Migration and Assimilation: An Ethnographic Exploration of Expatriate Experiences within the Kekeluargaan Organizational Culture of Indonesia

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Abstract

Amidst global professional migration trends, Indonesia emerges as a unique cultural nexus for expatriates. This paper provides an ethnographic exploration of expatriate experiences, focusing on their assimilation within Indonesia's distinct "Kekeluargaan" organizational culture. Drawing from migration narratives, we delve into the motivations, expectations, and challenges expatriates face as they navigate Indonesian workplaces' harmony-seeking, conflict-avoiding, and collectivist nature. Central to this exploration is the concept of 'Indonesianness,' characterized by familial ties, mutual respect, and a deep-seated hierarchy of relationships. The study underscores the significance of cultural adaptability and open-mindedness in today's interconnected professional landscape. Through these narratives, the paper aims to offer insights for future expatriates and businesses, emphasizing the importance of fostering inclusive and culturally rich work environments in the context of global migration.

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural research has dealt with expatriate managers' experience, adaptation, and leadership towards host country like Indonesia (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2017; Suutari et al., 2002), . International management and human resource management attempt to overcome such difficulties for expatriates to adjust new environment and, of course, the local people. In the case of Indonesia, literature confirms that extra preparation is needed for an expatriate to enter the country. Such preparation includes technical expertise, cultural knowledge, language ability, and expertise in education (Cannon, 1991). Further finding explores the perspective of the Indonesian by observing their lived experiences. Russell and Aquino-Russell (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2013 study the importance of expatriate managers to be open and democratic when leading Indonesian staff. They found that such leadership style leads to understanding and respecting cultural difference and demonstrate respect and eager to fit local culture.

However, there needs to be more effort to discover the in-depth understanding of Indonesian norms and values that, in some way, may hinder the expatriate's adaptation in working in Indonesia (Pruetipibultham, 2012). In a business context, it is obvious to consider the common business norm accustomed to practitioners worldwide. Hermawan and Loo (2019) argue that the Indonesian norm of kekeluargaan (Familial and Kindships),

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has been misinterpreted by non-Indonesians, as they tend to neglect such an important value within the Indonesian society. Additionally, Rahayu et al. (2023) highlights the significance of cultural landscapes in rural areas of Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and sustainable tourism development. It is thus imperative to understand the importance of scrutinizing Indonesia's values and norms in which expatriates may learn to become more 'Indonesian', rather than remaining as the 'outsider' of the community. This paper offers an exploration of in-depth experience towards understanding Indonesian norms and values, in order for expatriates to become more 'Indonesian'. Thus, the question arises, "How do expatriates adapt Indonesian norms to be accepted in the society?" This also leads to a notion of, "what does it take for the expatriates to be accustomed to Indonesian norms?" The following sections are ordered: literature review, methodology, findings, conclusion, limitations, and recommendation.

2. Literature Review

Issues in International Human resource development in Indonesia mainly focus on the extent to which expatriates can adapt to the new country. In addition, much of the studies focus on compare and contrast on cross-cultural leadership styles of managers(Suutari et al., 2002), adaptation process of expatriates (Windiarti et al., 2014), work relationships between local staff and expatriate managers (Shimoda, 2013). Such dichotomous studies may restrict the holistic view of cultural differences. Moreover, these studies, which are predominantly quantitative approaches, may have caught a 'snapshot' and linear causality of the cultural phenomenon (Baskerville, 2003; McSweeney, 2002) . Hermawan & Loo (2019) argues that studying cultural context by linear causality may result in a static and oversimplified reasoning. On the contrary, cultural context requires a dynamic process of interpretation and reinterpretation, and one may not gain an in-depth understanding (Baskerville, 2003, 2010; Bate, 1997).

Nonetheless, attempts have been made to employ a qualitative approach to human resource management. (Shimoda, 2013, 2014) utilize an ethnographic approach to oversee the relationship between the Japanese managers and the Indonesian staff. At the same time, Lee and Chen (Lee & Chen, 2003) employ case study in Taiwanese firms in Malaysia and Indonesia. Russell and Aquino-Russell (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2013) investigate the relationship of trust between Westerners and Indonesian by employing the phenomenological method offered by Giorgi & Giorgi (2003). These depict the enthusiasm to study Indonesia's rich and vast norms, values, behaviors, and cultures, in a systematic nature.

