

International management of human resources: intercultural adaptability in the expatriation of brazilians

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ABSTRACT

This paper problematizes the experiences of Brazilian expatriates to show the challenges and opportunities that they face in other cultures. Grounded on the literature, we emphasize the need to humanize the internationalization process because expatriation is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires a multidisciplinary approach. Its empirical contribution is to analyze data collected through interviews with sixteen expatriates. The findings suggest that the process of expatriation is an issue that requires more attention from the area of International Management of Human Resources. We identify the challenges as the fragility of the so-called anticipated adaptability, of repatriation strategies, of the repatriation implications to the job plan, as well as, the need of specific programs of intercultural training. Otherwise, expatriation processes register positive aspects as the professional and personal opportunities in the assignments. Taking into consideration these findings, the area of International Management of Human Resources may incorporate the intense experiences of expatriates to reformulate policies and practices and, consequently, benefit from the global mindset.

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1. Introduction

Faced with the multifaceted phenomenon of globalization, Brazilian companies' growing internationalization has boosted the International Human Resource Management (IHRM) area. When meeting specific needs of international mobility and the challenges arising, such as the integration of cultures in cross-border mergers and acquisitions and strategic alliances, IHRM became an important strategic study area under international management in Brazil. As a result, the phenomenon of expatriation – involving the professional's displacement from the company headquarters to countries of operation and vice versa – has intensified. Brazilian multinationals have continued to increase the average rate of internationalization in recent years in approximately 2.0% a year (FDC, 2014). Moreover, regarding 2014 data, there was an increase in the number of input countries, from 26 to 33 (FDC, 2015). This suggests a

positive outlook for international expansion and of course Brazilians' expatriation.

However, understanding the experience of being an executive abroad, according to Joly (2012) requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary look. Expatriation presents a number of challenges and opportunities that this article tries to problematize based on the analysis of reports of experiences by Brazilian expatriates in view of initiatives that the IHRM area has been using to follow this process.

This paper contributes to the literature about IHRM by focusing Brazilian expatriates. Therefore, it shows aspects of Brazilian-type management in an area of knowledge colonized by the Anglo-American hegemonic practices. In parallel, we emphasize the need to recover the human dimension in international management to prevent people from becoming just a resource (Spanger, 2012). In practical terms, the article shows the potential for companies'

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better performance in the internationalization process and particularly for managers of international areas, people management professionals, consultants and expatriates.

This article is structured in four parts besides this brief introduction. First, we present the theoretical basis for the topic, followed by the methodology used in the study. Then we describe and analyze the results and finally present the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. International People Management: implications for the human dimension

The vast literature about IHRM is focused primarily on multinational companies (MNCs) covering the following topics: the executives' attitudes in the management of subsidiaries (Perlmutter, 1969); the expatriates' process of adaptation, (Tung, 1981; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991); comparative studies about HRM among different countries, highlighting the cultural aspects (Hofstede, 2003); models of IHRM (Schuler and Tarique, 2007), notably functionalist ones, which imply that it is possible to transfer best practices. However, critical authors such as Peltonen (2006) point to the need to take into account the contextual variety when it comes to implementing management policies at the local level (Peltonen, 2006), questioning the existence of a universal model for IHRM. Moreover, as the contemporary literature about IHRM considers expatriates as "strategic resources", research has deviated from the human problems of intercultural adaptation. This topic, according to Peltonen (2006) needs to be revisited.

For Peltonen (2006, p. 532), the IHRM field "is an offshoot of the studies investigating the people management arrangement and practices in organizations in intercultural contexts" and would be located at the intersection of International Business (IB) with Human Resource Management (HRM) and the Organizational Behavior (OB). Consequently, we believe that IHRM must take into account both the individual and the organization and the multifaceted business context as elements constituting the same phenomenon.

Brazilian companies' internationalization acceleration in recent decades has ended up reproducing a dominant pattern of business strategy and international competitiveness that dehumanizes organizations. As a result, people are treated as

objects (Chanlat, 2012). Certain human dimensions are "forgotten", such as: cognitive, language, space-time, psychological and emotional, symbolic, otherness and the psychopathological, which are manifested in expatriation.

