicated aspect of the global labour market mainly because most of its cues are invisible and cannot be understood immediately. Cultural differences, which unfold in situations involving culturally diverse individuals, have a high potential to lead to cross-cultural conflicts if misunderstood or misinterpreted by the others. Such situations may result in a bad working climate and in decrease of results. Taking this into consideration, differences between the cultures serve as the main source of global leadership challenges. To be able to work effectively together, people have to find ways to embrace cultural differences. Therefore, the capability to handle cross-cultural situations has become one of the main attributes the global managers involved in international assignments should possess.

Crowne (2008) points out that the decision of choosing the right individual who can be effective on an international assignment is of high importance. However, international civil servants' inability to adapt successfully to foreign cultures is referred as one of the main reasons for international civil servants' ineffectiveness abroad. When taking a look back at the recent expatriation practices, cross-cultural competency of a candidate has rarely been taken into consideration when selecting an expatriate for an

assignment abroad. Selection decisions made in the past are heavily criticised for low-utility selection strategies and criteria. The main criticism is directed toward the lack of consistency in selection procedures. Expatriate selection usually takes place through informal talks by recommending certain managers based on their technical competencies and their domestic performance . Such kind of informal selection is what Harris and Brewster (1999) refer to as "coffee-machine system." However, domestic performance does not define a successful completion of an international assignment. Differing contexts require international civil servants to have a distinctive set of competencies (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2) which are not needed in a domestic environment. Therefore, employees performing successfully at local companies do not necessarily deliver a good performance when working abroad (Black & Gregersen, 1999). As often proven in the past, inappropriate selection decisions and ignorance of cross-cultural capabilities turn into an expatriate failure resulting in high costs for the organization. For this reason, selection of individuals who are capable of managing culturally diverse settings is of strategic importance.

Studies report that companies need persons who are referred to by Kanter (as cited in Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2012) as "a new breed of managers" (p. 29). Not only do they have the technical competencies necessary to fulfil their roles, but also are also capable of performing and leading effectively in culturally diverse situations (Ng et al., 2009a). In the literature such individuals are often referred to as global managers or global leaders (Baruch, 2002; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Ng et al., 2009a; Osland et al., 2012).

When trying to identify the difference between an expatriate and a global leader, Baruch (2002) defines international civil servants as employees who are transferred abroad by their companies to manage a foreign business unit for a defined period of time, ranging between one to five years. Waxin et al. (2007) also add that after the completion of an international assignment, International civil servants return to their home. To define a global leader, Baruch (2002) uses a notion of travelling manager." The author claims that the traveling manager's work is based on frequent switching between different cultures due to the work requirements. Usually, such a manager does not relocate to a country other than his/her home base. While many authors separate the notions of "expatriate" and "global leader", Baruch (2002) considers both of them to be global managers. The author claims so, because both international civil servants and global managers need skills and abilities to operate in a foreign environment defined by a high degree of complexity. Besides that, Deal, Leslie, Dalton, & Ernst (2003) notice inconsistencies in the use of "global managers" or "global leaders," and specify that "global leader" is one of the roles played by global managers.

It is important to mention a category of managers who engage in more than one long-term international assignment throughout their careers (Suutari, 2003; Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005; Waxin et al., 2007). They either may be committed to a life-long expatriate career, or they may be appointed for long-term international assignments at intervals (Suutari, 2003). The latter arrangement of expatriate career is called a spatial career, where managers switch between their positions abroad and in their home countries (Suutari, 2003). Based on this, such managers do not fall neither under category of "travelling managers," nor "traditional international civil servants." However, considering that these individuals spend a substantial period of their lives working in several culturally different environments, they have characteristics of global managers. At the same time, they are international civil servants who spend at least twelve months on an international assignment and are repatriated to their home country before going on the next assignment. In his work, Suutari (2003) refers to this group of managers as "global managers." Accordingly, the current study, based on Baruch's (2002) proposition that both international civil servants and global leaders are considered global managers, uses the notions of "expatriate" and "global manager" interchangeably.

Global managers have job tasks to some extent similar to those of domestic managers. These tasks include leading the others, directing action, and managing information. However, it is important to point out the difference between leading in a domestic environment and leading globally. Osland et al. (2012) emphasise that it is the complexity of a global environment which determines the difference between domestic and global leaders. As mentioned before, the complexity lies in cultural differences emerging subsequently as an expatriate manager has to lead individuals coming from the cultural backgrounds other than their own and operate businesses across multiple countries. Global managers, getting involved in cross-cultural situations on a daily basis, encounter the pressure of understanding diverse customers, managing diverse teams, recruiting and developing multicultural talent, adapting leadership style, and demonstrating respect. In order to be effective and to achieve organisational goals, global managers have to navigate successfully among different value systems of different cultures. To do so, they often have to deal with ambiguity when being involved in cross-cultural interactions (Osland et al., 2012).

Osland et al. (2012) list a few significant competencies which a successful global manager should possess: cognitive knowledge, global mindset, flexibility to adapt one's behaviour, intercultural competence, learning capability, and integrity. In turn, others highlight the ability to manage complexity and uncertainty as a key skill of a global manager. However, Baruch (2002) does not agree to use a set of predetermined capabilities constituting global leader. This author proposes to consider them only as

guiding qualities. Summing up, a complex global environment requires global managers to develop a common framework for obtaining cultural knowledge, making sense of cultural differences, and adjusting behaviours in cross-cultural situations (Osland et al., 2012). Other authors note that these abilities are best reflected by cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003; Li et al., 2013; Thomas & Inkson, 2003). Based on these requirements, the current study maintains that contemporary managers should develop cultural intelligence as an ability to transcend cultural boundaries in order to be effective abroad.

Cultural intelligence

Culture, as previously defined by Hofstede et al. (2010), is shared among its members (Browaeys & Price, 2008). Hofstede et al. (2010) believe that culture is not coded in human's genes, but it can be learned in a particular social environment. Therefore, each expatriate who comes as an outsider to work in foreign culture is expected to develop a framework of common meanings, practices, and behaviours to ensure an effective interaction abroad and achievement of organisational goals in a complex business environment (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008).

This subchapter provides various authors' definitions of cultural intelligence, describes its components based on three concepts, and outlines the importance of acquiring cultural intelligence.

Definition of cultural intelligence

Research on cultural intelligence becomes more prevalent by receiving lots of attention from different practitioners. Thomas (2006) defines it as „a capability to deal effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds" (p.78). From Earley and Ang's (2003) perspective cultural intelligence reflects "person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" (Earley & Ang, 2003, p.59). Cultural intelligence is also regarded as „the ability to interact effectively in multiple cultures" (Crowne, 2008, p.391). The most frequently cited definition suggested by Ang and Van Dyne (2008) considers cultural intelligence as "an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings". Generally, all the definitions of cultural intelligence are based on describing how well a person is able to understand and to adapt to the situations defined by cultural novelty and differences. Cultural intelligence determines why some individuals are more effective in functioning abroad than the others (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Therefore, cultural intelligence is especially important in the context of international assignments.

Earley and Ang (2003) were the first ones to systemise the theory and to articulate it as cultural intelligence. They build their concept on the framework of multiple intelligences. The notion of intelligence has transcended the academic limits and does not reflect only mental capabilities anymore.

Thus, cultural intelligence is considered to be one of the forms of non-academic intelligence. It refers to a general set of capabilities which is relevant for the situations distinguished by cultural diversity therefore, cultural intelligence is not culture-bound, unlike for instance, emotional intelligence which is acquired in the own culture and is bound to it. Due to its flexibility, cultural intelligence enables an individual to adjust to the cultural situations.

Cultural intelligence involves the capacity to observe and reflect on unfamiliar cultural situations; understand fundamental similarities and differences between the cultures; focus attention on learning in novel cultural situations; and exhibit appropriate behaviour while engaging in an interaction with culturally different individuals. Similarly, Thomas and Inkson (2003) suggest that cultural intelligence concerns understanding cross-cultural encounters, developing a mindful approach towards these situations, and acquiring adaptive skills and a repertoire of flexible behaviours in order to interact effectively in culturally diverse situations. The complexity of these capabilities makes it necessary to explain what cultural intelligence is comprised of.

Components of cultural intelligence

Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualise cultural intelligence as a multidimensional construct. It consists of four different types of capabilities referred to as cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioural CQ. Together they form an overall construct of cultural intelligence as displayed in Figure 1 (Ang et al., 2007; Ng et al., 2012).
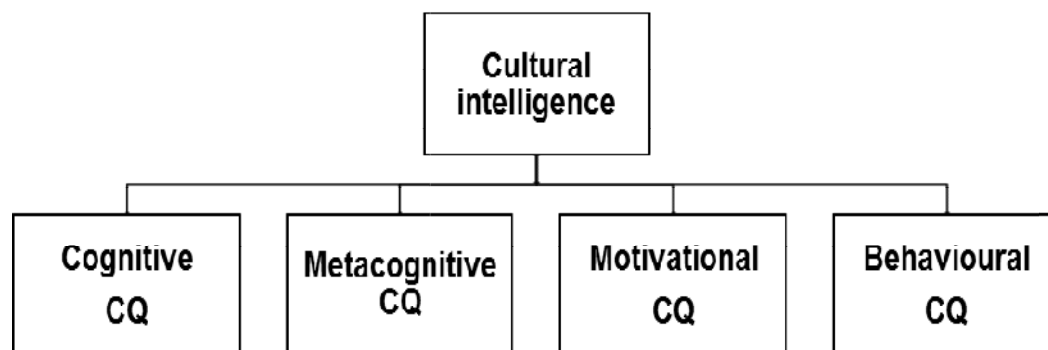
Figure 1. The four-factor model of cultural intelligence (Van Dyne et al., 2010)

Cognitive CQ refers to the knowledge of cultural values, social norms, practices, economic and legal systems, and language (Van Dyne et al., 2007; Ang et al., 2011). It includes information on how various cultures handle time, hierarchy, and relationships. This knowledge is acquired consciously and subconsciously from individual experiences, education, and childhood. Thus, high cognitive CQ enables an individual to recognise similarities and differences among cultures. Cognitive CQ is the most known capability of cultural intelligence, as traditionally expatriate training emphasises this aspect only

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however, people advancing in cultural intelligence are concerned not only with the content of learning, but also how the learning takes place and in order to be effective in cross-cultural interactions, an individual has to supplement cultural knowledge with the other capabilities of cultural intelligence.

Responding to this, metacognitive CQ is the capability of increased awareness and consciousness during intercultural situations. It focuses on higher-order mental processes which induce active thinking about cultural encounters and help to create coping strategies towards cultural ambiguity. The strategies enable people to perceive cultural situations more accurately and to make sense of experiences involving cultural complexity therefore, metacognitive CQ distinguishes cultural intelligence from other intercultural competences which usually emphasise knowledge about specific cultures and appropriate behaviours only.

Meanwhile, motivational CQ reflects individual's interest to adapt to new environment. It describes how motivated an individual is in experiencing unfamiliar cultures and getting involved in interactions with culturally different people. Motivational CQ triggers the energy which is targeted at "learning about and functioning in culturally diverse situations". Individuals having high motivational CQ show an interest to socialise with people coming from other cultures and to get acquainted with novel cultural settings. Motivational CQ can also reflect the level of confidence. Persons functioning and performing effectively in foreign environments improve their confidence which reinforces their motivation to engage in cross-cultural interactions.

The last capability – behavioural CQ – refers to the person's ability to display "appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures" (Ang et al., 2011, p.585). Since it is impossible to be familiar with all the suitable and not suitable behaviours pertinent to various cultures, behavioural CQ requires developing a range of actions which could be universally used in different cultural settings. While metacognitive CQ helps individuals to realise which behaviours are likely to improve intercultural effectiveness and which not. Based on this knowledge, high behavioural CQ enables people to adapt their verbal and non-verbal behaviours, including tone, body language, and gestures, to what is required in a particular situation.

Even though Ng et al. (2012) acknowledge that all these capabilities of cultural intelligence are very different and require a wide range of effort to develop them, it is essential to obtain all of them. Together the capabilities constitute a multidimensional construct which supports an individual in being effective in cross-cultural situations.

Another important stream of theory on cultural intelligence has been developed by Thomas and Inkson (2003) and Thomas (2006). It has many similarities with Earley and Ang's (2003) approach, but focuses

rather on "the ability to generate appropriate behaviour in a new cultural setting," (Thomas, 2006, p.80) implying a more practice-oriented approach than Earley and Ang (2003). Thomas and Inkson (2004) define cultural intelligence as a „multifaceted competency consisting of cultural knowledge, the practice of mindfulness, and the repertoire of behavioural skills" (p. 183). It refers to three components which comprise cultural intelligence (Figure 2).
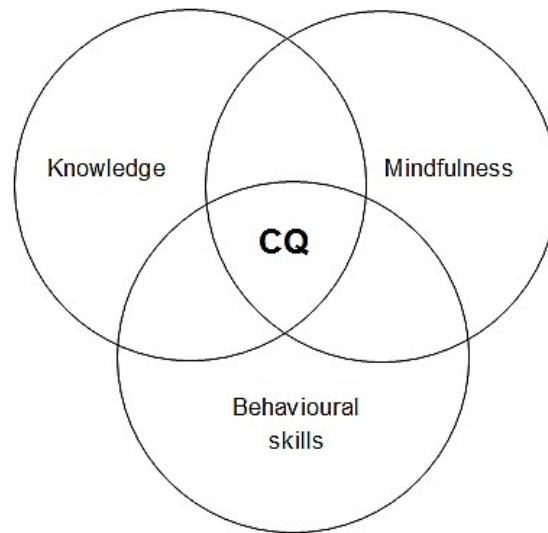
Figure 2. Components of cultural intelligence (CQ) (Thomas & Inkson, 2003)

In particular, Thomas and Inkson (2003) explain what culture is, how it influences behaviour, and the way it varies across multiple environments. Similar to Earley and Ang's (2003) cognitive CQ, an individual has to possess an adequate level of information on cultural values, practices, and norms to be able to distinguish between own attitudes and assumptions from the ones of culturally different people (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). This information stored in the individuals' mental maps is applied in processing and interpreting events in cross-cultural situations.

Mindfulness is a process which concerns observing and understanding cross-cultural situations. It refers to an enhanced awareness towards a new cultural situation. In this way, mindfulness enables an individual to pay attention and to reflect on the signals transmitted during cross-cultural encounters. It helps an individual to choose an appropriate knowledge deliberately instead of applying information at random metacognitive CQ, mindfulness plays an important role in the process of improving categories of knowledge and behaviour in the individual's mental framework. These authors emphasise the significance of mindfulness as a link between knowledge and behaviour.

Cultural intelligence is completed with an ability to adapt the individual's behaviour in accordance to the cross-cultural settings. In order to achieve a successful outcome from a cultural interaction, a person's

behaviour has to correspond with the expectations of the culturally different ones. However, cultural intelligence is not about copying other people's behaviours: Behavioural skills create authentic actions based on the process of mindfulness which ensures the choice and application of an appropriate cultural knowledge.

On the whole, having and being able to exhibit all the three components – knowledge, mindfulness, and behavioural skills – leads an individual to a high level of cultural intelligence.

Finally, Thomas et al. (2008) perceive cultural intelligence "as a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment" (p. 127). They have sharpened up the existing views on cultural intelligence, defining it as a system of abilities, emphasising interaction and relations between the components (Figure 3, p.16).
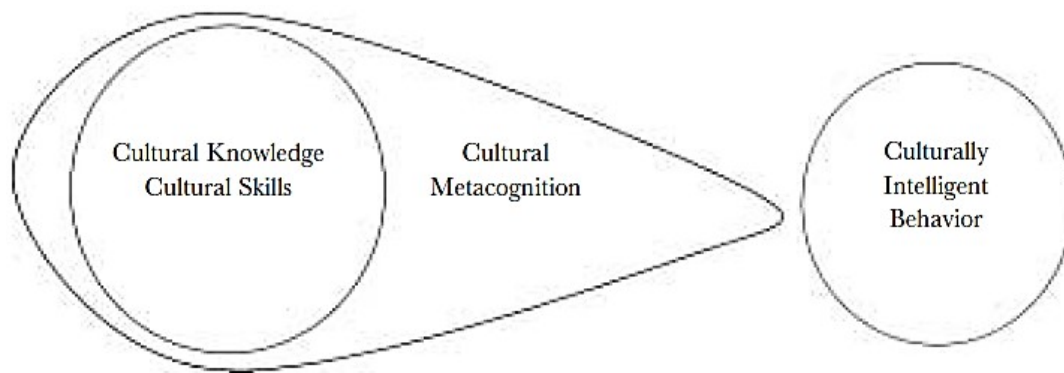
Figure 3. Domain of cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008, p.128)

Cultural knowledge is the basis of cultural intelligence because it provides an individual with the fundamental information for understanding and interpreting the behaviour of oneself and culturally diverse people (Thomas et al., 2008). It is acquired in specific cultures and is sorted in a person's mind to manage complexity of culturally different settings.

Nevertheless, individual's effectiveness in cross-cultural situations is determined by cultural metacognition. Generally, metacognition is defined as "knowledge of and control over one's thinking and learning activities" (Flavell, as cited in Thomas et al., 2008, p.131). Cultural metacognition translates culture-specific information into broader, general cultural principles which can be applied in other cross-cultural interactions, in this way, the knowledge is detached from the specific context in which it was acquired. According to Thomas et al. (2008), cultural metacognition influences the structure of the mental maps by centring the attention on the most suitable information. With an increasing cultural knowledge, the individual develops more sophisticated cognitive frameworks. They help to refrain from

preconceived judgements and to assess the intercultural situation more precisely therefore, the individual is better able to decode the information and to ascribe the actions more appropriate to the situation.

Similarly, to Thomas and Inkson's (2003) approach, Thomas et al. (2008) emphasise "the ability to generate behaviour appropriate in a new cultural context" (p.130). By applying culture-general principles developed through cultural metacognition, individuals can exhibit authentic behaviours which suit the context of cross-cultural interaction instead of simply imitating the actions pertinent to the target culture. It enables culturally intelligent persons to influence the context around them and to extract more effective outcomes. Thomas et al. (2008) and Thomas et al. (2012) regard this behavioural ability as an essential difference between their and other concepts.

According to Thomas et al. (2008), the uniqueness of their concept of cultural intelligence lies in the linking role of cultural metacognition between cultural knowledge and skills. It triggers the emergence of cultural intelligence as a result of the interaction between its facets hence, cultural metacognition determines the dynamic nature of cultural intelligence. In summary, Earley and Ang's (2003), Thomas and Inkson's (2003), and Thomas et al. (2008) models of cultural intelligence are very similar since they describe the essence of the concepts in an analogous manner. However, a few differences are noticed among the three constructs. First, Earley and Ang's (2003) construct of cultural intelligence has been criticised for the absence of relations between its capabilities. They do not clarify how these capabilities are interconnected to comprise a solid construct of cultural intelligence, whereas, knowledge and behavioural skills are bridged by mindfulness in Thomas and Inkson's (2003) approach. The relation among the elements of cultural intelligence is also displayed in Thomas et al. (2008) model, which considers cultural intelligence to be "a system of interacting abilities" (p. 125). Second, unlike Earley and Ang (2003), Thomas and Inkson (2003) do not distinguish motivation as a separate facet of cultural intelligence. Thomas et al. (2012) criticise that the addition of motivational aspect creates a subjectively positive image over the construct. Despite a few conceptual differences, both Earley and Ang (2003) and Thomas and Inkson (2003) agree that cultural intelligence requires an equal acquisition of all capabilities in order to achieve effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions.

