

‘CULTURE SHOCK’ – A THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

In the modern world ‘Culture shock’ has several negative effects in the field of education and in the workplace. Most international students and foreign workers experience culture shock. In India since the IT boom took place, salaries are at an unbelievable high. Due to the attractive salary packages offered in the IT sector, this sector has attracted employees from all parts of the country and even from across the globe. The workplace has become a meeting place of various ‘cultures’. Yet little research exists which has investigated the factors leading to culture shock. In this paper an attempt is made to investigate the factors leading to culture shock.

Key Words: Culture, Culture Shock, Globalization, Social withdrawal and Emotional discomfort

Part 1

1.1 Introduction

“Culture Shock” has been a topic of research for over 30 years by European and American anthropologists and psychologists (Eickelmann, 2006). It is usually used to describe the physical and emotional discomfort experienced when someone moves to a completely new environment, although it also may result in a positive learning experience leading to increased self-awareness and personal growth (Adler, 1987). Paul Pedersen (1995), a cross-cultural psychologist and a professor of educational Syracuse University in the Department of Human Services, defined culture shock as the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. He pointed out that this psychological construct of culture shock has been used to describe the adjustment process in its emotional, psychological, behavioral, cognitive and physiological impact on individuals. Geert Hofstede, one of the pioneers on the field, an international authority on cross-cultural social psychology; the aforementioned personality Paul Pedersen and Gert Jan Hofstede, son of Geert Hofstede, a senior researcher in Information Technology at Wageningen

University who has designed group events and exercises for cross-cultural learning in many countries, (2002), claim that the phenomenon of culture shock is a profoundly personal experience which does not have to be the same for two persons or for the same person during two different situations. Culture shock has its negative effects on both education and workplace. According to a European Conference on Educational Research (McFarland, 1999), “Research shows that 83% of reporting companies experience expatriate failure, and 86% attribute failure to candidate selection and inability to adapt to host cultures.” Some companies provide communication preparation for employees to help them adapt, but other causes of cultural shock are rarely addressed or acknowledged by companies or universities. Many students contact University Counseling services and report feeling more alienated because of the counselor’s lack of knowledge about their culture. For example, the emotional impact of moving from a gender-segregated to a mixed educational system was criticized instead of acknowledged and understood. Numerous studies focused on the difficulties students of specific nationalities experienced in adapting to different cultures.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the modern world ‘Culture shock’ has several negative effects in the field of education and in the workplace. Most international students and foreign workers experience culture shock. In India since the IT boom took place, salaries are at an unbelievable high. Due to the attractive salary packages offered in the IT sector, this sector has attracted employees from all parts of the country and even from across the globe. The workplace has become a meeting place of various ‘cultures’. Yet little research exists which has investigated the factors leading to culture shock. In this paper an attempt is made to investigate the factors leading to culture shock

1.3 Significance of the study

Very few studies have been conducted in India with regard to Culture Shock. This study has both theoretical and practical importance. The awareness and perception on Culture Shock based on the results of the study would highlight the importance of Culture Shock and help employees to adopt measures to mitigate the effect of this shock. The study will also be useful for the employers to identify the factors leading to Culture Shock and provide necessary help to employees to adjust during the period of Culture Shock.

1.4 Objective of the study

1.4.1 To examine the symptoms of Culture shock

1.4.2 To identify the factors leading to culture shock

1.5 Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and is based on secondary data.

Part II

Theoretical framework on culture shock

2.1 Culture

There is no one definition of culture nor is there unanimity among various thinkers. Mr. A.L. Korelaber and T. Parsons in an article on the Concepts of Culture and of Social Systems American Sociological Review has defined culture as “a complex of values, ideas, attitudes, and other meaningful symbols created by a man to shape human behaviour and the anti facts of that behaviour as they are transmitted from one generation to the next”.

According to another author “culture refers to a set of values, ideas, anti facts, and other meaningful symbols that help individuals communicate, interpret, and evaluate as members of society”. Another writer feels that “culture is a set of socially acquired values that society accepts as a whole and transmits to its members through language, and symbols”. The culture may also be defined as “the largest simple grouping of people sharing a distinctly unique social heritage”. In a sense culture is a society’s personality.

2.2 Culture Shock

The term culture shock was first introduced in year 1960 by Kalvero Oberg who used this expression as a description of the anxiety resulting from not knowing what to do in new culture. Furthermore, the familiar cues either have been removed or have been given a different meaning, which can finally lead from certain discomfort to profound disorientation. (Pedersen 1995)

Culture shock can be generally described as a state of frustration, anxiety and uncertainty not knowing what to expect from other people’s behavior but also what is expected of one’s behavior. The phenomenon of culture shock usually occurs when encountering new unfamiliar cultures or even new unfamiliar social systems. Nevertheless, it must be realized that this not necessarily means arriving in new country.