According to Joly (2012, p. 84), people who experience an international assignment can go through a "personality disintegration-restructuring" that affects the expatriate's personal identity and is expressed in each of the **stages of the experience abroad**. The author presents four steps – dazzle, extreme negativism, keeping a distance or integrating and the shock when going back home – that "permeate" an expatriation process. They interact differently and can be, according to him, generalizable to all experiences "of exposure to foreign cultures" (Joly, 2012, p. 92).

On the other hand, one must consider a certain blindness and lack of sensitivity from HR professionals on the implications of the expatriation process for the expatriate by ignorance and/or lack of international experience (Freitas and Dantas, 2010; Lima and Braga, 2010). As highlighted by Silva, Orsi and Nakata (2013), the IHRM area has expatriates as a privileged object of study. However, the cultural and adaptational aspects are still a challenge for companies.

2.1 Main IHRM works in Brazil

Although Brazilian companies have increased their operations around the world and leaders are considered among the so-called multilatinos (Cazurra, 2010; Casanova, 2010), they present difficulties when it comes to IHRM (Fleury and Fleury, 2012). Because they would be neglecting important aspects for the IB success such as, for example: recruitment and selection (Salgado, 2014); preparation and training for expatriates, repatriates and their families (Lima and Braga, 2010; Spanger, 2012), policies of rewards and benefits for the employees (Orsi, 2010), development and career policies for international staff (Lima and Braga, 2010; Nogueira, Barreto and Delgado, 2013), international performance evaluation (Salgado, 2014), diversity of international labor (Lisboa, 2014); the IHRM ethical and legal climate (Aguzzoli, 2008). In this context, the absence of the HR strategy alignment with the organizational strategy has been emphasized by several authors (Aguzzoli, 2008; Nogueira, Barreto and Delgado, 2013; Tanure and Duarte, 2006) as the main problem.

The lack of alignment with the HR area is due to the perpetuation of a hegemonic model of management, according to which what is “human” is neglected and, on the other hand, economic or corporative aspects are privileged.

Despite the relevance of what is human, highlighted in this article, it does not appear in Brazilian organizations’ daily practices and this is probably a consequence of some business schools education policies that have originated, according to Caldas, Tonelli and Braga (2009, p. 13), from “bilateral agreements between the Brazilian government and US schools,” whose research tradition is predominantly functionalist. Hence the need to (re)think PM (People Management) in the Brazilian context to include the unique aspects of what is human, which have been neglected when emphasizing purely functional aspects. Wood, Tonelli and Cooke (2012, p. 124) point out that the PM area in Brazil needs to be free of the “colonial heritage without losing healthy permeability to knowledge originated abroad and rebuild its identity, basing its actions on human values by an expanded awareness of reality and by simplicity.” In short, the authors encourage rigorous research about the local reality to have results consistent with the locus, which is an opinion that we share.

3. Intercultural adaptability

Much research about the expatriation “adjustment” uses the theoretical model by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991). In such model, the authors consider that “adjustment” must take place in two moments. The first one would happen in the country of origin and the second one when the expatriate is already in the host country. However, the term “adaptability” seems more appropriate. When considering the adaptability at the source, we would be talking about the organization’s concern in having IHRM reputable policy practices, including selection, for example, which would be made not only taking into account technical but also intercultural and intracultural skills.

The model by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) identifies four types of adaptability on which expatriates can feel more or less difficulty:

- **General adaptability - outside of work:** It involves the society’s cultural novelties, that is, differences from basic values such as religion, beliefs, norms, male and female

roles, recognition of adaptability factors related to the family.

- **Individual adaptability:** It includes aspects such as self-efficacy, resistance to cultural stress, maintaining technical competence and replacement mechanisms, the ability to relate to people despite cultural differences, which involves developed self-awareness and keen insight into the other.
- **Interactive adaptability - professional:** It concerns the clarity of roles, understanding new tasks, demands, needs and duties, the insight into the differences between the company in the country of origin and in the new culture.
- **Cultural organizational adaptability:** It is related to differences between the organizational culture of the company branch and the culture of the company headquarters. It also comprises social support to the expatriate, i.e., monitoring at arrival and at work and providing logistical support in relation to housing, banking, health and school.

Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks (1995) signal that IHRM researchers have studied key success factors for expatriates, tried to isolate the exact nature of international adaptation and identified the key skills that contribute to the expatriate’s adaptation to a new social and business culture.

Tab. 1
Intercultural scopes and movement

Movement	Description
Multicultural	Acknowledging the dynamic presence of different cultures and subcultures in a region, country or company.
Intracultural	Looking, feeling, experiencing a culture from inside a team, organization, community or nation.
Intercultural	A cultural movement that enables the exchange between different cultures and/or subcultures.
Transcultural	Smoothly and harmoniously engaging in different cultures and subcultures, respecting the uniqueness of each so that exchanges are productive and ethical in the pursuit of common sense towards co-humanity.

Source: Fraga and Esteves (2004, p. 280).

In the case of cross-cultural training, we consider relevant what is proposed by Fraga (1998) when

discussing the need to see intercultural education in terms of culture globalization, aiming at humanizing globalization. The four cultural scopes and movements proposed by Fraga and Esteves (2004) – multicultural, intracultural, intercultural and transcultural – are shown in Table 1.

We assume that the understanding and experience of these movements before, during and at the moment of coming back from an expatriation process in an intercultural education perspective, according to Fraga and Esteves (2004) would allow a better understanding of the “others.” From the recognition of differences, self-knowledge, willingness to exchange and to smoothly engage between cultures, respecting what is different, but essentially human. Thus, we believe it is necessary to supplement the model by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991), as shown in Figure 1.

4. Policies and practices for managing expatriates

Expatriate Management policies and practices must humanize relations and help employees accept and live with values that often clash with their own identity and values. Although IHRM is a “recent and incipient” subject matter (Silva, Orsi and Nakata, 2013, p. 51), relatively new and little explored in Brazil (Aguzzoli, 2008) it is a contemporary and complex issue (Bianchi, 2011) which requires empirical research to support policies and practices of IHRM. First, with regard to the selection of candidates for expatriation, Nogueira, Barreto and Delgado (2013) claim that there are no specific criteria for a global selection. However, Manzon, Jaeger and Kato (2010, p. 33) highlight the dominance of the “technical criteria over the cultural one.” As for Tanure, Evans and Pucik (2007), they indicate that in Brazilian companies the criterion considered is the