Importance of developing cultural intelligence
Cultural intelligence distinguishes between individuals who are successful in dealing with culturally diverse people and those who are incapable of that. The level of the individual's cultural intelligence is best defined by his/her effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions suggest that individuals who are high on cultural intelligence are better capable of engaging their previous international experiences in order

to improve their effectiveness on the following international assignments compared to those whose cultural intelligence is low.

Low cultural intelligence or its absence implies a lack of complex mental maps which guide individuals in unfamiliar situations. Each individual has a mental map of ingrained assumptions in his/her head programmed by the native culture. It entails information on personal beliefs, values, and biases about one's own and other cultures. References of the mental maps help individuals to navigate in the domestic environment. People rely on their mental schemes, because these have proven to be effective when navigating in a familiar environment. Thus, the majority of individuals, who have not obtained extensive international experience, instinctively approach culturally novel situations based on their rooted mental schemes. Cooper (2008a) refers the use of inherent assumptions about other cultures to the mental shortcutting which allows simplifying the information about other people's behaviour in an unfamiliar situation. However, in a new cultural context, individuals might be misguided by their perceptual framework which works in the domestic settings, but hardly anywhere else. Their long-held assumptions about cultures are challenged hence, cues familiar to an individual disappear, whereas behaviour of culturally different people might seem to be peculiar. Consequently, applying inherent strategies may appear to be ineffective and result in undesirable outcomes such as stereotyping, conflicts, and failed leadership leading to a low level of cultural intelligence.

Compared to the people with low cultural intelligence, culturally intelligent individuals are able to understand differences between the cultures, and they know how to manage them when dealing with diverse people. These persons have motivation to learn about new cultures and to function in novel contexts. Culturally intelligent people engage their minds in conscious thinking about other individuals' values, preferences and adjust their assumptions before the situation occurs and in the course of it. Finally, persons who have a high level of cultural intelligence are able to perform verbal and nonverbal actions which are suitable to a particular cultural situation.

High cultural intelligence is claimed to be a precondition for successful expatriate adjustment and performance in contemporary international assignments. Due to the work specifics of global managers, Earley and Peterson (2004) compare them to chameleons because of their skills to switch their behaviours immediately depending on a situation. Thomas et al. (2008) summarise effective outcomes of exhibiting high cultural intelligence as helping executives to improve communication effectiveness, to build relationships with others, and to lead in a global context.

In order to ensure a high level of effectiveness, managers have to improve their cultural intelligence. To do so, their mental maps have to be adjusted to the circumstances of environment and situation. This

necessitates the development of the new ways to handle unfamiliar cross-cultural situations. Developing more sophisticated frames for understanding and reacting to unknown situations contributes to increasing cultural intelligence. The next subchapter discusses the ways in which cultural intelligence can be improved.

Development of cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence, as an ability to work and adapt in diverse cultures is not a given for individuals naturally. Consistently with other forms of intelligence, it is regarded as a set of dynamic capabilities rather than inherent personality traits. Even though individual's cultural intelligence is influenced by personality characteristics, such as openness to new experience and extroversion, it is not considered to be one of them.

Being comprised of dynamic capabilities, cultural intelligence is a malleable construct. Scholars agree that unlike personality traits, it can be enhanced over time through education, training, international experience, and cultural exposure propose that in order to increase cultural intelligence, a person must "learn the ways that people act and behave in a new culture and create a new mental framework for understanding what is experienced and witnessed".

Development of cultural intelligence is distinguished between formal training and experiential learning according to the context of training. Formal development concerns traditional cultural trainings, whereas experiential learning refers to acquiring knowledge from experience.

Formal training

Expatriation literature dedicates a lot of attention to the cross-cultural training (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Brewster, 1995; Fowler & Blohm, 2004; Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000; Mendenhall et al., 2004; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). For a long time, it has been considered as the main means to prepare expatriates and international civil servants for international assignments and to improve their effectiveness abroad. Therefore, the current methods for developing cultural intelligence still rely mainly on conventional intercultural training methods.

Thomas and Inkson (2003) classify formal development of cultural intelligence based on the extent of experience and the degree of applicability to the other cultures. They discern three types of formal education: factual, analytical, and experiential. Factual training involves traditional cognitive training methods directed to the knowledge acquisition from books and articles, lectures, and area briefings. Cognitive training results in an enhanced understanding about particular cultures, their dos and don'ts, cultural dimensions and processes (Earley et al., 2006; Thomas & Inkson, 2003).

Analytical training includes watching films and practising culture assimilators (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). Earley and Peterson (2004) add that cultural assimilator is a method often used in this type of training. Its essence is confronting participants with cultural scenarios and asking them to understand and to explain how they see the situation. Such type of training helps to create a collection of responses and behaviours suitable for culture-specific encounters (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Experiential training contains simulations, field trips, and role-plays. This type of development puts an emphasis on the practical aspect (Earley & Peterson, 2004), thus creating conditions which come closest to the settings of international assignments (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). During the experiential training an individual learns to get on an emotional level similar to the cross-cultural interaction (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). The authors maintain that the closer a training method gets to real-life experience, the more effective it is. Therefore, experiential training is considered to be the most effective method among the types of formal development (Alon & Higgins, 2005). On the other hand, this kind of training requires emotional efforts, is expensive, and therefore is not common as a means to develop cultural intelligence (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2003).

However, managers acknowledge that cultural training provided by the organisations is often insufficient considering the challenges they have to deal with on international assignments. The information acquired during factual and analytical training can be applied only in the respective cultures, hence, it does not tackle development of metacognitive capability, which is the core of cultural intelligence. Therefore, widely used cognitive training is too simplistic for developing contemporary global managers who should lead effectively across the cultures. Due to these reasons, traditional cognitive training often fails to prepare labour for managing complexity in cross-cultural situations.

The nature of global managers' careers requires them to develop cultural intelligence as a framework for functioning successfully in different cultural environments. Cultural intelligence goes beyond the cognitive knowledge as it is comprised of different components. Therefore, contemporary work arrangements require preparation of expatriates and international civil servants by means other than only conventional training methods, which emphasise basic information about particular cultures. In order to increase effectiveness in culturally diverse environments, cognitive knowledge has to be complemented with other capabilities of cultural intelligence. Due to the complexity of the construct of cultural intelligence, Ng et al. (2009c) propose to shift the focus from rigorous training of the cognitive knowledge to a more holistic approach which is concerned with enhancing metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural capabilities comprised by cultural intelligence. Therefore, among many different ways of increasing cultural intelligence (Alon & Higgins, 2005), international experience is regarded as the

most powerful means to improve individual's cultural intelligence (Lovvorn & Chen, 2011; Thomas & Inkson, 2003).

Experiential training

McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) recognise an important role of international experience in driving the development of global managers. International experience provides individuals with a unique learning context entailing authentic situations and real-life settings for managing cultural differences and improving their cultural intelligence (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Ang et al., 2011). Alon and Higgins (2005) are convinced that managers can advance and understand other cultures only in true-life situations, such as international assignments, encounters with culturally different individuals, and work in multicultural teams (Li et al., 2013; Thomas & Inkson, 2003). Real-life cultural experiences are oriented toward a more holistic development of individuals by confronting them with the challenges arising from living and working in a foreign environment.

Intercultural experiences involve learning opportunities which emerge in form of cultural differences between culturally diverse individuals and their cultures (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). International assignments expose International civil servants to different institutional environments, languages, value systems. Differently than in a domestic environment, individuals are confronted with ambiguity and uncertainty, because the cues familiar to them go missing and their long-held cultural assumptions are questioned.

Subsequently, the cultural differences are expected to induce the learning process as International civil servants will have to find sophisticated and effective ways of responding to the complexity in intercultural encounters. For this reason, cultural intelligence implies shifting from conventional intercultural training methods to the more universal means of embracing development of all capabilities of cultural intelligence.

Nevertheless, the development of cultural intelligence does not seem to be a central topic in Earley and Ang's (2003), Van Dyne et al. (2010), and other authors' works. In most cases, their attempts to answer the question "how individuals develop their cultural intelligence?" lack empirical evidence and are content with the vague theoretical assumptions. However, development of cultural intelligence is an important topic which is unreasonably underestimated in the literature. By today, Thomas and Inkson's (2003) attempt to explain how cultural intelligence can be cultivated, has been so far the most comprehensive and the most convincing in the literature of cultural intelligence.

Process of developing cultural intelligence

Thomas and Inkson (2003) propose that cultural intelligence is best acquired through experiential learning which derives from international experience, social interactions, and observation of different cultural environments. They maintain that development of cultural intelligence has to embrace all three components: knowledge, mindfulness, and behaviour. Acquisition of cultural intelligence is not a linear process; it is reinforced by iterative experiences taking place over a longer period of time. The process of developing cultural intelligence is presented in Figure 4 .
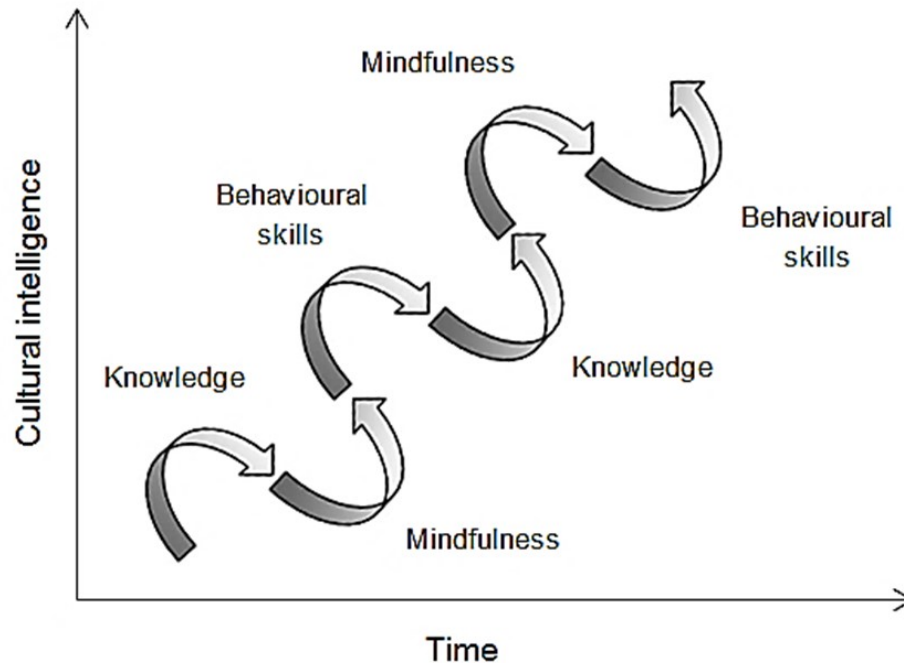
Figure 4. Development of cultural intelligence (Thomas & Inkson, 2003)

First, the enhancement of cultural intelligence requires an individual to have some prior knowledge about cultures as well as their own cultural biases (Green, Hassan, Immelt, Marks, & Meiland, 2003). This information is normally stored in the form of assumptions in the individual's mental maps. Thus, people evaluate cultural situations based on their own cultural assumptions. Subsequently, mindfulness as a metacognitive strategy revises the individual's mental schemes. It results in the emergence of new knowledge or its categories in the mental maps of an individual. Finally, in order to exhibit culturally appropriate actions, mindfulness incorporates this knowledge into behavioural skills. The new information, which has been just produced, is stored in the individual's mind to be retrieved the next time a similar cultural situation occurs. It is a constant process which repeats in the subsequent cross-

cultural interactions, building on the previous experiences and refining them, thus developing the individual's cultural intelligence over time.

Thomas (2006) and Thomas and Inskon (2003) suggest that individuals increase their cultural intelligence while proceeding through a sequence of stages. The first stage refers to the reactivity to external stimuli. An individual respond to an unfamiliar cultural situation by relying on his/her mental scheme based on the norms and values of the home culture. It is likely to happen when the individual has not had a previous need to adapt to different cultures.

The second stage concerns the recognition of other cultures and motivation to learn more about them. Interaction between experience and mindfulness generates individual's awareness about the existence of other cultures. Individual's interest in finding out more about the cultures is increased. However, the individual might get overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of new knowledge. Therefore, he/she might be looking for simple references which help navigating through the new environment.

The third stage accommodates other cultural norms and rules into the person's mind. An individual detaches from his/her inherent assumptions about different cultures and starts developing deeper and more comprehensive views on culturally different societies. Appropriate behavioural patterns start emerging, but this process demands some effort. At this stage, people are aware of suitable verbal and non-verbal behaviour in cross-cultural situations. Nevertheless, it does not come naturally; they have to give it some thought (Thomas & Inkson, 2003).

The fourth stage refers to "assimilation of diverse cultural norms into alternative behaviours" (Thomas & Inkson, 2003, p.67). During this stage, individuals have gained experience in order to develop a repertoire of effective actions applicable to various cultural situations. Experiencing different cultures does not cause stress and does not require much effort anymore. An individual is accepted by the members of other cultures as a culturally knowledgeable person.

Stage five is „proactivity in cultural behaviour based on recognition of changing cues that others do not perceive" (Thomas & Inkson, 2003, p.67). This stage refers to individuals with very high cultural intelligence. Such persons are so sensitive to different cultural environments that they intuitively adjust and exhibit their behaviours most suited to the cross-cultural situations, in order to ensure the highest effectiveness. This level of cultural intelligence enables individuals to be highly effective in any cultural context; however this in nature it is rare and difficult to achieve. The authors note that it takes a long period of time to progress through all the stages and to reach a high level of cultural intelligence.

Thomas et al. (2008) propose that cultural intelligence is acquired through learning from interactions with culturally diverse individuals. Consistently with the social learning theory conceptualised by

Bandura (1971), people learn from their direct experiences. They constantly face situations which require their interactive abilities. During the cross-cultural interactions, individuals notice which of their verbal and non-verbal responses generate more effective outcomes than the others. Over the time, effective behavioural strategies are stored in an individual's mental schemes, whereas, inadequate behaviours are removed.

Subsequently, cultural intelligence is "the result of reflective observation, analysis, and abstract conceptualization, which can create new mental categories and re-categorize others in a more sophisticated cognitive system" (Thomas et al., 2008, p.129). This draws a parallel to the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984), who proposes that knowledge is obtained through the four-phase process of experiential learning.

Experiential learning theory

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is one of the most influential concepts of learning from experience (Kayes, 2002; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). By introducing this theory, Kolb (1984) aims at creating "a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour" (p. 21). Among all, experience is distinguished as the most important aspect in the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000).

Meanwhile, Li (2009) sees international experience as an emotionally intense context which involves adjustment to an unfamiliar environment, aiming at successful outcome. Individuals tend to engage in the experiential learning process due to the need to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity caused by culturally novel situations. Each new experience requires managers to revise their mental maps and to adjust them to fit the cultural settings. The process of rearranging the mental framework to accept unfamiliar attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions is known as adaptation. According to Yamazaki and Kayes (2004), expatriates' adjustment depends on how well they are able to learn from their experiences abroad. Thus, learning is perceived as "the major process of human adaptation".

In order to facilitate effective learning while on an international assignment, international civil servants' cross-cultural experiences of are processed through a cycle of four experiential learning phases as displayed in Figure 5: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation.

Kolb (1984) proposes that learning should be seen as "a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 41). According to him, knowledge derives from grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 1984). Thus, concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are two different modes of understanding the experience (Ng et al., 2009b). The former one concentrates on the

tangible aspects of the immediate experience, while the latter one is based on the symbolic representation of the experience. Similarly, reflective observation and active experimentation are two different ways of transforming experience. The individual's experience is processed internally through reflective observation, whereas active experimentation involves the exhibition of actions in real-life settings.
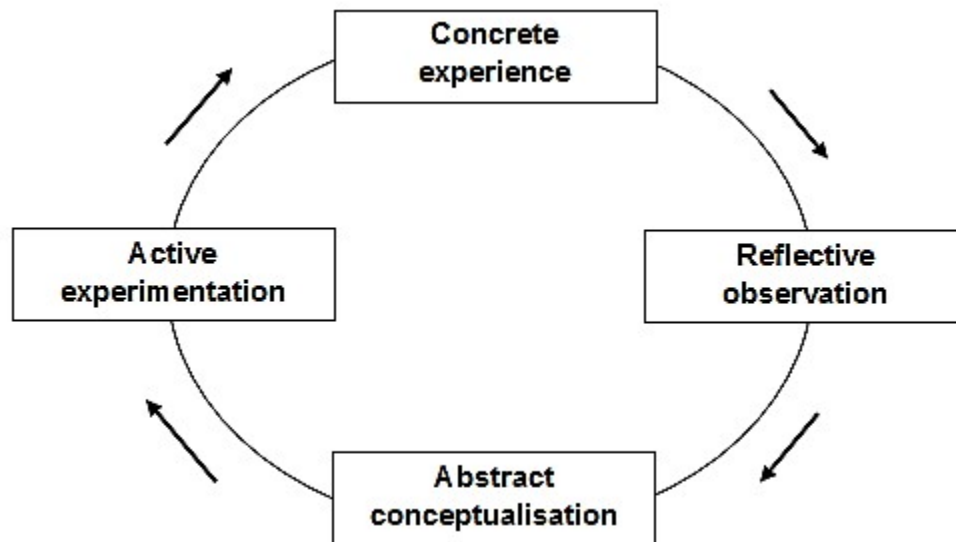
Figure 5. Experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984)

People acquire their experiences when they engage in cross-cultural interactions. Concrete cultural experience provides the basis for reflective observation and is triggered by people's critical reflection on their attitudes and beliefs. It helps to shape an objective view on the situation, emphasising thinking instead of feeling. Reflective observation distils the experience into abstract conceptualisations. The abstract concepts entail general principles which help individuals to steer their future actions. Subsequently, the effectiveness of the new concepts can be assessed by applying the knowledge to the particular situations. Active testing of behaviours in the real-life situations completes the experiential learning cycle and provides feedback which initiates a new cycle of learning. An individual may enter the cycle at any stage, however, to ensure the most effective learning outcomes, the person has to pass through all the phases (Kolb et al., 2000), and follow them in sequence. Consistently with Thomas and Inkson's (2003) theory, iterative experiential learning results in increased cultural intelligence.

On the other hand, Ng et al. (2009c) argue that international experience itself does not automatically transform into effective learning outcomes. They propose that cultural intelligence, therefore, acts as a moderator between international experience and the knowledge gained on international assignments.