From the perspective of history, globalization is a comprehensive and gradual process in human society, which is caused by the longitudinal development of culture. The human's demanding of cultural sharing and some characters of culture such as diversity and territoriality determine the inevitability of cross-cultural communication. At the same time, large-scale economic activities, which are the most common phenomenon in the movement of globalization, also lead to an increase in cross-culture interactions (Ruble & Zhang 2013: 202; Lee & Sukoco 2010: 963). A very significant aspect in the field of intercultural management is the issue of Culture Shock.

Part III

Findings and conclusion

3.1 Symptoms of culture shock

Based on previous research (Guanipa, 1998 and Schneider, 2006), it has been identified that the main symptoms of Culture shock can be categorized as:

- (1) **Irritability** : Hyperirritability is a hallmark of culture shock. It often comes out in the most unattractive manner at the worst moments and can be in the form of inappropriate venting of anger, Blaming the members of the other culture for ones negative feelings or Assuming the worst out of ambiguous interactions
- (2) **Homesickness**: one misses ones family and friends back home and may want to be back in the familiarity of home is the distress caused by being away from home. Its cognitive hallmark is preoccupying thoughts of home and attachment objects. Sufferers typically report a combination of depressive and anxious symptoms, withdrawn behavior and difficulty focusing on topics unrelated to home. In its mild form, homesickness prompts the development of coping skills and motivates healthy attachment behaviors, such as renewing contact with loved ones. Indeed, nearly all people miss something about home when they are away, making homesickness a nearly universal experience. However, intense homesickness can be painful and debilitating
- (3) **Sudden intense feeling of loyalty to your own culture (social withdrawal)**: One of the most important symptoms of culture shock is a sense of loyalty towards ones own culture. The more one finds time with co-workers or same-culture friends, more time is spent complaining about today's irritating or baffling encounters. The culture that once enamoured, now seems illogical, petty, and unsophisticated. Negative thoughts and emotions towards this new culture are completely normal, and part of the adjustment process. These can play out in multiple ways:

- Wanting to withdraw from the foreign culture/people
- Criticizing the local culture
- Daydreaming about being somewhere else
- Idealizing your home culture/food
- Focusing your energy primarily on relationships back home or with same-culture friends.

(4) **Anxiety:** Common anxieties that show up when facing culture shock include:

- A general, undefined sense of anxiety
- Preoccupation with your health
- Sense of dread
- Excessive fear of being cheated, tricked, or robbed
- Inordinate concern over the safety of the food served to you
- Preoccupation with overall cleanliness

(6) **Fatigue** : One of the least recognized symptoms of culture shock, fatigue can come on slowly or hit all at once. Baring a specific medical diagnosis, this can be one of the most common symptoms of culture shock. Some of the ways it might manifest itself include:

- Lethargy
- Sleeping more than normal
- Feeling overwhelmed by even the smallest of problems
- Just wanting to “veg out” when you get home from work

(7) **Depression** : Depression stemming from culture shock can show up in many forms. Some of the most common include:

- Loneliness
- Feeling lost or helpless
- Feeling especially vulnerable
- Lack of motivation to do things you once enjoyed
- Feeling like you’ve lost a sense of your identity
- Inability to complete tasks

(8) **Loss of ability to study effectively:** students who experience culture shock are not able to concentrate on their studies. They feel confused and disoriented

(9) **Marital or relationship stress:** Due to the depression and fatigue caused by culture shock, one is not able to maintain normal relationships with colleagues, friends or even one’s spouse.

(10) Feeling sick much of the time: Sometimes the emotional stress of adapting to a new culture plays out in our bodies. These may include:

- Feeling “off” with no apparent explanation
- Aches and pains – sometimes just when one resolves another starts
- Sleep disturbances
- Resurgence of chronic health issues

3.2 Factors leading to culture shock

(1) **Language:** Language is needed for any kind of communication, even people with speech impairments communicate with sign language and brail. Communication becomes difficult in situations where people don't understand each others' language. The inability to communicate using a language is known as language barrier to communication. Language barriers are the most common communication barriers which cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations between people. Most of the people in the world do not speak English or, even if they use, it is their second or third language. If the speaker and receiver do not use same language and words, there is no meaning to the communication. Not using the words that other person understands makes the communication ineffective and prevents message from being conveyed. This is the most significant factor which leads to culture shock.

(2) **Interpersonal Communication** (body language, facial expressions): interpersonal communication looks at a variety of elements that contribute to the interpersonal communication experience. Both quantitative/social scientific methods and qualitative methods are used to explore interpersonal communication. Additionally, a biological and physiological perspective on interpersonal communication is a growing field. Interpersonal communication includes concepts like, personality, knowledge structures and social interaction, language, nonverbal signals, emotion experience and expression, supportive communication, social networks and the life of relationships, influence, conflict, computer-mediated communication, interpersonal skills, interpersonal communication in the workplace and intercultural perspectives on interpersonal communication.