Pruetipibultham, (2012) studies the importance of expatriates to learn insights of Javanese culture. She argues that since 45% of the Indonesian population has Javanese roots and its culture flourishes the Indonesian way of doing business, it is important to understand the nature, norms, and values of a Javanese. Moreover, the paper elaborates two cultural characteristics of a Javanese society: the concept of social status, and the Javanese business values. The former represents Javanese society, which consists of high patriarchal and hierarchical norms. Such a culture allows high power distance between social structure. Respecting elders is one manifestation of this value (Irawanto et al., 2011; Sarsito, 2006). The latter describes the essential day-to-day business relationships. Whitfield (2010) states respect, understanding, and trust must be upheld when foreign business people deal with the Indonesian. These values are the key factors to successfully overcome discrepancy of culture when investing business in Indonesia.

 Cannon, (1991) argues that to gain personal and professional qualities, expatriates must have expertise such as establishing and maintaining a good relationship with people, being well organized and effective, and transferring skills that apply to the host nation. On a contrary, a reciprocal study on how the Indonesian work in western organizations was conducted by (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2013). They concur that a paradox of

'feeling respected -not respected' occurred when Westerners are open to differences while treating individuals fairly. Moreover, having 'talk' supports the notion of trust between expatriates and Indonesians (Shimoda, 2013). This includes small talks and informal events such as greetings, gestures, and expressions.

Prof. Christopher Selvarajah conducted the latest study on Indonesian cross-cultural leadership and organization. His duo-paper entitled Human capacity development in Indonesia: 'Exploring managerial leadership in Javanese (Indonesia) organizations: engaging Asta Brata, the eight principles of Javanese statesmanship' (Selvarajah et al., 2017) and 'Leadership and managerial ideology in Javanese organizations' (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2017). These papers represent the quantitative study on how Javanese ideology of statesmanship influences the common Indonesian leadership and management organization. Hypothesizing eight Asta Brata principle of what Javanese leader should have, the papers introduce Chandra (Decisiveness), Surya (Authority), Kartika (External Realities), Bumi (Patience), Agni (Governance), Tirta (Trustworthiness), Naruto (Discerning) and Samudra (Progressiveness). Both papers concur that trustworthiness was the most important aspect becoming become an excellent leader, while authors are negative towards leadership. Overall, (Selvarajah et al., 2017) suggest that foreign organizations ought to understand the behavioral values, deference to authority, the familiarity of open management style, obtaining trust from the locals, mutual respect.

The above literature suggests further scrutiny on how expatriates adapt to new environment and their experience towards becoming 'Indonesian'. The extent to which processing behavioral changes, overcoming different norms, values, and behaviors, while adapting to the working environment, requires much effort, time, and even money. While the above literature confirms these obstacles, few describe the feeling, thoughts, and opinion regarding adaptation from the expatriate point of view. This study allows a more in-depth understanding of cultural, behavior, and constraints for expatriates in understanding Indonesian norms.

3. Methodology

The ethnographic study is an appropriate methodology to interpret cultural context (Heracleous, 2001). It is a design of inquiry in which an actor is intended to observe daily experiences within a setting. Similar methodology has been done in accounting (Dent, 1991; Jönsson & Macintosh, 1997), management (Heracleous, 2001; Maanen, 1979) to grasp understanding between cultural phenomena. The reason to choose an ethnographic approach as a research method is that the author attempted to study the shared patterns of behavior, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014). This methodology was initiated by Bronislaw Malinowski (Malinowski, n.d.), and is used to gather an in-depth understanding of a social construction, and this method is appropriate in this study. This study thus employs ethnographic study by observation and interview methods.

In the spirit of an ethnographic approach, the study was initially conducted in 2016, where one author initiated the importance of bringing the interpretivism paradigm in scrutinizing expatriate behaviors within an Indonesian local organization. Following a thorough observation, informal chatting, and semi-structured interview, a two-year longitudinal study empirically revealed substantial findings. Adopted from (Crotty, 1998; Heracleous, 2001) systematic research approach, this study utilizes philosophical commitments, methodological paradigms, research strategies, and methods, describes in Table 1 below:

Philosophical commitments	Interpretivism, indigenous perspective
Methodological paradigms	Ethnography

Research strategy	Longitudinal approach
Methods	A semi-structured interview, participant, and non-participant observation, informal chat