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Ng et al. (2009b; 2009c) see cultural intelligence as a learning capability which influences how individuals use their international experiences to convert them into effective outcomes through experiencing, reflecting, observing, and performing in cross-cultural situations.

According to Ng et al. (2009a), the specific capabilities of cultural intelligence – cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioural CQ – can be related to the particular modes of experiential learning. Nevertheless, all the facets of cultural intelligence have to be equally developed and used to enable effective learning from experience; otherwise, the execution of the experiential learning cycle will not be smooth.

However, this view of Ng et al. (2009a; 2009b; 2009c) implies a one-sided relationship and an assumption that individuals automatically possess cultural intelligence if they are successful in translating their experiences. At this point, the essential link to the development of cultural intelligence is missing. Due to the lack of theoretical and empirical support, it remains unclear how an individual can acquire cultural intelligence and enhance it further. Thomas and Inkson (2003) notice a paradoxical relation between cultural intelligence and international experience. On the one hand, international assignments are considered one of the most effective ways to develop culturally intelligent individuals. On the other hand, to be successful on international assignments, individuals need to have cultural intelligence. The authors admit that it is difficult to manage this paradox.

However, while Ng et al. (2009c) regard cultural intelligence as a set of learning capabilities, at the same time a few authors see it also as a learning outcome, establishing a reciprocal relationship between international experience and cultural intelligence.

Even though Lovvorn and Chen (2011) also recognise the role of cultural intelligence as a moderator between international experience and effective learning outcomes, they, differently than Ng et al. (2009a; 2009b; 2009c), identify a reciprocal relationship existing between international experience and cultural intelligence. With every experience, as per experiential learning theory and Thomas and Inkson's (2003) iterative learning experiences (Figure 4), individual's cultural intelligence increases. In turn, according to Ng et al. (2009c), cultural intelligence moderates the transformation of international experience into effective learning. As a result, cultural intelligence and international experience become interdependent and reinforce each other. Cultural intelligence not only is considered to be a moderator between international experience and effectiveness on international assignment, but also as an outcome of international experience itself.

Individuals who are motivated to engage in cross-cultural interactions get more opportunities for cultural exposure which facilitates learning from experience. Subsequently, the reciprocal relationship

intensifies as cultural situations get more frequent, and an individual constantly has to revise his/her mental maps. Increasing exposure to different cultures further enhances individual's cultural intelligence, which, in turn, positively affects individual's effectiveness on an international assignment.

Varieties of cultural exposure

Crowne (2008) suggests that the development of cultural intelligence depends on the extent to which an individual is exposed to a different culture. The cultural exposure can vary in terms of the total time spent abroad, the number of countries stayed in, the cultural proximity between those countries and an individual's home country, and the intensity of the cross-cultural contact with the locals in specific countries. This implies that cultural exposure is multidimensional. Subsequently when a person works in its own environment but with a minority group for example, s/he can be exposed to new cultural norms, thus being more aware of the diversities with in on cultural context. This is particularly noted among the countries where significant migrants' groups are involved in the labour market, and in particularly when these are grouped in a particular sector. In many European countries this became a significant skill when working with the integration of migrants in labour market since 2016. In the context of international civil servants this exposure may vary from employer, teams, as well as organizational culture. While many international civil servants rotate in their professional careers they also get exposures to many different cultural varieties.

The amount of international assignments

Reiche and Harzing (2008) have found a positive relation between the amount of expatriate assignments and adjustment. A higher number of international experiences enables expatriates and international civil servants to acquire knowledge and skills and to develop mental schemes by engaging in experiential learning process in order to deal with unfamiliar situations (Ng et al., 2009a; Takeuchi et al., 2005).

During the former international assignments, International civil servants might have tested a variety of behaviours, and depending on the outcome of an interaction, might have discovered the strategies which have proven to be ineffective in dealing with cross-cultural situations and the strategies which have shown to be successful in such interactions (Gudmundsdottir, 2012). This is what Gudmundsdottir (2012) refers to "trial and error processes of discarding ineffective coping strategies and retaining effective ones" (p. 88).

Takeuchi et al. (2005) claim that individuals cannot transfer complete international experiences to another expatriate assignment because of the particular contextual differences in various countries. General behavioural patterns developed through learning from prior culture-specific experiences guide

an individual in reducing uncertainty, ambiguity, and stress in the new work environment. Therefore, experienced global managers approach such encounters with a greater degree of confidence and consequently, international civil servants having been on multiple international assignments or having a longer work experience abroad will likely adjust to the new environment gradually and with less effort, while expatriates and international civil servants having less international experience will experience a more stressful and intense adjustment process. Previous international experience facilitates a smoother process of adjustment in a new culture by establishing more realistic expectations about the necessary competences, the environment, and the international assignment itself. In this way, prior international experiences protect international civil servants from the challenges of adjustment in their current international assignments.

Expatriates and international civil servants who have acquired more previous experience of working abroad are expected to develop a higher level of cultural intelligence. As a result, Ng et al. (2009a) assume that experienced international civil servants will more likely handle upcoming international assignments in a more effective way than those without any prior experience. International experience places international civil servants in authentic social contexts and situations which provide them the opportunities to develop more sophisticated mental maps which in turn create more precise strategies for handling intercultural encounters.

On the other hand, the results of Wilson and Stewart's (as cited in Ang et al., 2011) study about voluntary international service programmes have shown that people experience the steepest learning curve on their first international assignment. Thus, enhancing their cultural intelligence the most compared to any later assignments. Based on this finding, it is suggested that cultural intelligence increases only marginally with the growing amount of international experiences. However, as shown in Figure 4, development of cultural intelligence consists of iterative practices, meaning that intercultural experiences should be quite dense and frequent to be able to enhance and sustain the level of cultural intelligence.

Even though Ang et al. (2011) and Ng et al. (2012) agree that the amount of international experiences plays a role in the development of cultural intelligence, more attention should be dedicated for the quality of international experience. Thus, it implies that not all international experiences are equally developmental.

The length of international assignments
Intercultural experience can occur in many different forms including interaction with culturally diverse individuals, short trips to foreign subsidiaries, and long-term allocation in a host country.

Long-term international assignments are considered to be one of the most intensive ways to gain international experience. Normally, it lasts between one to five years, with an average of three years and involves a complete relocation of an expatriate to a foreign country. However, the current trend shows an increasing number of organisations switching from the long-term international assignments to short-term international assignments (Collings et al., 2007; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010; Ng et al., 2009a; Thomas et al., 2005). Short-term expatriation is characterized by the duration of one to twelve months. It is regarded as a temporary internal transfer, therefore normally not requiring a manager to move to a foreign country. Short-term international assignments are attractive to the companies because of simpler administration, lower costs since the relocation and the repatriation are not applicable, and less complex compensation packages.

Long-term international missions give an opportunity for expatriates and international civil servants to live long enough in a foreign environment. International civil servants are fully exposed to a foreign culture as they set their lives abroad by finding an apartment, dealing with authorities, and encountering the infrastructure of the country. Due to the intensity of experience, persons can obtain an in-depth cultural understanding allowing the development of more sophisticated mental frameworks. Although short-term international assignments are characterised by efficiency and effectiveness, Ng, Van Dyne, and Ang (2009a) assume that the temporary nature of such missions holds the managers off from direct cultural contact.

Li et al. (2013) have found a positive relationship between the length of international experience and a level of cultural intelligence. It is consistent with Thomas and Inkson (2003) that development of cultural intelligence requires time. Therefore, it is unlikely that it will occur during short-term stays abroad.

The level of challenges on international assignments

Long-term international assignments provide an intensive learning context which can be very challenging. They require a full establishment of a new expatriate life in a foreign country: finding an apartment, obtaining residence and work permits, and dealing with the local authorities. Therefore, living and working abroad between one to five years involves dense intercultural experiences and confrontations with cultural differences. Nevertheless, expatriates and international civil servants should not fear international assignments but take it as a unique opportunity to learn and to develop their cultural intelligence.

Blasco, Feldt, and Jakobsen (2012) argue that new experiences are crucial in knowledge creation because the individual's mind generates new information based on what he/she experiences. When existing knowledge is not capable of making sense of an unknown context, it has to be adjusted to

respond to the situation. Therefore, Blasco et al. (2012) notice that development of metacognitive abilities is induced through unfamiliar situations. Individuals who seek to enhance the level of their cultural intelligence have to be ready to abandon their comfort zone.

Majority of authors do not differentiate between experiences on international assignments which result in either positive or negative outcomes and feelings. However, it is important to mention that individuals can learn both from positive and negative experiences. Blasco et al. (2012) advise to see misunderstandings, wrong interpretations, and other undesirable moments in cross-cultural situations as learning contexts rather than mistakes.

Culture shock can be regarded as one of the first major negative experiences expatriate encounter abroad. Even though it is characterized by frustration and anger, it should be accepted as a particular learning experience. This experience makes an expatriate to question his/her mental framework brought from the own culture and induces the development of more complex mental maps and personal growth. As McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) state, demanding experiences induce the learning process, whereas, effortless experiences do not require international civil servants to learn. Therefore, challenging international assignments should be accepted as an access to the source of learning and development of cultural intelligence.

Many companies, as well as international organizations have acknowledged the importance of this. While there are significant findings that prove a direct correlation among the productivity and the cultural competence of the employees, international organizations on the other hand have experienced a more engaging and rewards work environment and cultural competence. For example, both businesses and international organizations have endorsed policies for orientation week(s) for employees, and programmes[1] that reduce acculturation stress.

Summary

This chapter has presented an overview on the concept of cultural intelligence in the framework of international assignments. Cultural intelligence has been widely researched in the context of expatriation and has been seen as a predictor for many positive outcomes of international assignments (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2007; Ng et al., 2009b; 2009c). However, it has been noticed that development of cultural intelligence is not well covered in the respective literature.

Even though many authors agree on the developmental nature of cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2011; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Ng et al., 2009a; Van Dyne et al., 2010), evidence on how it is actually

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[1] Example of a progarme offered by business:
https://www.crownworldmobility.com/solutions/training-and-support/ <last retrieved on 30.06.2019>

developed is very rare. Thomas and Inkson (2003) admit that development of cultural intelligence is difficult to be captured in practice as it requires a considerable amount of time; therefore, there have hardly been any attempts to explore this domain of cultural intelligence.

Limited information on how individuals and particularly global managers develop their cultural intelligence requires taking a deeper insight into this topic. Taking this literature gap into consideration, the current study aims at exploring and understanding international civil servants' perceptions about their development of cultural intelligence based on their experiences on multiple long-term international assignments.

The literature review has suggested that international experience is the most effective tool in developing individual's cultural intelligence (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). Thomas and Inkson (2003) have presented a comprehensive explanation on the process of acquiring cultural intelligence via experiential learning. Referring to the aim of the study, the literature review has outlined varieties of cultural exposure (Crowne, 2008) and has found that, consistently with Thomas and Inkson (2003), development of cultural intelligence occurs more on long-term international assignments than on the ones of short-term. Similarly, multiple long-term international assignments provide more learning opportunities and enable comparison between the experiences.

It is expected that the qualitative methodology outlined in the next chapter will support finding the answers to the research question and contributing to the body of knowledge.

3. Methodology

This study is of exploratory nature aiming at understanding individual perceptions of International civil servants on their development of their cultural intelligence. This, by no means cannot be a representative to the expatriates' community, neither can be a representative for a particular geography. In order to address the research question, it adopts interpretative phenomenological analysis which is a unique approach to conduct qualitative research and is based on understanding each individual's experiences. This research approach facilitates the understanding of people's experiences and behaviours on an individual level. It also enables comparison of people's experiences in similar settings and allows discovering common patterns and differences.

The purpose of this chapter is to specify the methodology used to achieve the aim of the study. The following subchapters elaborate on the choice of research approach, sampling procedure and the research participants, research method, approaches and procedures of data collection and data analysis.

Research approach

One of the first and the main steps when deciding to conduct a research is choosing an appropriate research approach. It has to be capable of addressing a research question and answering it. Considering the exploratory nature of the research question, this study requires to embrace an approach which is able to use the individual's experience as the main source of information. A need to understand how International civil servants' experiences have affected their development of their cultural intelligence necessitates employing qualitative research. This approach will also refrain us to conduct a causal relationship between variants. We cannot run a test, neither regression in order to determine the relations among the variants and their strength in a prediction to increase the cultural intelligence. We will rely on the factors identified in the literature on this topic, and further explore in-depth the qualitative aspects of this.

Qualitative approach

Qualitative research involves collection and analysis of data which are not measurable. It refers to collecting data on people's experiences, behaviours, and feelings which are later developed into concepts and theories. In contrast, quantitative research typically concerns itself with quantification of data. The data collected are highly standardized so that they are processed easily by statistical means. On the one hand, a quantitative approach is regarded to be more objective than the qualitative one, as data is independent from the researcher. Then again, researchers adopting qualitative approach are not concerned with collecting objective data which can be applied to a larger population. They are interested in obtaining in-depth information about people's experiences and understanding it. Therefore, a qualitative approach accepts the role of the researcher as part of the knowledge generated. Qualitative research is suitable to study human behaviour and its changes reflected from the research participant's view. As the data are not measurable, implementing collection and analysis of such complex data by quantitative approach is not feasible.

In addition, qualitative research is closely related to induction training. Induction training is established as an approach where theory is developed from the data explored and afterwards is related to the existing literature. By contrast, deduction predetermines theories and hypotheses first and tests them later by using data. This approach is mostly used in quantitative research.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

In consistence with the qualitative approach, this study employs the methodology introduced by Smith (2004) and Smith and Osborn (2008) as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). It is one of the most recent approaches of qualitative research which examines in detail how individuals perceive their

experiences. This approach involves a phenomenological aspect as it investigates the person's lived experiences and his/her perception on events or phenomena. At the same time IPA entails an interpretative element as the participant's social world is accessed through the researcher's view.

IPA differs from the other qualitative research approaches as it consists of "a two-stage interpretation process" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.53). First, research participants try to make sense of their experiences and their social world. Subsequently, the researcher attempts to make sense of the participants who are trying to understand their own experiences. The researcher applying IPA aims at accessing the participant's world through the view of an individual. Therefore, the researcher's ability to reflect on personal experiences strongly influences the quality of the research.

In turn, IPA highlights the importance and tight involvement of the researcher in the process and it accepts that this approach is highly subjective. IPA is characterized by understanding meanings of human experiences and behaviours and being less concerned with the necessity to formulate a statement applicable for a wider population.

IPA is more prevalent in the field of psychology than in the business research, however, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest using the approach when research involves aspects of complexity, process or novelty, as it leaves space for unexpected findings. So far there have been only a few attempts to apply it in a business context. The usage of IPA in the respective studies has produced new, interesting perspectives on the topics. Thus, it encourages a more frequent application in business research.

Sampling

Bryman and Bell (2007) define sample as a fragment of population selected for the research. Qualitative research usually involves a number of participants smaller than quantitative research. A small-sized sample is also common in IPA approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is more concerned with the depth of the information rather than with its statistical representativeness. Thus, qualitative research data derive from the rich information provided by the respondents. The inductive approach is especially interested in understanding the context in which the research phenomenon takes place.

Due to these reasons, qualitative research typically does not involve cases drawn randomly from the entire population. Instead, sample units are chosen deliberately based on their characteristics or relevance to the researched phenomenon. Participants are selected with an expectation that they are informed about the topic and are able to share their views.

The following subchapters entail a discussion about sample criteria, choice of sampling methods, and sampling procedure.

Sample criteria

The current study aims at creating knowledge in a context specific to a particular group of individuals. Due to this reason, obtaining a sample for a qualitative study involves defining selection criteria.

This research is interested in understanding the perceptions of a specific group, in our case international civil servants. In this study, international civil servants refers to group of people whose home is a third country and who were temporarily relocated by their employers based in their home country to work in foreign subsidiaries. In particular, the research targets International civil servants, who have been on more than one long-term international assignment during their careers. Long-term international assignment refers to expatriation tasks with the duration of 12 months and more. As discussed in Chapter 2, the development of cultural intelligence occurs over a longer period of time rather than on short-term international assignments. Therefore, the criterion of long-term international assignments has been included to depict a sufficient improvement of expatriate's cultural intelligence. Furthermore, multiple international assignments enable comparison of experiences of the international civil servants who were involved in numerous intercultural situations. Consideration of more than one international assignment can reveal whether there are any differences and similarities in the expatriate's behaviour when encountering analogical intercultural situations in different settings implying their development of their cultural intelligence.

Considering the predefined criteria, the sample of this study includes people who share similar characteristics. Similarity of members of the group means there will be a homogeneous sample. IPA generally studies homogeneous samples to explore data in greater depth to uncover common patterns, hence, homogenous sample enables sharing the aspects relevant to the research question, in contrast to that, heterogeneous sampling aims at comprising a sample containing as many different characteristics as possible. Researchers seek for diversity within the sample in order to achieve the maximum variation of the data and to explore the broadest possible range of viewpoints. Conversely, IPA is more interested in revealing differences and similarities in a less varying population. When applying IPA with a homogenous sample, it is advisable that a sample size of 5-6 participants should be sufficient.

Sampling procedure

Participants for this qualitative research have been selected by applying non-probability sampling methods. This kind of sampling is referred as judgemental sampling, because the sample is selected based on researcher's subjective assessment. Non-probability sampling targets at individuals who are informed about the research topic and are able to provide their own outlook on it. Non-probability sampling does not aim to be statistically representative to the entire population like probability

sampling. For an exploratory study it is essential that participants are selected based on their relevance to the research question, as the sample has to enable understanding of phenomenon through an individual's prism. Probability sampling is not suitable for qualitative research, since people selected randomly might not have the specific knowledge necessary to provide information. IPA strives for the depth of the information, therefore, it does not employ non-probability sampling.

Based on the requirements for the target group, a few participants have been identified by using a purposeful sampling method. It is a non-random selection of participants. They were chosen because of their unique knowledge or specific settings. In order to spot the first research participants matching the criteria, the researcher's personal network was used, even though there is a high risk to create bias. Purposeful sampling is the most commonly used sampling method in IPA. Cases of purposeful sample enable the research to answer the research question best and to achieve the aim of the study. It is frequently used when dealing with samples of small size. Purposeful sampling aims at the optimal depth of the data, therefore, it is not expected to be statistically representative of the entire population, while on the other hand, compared to purposeful sampling, convenience sampling – another non-probability method – does not take the requirements for the sample into consideration as it selects the research participants based on their accessibility to the researcher.

Research method

This research requires embracing an appropriate method to obtain in-depth data. In general, qualitative data can be collected using qualitative interview methods, focus groups, or participant observation. Observation, usually used in ethnographic studies, provides detailed insight about observable people's activities, behaviours, and interactions in specific settings. In focus group data derive from the interaction between the participants. Not only do they share their viewpoints but also reflect on what the other participants say, thus creating certain group dynamics. Focus group can generate rich data; nevertheless, it does not go deeply into each individual case. Finally, interview is described as a method which establishes direct contact between researcher and participant in order to gather in-depth data about each individual's experiences, views, and feelings.