(3) **Politics:** a country's political decisions and politics play a very significant role as a factor leading to culture shock. The governments laws regarding expatriates influences the lives of those coming from other country's

(4) **Mentality** (mental attitude): a habitual or characteristic mental attitude that determines how one will interpret and respond to situations. The mental attitude of each person plays an important role in determining the extend of culture shock that affects the individual.

(5) **Religion:** The religious sentiments of each individual differs and this is a significant factor which leads to culture shock in individuals exposed to a different culture

(6) **Education System:** Newcomers have a difficult time adjusting to the local education systems when they begin to settle into their new environment. It is a significant factor that contributes to Culture shock. Most of international students cannot adapt to the different style of teaching immediately, in some countries, teachers pay more attention to the students' self-study and practice, it can be take the British education into an example, in UK, maybe the teachers think in the process of searching the sources, students can gain more knowledge than they taught to them, teachers told students the task ,topic and the method to find information, then students need to find some resources and finish it by themselves. A lot of international students cannot adapt to this kind of educational system, generating heavy stress for their professional learning

(7) **Food:** the most obvious aspect present is the daily diet, especially on food, "Changes in weight may indicate that a person is experiencing culture shock. (Barker, 2012) at the beginning of their new life, they will not eat anything or eat less than before and then they will think these sorts of food do not suit their taste. After one week or month, it is obvious that they get thinner, for example, a lot of international students the first time to go abroad, they do not like the western food, not only expensive but also not healthy, in

they will cook some various of vegetables or soup eating with rice, this is their diet habit. Because they cannot get their ideal diet, they will extremely feel homesick. At the beginning of entering a new environment, they cannot find their native countries' stores to purchase their domestic food, the price of food maybe higher than their country, so they eat less and usually feel hungry and eager to come back to home to enjoy a great fancy dinner with their family members.

(8) **Environmental Concerns:** A serious threat to human beings and their environment is the continuous and accelerating overuse and destruction of natural resources. Bearing this in mind, it

is unfortunate that efforts to permanently change people's environmentally destructive behaviour through interventions has typically not been met with success. A necessary condition may be an increase in environmental concern and knowledge about the effects and consequences of the ongoing environmental deterioration for future generations. Studies have proven the correlations between determinants, such as socio-demographic and/or psychological factors, and environmental concern, and an impact of environmental concern on environmentally responsible behaviour. In general, correlations with background factors are weak. Factors affecting behaviour appear to be knowledge, internal locus of control (positive control beliefs), personal responsibility, and perceived threats to personal health. All these are causes for culture shock

(9) **Social Responsibility:** When employees get a new job they are extremely excited about their famous culture, or the values and goals shared by everyone working with the company. Company culture is their top priority; they know that the culture of a company affects everything they do, especially when it comes to maintaining social responsibility. Any change in these values may be a cause for culture shock.

(10) **Immigration Policies:** The Cordell Hull Foundation for International Education (CHF) has created a very informative culture shock curve and video presentation. They have granted permission to Immigration Services to share this valuable information with students and scholars. The reason for this is because it is widely accepted that the immigration policies of a country plays an important role in the culture shock of those from other countries.

3.3 Conclusion

In India Since the IT boom took place, salaries are at an unbelievable high. Due to the attractive salary packages offered in the IT sector, this sector has attracted employees from all parts of the country and even from across the globe. The workplace has become a meeting place of various 'cultures'. India is known for its strong IT sector, which makes up more than 7 percent of the country's growth, but has slipped into crisis recently, increasing stress on employees. For some, the pressure has been too much. The available literature and data suggest that Bangalore is India's suicide capital. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, at least 35 in every 100,000 people in Bangalore commit suicide. Experts say most suicide cases in the city are related to stress; its citizens are unable to cope with Bangalore's quick growth. A walk into Bangalore's leading hospitals, will find a large number of patients suffering from stress-related ailments.

Doctors specialising in this disorder have disclosed that, on an average, they treat at least 10 patients a day for stress-related ailments. Anoushka Tripathy, a clinical psychologist, says, "Several of my patients, especially from the IT and BPO industry, complain that they are unable to cope with their work". The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bangalore also treats patients for stress-related ailments. Doctors at NIMHANS say software engineers in the age group of 24 to 30 years form a large chunk of the patients facing this problem. The doctors add that such patients complain of restlessness, lack of concentration, anxiety and body pain - all of which are symptomatic of stress.

In the last two months, over 100 IT professionals have made a beeline to Ayurvedic centres for de-stressing programmes, where they are taught how to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. A close study indicates that work-related insecurity, extended working hours and stringent deadlines also contribute to Bangalore's rising stress levels. Psychiatrists say those afflicted by stress should spend more time with the family and talk about their problem.

Moreover, people working in the IT and BPO industries constantly need to adjust to different cultures as they keep interacting with different people of different nationalities. This constant change also takes a toll on them, the doctors say. At this juncture, it is indeed significant to study these factors which lead to culture shock in the Indian IT sector .

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