 The philosophical commitments allow setting an epistemology background in research. Interpretivism argues that social sciences are different from physical and natural sciences, in that ontologically, there is no separable separation of the person (author) and the reality (Weber, 2004). Unlike positivist approach which often denies relativism, interpretivists recognize the existence of cultural, experiential, historical contexts of a human being (Crotty, 1998; Weber, 2004), which epistemologically suggests knowledge is not waiting to be discovered, but socially constructed in the world. On the other hand, the Indigenous approach can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of indigenous peoples (Porsanger, 2004). Hence, ethnographic methodology and an indigenous perspective may enhance the rich description of the Indonesian norms. The research strategy employs longitudinal study, which allows scrutiny on constructing a phenomenon while conforming data with semi-structured interviews. Lastly, the methods used in this research were a Semi-structured interview, participant and non-participant observation, and informal chat. Ten expatriates were interviewed and observed during the longitudinal study and 5 local staff were interviewed for confirmatory factor, described in table 2 below.

Code	Nationality	Length of stay in Indonesia (year)	Gender
C001	Madagascar	12	Male
C002	The Philippines	6	Male
C003	France	9	Female
C004	Malaysia	8	Female
C005	Canada	0.4	Male
C006	United Kingdom	8	Male
C007	Iran	6	Male
C008	India	4	Female
C009	United States	20	Male
C010	South Korea	21	Male

4. Findings

It is expected that this study enables to discover difficulties in coping with Indonesian local staff. There is a high degree of the boundary between the foreigner and the local in gaining trust, relationship, and networking within one organization. Such difficulties can also result in ineffective resulting in unproductive situationist situation. This exploratory study may assist expatriate to overcome such network burden, by understanding how kekeluargaan underpins the business relationship. The contribution of this study relates to business communication, international human resource management, and cross-cultural management.

4.1 Case #1 - the word "InshaAllah" and addressing "Ibu & Bapak".

Scenario: The author worked closely with the Marketing Communication (MC) team to deliver the latest promotional material. After providing the feedback to the MC, the

author would like to know when it will be ready for the last read before mass print for consumer consumption. MC staff responded to the author "InshaAllah bu". As a foreigner who is familiar with Islam as a religion finds it hard to understand what it means by "InshaAllah". So the author asked again, more specifically, which date? Responding to the same answer "InshaAllah as soon as possible, Bu". Hence, the author suggested dates to align with each other expectation instead of "guessing game" on the dates or expectation.

The above case shows the word "InshaAllah" and salutation of "Ibu" or madam/mam. "InshaAllah" an Arabic word of "If God permits". In such cases, the usage of this word has evolved based on geographic, demographic, and cultural contexts. One example is that in Persian region, "InshaAllah" are perceived into three categories: 'Being a Muslim', 'Dealing with emotions', and 'Displaying indirectness' (Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2012), whereas, in Indonesia, it has been traditionally employed to set a promise to another party with 'no strings attached'. This means that the Indonesian, which is more loosening to making a promise, tend to 'misuse' this word into an ambiguous response on whether such promise can be delivered. Some comments from other foreigners support this case as below:

Because they're brothers and sisters, so it becomes difficult to execute authority or demand deadlines and meet deadlines, that's how I feel about it. So that's why from one department to another department is like we're brothers and sisters, we're talking, then pushes, let's work it out so it can't result in delays and get work done – C005

The comment illustrates the kinship-type relationship between individuals, which creates closeness and harmony. Also, the Indonesian tends to address a person with either "Bapak/Pak" for a gentleman, and "Ibu/Bu" for Ladies. There is a relationship between being a 'family' and being 'together', which is reflect by the usage of 'bapak' as a father, and 'ibu' as a mother. Another comment confirms the same:

I don't have many comments because the supermarket that I go to also called "Ibu Pak, Ibu Pak". So even as a visitor, you have to be very careful in how you will relate to, even the people who are serving you, even if you're paying for it, how you relate to them is also important. – C005

Consequently, many expatriates are 'forced' to be proactive when trying to execute a taskwork. One must ensure that although they are trying thaw they express things needless things need to be toned down.

If I don't initiate anything, it will stay the same the way it is. So I was always to be pro-active, I was to move things on, I was just being aggressive and then because, I'm not sure if I'm right to say that, it says that somehow the people they are not really eager to compete – C001.