If it is necessary to understand the individuals' attitudes and their reasons behind it, which, according to Saunders et al. (2009), is best achieved by qualitative interviewing. Kvale (1996) adds that qualitative interviews attempt to disclose the meaning of the experiences. Such kind of interviewing emphasizes a greater interest in the interviewee's point of view compared to quantitative interview methods. Quantitative interviewing is typically associated with structured interviews and is mostly applied to collect quantifiable data. Structured data are derived from respondents' answers to standardized

questions which are predefined and are identical in each interview. For these reasons, such kind of interviewing is not capable of illustrating the individual's attitudes, feelings, or behaviour appropriately. It is limited by predefined themes which the researcher regards as significant. On the other hand, qualitative interviewing is able to adjust the flow of the conversation, in which the interviewee uncovers what he/she considers as important. Therefore, it exercises a higher degree of flexibility compared to structured quantitative interviews.

Qualitative interviewing is characterized by two major types of interviews – semi-structured and unstructured. During unstructured interviews, the interviewee is given an opportunity to talk freely about his/her experiences, behaviour, and beliefs related to the research topic. In this way, the participant sets an interview direction, by highlighting what he/she sees as important. Semi-structured interview is a more pre-arranged approach to collect data than unstructured interview. When conducting a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a vague idea which topics will be covered. It has an advantage of balancing flexibility and at the same time having control over the interview. The semi-structured approach implies that participants are confronted with similar topics. Key ideas and questions to be covered are usually put into an interview guide, which keeps an interview in a certain frame.

The interview guide was constructed as a tool to list the topics to be covered in the interviews. As suggested by Kvale (1996), it also contained some predetermined questions. Generally, its format is quite free, foreseen to be used conveniently as an instrument to maintain consistency through the interviews, so that data are comparable. However, it does not intend to limit the researcher to ask spontaneously arising questions which respond to the flow of the conversation. The purpose of an interview guide is to not dictate the flow of the conversation, but rather to guide it through certain topics relevant to the research question.

An interview guide provides some standardization in the participants' responses, hence, enabling comparability between multiple cases. Taking this into consideration and consistently with the method usually used in IPA, semi-structured interview has been chosen to conduct this research.

Data collection

The data collection for this study consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant individually. Legard et al. (2003) suggest conducting qualitative interviews in person. Telephone interviews are not considered to be suitable for obtaining in-depth information in comparison to a physical encounter, which allows depicting other relevant. Therefore, it was decided to conduct face-to-face interviews. Such interviews transmit not only the content of what is said, but also

how an interviewee behaves, which body language he/she exhibits. Non-verbal communication is an important source of information when interviewing.

Each participant was approached by an individual e-mail explaining the purpose of the research, the reasons why they were selected, and the interview settings. Upon consenting to take part in the research, the meeting time and location were settled with each of them. Due to the intense schedules of the research participants, interviews took place either on the weekends, or in the evenings after business hours. The duration of the interviews was ranging between 30 to 45 minutes.

To ensure a mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewee, English was chosen as a common interview language. However, it is important to mention that it is neither the researcher's nor the research participants' mother tongue.

Interviews focused on understanding how international civil servants made sense of their international experiences and capturing changes in their perceptions in regard to different situations in the past. An interview guide was used during the interviews to cover certain themes. It included key topics such as the international civil servants' career tracks, intensity of cross-cultural contact during international assignments, reflection on previous international experiences (including concrete situations), differentiation between experiences which caused positive or negative feelings, and comparison of the first international assignment with the following ones. Due to the nature of a semi-structured interview, some topics arose spontaneously from the flow of an interview.

During the interviews, the participants were asked open-end questions. Qualitative interviews normally consist of open questions in order to obtain detailed answers about individual's experiences, attitudes, feelings, and knowledge. To avoid researcher's influence on the participants' responses, the questions were formulated as, for instance, "How would you describe…?" Such questions enable interviewees to respond in their own words emphasising what is important for them. In order to depict these aspects, interviews had to be recorded. Upon agreement of each interviewee to record an interview, a digital voice recorder was used. Later the recorded interviews were transcribed manually. Five interview transcripts produced a lot of data, hence, three interview transcripts are included in the Appendix, however, the passages not essential for the data analysis and disclosing information about participants's identity were omitted while other sensitive details were coded due to the obligation of keeping research participants' anonymity.

Data analysis

Considerable differences between quantitative data and qualitative data require applying distinct approaches to data analysis. Quantitative data are numerical and standardised and require to be

processed by statistical analysis. Qualitative data are expressed through words and are non-standardised. Therefore, classification into concepts and categories which make the basis for developing theoretical concepts from the data is necessary.

Qualitative data analysis can be conducted using several different approaches such as disclosure analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and others. While disclosure analysis focuses on analysing the use of language, note similarities as well as differences between IPA and grounded theory. Both IPA and grounded theory are data-driven: Data serve as the only source for developing the theory. When analysing data, categories derive solely from the text to avoid any preconceived associations with the literature which could influence the research.

When trying to identify differences between IPA and grounded theory, Brocki and Wearden (2006) distinguish IPA as being more interested in an individual. It selects participants to whom the research question is meaningful and interprets data from an individual's perspective revealing novel and interesting aspects. Whereas, grounded theory is based on theoretical sampling. Since data collection and analysis take place simultaneously, the following data collection is guided by the prior analysis until the data saturation is achieved. Accordingly, IPA is more concerned with depicting divergence and convergence in personal experiences, while grounded theory aims at developing a data-based theoretical model applicable to a wider population.

As the current study aims at understanding international civil servants' perceptions about their development of cultural intelligence, for the data analysis this research adopts the procedure used in IPA. Even though Smith (2004) emphasises that IPA is not a prescriptive methodology, thus permitting a flexible approach toward the research, this study follows a basic procedure proposed by Smith and Osborn (2007).

The data analysis started with a scrutiny of the first interview transcript referred by Smith and Osborn (2008) as a case. In order to get familiar with the content as good as possible, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest re-reading the transcript many times. They claim that by doing so, the researcher gains a deeper understanding about the participant's world, allowing the emergence of new insights reading the text each time. This stage did not entail strict procedures of working with the text. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), it is rather like a free textual analysis. As recommended by the authors, interview transcripts were prepared leaving margins on the both sides of the sheets. The left margin was used to make remarks arising from significant responses while reading the text. It is suggested to note comments which serve as initial codes, summaries, associations, or early attempts to make interpretations. Careful attention was given to the repeated thoughts and contradictions.

When the process of free textual analysis of the first case was finished, the examination proceeded with searching for common patterns among the initial codes and comments. The notes and the comments made previously were converted into the phrases which depicted the essence of the main idea in the text. Smith and Osborn (2008) refer to these phrases to themes which transform interviewee's responses to a more abstract level. They can start at a low level of abstraction, eventually moving to more general categories. The right margin was used to note the themes occurring. The notes of similar content were grouped under the same title. Subsequently, the themes started getting analytical rather than descriptive. At the end, a list of themes identified from the text was made according to the order of their appearance in the first transcript.

The next step was searching for connections between the themes which emerged from the first case. This allows a more systematic ordering of topics as a researcher identifies relations between them. Smith and Osborn (2008) notice that some themes will be clustered together, while others will appear as superordinate concepts. To ensure the accuracy of the themes, it is advised not to drift away from what is mentioned in the transcript. This requires a constant interaction with the text checking whether the theme title really supports the participant's response.

When proceeding with analysis of the other cases, Smith (2004) suggests two approaches: Either using the themes identified from the first transcription as an orientation for the other cases (cross-case analysis) or starting analysing a new case from the beginning allowing its own themes to emerge (case by case analysis). The authors do not favour any of the approaches; however, they note that in any case, it is important to recognise patterns which are recurring across the cases, as well as accepting the new topics arising. This study has adopted the approach of analysing each transcript independently from each other. It helps to identify convergence and divergence between the cases more clearly. The process of developing themes from the first case was applied to analyse the other five cases.

As the analysis of all the transcripts was finished, the related themes from all five cases were grouped together. It is up to the researcher to decide how the themes are prioritised. Brocki and Wearden (2006) and Smith and Osborn (2008) mention that frequency of the theme appearance in the data is not an indicator for its importance. They suggest that particularly the themes which are not that prevalent in the text, but provide rich evidence, should be considered. In the end, superordinate themes and the themes one level below emerged based on the experiences different people shared. Some themes were particular only for single cases. However, not all the themes identified initially were included in the final theme list, as in-depth information could not be provided by all of them.

Ethical issues

Since qualitative research requires access to an individual's personal world, there are some ethical issues. A researcher has to deal with sensitive information, therefore it is essential to obtain an informed consent, to ensure participant's anonymity, and to be aware of researcher's bias.

In any qualitative research a participant has to provide a researcher with an informed consent. Prior the interviews the participants were explained what the purpose of the research was, why they had been chosen to participate in the study, and how the interview data would be used. Each participant was informed about his/her right to withdraw from the research any time. Knowing these conditions, the participants had to decide voluntarily whether they would take a part in the study. Finally, the interviews were recorded only upon consent of the interviewees. Additionally, a possibility to receive an interview transcript was offered to each of them.

It is important to protect the research participant's identity, as some things said in an interview could discredit his/her position. The research participants shared very personal experiences, which included even some worries about their safety, as well as publicly undisclosed specifics of their international assignments. Therefore, each participant was assured that nothing which could reveal his/her identity, company, position within the company, or specific contextual details would be used in the data presentation available for the third parties. To ensure participants' anonymity, the linkage of comments to specific names or references to special characteristics which could have revealed person's identity was avoided. Due to these confidentiality issues, the interview transcripts are not included in the appendix of this master thesis.

Finally, it is accepted that a qualitative research involves a high degree of subjectivity arising from both research participants and a researcher. It is important to note that at times a close relationship between interviewer and interviewee developed while sharing personal experiences – this as well as individual interview settings, and personal contact with some of the research participants may influence the research results. It is essential that the researcher is aware of this impact on the research process. The subjectivity is minimised by the researcher's reflexivity. When interpreting the data, the researcher has to take his/her impressions and feelings, as well as other relevant details into consideration. While reflecting on his/her assumptions, the researcher accepts the aspect of subjectivity as a part of the research.

Summary

This chapter has presented an exhaustive description of the qualitative methodology used to conduct the research. The choices of research approach, sampling procedures, research method, and approaches

of data collection and analysis were discussed considering various alternatives. IPA, chosen as a general research approach, has enabled capturing international civil servants' perceptions about their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments. The following chapter presents the findings based on the research participants' experiences and the themes which have emerged from the data.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the research findings which have derived from the qualitative data analysis. The study was driven by the research question „How do international civil servants perceive their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments?" In addition to that, four sub-questions were developed in order to support the research: (1) Which factors shape international civil servants ' experiences on their international assignments?; (2) How do international civil servants perceive learning from experience on multiple long-term international assignments?; (3) How do international civil servants perceive the differences between their multiple long-term international assignments?; (4) How do international civil servants view themselves after their international long-term assignments?

In response to these questions five major themes have been developed. The first theme presents the factors influencing the international civil servants' experiences abroad; the second theme elaborates on the importance of understanding culture; the third theme analyses the international civil servants' perceptions on social interaction; the fourth theme describes how the international civil servants have experienced the process of developing cultural intelligence; and the fifth theme outlines the outcomes of the international civil servants' learnings from their experiences.

In order to convey the context for interpretation as precise as possible, direct quotations from the interviews with the research participants are included. It emphasises the importance of an individuals' interpretation of their own experience into "a form that is understandable to them".

Five international civil servants participated in the research: three men and two women. Due to granting anonymity to the participants, the real international civil servants' names will not be disclosed. Instead, they have been assigned the codes "Interviewee 1", "Interviewee 2", "Interviewee 3" etc. Similarly, the specific country names were coded as "Country 1", "Country 2" etc. referring to the sequence of the countries each expatriate had been.

It is important to note that no differences were found in the international civil servants' perceptions between female international civil servants and male international civil servants. It implies that both genders went through the same process of development of their cultural intelligence on their international assignments. Since all the international civil servants stayed abroad without their families, there was no possibility to compare the experiences of the international civil servants moving to another country with their families with the ones who decided to live abroad alone. It is very likely that family situation would have had an impact on different socialisation and adjustment patterns and would have involved more complexity in dealing with cultural differences.

Factors influencing international experiences

The international civil servants named a range of aspects which have had an impact on their stay abroad and their effectiveness on the international assignments. The factors which the international civil servants perceived to be influential for their international experiences were classified as contextual circumstances and international civil servants' mental maps.

Contextual circumstances

The factors identified as contextual circumstances shaped the context of the expatriate's experience and development on the assignment. Specific characteristics of a country, the length of an international assignment, gaps between the assignments, and an organisational infrastructure in a particular country were mentioned as the elements influencing international civil servants' experiences on the international assignments. They were not depending on the expatriate but had to be accepted as a given setting to adjust to.

Country-specific characteristics

The majority of the research participants went on the international assignments in the Central-, Northern-Eastern-, and Southern European countries. The international civil servants shared that they had less information and informed themselves less about some of the countries compared to some others. Interviewee 1 expressed that the countries he had been were not considered to be „holiday destinations," meaning that international civil servant is in general were less familiar with those countries. Not everywhere international civil servants perceived the same living standard as in Austria; the infrastructure in some of the countries was seen as less developed than in their home country. Nevertheless, they did not experience major inconveniences, for instance, in relation to their household. Instead, the international civil servants admitted that it was more difficult to overcome cultural differences between the countries than getting used to a different infrastructure.

Each country had a unique culture which required behavioural strategies customised to the specific characteristics of that culture. Local people in various countries had different styles of communication, different attitudes towards foreigners, and distinctive mentality influenced by their local culture. All these aspects had an impact on the working styles in different countries which also influence the international civil servants' adjustment to a foreign culture.

Length of the assignment

As determined in the sample criteria, an expatriate had to have spent at least 12 months on the assignment abroad in order to qualify for the current research. It was found that the length of a single international assignment ranged between 1–3.5 years. The International civil servants agreed that the long-term assignments influenced their learning curve more positively than the short-term assignments:

> *"I think the more often you go on such missions and the longer you stay abroad, the more you learn constantly" (Interviewee 1).*

It was argued that in a longer period of time they had better opportunities to immerse into a local culture and to understand it better.

Some of the international civil servants noted that beside the long-term international assignments they had some short-term tasks which involved extensive travelling to other countries for a certain period of time. However, such assignments did not require them to move from Austria to a foreign country. Thus, the international civil servants did not consider those assignments as their „*expatriate experience"* (Interviewee 2).

Gap between the assignments

Having gone on more than one international assignment, it was important to consider the period of time passed between the assignments. It was found that some international civil servants had aspatial careers, which meant that after the first assignment they were repatriated to their home companies before going on the next mission. They noted that the gap between the assignments was also important for their personal lives. Since the international civil servants went abroad without their families, it was expressed that after the first assignment, they were expected to come back home (Interviewee 1). In addition to that, Interviewee 4 mentioned that spending some time in home environment between the assignments helped to maintain domestic social contacts.

It was indicated that the gap between the expatriate assignments ranged between 1-3 years. The international civil servants who had a longer interval between their assignments noted that they had a chance to reflect on their experiences made abroad and sort them out in a more structured way. Subsequently, they were able to get a more objective perception on their experiences:

> *„After their assignments people tend to see their experience too romantically and sentimentally. And only after some time they obtain an objective view on their experiences. They need distance to see that" (Interviewee 1).*

Whereas, other international civil servants were transferred directly on their next international assignments without being repatriated home. They admitted not having had enough time to reflect on the experiences made and to build a plan for improvements for the upcoming assignment (Interviewee 5). Thus, their approaches were less structured, more spontaneous and based on an actual situation.

Organisational infrastructure

It was identified that organisational infrastructure influenced and defined the purpose of an international assignment and an expatriate's role in it. Some international civil servants were sent abroad in order to establish business units in the countries where their companies had not been represented yet. Whereas, in the countries with an existing organisational infrastructure the international civil servants most commonly replaced their predecessors in leading a business unit:

> *"You need to differentiate if you have been assigned to a country where you are obliged to establish business when there is nothing there. This is more challenging than if you already have a local organisation there and you're only substituting your predecessor. Because then you get a lot of local support by the people from your own organisation's" (Interviewee 2).*

It was acknowledged that existing organisational infrastructure facilitated the expatriate's establishment abroad. The international civil servants perceived it as a positive influence on the level of support and socialisation during the first days in a foreign country. The assistance received from the local employees was considered as a great benefit, while they, in turn, became the first social contacts of the expatriate (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 2).

Going to the country without an existing organisational infrastructure was considered to be more difficult since the international civil servants had to rely on the people other than their employees:

> *„I got to Country 2 with no local team available, I was basically alone. Eventually, it was not that difficult, because I hired lawyers to help me establishing from the legal aspects. And it was not that difficult to find a good flat in Country 2. Then other people helped me finding a company car and the rest, like establishing the office, I did myself" (Interviewee 1).*

This implies that at the beginning they had to put more effort into making social contacts and finding people who would help them compared to the international civil servants who were supported by their local employees.

International civil servants' mental maps

Mental maps were identified as another important factor influencing international civil servants' experiences abroad. The international civil servants' viewpoints, beliefs, and assumptions, which they articulated during the interviews, were understood as the elements of their mental maps built on their past experiences. It was observed that every expatriate had an individual mindset which controlled the expatriate's attitudes, expectations, and behaviours towards different cultures. It was found that effective behaviour abroad was often hindered by the International civil servants' mental maps which were strongly influenced by their home culture (Interviewee 1). Thus, the mental maps seemed to be biased and not always leading to the most effective behaviour abroad.

It implies that international civil servants tended to view and evaluate other cultures through the lens of their home culture. However, some of the countries seemed less familiar than the others. Not having enough of reliable information, people tended to create assumptions about the places they were not familiar with (Interviewee 1). It was found that due to the lack of knowledge or a high degree of uncertainty, the international civil servants' mental maps stored stereotypes, prejudices, and other subjective information about other cultures. Based on this, the international civil servants subconsciously formed inaccurate expectations. Expectations were understood as the outcomes the international civil servants anticipated from cross-cultural situations. They served as a constructed reality which affected the expatriate's approach towards the situation:

> "If you don't expect too much and you somehow are prepared for changes, you might not be hit as strong. It's all about how you act and how you react, and how you approach people, how you are dealing with that" (Interviewee 4).

The international civil servants' mental maps as well as their expectations about cultures were also influenced by their perceptions of the cultural distance between the countries.

The problem was that the international civil servants often considered cultural distance between the countries to be equivalent to the geographical distance. It was a frequent mistake to misjudge the cultural differences between the countries considering their geographical closeness:

> "Actually, it was easier to relocate to the geographically distant country than it was to relocate to the neighbouring country. I think you expect a more different culture when you move to a distant country. You think that the neighbouring country is similar to your home country, but eventually you learn that there are bigger cultural differences than you expected. Nevertheless, when you move to a country which you expect to be different,

because of the religion and the language, it's easier, because you kind of know what you're

dealing with, because you're expecting it" (Interviewee 6).