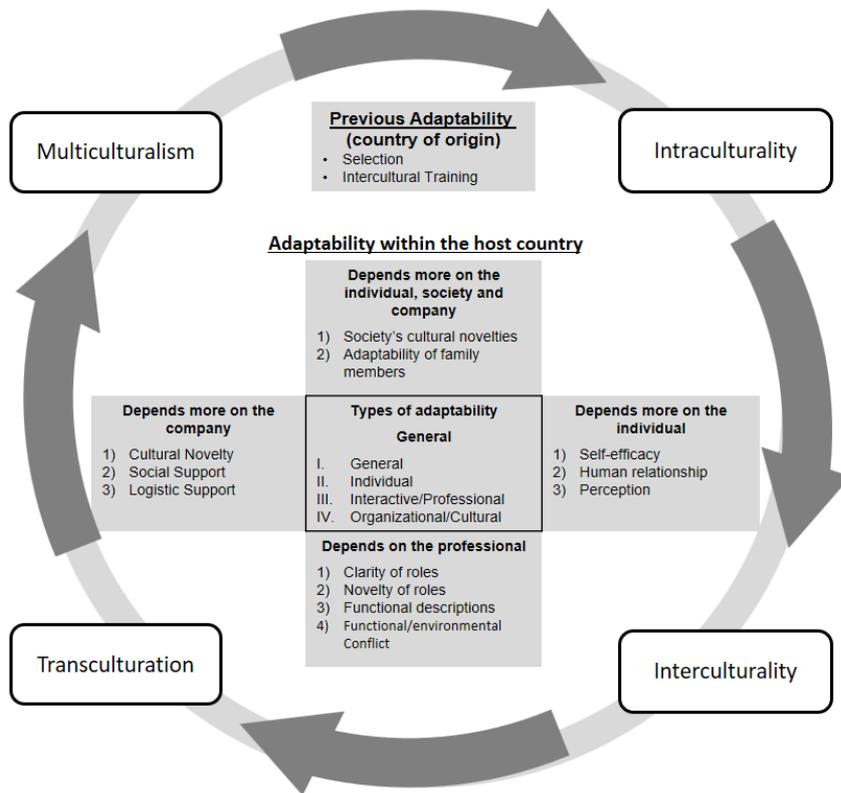


Fig. 1
 Dimensions of Intercultural Adaptability: contributions and supplements
Source: Adapted based on Mendenhall, Punnett, and Ricks (1995); Fraga and Esteves (2004).

We reinforce the understanding of these four movements not only in theory but mostly according to a phenomenological reading of the world (Fraga, 2009), where each of the expatriates, repatriates and HR managers understand this process in itself, in its unique and concrete reality.

reliance on the expatriate. However, “this is not enough,” since companies do not take into account the “candidate’s intercultural ability and the family’s willingness to live in a foreign country” (2007 p. 180). Key aspects for a successful expatriation in terms of the expatriate and family’s emotional balance.

According to Corsetti (2013), there is unanimity in research on the lack of concrete actions that take into account intercultural training, and technical training is usual, which shows a “misalignment between people management practices and the expatriates’ expectations” (p. 62). This shortage shall affect their adaptability, since it “confronts their personal baggage and their career with unfamiliar habits and individuals” (Corsetti, 2013, p. 64). On the other hand, Rosal (2015) states that compensation management reflects the way the expatriation process is understood by companies who “adopt a one-sided view as the dialogue between the company and the expatriate is not covered in that stage of the process” (p. 14). Thus, they restrict the possibility of offering and negotiating rewards and/or benefits that minimize losses and risks arising from the experience of living abroad.

In the expatriate’s perspective, there are challenges and opportunities that must be understood. Gallón, Garay and Bittencourt (2012) identify: an inadequate adaptation of the spouse or family; an inadequate adaptation of the expatriate because of culture shock; the expatriate’s difficulty to meet the office’s requirements; insufficient technical expertise for the position; lack of motivation to work abroad; lack of emotional maturity; lack of communication and socialization skills. Muritiba Campanário Albuquerque (2010) also mention the language differences. Among the opportunities, successful expatriation promotes personal and professional development of the individual, which

can be characterized as “a transformational process for a person” (Bianchi, 2011, p.10).

Unfortunately if they do not understand the nature of expatriation and ignore the dimensions of intercultural adaptability, intercultural scopes and movements, the trend, according to what is pointed by the research is the myopia of the IHRM area and, consequently, the absence of policies and practices that take into account the relevance of what is human in management.

5. Methodology

A qualitative research was chosen because we intend to not only to describe the expatriates’ experiences and experiences, but understand the “essence” of this phenomenon from the perspective of Brazilian expatriate, including their voices in an interactive process that takes place in a natural context where the essentially human phenomenon shines under the light of the dialogue (Creswell, 2014). In other words, a qualitative research gives opportunity for a “thick” description that allows explanations for what is happening (Gibbs, 2009).

The research began with a bibliographic research that allowed the theoretical and methodological basis. The elaboration of the data collection document was carried out in line with the recommendations by McCracken (1988) for in-depth interviews. The script consisted of 27 questions divided into 6 sections and was prepared mainly from Mendenhall, Punnett, and Ricks (1995); Fraga and