4.2 Case #2 – Univ Family Day, UNIV Staff Outing Weekend, UNIV run/walk day

Scenario: The author finds that UNIV as an organization and a higher education, often organized the event, yearly strategy meeting, Program PI together, work on Quarter reviews together to have constant unity in the event and work. Sometimes, PI's and Quarter reports can be done on a separate occasion in their own individual time frame. However, in UNIV, meetings are often extended beyond 1 hour to the entire day and sometimes in phases dragged up to 5 days.

"Everything you have to do together, a lot of things that you have to do together, that unity of doing things" - C004

Nevertheless, it may be based on their working culture, that they like to have a teamwork or involve all the people. - C007

"Whether not being a manager I don't know, but I see that the management culture here as allowing a lot more of the family life into work that would be normal where I come from. Certainly, the whole idea of family days, meet-ups at the weekends where you were encouraged to kind of, to enlarge the network so your family knows their families so everybody gets to know everybody better, although since I don't have a family myself it's very much an outsider looking in" – C006

4.3 Case #3 - Tolerance to Failure

The author found that some students were dissatisfied with one of the lecturers as they needed help understanding what was being delivered during class. The author then asked the students to email a formal complaint to the Head of Program. The students responded "ngaak enak, miss", as they feared that the complaint would affect the lecturer career, and supported that the lecturer was very nice to them. The students are willing to tolerate for the entire 6 month semester of their educational development when they are the paying customer.

. So then also the contribution of understanding of tolerance. To accept each other. The way we are. No specific negative perception of standard about what should you be like. What is good and then no, because if you're not like this, you cannot be part of the group, right? So I think as well that is the sense of being part of the family - C003

During the first 3 months of the author's employment as the Deputy Head of Program (DHoP), she was asked by a colleague who is part of the Thesis Panel that author will need to decide should the panel fail the students for the inadequacy of completing the thesis up to the expected standards. Without understanding the culture and being a straightforward personality, she felt that one should not meet the expectations, hence shared her opinion that one should fail for not meeting the expected standard.

"Tolerance for failure. And that does not mean that they're willing to accept failure, it means they're far more accommodating and understanding towards why the person is not succeeding and creating a platform" - C008

4.4   Case #4 - Sharing of Domestic responsibilities/obligations at work

In this generation, having more career women in the household is a norm. During the Idul Fitri/ Lebaran, many maids will return to their hometown for at least a month. Moreover, this usually happens at least once a year. You will see your lady colleagues will be tagged along with their children, place them close by so they can keep them busy while they are busy attending to task needed at work.

"And that would be absolutely taboo in the UK. There's the fact that if the kid's sick the mother will take the time off to take the kid to the hospital and that would be something that we very, very well noted by any managers in the UK that your family is taking precedence of your job. And here there's a certain mind of forgiveness and certain" – C006

There is another kind of sharing, where your colleagues will explain to you in a casual conversation about their child's upcoming wedding and the challenges they went through to get the ceremony up running within 3 months. Most of the time, they will also discuss how their relative has organized it and are kept as a benchmark to ensure that their child's wedding ceremony will be better than their previous child or their relative child's wedding. The amount of pressure and "impression" has to be made.

At the end of the day all these are acceptable in discussion with your superior and it is acceptable to discuss. It is also expected to accept the "down" time that is required, and with pleasantries, statements come along like "good luck," "my deepest condolences" "congratulations," "sorry to hear that," "take care," etc.

"Indonesia but I think here it's a lot more overt, there's a whole "When are you getting married? How many kids have you got? When are you going to have kids?" there's a life goal thing that doesn't seem to exist in the UK? In the UK it's kind of, it's overall, when you see on television every single day you see the happy mom and dad, and the 2 kids, no one is directly telling you that is what you have to achieve but here in Indonesia they take it a little bit further by having expectations". – C006

4.5   Case #5 – Separation between Expats & Local, Why?

During the Human Capital (HC) forum recently, the author that a couple of respondents brought up a couple of strong perspectives of the expats in UNIV. For some reason its, being described "arrogant" and expressed that "expats think they are better than the local" and "they must learn how to behave in the Indonesian culture".