As seen from the example above, the international civil servants' expectations were strongly affected by a subconscious stereotype about cultural and geographic distances between the countries. Thus, in some cases the international civil servants were not adequately prepared and their expectations were misleading. This caused a more difficult adjustment process as their initial expectations were shattered. In general, the international civil servants found it surprising that a small geographic distance would result in a perceivably large cultural difference:

"It's only 1 hour and 20 minutes flight time, but it's a different world. It was completely

different from what I was used to here" (Interviewee 4).

Furthermore, in the foreign countries the international civil servants encountered situations which made them feel ambiguous. While they would have known how to handle a particular situation in their home environment, they were uncertain about how to approach the same situation in a culturally different context. The international civil servants expressed that they were lacking knowledge to assess situations more accurately (Interviewee 5). Uncertainty was especially noticeable in situations which involved concerns about the safety:

"During the very first weeks in Country 1 I found a threatening message on a piece of

paper on my windscreen. I was concerned how to deal with this situation. Meaning, do

you take it serious or not. How to react? Further drive the car or walk? Questions like are

you safe in your office, are you safe in your flat, are there any people behind observing

you? Or is this just a joke? Evaluating the severity of this threat was much more difficult

than in Austria, because in Austria you clearly know, whether it is some children kidding

you or it is a real threat" (Interviewee 5).

From the international civil servants' responses it was noticed that they were constantly involved in an interaction between expectations, mental maps, and an actual situation. It was observed that inaccurate expectations caused by the lack of information stored in expatriate's mental maps triggered disappointment, cultural shock, confusion, and ambiguity in a cross-cultural situation (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5). Therefore, international civil servants found it important to understand culture in order to adjust their expectations and strategies more accurately, thus, avoiding significant failures.

Understanding culture

The international civil servants soundly articulated the importance of understanding different cultures. In their interviews they repeated the necessity to *"understand culture"* (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 5) in order to be able to demonstrate more effective behaviour in intercultural situations.

Understanding culture was perceived as a precondition for forming more accurate expectations and knowledge to become more effective on international assignments, to assess cross-cultural situations more precisely, and to meet the local people's expectations as much as possible.

In order to increase their effectiveness on the international assignments, the international civil servants needed to influence their mental maps by broadening their categories with new knowledge and perspectives. In order to understand diverse cultures better and to develop the individual mental maps, the international civil servants identified a range of activities which potentially help to gain a better insight about culture and to form more accurate expectations. The international civil servants indicated cross-cultural training, individual preparation, and observation and listening as the means to acquire better cultural knowledge.

Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training as a means to enhance the understanding about cultures emerged as a controversial topic among the international civil servants. The international civil servants shared contrasting views on cross-cultural training: On the one hand, some international civil servants expressed regrets on not receiving a cross-cultural training which could have helped them to be more effective (Interviewee 3); on the other hand, other international civil servants considered cross-cultural training as a context for creating stereotypes, thus causing negative effects (Interviewee 6).

However, it is important to note that most of the international civil servants did not receive support from their companies in regard to the cross-cultural training. Since majority of the research participants were sent on the international assignments in European countries, it was assumed that their companies did not consider cultural differences in Europe as significant enough to provide a cross-cultural training (Interviewee 3). Cultural differences in Europe seemed to be underestimated, until one of international civil servants already being on his assignment abroad realised the need to get a cross-cultural training:

> *"After some weeks I got a professional support. This was a very supportive training because it helped me to understand how local people in Country 1 think, how they operate, what makes them resist, what is their normal process of elaborating on some challenges, how to come up with solutions or not, when they are active or passive, etc. (. . .) I was provided with a comprehensive report of results and my average fit in some dimensions to the*

average local. This helped me later to understand better how and why local people reacted or did not react at all" (Interviewee 5).

It was admitted that cross-cultural training was underestimated by the international civil servants. Interviewee 5 was pleasantly surprised about the positive effect the training had generated.

However, the international civil servants were not inclined to rely fully on cross-cultural training. They considered it more as a supporting means, introducing a specific country and its culture, and giving general directions of behaviour and a rough idea of what to expect (Interviewee 4). Other international civil servants viewed cross-cultural trainings more sceptically claiming that such formal education imposed stereotypes and prejudices about cultures (Interviewee 6). According to them, it was possible to survive in a foreign environment relying on a common sense.

Cross-cultural training was not classified as a distinctive form of developing cultural intelligence, but rather as a supporting means which influenced and facilitated learning from experience. For the international civil servants who received the training, it helped to gain the first insight about culture and to avoid major mistakes.

Individual preparation

Having discussed cross-cultural trainings, the international civil servants agreed that individual preparation could be done independent of the company's support. They strongly emphasised that the individual preparation required a personal interest and curiosity to some extent (Interviewee 3; Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5). Curiosity emerged as an unexpected but important aspect in gaining cultural understanding. It was referred to as a driving factor in acquiring a deeper insight in culture:

> *"Curiosity helps to address proactively other people, get to know them, and learn about them. Or being curious how people in certain countries do this or that. Such natural curiosity helps to interconnect with people and to build relationships. In my opinion, it is a kind of respect to show interest in the other person's life and circumstances. So as a foreigner you don't appear as the only one who knows everything and who tells what to do" (Interviewee 5).*

Among various ways to prepare oneself for an international assignment, the international civil servants named reading about the country, its past, and processes, and trying to understand how history had influenced culture and people (Interviewee 5). The international civil servants also considered learning the local language to be an important part of understanding culture. They perceived the ability to speak a local language not only as a direct means of communication, but also as a sign of respect to the local

people. It was noted that the effort alone demonstrated in learning the language was appreciated by the locals (Interviewee 5).

While the international civil servants were discussing individual preparation for the international assignments, they also considered their work experiences in multinational companies as an aspect worth to reflect on when trying to understand certain cultures. While working for their companies in Austria, the international civil servants had a possibility to encounter culturally diverse individuals on a regular basis. It allowed them to get an initial impression on how cross-cultural interaction might take place. In addition to the work experience in international organisations, the international civil servants indicated that their travel experiences helped them to get to know certain cultures better:

> *"I always travelled a lot. When I travelled, I did backpacking, so I kind of interacted with the local cultures. My travel experience gave me some positive feeling, because I knew how to deal with other cultures already" (Interviewee 6).*

Reflection on the work and travel experiences the international civil servants made before implied a contribution to an individual's preparation and an improved ability to understand cultures.

Observation and listening

It was found that understanding of culture could be increased by observing and listening on an international assignment (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 5). The international civil servants emphasised the necessity to be attentive to a new unfamiliar environment. They believed that by having good observation and listening skills it was easier to understand a culture and its people. According to the international civil servants, observation and listening were essential in understanding local people's expectations:

> *"First listen, listen, listen, and understand. Many managers think they have been sent on an assignment because they know something better and they need to tell. But before you tell and lead, you need to be sure that you understood yourself and that your diagnosis of a country and of the culture is very good" (Interviewee 5).*

Interviewee 1 advised to sharpen the senses in an unfamiliar environment and to be especially attentive to the behaviour of the international civil servants who have been living in a particular country longer. He confirmed that observing such people affected some of his impressions about culture.

It became apparent that understanding culture by observing and listening required the international civil servants to be curious and interested, as well as patient:

> *"At the beginning it was important to invest a lot of time in listening, asking questions, observing how the locals behaved, how they communicated and interacted with each other,*

and trying to ask many questions about what's effective, what's not effective, how would
people react in certain situations" (Interviewee 3).

By observing and listening to the surrounding environment, the international civil servant were able to gain a better insight into the culture and understand it better by noticing certain processes and patterns from the behaviour exhibited by other people. A better understanding of culture positively influenced the International civil servants' mental maps and facilitated the engagement in cross-cultural situations.

Social interaction

At the beginning of the research, it was assumed that the expatriate's social environment would play a role in the experience on the international assignment. Unexpectedly, the prominence of this topic in the international civil servants' responses required distinguishing it as a separate theme. This implies that social interaction had a great importance in international civil servants' lives. Subsequently, two subthemes have been derived from this topic. Firstly, the importance of networking was pointed out; secondly, the international civil servants shared their experiences about the interaction with local people.

Building a network

The international civil servants repeatedly mentioned the need to build a network in a foreign environment, thus implying the significance of this topic to them. Some international civil servants shared their experiences of not having succeeded to build strong networks around them on their first international assignments which resulted in them feeling socially isolated. A network, as pointed out by the international civil servants, was important for satisfying social needs, as well as exchanging experiences and learning from each other (Interviewee 5).

Expatriate community

It was found out that the international expatriate community in each country was the international civil servants' primary addressee in making the first social contacts. As noticed from the interviews, international civil servants living and working in a particular country had a unique link to each other because they all shared a similar status and life situation: Many of them resided abroad without their families.

It was noticed that the international civil servants were likely to develop close relationships with other international civil servants residing in the countries which they perceived as particularly different from their home. The international civil servants agreed that they tended to look for people similar to themselves. This seems to imply their need to exchange their experiences with people who are in a similar life situation:

"When you go to countries where you're kind of different, then you find little groups where people meet the same cultural and regional background. In the Western countries you're just one of many. It's different than going to a totally different country where everyone is looking for someone who is similar, like other foreigners, other international civil servants" (Interviewee 6).

Nevertheless, Interviewee 4 was sceptical about socialising with other international civil servants. This expatriate refused „*being squeezed into the round table of international civil servants"* (Interviewee 4). This inferred the expatriate's perception about expatriate community as imposing a certain framework on its members and keeping them away from the external environment. Missing an opportunity to interact with the local culture seemed to concern the expatriate.

Diverse channels of socialisation

Interestingly, the international civil servants revealed that on their second international assignment they were able to build a more diverse social network compared to the first assignment (Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6). It seemed that with growing experience they became more competent in socialising in culturally different environments and learned to engage in more diverse channels of socialisation:

„In Country 1 I spend a lot of private time with other foreigners. Obviously, work-wise I was involved with the local people. And in Country 2 it was a mix. I was hanging out with some local colleagues, people from the embassy, and other international civil servants" (Interviewee 5).

After experiencing a low level of socialisation on the first assignment, the international civil servants became more active and took the initiative in creating their social surroundings (Interviewee 5).

Beside the expatriate community, the international civil servant/managers identified a wide range of possibilities for more intense networking. First of all, many of them contacted to the international embassies in various countries as their first step in establishing social connections (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6). The international civil servants used to be invited to receptions where they could pursue networking further. Secondly, the international civil servants perceived foreigners who had been living there for longer on a permanent basis as a good source of socialising. The international civil servants particularly valued such connections because, on the one hand, they were able to share their experiences with the foreigners who lived there longer and knew the local culture better and to get advice from them; on the other hand, the foreigners introduced international civil servants to the local people they knew. Thirdly, it was indicated how significant the internet and social media were in establishing contacts. international civil servants believed that nowadays it is easier to

acquire new social connections due to the easy access to various web sites, interest groups, and social media compared to the past (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 6). They were convinced that this enabled international civil servants in general to get in touch with some people even prior the international assignment.

The international civil servants acknowledged that approaching different groups of interest helped them to establish contact with a higher number of people and to build more diverse networks than on the previous international assignments. The acquired connections facilitated a smoother start and a more positive stay in the new country.

Interaction with local people

When living as an expatriate in a foreign country at least for one year, interaction with local people was unavoidable and comprised an essential part of experiencing a local culture. For the international civil servants socialisation with people from the host country was an essential but at the same time a problematic issue.

Aspects influencing socialisation

It was found that the international civil servants obtained contrasting experiences in social interaction in different countries. Two international civil servants, who were sent on the assignments both in the northern and in the southern parts of Europe, confirmed the existence of differences between the northern and the southern people's mentalities. They assumed that the differences in communication and interaction were mainly determined by cultural temperaments:

> *"Even within Europe cultures are very different. In some countries people are very outspoken, very open, very inviting. While in other countries they are very closed, and it takes you a lot of time to get close to them. I could really sense a completely different attitude, completely different behaviour in a much more disciplined way of acting and interacting which obviously was driven by the Nordic culture" (Interviewee 3).*

In addition to the local mentality and temperament, the international civil servants felt that a certain attitude the local people had towards the foreigners also influenced their socialisation abroad. For instance, Interviewee 5 had the impression that people in Country 1 treated foreigners with a certain degree of caution; nevertheless, he did not perceive any hostility. This kind of attitude required additional time to build mutual trust (Interviewee 5), thus affecting the expatriate's socialisation.

Patterns of socialization

The combination of two components – local mentality and the local people's attitude towards foreigners – defined how easy or difficult socialisation in distinctive countries seemed to the international civil servants.

In the Southern European countries, the international civil servants perceived that it was uncomplicated to socialise with the locals. They found the style of communication to be easy-going and informal. The international civil servants appreciated the fact that the local people tried to involve them in their private lives:

> "The people in Country 1 were quite open and welcoming (. . .). I got involved from the first day on quite much in the local life. During the week the local people with whom I got in touch via the work, invited me for lunch to the countryside, and told me about their families" (Interviewee 1).

Coming to the northern host countries as outsiders from another culture, the international civil servants could feel the contrast to the experience in the south. The interviewee found this contrast quite shocking:

> "In Country 2 it took quite long to get better acquainted with the people (. . .). It took me almost a year in Country 2 to get at the same stage where I was in Country 1 after one month. Of course, at work with all the stakeholders there everything was done correctly and friendly but definitely more distanced. I didn't get anything about private lives of others just what I heard accidentally" (Interviewee 1).

It was expressed that the distance between international civil servants and the local people was obvious. However, it was not as apparent in the business environment as it was on a private level. Establishing contacts in the work environment was identified as easier than in private. Nevertheless, it also depended on how employees perceived the power distance relation. In the countries where people adhered to the status, hierarchies, and power relations, the international civil servants performing managerial roles were confronted with difficulties in establishing relationships with their subordinates (Interviewee 3).

The contacts international civil servants made in a professional environment could not compensate and satisfy their need for social interaction. Having an understanding how their subordinates were beyond the office hours was an important part of establishing a sustainable contact and rapport with their employees. It seemed that it was important for the international civil servants to participate in the lives of the local people to some extent.

Interaction on a private level

While getting in touch with people in the business environment was perceived by the international civil servants as relatively uncomplicated in all the countries, forming connections on a private level was much more challenging than expected:

> „The main contacts were driven by the organizational environment. And interaction on the private side, (. . .) took a much longer period of time to be established. It was very difficult to get closer to the people and to get to know their private lives or to know what they do on the weekends, or what they think about certain things" (Interviewee 3).

The international civil servants, who experienced troubles in socialising while on international assignments, admitted that it was hard to deal with the difficulties related to establishing personal contact with the local people (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 5; Interviewee 6). On the other hand, it was found that some international civil servants themselves hesitated to make social contacts since they claimed to have low trust in their own intercultural abilities and focused on the organisational matters rather than on socialisation (Interviewee 5). Consequently, some of the international civil servants were suffering from the lack of private relationships. They had nobody to share their experiences with, thus expressing the feeling of loneliness:

> „The first year in Country 1 for me was really a very lonely year. For more or less 12 months I had no one to share really openly and to talk deeply about private things" (Interviewee 5).

As discussed previously, the international civil servants perceived their social interaction on a private level more positively on their second international assignment in comparison to the first one. They became more proactive in socialising, thus becoming able to connect to more people.

An important aspect in this subtheme was that all the international civil servants, both male and female, went on the international assignments without their families. This sudden life change seemed to cause a gap of missing their social networks and home environment which was not replaced by strong personal relations abroad. Even though the international civil servants emphasised that the business was their priority while on assignment (Interview 3), a private network was considered as a must for a good work-life balance. It implies that social contact was crucial for their existence in an unfamiliar country. Thus, it clarifies why the international civil servants perceived this situation as difficult and emotionally exhausting.

Learning from experience

Social interaction with culturally diverse individuals provided the international civil servants with a context for making their experiences. They perceived that learning from experience was the key to their

development and increased effectiveness on the international assignments. Compared to the cross-cultural training, the experiential learning was regarded as a more effective means of advancing in the international environment:

> *"Even if you study and you learn, it's always learning by doing, because some things cannot be taught. You have to live them, which was the perfect experience" (Interviewee 4).*

This theme contains two subthemes which require elaborating on the process of experiential learning and depicting how international civil servants perceive their experiences of learning from multiple international assignments.

Process of experiential learning

During their assignments abroad, the international civil servants went through the process of experiential learning. Despite of the different contexts and circumstances, all of them shared very similar schemes of their learning experiences. Experiential learning was articulated as a sequence of actions which were found to be moving in a circle. The process of experiential learning, as perceived by the international civil servants, is depicted in Figure 6.
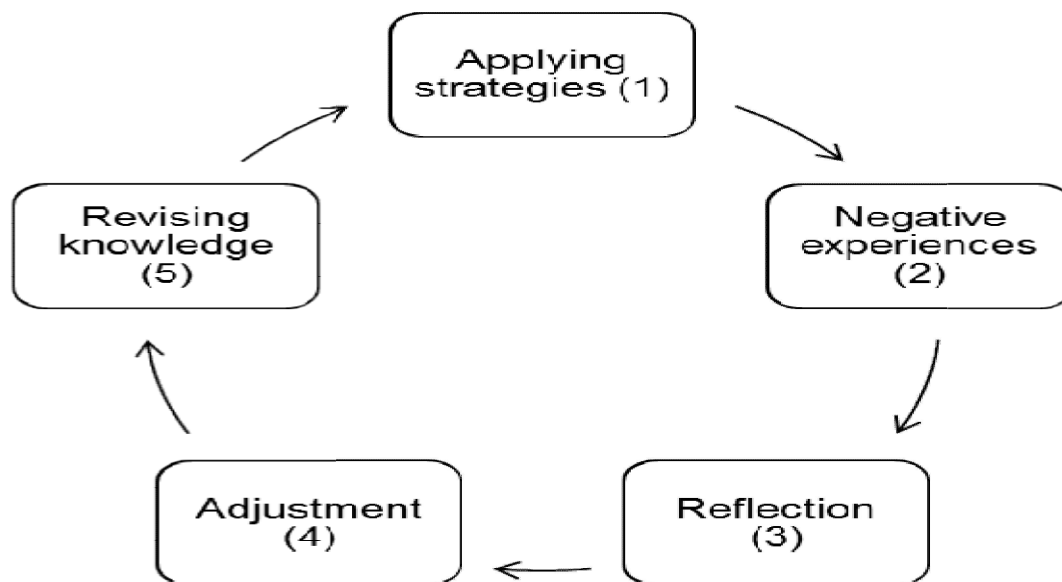
Figure 6. Process of experiential learning on international assignments (own source)

From the international civil servants' experiences, it was found that the process of experiential learning is comprised of five stages as seen in Figure 6: applying strategies, negative experiences, reflection, adjustment, and revising knowledge. The following subchapters will analyse the phases of the process and relations between them in a greater detail.

Applying strategies

During the interviews it turned out that international civil servants were most likely to handle cross-cultural situations relying on their previous learnings which had resulted in effective outcomes. This implies that international civil servants' actions were strongly influenced by their mental maps which are shaped by their home culture, previous experiences, assumptions, and knowledge. The role of the international civil servants' mental maps on their international assignments was discussed in depth in subchapter 4.1.2. International civil servants getting into unfamiliar situations in culturally different environments tended to retrieve the strategies from their mental maps which worked effectively in their home environment or in another country and applied them to similar situations in other countries. However, the strategies chosen by the international civil servants most commonly did not meet the local people's expectations and turned out to be ineffective. This finding was strongly supported by the evidence from the interview data:

> „Initially when I got to Country 2, I thought I could rely on my experiences from Country 1. And just in the course of time it turned out that I couldn't rely on the experiences which had a social basis" (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 3 also experienced that transferring one strategy which was successful in a particular country did not automatically grant an effective outcome in another country:

> „After my learnings in other countries, I tried to invest more time to understand how they [employees in Country 3] feel and who they are, which interestingly was considered a bit strange from their side. They didn't really understand why I wanted to know who they are, where they live, and what they do, because this is not the habit in those countries" (Interviewee 3).

This proves that international civil servants had to be aware of the country-specific differences when applying their behavioural strategies. At this point, they again emphasised the importance of understanding the local expectations instead of taking experiences from the past and trying to impose them on a different culture (Interviewee 3).

Interviewee 1 believed that on his first international assignment certain models of behaviour which had proven to be efficient in that particular context were recorded in his mental map. He explained that his mind relying on those strategies retrieved them on the second assignment as well:

> „When you are going on such a mission abroad again, the mechanisms which you were used to, start right away again and then you find out that they don't work there. It was something like a shock because I was so much used to this very open communication in

Country 1. And then in Country 2 it was such a contrast and I needed some time to get used to that" (Interviewee 1).

It seemed that the international civil servants were likely to consider their first international experience as a benchmark for their behaviour on the following assignments. Interviewee 6 expressed that it was unavoidable not to think of the place she lived previously which led to a constant comparison of the countries. It implied that majority of expatriate managers relied on their prior experiences made on assignments abroad.

Consequently, the international civil servants shared their failed attempts of applying the strategies which worked successfully in particular countries, but elsewhere resulted in ineffective outcomes causing negative experiences.

Negative experiences

Due to the inappropriate strategies applied, the international civil servants admitted that the situations they were involved in had turned out negatively to some extent and caused unpleasant feelings to them:

"For instance, in Country 1 people tend to communicate loud and with emotions. This is normal. If you don't communicate there this way, they think you don't take it serious. I had a case in Country 2 that in a stressful situation one employee did a major mistake. I came back, and I told it to her and I was not even really upset about her… But she perceived it as a major personal offense" (Interviewee 1).

Subsequently, Interviewee 1 admitted that this situation had generated a long-term problem in the communication at work. In general, negative experiences reduced the international civil servants' effectiveness and affected their confidence and self-esteem. Thus, learning how to deal with such situations was of key importance.

The international civil servants' perceptions of their experiences implied that undesired outcomes causing negative experiences were the crucial point which triggered the learning process. A wish to improve the situation in order to avoid negative emotions the next time encouraged the international civil servants to engage in a learning process:

"The learning comes from doing things and from doing mistakes. So, whenever I figured out I said something wrong or something that I did was not effective, it triggered learning and triggered a change of behaviour. The next time, obviously, this would not repeat itself again, but then you're moving to the next error and trap. At the end of the day, you're moving from one trap to the other, and eventually you learn how to navigate" (Interviewee 3).

As seen from the example above, the international civil servants perceived learning as a constant process they were involved in.

Although negative experiences were regarded as unpleasant, international civil servants accepted them as *"a part of the game"* (Interviewee 2). More so, it was found that international civil servants tended to learn from their mistakes more effectively than from positive or neutral experiences:

> *"I think you learn from both, but it is a principal of humans to learn the most from failures, mistakes, and negative experiences. Because normally next time you tend to do it differently and by this you develop and elevate. In consequence, I think that from all these negative experiences in Country 1 and the learnings out of it, I had more positive experiences in Country 2, because I didn't pursue the same approach, I didn't react in the same manner" (Interviewee 5).*

On the other hand, it was noted that the learning approach was very much depending on an individual's attitude:

> *"If you're a person who wants to learn from mistakes, this is the way you learn. If you move abroad, and if you just don't want to change, if don't want to get involved with the locals, then it doesn't matter if you don't learn. You just always get upset about the differences in every situation" (Interviewee 6).*

The engagement in a learning process itself required from the international civil servants to be open enough to accept differences and to acknowledge their own mistakes. Thus, it is implied that learning from experiences, especially from the negative ones, was an emotionally demanding process.

Reflection

The experiential learning process triggered by negative experiences was, first of all, carried out by the reflection process. The international civil servants had to assess the situations they experienced from a very close distance. The reflection process was understood as a conscious thinking and comparison of similar situations in culturally different environments:

> *"Because of my experiences in Country 1, and then comparing them to the situation in Country 2, it was easier to understand the cultural difference and the perception of my communication which helped me to adopt that I got more accepted in my communication" (Interviewee 1).*

After a thorough analysis of what had happened, the international civil servants were able to identify causes of the negative experiences and, subsequently, contrasts between different cultures.

> *"The experience from Country 1 helped me to adjust quicker in Country 2, because after the reflection I noticed the difference better. It was such a contrast, and it caused this reflection process, which helped me to analyse situations better and compare them"* (Interviewee 1).

It was articulated that the more cultures were different from each other, the easier it was to identify the differences between them. As a result, it allowed the international civil servants to create more effective adjustment strategies, thus managing the adjustment process better.

Adjustment

International civil servants perceived the adjustment as a process of changing their mind-set and behaviour in order to meet the expectations of the local people. This was necessary for becoming more accepted and more effective in a foreign environment. After reflecting and identifying the causes of ineffective behaviour, the international civil servants were more aware of their own culture and of another culture and were able to recognise more easily how what they needed to behave in order to adjust better. As outsiders of the local culture, the international civil servants had to give in more in order to meet the local expectations.

However, it was found that international civil servants did not perceive the adjustment as an absolute compliance with the local norms. They were comparing the local culture with their own, and if the local norms were in conflict with their values and interests, the international civil servants were not ready to give up their principles. This demonstrates that adjustment was a personal decision of each expatriate: Everyone had to answer to himself/herself whether he/she could adjust. For instance, Interviewee 3 shared the following experience:

> *"I'm used to play football for having fun, moving, having a team exercise, where everybody is trying to give the best. However, the local people were engaged very emotionally in a way that they did not accept any mistakes done by anybody and they were very critical about it. They were very hard-headed and not aiming at engaging in the team. So I came to the conclusion that it was the way they played and either I would just accept it or not. I consider football as a fun game and not an absolute will to win and to criticise others who are making mistakes which everybody does. That's why finally I decided to quit"* (Interviewee 3).

By adjusting to the local culture, the international civil servants revised their existing knowledge. Subsequently, they recorded new and more effective strategies of behaviour in their mental maps which next time resulted in a more effective outcome.

Learning from multiple experiences

The aspect of multiple experiences was important in order to display how the international civil servants compared and contrasted different international assignments. It was interesting to find out how the international civil servants saw their progress, whether their expectations changed over time, and if they perceived their multiple international assignments in a different way. Subsequently, two subthemes present how the international civil servants perceived their experiences on multiple international assignments.

Learning curve

International civil servants experienced their movement through several international assignments as a constantly rising learning curve. Thus, it was referred to by Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 5 as an exponential learning curve. They indicated that the learning curve was very steep at the beginning, mostly influenced by less positive experiences and difficult adjustment periods. The international civil servant shared that their first international assignments were characterised by inaccurate expectations, uncertainty, lack of confidence, doubts, prejudices, and scepticism (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 2; Interviewee 4; Interviewee 5). It was strongly emphasised by those international civil servants who did not get any cross-cultural preparation from their company.

> *"Before the first assignment you have absolutely no idea what is waiting for you. You think you go somewhere to the office and everything is like you're used from home. This is not the reality. You are entering a completely different world. And then it takes some time until you wake up and realize that this is your new reality now, and that you have to establish very rapidly" (Interviewee 2).*

From the international civil servants' experiences, it was understood that not only their first international assignment was learning-intense, but the second one as well. In particular, on the first international assignment the international civil servants were getting familiar with the life and work abroad. Without having prior international experience, they were relying on the experiences they made in their home environment and used them to deal with intercultural situations. Subsequently, the international civil servants started learning on their first international assignments, which they recognised as a framework of behaviour abroad. However, since these actions were bound to a particular culture, they did not work on the second international assignment in a different country. Even though the international civil servants had a better understanding how things work abroad, they had to make new learning experiences realising that international assignments were not „one size fits all" and that cultural differences had to be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is implied that the second

international assignment was similarly intense in terms of learning experience as the first international assignment.

Although the international assignments, especially the first ones, were considered to be coupled with very steep and intense segments of the learning curve, the professional as well as the cultural challenge were driving people to seek for further international experiences. The international civil servants who repatriated to their home environment and home companies found it difficult to get used to the pre-assignment level where they had hierarchical levels in the organization above them. After mastering the first international assignment the international civil servants were missing the challenge in the home environment (Interviewee 1). Therefore, it was assumed that the majority of international civil servants were driven by the challenge.

The international civil servants admitted that they felt completely different before their second international assignment. They had a clearer structure of what to expect, what to look for, how to meet people, and how to create a new life there (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 6). They were more confident and less prejudiced about the cultures.

> *"On the second mission I made so many things better right away from the beginning. First of all, I was totally positive, I was way more confident about my skills. And, of course, I made some learnings from the first mission, which I aimed to avoid and to do things better, so even before I went I made already at home a clear plan how I want to act" (Interviewee 5).*

With acquiring more experiences and learnings, the international civil servants formed with much more ease more accurate expectations for the upcoming international assignments. They could observe the evolution of their expectations: The more experience they acquired, the more realistic their expectations became.

> *„Pre-assignment was the phase of curiosity, very positive, maybe even childish, wishful thinking. The first foreign assignment, the first experience, the first such role... In reality, the first assignment itself was about facing the reality and quite many troubles and issues, nevertheless, managing them in the long-run and surviving. And the second assignment was more balanced. I had less of positive, wishful, hopeful thinking, but it was more realistic"* *(Interviewee 5).*

The international civil servants understood their experiences as accumulative. They were convinced that each experience they had before was *„the basis for the next step later"* (Interviewee 5). It was expressed that learning got less intense with growing experience, because some things started repeating themselves from one to the next assignment.

Forming patterns

While progressing through their multiple international assignments, the international civil servants started developing a universal framework of patterns which was to some extent common to the different environments, but at the same time flexible enough to be adapted to each country.

As of the second assignment, the international civil servants began noticing practices and processes which were repeating themselves throughout their assignments but just in different cultural contexts. Based on this, the international civil servants started forming the patterns of the processes common to the countries they had been to. The international civil servants identified patterns as routines which they encountered in every country:

> „It's always the same what you need to know: you need to find a flat, to get a working permit, to connect with some key people, to build up a professional network, and also some kind of a private network" (Interviewee 5).

The international civil servants claimed that the patterns they formed stayed the same during their international experiences, but in each country, it was moderated by the local culture (Interviewee 1). This implied that a framework could not be completely general so that it could be used in any country, because it was affected by different cultures. Thus, the international civil servants agreed that the patterns had to be adapted to the country-specific contexts:

> „When you move to a different country with a different background, you have to re-think a little bit. But the pattern is always the same" (Interviewee 6).

Having developed a pattern of behaviours and thinking, the international civil servants were at the same time aware of the pitfall caused by underestimating specific differences in each country. In order to use the framework of patterns effectively in each country, they needed to gain a good understanding about the local culture and people.

Learning outcomes

The last theme presents the outcomes of learning from experience gained on the international assignments. In the long-run, these outcomes go beyond creating the frameworks for effective behaviour abroad and refer to more sustainable effects triggered by experiential learning. The international civil servants expressed that their experiences on the international assignments had resulted in professional and personal development, which will be discussed as subthemes in the following subchapters.

Professional development

The international civil servants noticed professional growth as a result of their experiences and learnings from their international assignments. Professional development was perceived not only in a superficial sense of career advancement, but also in gaining more competences, confidence, and versatility as a manager. Three subthemes explaining the international civil servants' perception about their professional development were found in this category: multidimensional stretch, entrepreneurial management, and career opportunities.

Multidimensional adjustment

The international civil servants mentioned that going on the international assignment was not the only challenge. For most of them it implied a further step in their roles and organisational responsibilities. This situation was referred to as a *"professional stretch"* by one research participant (Interviewee 5). According to the international civil servants, their *professional stretch* took place on several occasions. One of them was fulfilling different tasks on separate international assignments. For instance, one participant indicated:

> *"I went on the first assignment for the troubleshooting purposes. We had some organisational problems there. On the second assignment I had to build up a business unit from the scratch and to close it later" (Interviewee 1).*

This implies that a contemporary manager is expected to possess a wider range of competencies and a certain degree of flexibility concerning both the professional tasks and cultural environment.

Furthermore, some international civil servants were appointed on their international assignments to perform new roles entailing more managerial responsibilities. One of them expressed this move as *"jumping into deep cold water"* (Interviewee 5). The expatriate elaborated on it:

> *"…it was not only my first such role which is quite a stretch, but the more important topic was the cultural challenge I was not aware about at all at the beginning" (Interviewee 5).*

In addition to their tasks, the majority of the international civil servants were designated to lead the business units abroad. It was proven that leadership across cultures differed from leading in the domestic environment. For example, one expatriate encountered a different attitude of the local people concerning motivation:

> *"The motivation in my life is quite different; it has a different background than theirs. I'm a person who is motivated by outcome, results. While I was dealing with the people who did not earn a lot of money and their motivation was more about money than anything else. So,*

it's really hard to think that they will never reflect the way you are expecting" (Interviewee 6).

This experience inferred that the international civil servants as international leaders had to take the mentality of local people, their values, preferences, and working style into account in order to find effective ways to lead people abroad.

The last challenge which one of the international civil servants was confronted with was adjusting not only to the life in a foreign country, but also to a new company culture. Some of the expatriate's assignments coincided with the switch of employer, which created a challenge of multidimensional adjustment:

> *"Moving from one country to the other is driven not only by the local culture; it is also driven by a different company culture. And company cultures are completely different. So, moving from one country implied for me not only understanding the local country, but also learning a new company culture" (Interviewee 3).*

Considering the adjustment in the culturally different environment and the adaptation to the professional challenges, most of the international assignments involved a great degree of complexity. Thus, allowing the international civil servants to improve professionally.

Entrepreneurial management

It was noticed that the expatriate status was perceived by some international civil servants as a chance to work on a different level than in the home country office. Accordingly, working as an expatriate allowed them to be more autonomous and responsible for their decisions:

> *„You have to make the decisions on your own and to take responsibility for them because you don't have an organisational back up locally. You may call it an entrepreneurship" (Interviewee 2).*

On the other hand, it was shared that balancing the requirements of the headquarters and the local office was found to be very challenging:

> *„You had to fulfil the head-office requirements, then you had to obey the local needs, and to find the right balance. This was the most difficult situation in my life" (Interviewee 4).*

Even though the international civil servants still had to coordinate important decisions with the head office in Austria, they enjoyed the autonomy they had in decision making and leading the business unit.

Career opportunities

Professional development was also discussed in the sense of the career opportunities. One expatriate admitted that due to his experiences abroad he was able to get further career opportunities. It was also

expressed that the international assignments the expatriate went on played an important role in shaping his professional priorities and values (Interviewee 5). However, according to Interviewee 3, international experience does not automatically grant better career perspectives, but it is more likely to contribute to the personal development:

> *"It's not always a catalyst for a great career, but it gives life experience which one is never able to obtain when always staying in the same country" (Interviewee 3).*

The difference in the perception about the career could be explained by the fact that after his assignments Interviewee 5 is currently working in Austria, while Interviewee 3 is still on the international assignment. Having an objective view on the experience requires time and distance to be able to reflect on it from all the points of view in order to obtain an objective perception on how the experience turned out for particular persons.

Personal development

After their international assignments, the international civil servants perceived that their international experience and the learnings they made resulted in a substantial change of their mind-set in the long-run. All the international civil servants articulated the value of international experience for their personal development:

> *"It opens the mind, it opens the horizon, (. . .) and it gives life experience which one is never able to obtain when always staying in the same country" (Interview 3).*

Other than with the professional development, personal development was seen as a life-long, ongoing process (Interviewee 5). The international civil servants perceived their advancement as *"a huge step forward"* (Interviewee 4). In the long-run the International managers noticed that their attitudes became more open-minded, and the learnings they made on the international assignments were sustainable.

The international civil servants shared that their attitude had become more open because of encountering different cultures. Becoming more open-minded, more tolerant, and more patient was recognised as the most important trait acquired while living and working abroad.

> *"I lost quite some prejudices about other cultures. I can say I wasn't at the most common holiday destinations. I have been to the countries where many others wouldn't go because they would consider them problematic. And so, I got more open-minded and more tolerant, because you face differences everywhere" (Interviewee 1).*

At the end the international civil servants' attitudes had gotten very mature and allowed them to accept cultures as they were. They abandoned their ethnocentric attitudes common to Western cultures and did not try to impose their own norms any more:

> „...there is no right or wrong. Every culture has its own rules and set up, which you have to respect and accept. Don't try to change different cultures thinking that your culture is the right one" (Interviewee 6).

It was identified that being more open allowed the international civil servants to accept cultural differences and to learn from them. They agreed that such an attitude made them feel more comfortable among culturally different individuals and resulted in behaving more effectively (Interviewee 3).

One of the international civil servants revealed that patience was one of the most precious traits an expatriate could acquire. When it comes to expatriate's adjustment in a foreign country, it is especially important to be patient:

> „It takes you at least one year until you feel like at home. It's very important that you give yourself a bit of time and be patient. You have your ups and downs, you get lonely (. . .), it always takes a while. Especially with different cultures you have to be patient" (Interview 6).

Furthermore, it was found that experience and personal development transformed the perception of certain objects, processes and phenomena. Diverse experiences enabled the international civil servants to look at situations from different angles, forming a more universal and less biased understanding. International civil servants experienced that being far from the home environment they started valuing what they had at home and being more grateful for that:

> „I learned to appreciate things we take for granted, like having warm home and where you have stuff to eat, network, family. The value of friends I learned to appreciate there. Before I was not aware about the intensity of the friendship" (Interviewee 5).

Additionally, the international civil servants emphasised that the experiences they acquired abroad made them „learn for life" (Interviewee 2). The learnings made in foreign countries served them in their home environment as well:

> „Since I've come back to Austria, I still build on those experiences and it helps me today, because I have seen other ways of living, I'm much more humble and grateful, I value much more what we have here in Austria" (Interview 5).