The author also recently heard a lot more negative remarks that the "expats" salary is more than the local and a lot more negative gossips not directly to you but from someone else and another and it's not something crucial or professional performance that is measured in KPI or PI. It's usually targeted personally, as though "they" hate your guts. Another example was when another colleague approached me sternly, " you should not be wearing sleeveless," To avoid any conflict, the author just walked away without acknowledging the comment.

"A lot of people here I don't know they avoid eye contact" – C002

"When to tolerate something that they think that I am not included, they are speaking Bahasa. Sometimes they're speaking Javanese. No matter what you need to know that you're somewhere out there. It's all up to you to get close to you. It's not up to them to get close to you. That is crucial" - C001

5. Discussion

When interpreting the Indonesian workplace culture, the concept of 'kekeluargaan', as delineated by Hermawan & Loo (2019), proves essential. It resonates deeply within the social and professional realms, shedding light on the unique intricacies of Indonesian interactions. Drawing from the presented cases, it's evident that cultural intricacies play a pivotal role in the workplace, especially in Indonesia. This discussion will juxtapose the findings from the case scenarios with existing literature and knowledge to elucidate the implications for expatriates and international human resource management.

The language and its associated connotations are deeply rooted in cultural norms. As seen in Case #1, " InshaAllah " has different meanings and implications in various cultural contexts. Pishghadam and Kermanshahi (2012) highlighted the cultural nuances associated with this term in the Persian region, and this study further unravels its complexities in the Indonesian setting. Depending on the context, the interplay of religion, tradition, and cultural expectations makes it a loaded term that can signify commitment and ambiguity. Furthermore, the way Indonesians address their colleagues (as "Ibu" or "Bapak") can be likened to addressing someone as 'mother' or 'father', underscoring the deep-seated familial bond that's foundational in Indonesian workplaces. This kekeluargaan (family-oriented) approach underscores the significance of harmony and unity, resonating with Hofstede's collectivist cultural dimension where group harmony often outweighs individual assertiveness (Hofstede, 1984).

collective activity and group cohesion emphasisesion in Case #2 underpins the collectivist cultural orientation. This practice speaks to the interconnectedness between personal and professional lives, blur more distinct boundariestinct in individualistic cultures. The sentiments from respondents C004, C006, and C007 further echo the literature that collaborative engagements foster group harmony and loyalty, two values held high in collectivist societies. As reflected in Case #3, Indonesia's high-context

culture emphasizes understanding, patience, and empathy over confrontation or criticism. This could be rooted in the cultural dimension of avoiding uncertainty, where preserving face and avoiding conflict is paramount (Hofstede, 1984). The high tolerance to failure underscores the emphasis on relationships over task completion, valuing the individual over the act.

In Case, the shag of domestic responsibilities at the workplace underscores the intertwining of personal and professional realms. Although starkly different from Western cultures, such practices encapsulate the harmonization of familial responsibilities with professional obligations. The strong family orientation and associated expectations further underpin the cultural nuance that values familial bonds. On the other hand, Case #5 touches upon the sensitive issue of expatriate-local dynamics. While expatriates bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise, cultural misunderstandings or perceived superiority can create rifts. Cultural intelligence and adaptability become crucial. The importance of understanding and integrating into the host culture to mitigate feelings of alienation

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The profound exploration of expatriate experiences in Indonesia underscores the significance of the indigenous 'kekeluargaan' principle. As expatriates grapple with assimilation, challenges emerge in building trust and forging meaningful relationships within the local paradigm. This often leads to communication barriers, impacting business operations. Such insights are pivotal for business communication, international HR management, and cross-cultural understanding.

To navigate these challenges, several recommendations arise. Recognizing 'kekeluargaan' is paramount in formulating effective negotiation strategies, ensuring cultural appreciation is at the forefront, especially considering the Indonesian context. For HR management, insights derived from 'kekeluargaan' can significantly aid in managing cultural diversity. Creating specialized training tailored for expatriates destined for Indonesia ensures smoother integration and reduces cultural friction. Furthermore, this study serves as an invaluable source of ethnographic information, particularly emphasizing the nuances of Javanese culture. It beckons further qualitative exploration to decipher indigenous norms and val

Ace, a deep understanding and acknowledgment of 'kekeluargaan' are vital for expatriates aiming to thrive in Indonesia. Through targeted strategies and insights, they can seamlessly integrate, foster robust local relationships, and excel in their professional endeavours.

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