Referring to their personal development, the international civil servants considered their international experiences as an important part of their life-long learning curve.

Summary

This chapter presented the research findings which uncovered the international civil servants' perceptions on their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments. The international civil servants' experiences on their international assignments were influenced by contextual circumstances and the international civil servants' mental maps. The contextual circumstances shaped the profile of their international assignments and did not depend on the individual expatriate, whereas the expatriate's mental maps influenced the approach towards the cross-cultural situations. It was found that in order to increase effectiveness on the international assignments, it was important to understand local culture, its people, and their expectations. Understanding culture was perceived as a precondition for effective behaviour. Subsequently, the knowledge acquired about culture had to be grounded in practice through social interaction. Social interaction was perceived as an essential element of the international civil servants' experiences abroad in fulfilling their social needs and creating context for learning. It was identified that international civil servants increased their effectiveness abroad best by learning from experiences: They progressed through the several stages of the experiential learning. Consequently, the international civil servants were able to form behavioural patterns which guided their adjustment in different countries. Thus, development of cultural intelligence was understood as a constant process of learning and improvement resulting in professional and personal growth in the long-run.

In the next chapter the findings will be discussed and grounded in the context of existing literature.

5. Discussion

This study puts an emphasis on exploring the perceptions of international civil servants' concerning their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments. Cultural intelligence is considered to be one of the most important assets which international civil servants should develop in order to perform effectively in a foreign environment. The process of developing cultural intelligence in the context of expatriation, however, has not been properly addressed in previous scientific works. Since the literature on this topic is very scarce, the current study plays an important role in exploring the international civil servants' experiences regarding the enhancement of their cultural intelligence.

The previous research efforts on cultural intelligence were mainly focusing on finding the relationships between cultural intelligence and various aspects of expatriation in order to confirm the importance of

cultural intelligence in the context of international assignments. Thus, the studies were conducted using mainly quantitative methods. Nevertheless, since cultural intelligence is regarded as an individual capability, it is important to look at it from an individual's perspective which requires the application of qualitative research.

The importance of gaining more understanding on how international civil servants perceive their development of their cultural intelligence was highlighted by several issues. First, cultural intelligence is an important asset for the contemporary managers who, differently from the traditional international civil servants, do not limit themselves by being sent on only one international assignment, instead going on a number of assignments during their career. This implies that international civil servants are increasingly confronted with the challenges arising from cultural differences in diverse environments. Because of this, it is important to develop a high level of cultural intelligence in order to be able to handle cross-cultural situations. Secondly, the formal means of developing cultural understanding have been discussed questioning their effectiveness on the international civil servants' performance abroad. It was argued that the development of cultural intelligence should embrace more complex methods, mainly experience-driven ones. Thirdly, the lack of literature covering how to develop cultural intelligence hinders full understanding of this process. Experience-based learning on international assignments is considered to be the most effective means for developing high effectiveness in handling cross-cultural situations.

Thus, the study seeks to address these issues by focusing on international civil servants' experiences on their international assignments. By applying a qualitative approach and the methodology of IPA, the international civil servants' experiences were collected and carefully analysed.

The findings showed that the development of cultural intelligence was influenced by an international experience distinctive to each individual. It became apparent that the international civil servants perceived their experiences as unique, because they were influenced by a distinctive combination of various contextual circumstances..

As suggested by Crowne (2008), an expatriate is exposed to a foreign culture on multiple levels: the time spent abroad, the number of countries stayed in, and the cultural distance between those countries and the expatriate's home country. Accordingly, intense cultural exposures enhance the level of cultural intelligence. Similarly, international civil servants articulated country-specific characteristics, length of the international assignment, gap between their assignments, and organisational infrastructure in a host country as varying contextual circumstances which influenced their international experiences. These

aspects could not have been shaped by the international civil servants; therefore, they had to accept the combination of different circumstances as their new reality.

In order to depict the process of developing cultural intelligence, long-term expatriation was chosen as an important aspect of the research question. Thomas (2006) doubts that short-term assignments contribute to the development of cultural intelligence, since cultural intelligence is acquired rather over a longer period of time. In this study, the period of adaptation in a new country was assumed to be at least one year; therefore, the more time international civil servants spent on an assignment, the higher the chance to increase the cultural intelligence. It is also consistent with Crowne's (2008) finding that a higher number of the countries the international civil servants lived and worked in for a considerable period of time positively influences their levels of cultural intelligence.

This study differentiates between the international civil servants who went on their next assignment without being repatriated to their home country and those who had intervals in their international careers. Aspatial careers, as they are referred to by Suutari (2003), seemed to influence the international civil servants' motivation for an international career in a different way than those who relocated directly from one country to another. Even though work on international assignments was perceived as demanding, the international civil servants were driven by the challenge, as well as by professional and personal development opportunities. In the home environment they felt that their full potential was not used, they did not feel challenged enough, thus they could not develop further. As McNulty (2009) has found, many international civil servants prefer to be re-assigned to the other locations rather than being repatriated. The majority of them do not wish to be repatriated as their life and career outlook had changed and they had outgrown the home environment. It was confirmed during the interviews, that the international civil servants were under-challenged at work after being repatriated to the home company after their first international assignment. On the other hand, Suutari (2003) has also identified that international civil servants tend to choose aspatial careers in order to renew and maintain their social connections with relative and friends in their home environment, which is in line with the observations of the international civil servants.

Suutari (2003) was among the first ones to take a deeper look into the international civil servants' aspatial careers, otherwise known as international careers with intervals of work in a domestic environment. The author found that the international civil servants' commitment to an international career was determined by their positive experiences on the previous international assignments and their personal interest to work in an international environment. Thus, the gap between international assignments was found to be an important variable influencing international civil servants' experiences.

Furthermore, organisational infrastructure emerged as a novel factor influencing the international civil servants' experiences in a host country. The international civil servants found it important to differentiate between the international assignments in the countries where an organisational infrastructure has been set up and the ones where the organisation's subsidiary is not yet present. Due to the presence of the organisational infrastructure in a host country, they received more support from their local employees, thus perceiving their establishment as less complicated compared to the international civil servants who had to settle without having a local organisational backup. Subsequently, these situations had a different effect on the international civil servants' experiences. The impact of organisational infrastructure on international experience has not been discussed in the literature yet.

The host countries to which the international civil servants were transferred to in order to carry out their international assignments played an essential role in their experiences. The international civil servants interviewed for this study mostly were sent on the missions to the Eastern and Southern European countries. As noticed by Suutari (2003), the international civil servants did not articulate any preferences for the countries they wanted to be transferred to. Instead, their movement across different locations depended on the business needs of their employers (Suutari, 2003). The geographical range of the countries to which the International (servant) international civil servants have been sent to implies that in the last decade International (servant) companies took advantage of the enlarged European Union market and expanded particularly to the accession countries.

There is a prevailing assumption about Europe as a single entity, especially due to its economic and political ties, nevertheless, in order to avoid cultural misunderstandings, the international civil servants emphasised the necessity to treat the European countries as distinctive cultural units. Chapman, Gajewska-De Mattos, Clegg, and Jennings Buckley (2008) admit that "the concepts 'cultural distance' and 'physic distance' have often been used interchangeably" (p. 219). Especially in Europe there is a danger of underestimating cultural differences between the countries which are geographically close. Accordingly, Hippler (2000) and Selmer (2006) claim that international civil servants living and working in European countries are prone to the same cultural shock and stress as the ones operating across the continents. Thus, it is important to recognise the heterogeneity of the European countries and to take cultural differences between them into consideration.

According to Chapman et al. (2008), the countries which are similar in terms of culture can be of a greater danger for an expatriate than the countries which are culturally different from his/her home country. The reason for this could be because individuals do not expect the countries which are

culturally similar to their home country to be challenging, whereas they anticipate bigger cultural differences in the culturally distant countries. As a result, international civil servants assigned to the countries, which differ substantially from their home country in terms of culture, are conscious of dissimilarity in the majority areas of life and work. Therefore, the international civil servants are better prepared to be confronted with the challenges anticipated in culturally distant countries; while, they might be hit hard in the less distant countries due to their inaccurate expectations. Selmer (2006) believes that the expectations which the expatriate holds towards unfamiliar culture have a major influence on the expatriate's adjustment and international experience.

Individuals differ in the way how they see the world around them. Each person's mind-set is a unique reflection on the world – what it is like (Gupta, Govindarajan, & Wang, 2008), thus influencing how individuals interpret their environment. Their mind-set, also referred to by Gupta et al. (2008) as mental maps, is affected by the individual's previous experiences and home culture. The mind-set is comprised of cognitive filters through which a person sorts and interprets the information received from cross-cultural interactions. According to Nardon and Steers (2008), people tend to view intercultural situations from the perspective of their own culture: They approach such interactions relying on their assumptions, beliefs, values, biases, and misconceptions. Thus, individuals' views on other cultures are often biased.

It was found that due to unsound assumptions and lack of information about other cultures, the international civil servants tended to formulate inaccurate expectations which in the course of an intercultural situation evoked disappointment and cultural shock.

In order to become more effective on the international assignments, the individual's mind-set has to go beyond the boundaries of the domestic culture by increasing the understanding of other cultures. The international civil servants interviewed for the present study articulated acquisition of cultural knowledge as a precondition for effective behaviour in culturally diverse environments. Understanding local cultures was perceived as a process of acquiring cultural knowledge in order to broaden the individual mental maps. By understanding another culture, the international civil servants were more aware of the local people's expectations, thus being able to adjust their anticipations and behaviour to the local environment.

Scullion and Brewster (2001) notice that local employees in the host countries regard the attitude of western managers as arrogant and ethnocentric: Expatriate managers tend to ignore the opinions of their local employees and to impose their own culture on a host country. The international civil servants perceived an interest shown to the local culture as a sign respect and appreciation. An emphasis on the importance to understand culture implies that the international civil servants tried to deny the image

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which is often associated with western managers. Consistently, Levy, Taylor, Boyacigiller, and Beechler (2007), as well as Osland, Bird, and Mendenhall (2012) claim that developing open-mindedness towards different cultures requires abandoning ethnocentric attitudes.

Cross-cultural training, individual preparation, as well as observation and listening were identified as the most important means to obtain knowledge which would support cross-cultural interactions. Cross-cultural training is generally the most common approach of formal education used for preparing international civil servants for their missions abroad. The most widespread method of preparing international civil servants for their international assignments is considered to be teaching country-specific knowledge and increasing awareness of cultural values of particular countries. Most of the companies still tend to rely on conventional cross-cultural training methods. However, this kind of formal training has been questioned as an effective tool preparing international civil servants for successful performance abroad.

Earley and Peterson (2004) criticise traditional expatriate training methods due to their inability to prepare individuals for managing the complexity of contemporary international assignments. They maintain that cross-cultural training provides a simplistic preparation for the life in a new culture. Knowledge on specific facts about a country is insufficient to enable international civil servants to perform effectively in a foreign environment. Similarly, the international civil servants criticised some of the cross-cultural training programmes as stereotyping other cultures by providing superficial facts without getting a deeper insight into underlying reasons. On the other hand, it was expressed that cross-cultural training helped the international civil servants to avoid major mistakes by offering them a general idea on what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in certain cultures. Taken as a whole, cross-cultural training should not be regarded as the ultimate method to develop an individual's cultural intelligence, but rather as a supporting means to perform effectively on international assignments.

Observation and listening were also identified as some of the means to increase cultural understanding. These take place during the actual assignment as the expatriate immerses into a new cultural environment. This way of enhancing understanding of culture is consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, also referred to as observational learning. Bandura (1977) states that learning emerges from observing other people's behaviour and consequences of their actions. In order to avoid making their own mistakes and undesired outcomes emerging from ineffective behaviour, people have an opportunity to learn from others by observing their behaviours and their consequences. When encountering similar situations themselves, individuals may base their actions on this information (Bandura, as cited in Allen, 2007).

Consistent with the social learning theory, the international civil servants observed how the local people as well as other international civil servants interacted in the host country environment. By listening actively to the locals, international civil servants were better able to understand those people's expectations. Additionally, careful observation of an unfamiliar environment and how people interacted in it, enabled the International civil servants to recognise the behaviours effective in that particular settings without being exposed to the risk of making mistakes of their own. Overall, observation of the people's behaviour and listening to them is considered to lead to an improved cultural understanding and knowledge.

Finally, curiosity was identified as a general aspect supporting the acquisition of cultural understanding. Boyacigiller, Beechler, Taylor, and Levy (2004) describe curiosity in an intercultural context as "an interest in what makes people similar and what makes people different, an interest in how other people live and work" (p. 73). It was considered by the international civil servants to be inherent to the process of understanding cultures. Consistently with Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) and Boyacilliger et al. (2004), curiosity is recognised as the element driving cognition of culture and development of a global mind-set.

Knowledge about culture is a basic element of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2003). However, it does not translate automatically into effective behaviour abroad. Earley and Peterson (2004) note that most commonly people have difficulties applying their knowledge acquired during cross-cultural trainings to the novel real-life situations. Therefore, Livermore (2010) considers cultural intelligence to be more than just cultural understanding and knowledge. It includes the leader's abilities to think strategically in intercultural situations, and to exhibit the most suitable action for that particular cross-cultural situation. It is important to note that cultural understanding itself was not considered to be the process of developing cultural intelligence. It was regarded as a precondition for an effective behaviour which led to the enhancement of cultural intelligence. Thus, the knowledge acquired by the supporting means such as cross-cultural training, individual preparation, and observation and listening has to be grounded in practice, for example through social experience (Thomas, 2006).

Social interaction was identified by the International civil servants as a significant theme in the context of international assignments. Primarily due to the human's need to socialise, this topic plays an important role in the expatriate's experience abroad. International civil servants going on international assignments without their families find it especially vital to establish a comfortable social environment around them in order to replace social contacts left in the home country. However, not only does social

interaction address the International civil servants' social needs, but it also creates a context for understanding cultures and learning from experiences.

Social interactions involving culturally diverse individuals are referred to by Thomas (2006) and Thomas and Inkson (2003) as intercultural interactions. Crowne (2008) maintains that intercultural situations, unlike social encounters in a domestic environment, challenge the individual's mind-set and encourage its progress. Thus, social interactions on international assignments are considered to be the most effective means to acquire and cultivate cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008).

Consistently with the findings of this study, social interaction as a learning context is considered to be the basis for a situated learning theory proposed by Lave and Wenger (as cited in Ng et al., 2012). They suggest that learning is a social process situated in an authentic context which involves and generates particular knowledge. Based on the situated learning theory, international civil servants are provided with unique social settings on their international assignments in order to learn how to handle cross-cultural situations and the challenges arising from them. Thus, managers with international experience are more likely to develop higher cultural intelligence (Ng et al., 2012).

International civil servants perceived their socialisation with local people in foreign countries as challenging. This issue is prominent in the current study because the research participants mostly lived and worked in the countries where local people were more reserved in establishing social contacts and building relationships compared to some other cultures. Thus, socialisation on a private level was identified as especially problematic. According to Manev and Stevenson (2001), there is a relation concerning cultural distance between the expatriate's home country and host country and the expatriate's social network in that particular country. They propose that international civil servants are more likely to establish social relationship with local people when the distance between the cultures is smaller. Additionally, Black and Gregersen (1999) claim that successful socialisation with local people is determined by the expatriate's effectiveness. However, it was found in the current research that the intensity of interaction between an expatriate and the locals depends more on the mentality and temperament of the local people and their attitudes towards foreigners. Consequently, social interaction requires mutual engagement from both expatriate and the locals. Thus, it is not as simple to establish contact with local people as Black and Gregersen (1999) propose by taking only the expatriate's input into consideration.

The expatriate communities in different host countries played an important role in the international civil servants' social lives. They were the main and the closest social contact of the international civil servants especially on the first international assignments and in the countries where local people were reluctant

to establish personal relationship quickly and easily. Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) point out that the relationships among fellow international civil servants create a sense of belonging and provide psychological comfort by sharing common experiences. Nevertheless, as noticed by Wang and Kanungo (2004), in order to integrate socially in the host country, an expatriate has to balance his/her social network by including both local people and peer international civil servants in it.

Wang and Kanungo (2004) state further that the international civil servants aim at engaging in social interaction in the host country in order to reduce uncertainty and stress. The authors found that intense social networking on international assignments positively influences international civil servants' psychological well-being. In line with Wang and Kanungo's (2004) study, the current research found that any deficiency of social contacts in particular at the beginning of an international career caused a social isolation of an expatriate. This period of time was perceived as emotionally exhausting. Subsequently, negative emotions experienced on the first international assignment encouraged international civil servants to improve their situation on the following assignment. Likewise, Wang and Kanungo (2004) suggest that international civil servants should act proactively in the new environment in order to adjust to it. As a result of taking more initiative, the international civil servants started benefiting from more diverse socialisation channels such as embassies, foreigners permanently residing in a host country, internet, and social media. More intense networking also helped to acquire social contacts with the local people. Finally, it led to a more diverse network and a higher number of social contacts, thus positively influencing the international civil servants' adjustment on their second and any following international assignment.

The current research puts an emphasis on how international civil servants learned from their real-life experiences abroad in order to improve their effectiveness on their international assignments. Alon and Higgins (2005) argue that a deeper understanding about culture and the ability to function successfully in it can be obtained only in an authentic environment. On the assignments abroad, International civil servants are exposed to the real-life settings triggering situated learning. At the same time, international assignments are considered to be the most challenging means of developing cultural intelligence. The intensity of the learning process is determined by experiencing novel and unfamiliar situations during a temporary period of time spent abroad. Being exposed to an unfamiliar culture, the international civil servants have to find out which behaviours are accepted and which not.

The international civil servants perceived the improvement of their effectiveness abroad as a process driven by learning from experience. They learned from their experiences by progressing through a cycle of several stages. Such a concept of learning is analogous to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. In

his theory, Kolb (1984) suggests that effective learning takes place when individuals grasp their experience and transform it into knowledge. In line with the experiential learning theory, it was found that the newly produced knowledge reinforced a new learning cycle. Thus, it implies that the individual's mind-set develops over time through an iterative learning process (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). When individuals are exposed to new cultures, their mental maps are constantly being broadened by accepting new information from an unfamiliar environment. Over time, International civil servants develop a framework of behaviours guiding them in ambiguous intercultural situations.

Being exposed to a new culture, individuals instinctively focus on those cues which resemble the ones in their own culture and, thus appear familiar (Selmer, 2006). Consistently with Selmer (2006), the research findings demonstrate that international civil servants tend to rely on the strategies applied to similar situations in their own culture or on previous assignments abroad. Considering, however, that cultures can be substantially different, situations which seem to be similar may require different approaches across cultures. Thus, relying on their previous experiences individuals are likely to demonstrate ineffective behaviours resulting in negative outcomes (Selmer, 2006).

International civil servants tend to engage in the learning process in order to avoid the risk of failure and to reduce ambiguity caused by the host country's cultural novelty (Cooper, 2008a). The current research found that international civil servants' motivation to learn depended highly on their attitude and openness. Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) notice that individuals are most likely to learn when they accept that "their view of the world is just one of many alternative interpretations of reality". In accordance with this, Lovvorn and Chen (2011) maintain that open-minded persons are keen on developing through mistakes and challenging experiences. Similarly, to the current research findings, Cseh et al. (2013) found that the global leaders proved to learn most effectively from their experiences including learning from mistakes.

In line with reflective observation in experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), the international civil servants engaged in the process of reflection to identify their mistakes in cross-cultural situations. Cseh et al. (2013) emphasize that self-reflection is an important part of the informal learning process. The authors claim that reflection leads to improved "self-awareness of otherness"Being conscious of one's own cultural biases allows comparing, analysing, and understanding differences between own and foreign cultures. Becoming aware of one's own "otherness" enabled global leaders to identify cultural differences, appreciate them and learn from them.

It was found that the international civil servants regarded their development of cultural intelligence as a constantly rising learning curve. Consistently with this finding, Cseh et al. (2013) identified that the

international civil servants perceived themselves as "continuous learners" (p.494). While on the first international assignments the learning curve was very steep, it became more moderate later when individuals started forming patterns of actions and processes which repeated from one international assignment to another.

After carrying out a research on voluntary international service programmes, Wilson and Stewart (as cited in Ang et al., 2011) discovered that individuals' cultural intelligence had increased the most on their first international service assignment. Subsequently, the authors proposed that by acquiring more international experience, the increase of cultural intelligence was diminishing. However, the present study has revealed contradictory findings: The research subjects state that their learning curve on the second and any further assignments remained steep. Especially because the international civil servants relied on the experiences acquired on their first mission abroad and regarded these as a benchmark for effective behaviour, they required additional learning on each of their assignments. This led to the conclusion that international experience gained abroad is country-specific; therefore, it cannot be transferred automatically to another culture.

The international civil servants moved across different countries and admitted that each culture required specific adjustment. Even though there were common patterns existing across the countries, international civil servants had to find out what the local people expected from them. Suutari (2003) found that context-related learning and adjustment are always important, despite of previous expatriate's experiences.

Cooper (2008b) discovered that some international civil servants were likely to experience a culture shock on their second international assignment, while some of them even found adjustment the second time more complicated than the first time. Thus, it proves that previous international experience does not necessarily eliminate culture shock. As of the third international assignment, international civil servants' learning gets less intense as they start recognising the patterns repeating across different countries and begin to form a universal framework of experiences which enables them to navigate in new cultures.

Finally, it was found that in the long-run the international civil servants perceived their international experiences in a different way compared to the immediate experiences while on assignments abroad. The international civil servants observed that over a longer period of time the learning outcomes of their international experiences turned into professional and personal development. It was noticed that this change has influenced the individual's personality by nurturing it in certain aspects, thus ensuring more sustainability in the long-term. Consistently with the findings of the current study, Suutari (2003)

mentioned personal development as a significant outcome deriving from international experiences. Thus, the development of cultural intelligence was understood as a constant process of learning and improvement resulting in professional and personal growth in the long-run. This confirms the developmental character of international assignments.

Due to the dynamic nature of an international work environment, Suutari (2003) regards professional development as a process of continuous learning. International assignments required the International civil servants to adjust not only to a new cultural environment but also to the new work setting and in many cases even a new role in the organisation. Therefore, it was found that the international civil servants' experiences abroad involved a high level of complexity which was defined as multidimensional stretch – a professional and cultural challenge. It was found that international civil servants had to perform roles which they had never performed before in the domestic environment including leadership and people management. On the overall they needed to become more versatile and flexible. Corresponding with Osland et al.'s (2012) global leadership competences such as global mind-set, flexibility, and intercultural competence, International civil servants are expected to function as all-rounders in a complex contemporary business environment.

It was found that the International civil servants had opposing opinions on the usefulness of the international assignments for their future careers: On the one hand, international experience was regarded as a catalyst for climbing up the career ladder; on the other hand, experience acquired abroad was questioned as an effective contributor to the expatriate's career path. However, the latter finding deriving from a single case was not strongly supported by the data. On the contrary, the literature proposes that in order to move up to the executive level, a manager has to have international experience. The famous phrase of Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, reflects the current need for internationally experienced managers leading multinational companies:

> The Jack Welch of the future cannot be like me. I spent my entire career in the United States. The next head of General Electric will be somebody who spent time in Bombay, in Hong Kong, in Buenos Aires. We have to send our best and brightest overseas and make sure they have the training that will allow them to be the global leaders who will make GE flourish in the future. (Welch, as cited in Black, Morrison, & Gregerson, 1999, p. 20)

In addition, Suutari (2003) found that managers having successful international career are more likely to receive external job offers. Therefore, companies investing in their global leaders should work on effective retention strategies.

When comparing the current research findings with the existing literature, it was noticed that the study of Cseh et al. (2013) goes in a similar direction by exploring how the global leaders perceive the development of their global mindset. Many parallels have been found between the development of cultural intelligence and the development of a global mind-set. The study of Cseh et al. (2013) indicated curiosity, informal learning, learning from mistakes, and self-reflection as the core processes in developing a global mindset of contemporary managers. It is supported by Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) who claim that the individual's curiosity, self-awareness, and exposure to different cultures will lead to the development of a global mind-set. Surprisingly, the findings of the current research showed that the   International civil servants regarded the development of cultural intelligence in a very similar way compared to the development of a global mind-set. Subsequently, this has triggered the question what the difference between cultural intelligence and global mindset is.

When trying to identify how cultural intelligence is distinctive from global mindset, it has been noticed that Ang and Van Dyne (2008), Earley and Ang (2003), Earley, Murnieks, and Mosakowski (2007), and Thomas (2006) consider cultural intelligence as a capability, while Cseh et al. (2013) see the global mind-set as a holistic concept comprising various competences, one of which is cultural intelligence. Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) define a global mind-set as a combination of openness to and awareness of cultural diversity. According to Levy et al. (2007), global mind-set enables managers to be conscious of cultural differences, and to understand and accept other cultures. It is consistent with the personal development which   international civil servants indicated as a learning outcome. It was found that the international civil servants acquired and/or further developed openness, humbleness, gratitude, patience, tolerance, and understanding for other cultures which, according to Gupta and Govindarajan (2002), indicates development of a global mind-set. Likewise, Suutari (2003) identifies new perspectives, broadmindedness, and development of certain personal characteristics as a result of learning from experiences. Compared to cultural intelligence, a global mind-set involves a greater complexity focusing not only on cultural differences, whereas cultural intelligence handles differences arising from cross-cultural interactions.

Nevertheless, there are many indications that the two concepts are not only interrelated (Earley et al., 2007), but also overlap and sometimes are used interchangeably (Crowne, 2008; Lovvorn & Chen, 2011; Nardon & Steers, 2008; Thomas, 2006). For instance, Nardon and Steers (2008) refer to global mind-set as a cognitive structure entailing universal knowledge about several cultures. Just like Thomas and Inkson's (2003) cultural intelligence, global mind-set enables managers to interpret intercultural

situations using multiple mental maps and to choose the most suitable behaviour from the whole repertoire (Nardon & Steers, 2008).

Lovvorn and Chen (2011) are convinced that culturally intelligent individuals are most likely to develop a global mind-set. Therefore, it is apparent that there is a link between cultural intelligence and global mind-set, and that in the long-run cultural intelligence is transformed into sustainable mind-set changes. However, this process needs further investigation in the future.

The findings of the current research have presented organised knowledge on the development of cultural intelligence. While analysing the research data and considering existing literature, it has been noticed that the research findings were consistent with the literature in the contexts of cultural intelligence (Crowne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas, 2006; Thomas & Inkson, 2003), aspatial careers (Suutari, 2003), cultural distance (Chapman et al., 2008, Selmer, 2006), cross-cultural training (Earley & Peterson, 2004), social networks (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Wang & Kanungo, 2004), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), and global mindset (Cseh et al., 2013; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002; Lovvorn & Chen, 2011). The majority of the literature implies that development of cultural intelligence is an important topic influenced by different theories and concepts but not articulated explicitly itself in the existing scientific sources. Overall, the research findings contribute to the knowledge of cultural intelligence by reinforcing existing literature and relating it to the development of cultural intelligence.

6. Conclusion

With the international business environment becoming increasingly globalised and culturally complex, cultural intelligence has become one of the most important assets that global managers should develop in order to function effectively across different cultures. The present study has been centred around this new need and looked into how International civil servants develop such capabilities. However, until now the literature reviewed for this study has not tackled the topic of developing cultural intelligence appropriately. Taking the significance of cultural intelligence in the context of international assignments into account, it was important to understand the process of developing cultural intelligence.

In order to address the topic of development of cultural intelligence, this study was set out to explore International civil servants' perceptions on their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments. With this aim, the research question "how International civil servants perceive their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments?" has been formulated. In addition, four sub-questions were developed addressing (1) the

factors which shaped international civil servants ' experiences of living and working abroad; (2) their perceptions on learning from experience; (3) differences perceived between the International civil servants' multiple international assignments; (4) and the International civil servants' views on their development through experiences in the long-run. By answering the research questions through qualitative research, this study had an aim to fill the gap in the literature and to contribute to the body of knowledge.

This chapter outlines the conclusion drawn from researching the international civil servants' perceptions on their development of cultural intelligence. First, a brief summary of the main research points will be provided. Secondly, the key contributions of the research will be presented emphasising their significance for the knowledge of cultural intelligence. Thirdly, practical implications will be discussed. Fourthly, the limitations of the study will be considered, followed by suggestions for any future research.

Summary of findings

This study has confirmed the importance of international experience as an effective means of developing international civil servants' cultural intelligence. It was found that international assignments and interactions taking place in foreign environments create an intense but effective context for acquiring intercultural experiences and enhancing the individual's effectiveness in cross-cultural situations more effectively than, for example, cross-cultural training methods.

Concerning the main research question, it can be stated that the development of cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments was perceived by the international civil servants as a continuous process of experiential learning triggered by novel cross-cultural situations and the necessity to adjust to the new environment in order to be more effective. Developing cultural intelligence by learning from experience was found to be consistent with Kolb's experiential learning cycle of transforming experience into knowledge, and Thomas and Inkson's theory proposing that iterative learning from experience enhances cultural intelligence. Accordingly, it is suggested that long-term assignments offer better possibilities to enhance cultural intelligence than short-term assignments.

Addressing the factors which shape international civil servants' experiences, the development of cultural intelligence was understood to be an individual-specific process, influenced by a distinctive set of circumstances independent from an expatriate and his/her mind-set. Varying contextual factors such as host country, length of assignment, and a gap between the international assignments were found to shape the unique international civil servants' experiences, thus implying a non-standardised nature of expatriate assignments.

Referring to the international civil servants' development in the long-run, a link between cultural intelligence and a global mind-set has been found. It has been shown that international civil servants' experiences translate not only into the capability to interact effectively in culturally diverse settings but allows them in the long-run to evolve sustainable personal growth resulting in the development of a global mind-set. The global mind-set represents an individual's state of mind which is open to cultural diversity (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Therefore, not only does cultural intelligence lead to more effective interactions with culturally different individuals, but it also helps to enhance self-awareness and develop traits facilitating relationships with the people from own culture.

Contributions of findings

The current study which initially aimed at exploring and understanding international civil servant's perceptions on their development of their cultural intelligence on multiple long-term international assignments contributes to the knowledge of cultural intelligence in several ways.

First, the research has presented empirical data which increase understanding of the practical process of developing cultural intelligence as perceived by the international civil servants. Since a strong focus on the developmental aspect of cultural intelligence was absent in the literature reviewed, it was essential to address this topic. As a result, the research findings have improved the understanding of the process that international civil servants undergo in order to improve their effectiveness in intercultural situations. The findings deriving from the authentic international civil servants' experiences may draw other international civil servants' attention to the certain patterns which they might anticipate emerging from their own international experiences. This information is especially important for international civil servants going on their first international assignment and feeling uncertain about it.

Secondly, the current research confirms the developmental nature of cultural intelligence as proposed by Thomas and Inkson (2003). It implies that each individual has a potential to cultivate his/her cultural intelligence as long as he/she is motivated to learn. This finding is significant in the context of increasing cultural diversity in both international business environment and in people's private lives as discussed further.

Thirdly, the research findings draw attention to the influence of cultural biases imposed by individuals' mental frameworks. Cultural biases affect the international civil servants' international experiences by creating prejudices, stereotypes, and inaccurate expectations about other cultures hindering effective behaviour and, subsequently, resulting in negative experiences in intercultural situations. Thus, this study points out the importance of self-awareness and awareness of other cultures in order to be more effective in cross-cultural interactions.

Fourthly, the current study raises the awareness of the differentiation between cultural and geographical distance, which is especially important in Europe. As the findings of the current study have shown, it is common for International civil servants to live and work in several European countries during their international careers. A common assumption has been found among companies and international civil servants, namely the thought that the European countries are very similar in terms of culture. Due to the geographical closeness of the countries in Europe, people tend to underestimate cultural differences among them, thus not dedicating adequate attention to the preparation prior the international assignments in those countries. Nevertheless, this study has shown that international civil servants' experiences in various European countries can be very diverse due to the cultural differences between the countries. Therefore, it is essential to recognise and treat countries in Europe as culturally heterogeneous units.

Taking the points discussed into account, this study has brought up several important insights which could be of significance for future practices.

Practical implications

The findings of this study lead to some important implications for future practice. In times of comprehensive business internationalisation and increasing mobility, individuals frequently need to respond to cultural diversity in a culturally intelligent manner. As discussed previously, cultural intelligence is an important individual asset in the globalising world (Livermore, 2010). Increasingly, not only global managers are concerned with their development of their cultural intelligence, but also students studying abroad, diplomats carrying out their missions in foreign countries, employees of international organisations such as the United Nations, employees of multinational corporations working in multicultural teams, managers leading culturally diverse workforce even in the domestic environment, and, in general, people encountering culturally different individuals in their daily lives. As seen from these examples, the necessity to interact effectively with culturally diverse people is no longer a concern exclusive to international civil servants only. Due to the increasing migration flows and cultural diversity, more and more people will have to exhibit culturally intelligent behaviour even in their home countries.

Therefore, nowadays it is important for each individual to acquire a certain level of cultural intelligence. However, not everyone has the possibility to develop cultural intelligence by living and working abroad as discussed in this study. On the other hand, it has to be admitted that traditional methods of increasing effectiveness in intercultural situations discussed in Chapter 2 are obsolete and ineffective. For this reason, there is definitely need for reviewing cross-cultural training methods.

In order to be able to cultivate people's cultural intelligence, new and more effective training approaches should be introduced. With reference to the findings of the current study, new training approaches should be based on the experiential learning cycle simulating intercultural experiences as precisely as possible. Even though development of cultural intelligence should be of importance to the groups of people named above, it is expected that especially the companies sending their employees abroad would take more sophisticated training methods into consideration. Such training approaches allow for supporting global managers in carrying out complex tasks in culturally different environments. Additionally, considering how specific and individual international civil servants' experiences are, it is important to note that expatriate management cannot be achieved through a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Support for international civil servants has to be tailored to their needs, the profile of an international assignment, and other contextual circumstances.

Limitations of the study

This study has offered a deeper understanding of the international civil servants' experiences, more specifically of developing their cultural intelligence. In addition, the study has contributed with its findings to the body of knowledge of this topic. Nevertheless, certain limitations, which emerged in the course of the research process, have to be considered.

First, the sample size of five participants could be regarded as too small compared to similar qualitative studies, which were carried out based on a sample size of twenty-four participants (Cseh et al., 2013; Suutari, 2003). Thus, it might be regarded as not sufficient enough to provide representative findings. However, Marshall (1996) maintains that sample size is sufficient as long as it is able to answer the research question adequately. Since the sample of this research was rather homogeneous, five cases were able to saturate the data at an early stage. Additionally, a small sample size enables one to take a deeper look into each individual case and to analyse underlying assumptions of their experiences which was an important aspect of this exploratory study.

Secondly, the current research was subject to bias due to the application of a qualitative methodology. Qualitative data generally is unavoidably influenced both by the researcher and the research participants' subjective points of view. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that development of cultural intelligence is a very individual process, which requires a deep insight into the individual's experiences and interpreting the information. For this reason, such in-depth qualitative data can be collected and analysed only by applying a qualitative approach. As discussed previously in Chapter 3, subjectivity is accepted as a part of qualitative research, but it is attempted to be reduced by researcher's reflexivity.

Thirdly, this study aimed at exploring the process of developing cultural intelligence based on data collected at a single point of time. It captured the views of international civil servants who carried out assignments a few years ago. However, in order to depict a change over time, longitudinal research is considered to be the most suitable research design. Longitudinal studies are accomplished over a long period of time, sometimes over decades, conducting data collection at least twice. Nevertheless, since longitudinal research requires a considerable amount of time to be accomplished, the current study could not employ this research design due to the insufficient timeframe.

Despite these limitations, the current study has presented valuable findings contributing to the understanding of the process of developing cultural intelligence and reinforcing existing evidence. Subsequently, some findings triggered a need for further investigation.

Recommendations for future research

It is suggested that development of cultural intelligence should be further explored in future studies focusing on a few particular issues. First, future research has to be conducted in order to acquire better understanding concerning the differences between cultural intelligence and global mind-set. While analysing international civil servants' experiences in developing their cultural intelligence, it has been noticed that the two concepts – cultural intelligence and global mind-set – are interrelated and often even overlap, thus being used interchangeably in the literature. In order to resolve this inconsistency and to ensure the most effective application of both, cultural intelligence and global mind-set, in intercultural situations, it is necessary to find out their differences and similarities, as well as the relation between them, but also how they affect each other, what the processes of their development are like, over which timeframe they develop, and what their outcomes are.

Secondly, it is recommended to pay particular attention to the expatriate careers in Europe. As discussed previously, cultural differences particularly between European countries tend to be underestimated, in consequence, leading to inaccurate expectations, cultural shock, disappointment, frustration, and low effectiveness on an international assignment. Thus, it is of high importance to have a closer look at the international civil servants' experiences in Europe and to investigate them in greater detail.

Thirdly, since this research studied the experiences of international civil servants, there is a question whether international civil servants of other nationalities would perceive their development of cultural intelligence in a similar or in a completely different way. Therefore, it is proposed to include a wider range of expatriate nationalities in future studies. This would allow for comparing their experiences and provide better understanding of how diverse national cultures influence individuals' development of

cultural intelligence. Such a study could also help to identify whether there are common patterns in the experiences of the particular groups of international civil servants.

Fourthly, addressing the currently applied research design as a limiting factor to this study, it is suggested to conduct longitudinal study for any future research. Even though a longitudinal study requires finding appropriate research participants who would consent to take part in the study sharing their experiences over several occasions and dedicating a long period of time to be accomplished, it could potentially provide interesting and important insights into the development of cultural intelligence.

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