Tab. 2
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Nº	Name	Current Position	International experience
1	Antônio	Oil trader	Argentina (5 years); Singapore (5 years)
2	Beatriz	Corporate Director Assistant	USA (4 months); Argentina (4 years); England (2 years)
3	Celso	Ex. HR Director, Corporate University and IHR.	Bolivia (5 years); Chile (2 years)
4	Diego	Supply Coordination	England (2 years)
5	Eliane	Marketing and logistics analyst	Singapore (two weeks); London (2 years)
6	Francisco	Accounting manager	Angola (3 and a half years); Nigeria (4 years)
7	Giulia	Embarked on ships	11 other countries (last country, Italy – 8 months)
8	Hélio	Market analyst	England (2 years and 3 months)
9	Irineu	Operations manager	Argentina (2 months)
10	Jayme	Frigate captain	Portugal (3 years)
11	Kevin	Fuel oil trader	Bolivia (1 year)
12	Larissa	Occupational nurse	Peru (1 year); Argentina (9 months); Chile (1 year)
13	Marcos	Production engineer	England (3 years)
14	Nelson	Administrator	USA (2 years and 3 months)
15	Osiris	Production engineer	France (9 months)
16	Pedro	Purchasing manager	Colombia (4 years and 6 months)

Source: The Authors.

Esteves (2004) and Joly (2012). It was tested with an interviewee chosen because she had already been an expatriate on three occasions. And it was refined from suggestions by Gibss (2009) before its application to other respondents. This included the review and elimination of similar issues as well as the development of other more objective and clear questions.

Access to respondents was initially difficult. We took advantage of one of the authors' contacts who worked in an MC (multinational company). This first contact appointed other people who had been expatriates or directly dealing with this process in their company. After starting the first interviews, there were spontaneous nominations from the interviewees about other people who could contribute to the survey, following the "snowball" strategy (Creswell, 2014, p. 131).

Respondents were previously informed about the purpose of the research and authorization to record was obtained through signing a protocol. We ensured the participants' confidentiality with fictitious names, as stated in Table 2.

were more convenient in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro.

The transcript, categorization and analysis of the results were performed according to the Categorical Content Analysis technique (Bardin, 2011; Dellagnelo and Silva, 2005). To mechanize the organizing tasks and archiving texts, the (qualitative data analysis software) SADQ Atlas TI version 6.0 was used. This software allowed, in addition to storing and manipulating the texts, the creation of codes from the transcript of the respondents' speech and writing memos that allowed a more refined analysis of the data.

The initial encoding process, based on the literature review, had a list of 25 "a priori" categories established to facilitate data encoding and analysis and, as they were reexamined, others emerged, being complementary to the explanation and understanding of the expatriation phenomenon. Thus, the categories analyzed were "a priori" and "emerging", to be combined and integrated into six core topics that are described in Table 3:

Tab. 3
Central categories of topics of the research

Category	Description	Author for support
Phases of the experience abroad	Related to the four phases which permeate the expatriation process. They group variables that influence the expatriate's degree of adaptation.	Joly (2012) Mendenhall, Punnett, and Ricks (1995); Fraga and Esteves (2004)
Dimensions of the intercultural adaptability	Specifically linked to recruitment and selection, training, career plans and remuneration.	Lima and Braga (2010)
IHRM policies and practices	Characteristics which in the respondents' opinion have facilitated their adaptation.	Tanure, Evans and Pucik (2007)
"Brazilians" characteristics that have helped in the adaptation process	In this category were registered the gains from expatriation, both personal and professional, as well as the obstacles encountered during the process.	Gallón, Garay and Bittencourt (2012); Muritiba et. al (2010); Bianchi (2011)
	This category is related to the perception of the world through the senses (hearing, touch, smell, taste, sight) as well as the expression of feelings and emotions.	Merleau-Ponty (2011); Chanlat (2012)

Fonte: Elaboração própria das autoras.

16 Brazilians were interviewed from September to December 2014, who were expatriates in countries in South America, North America, Asia, Europe or Africa. Each interview lasted an average one hour. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese and later transcribed from the audio recording. Respondents were contacted by telephone and/or e-mail for the interviews to be scheduled on site and hours that

Therefore, the interpretation stage follows, "a moment of reflection, intuition based on empirical materials and theoretical frameworks available [...] That is, looking for the senses from what the processed data reveal" (Dellagnelo and Silva, 2005, p. 113). Following are description and analysis of the results.

6. Description and analysis of results

Based on the consolidation of the analyses, we present the results organized by topics.

6.1 Phases of the experience abroad

It was found that expatriates do not necessarily go through the “dazzle phase,” according to Joly (2012). This depends on the destination and the conditions offered by the host culture. When the assignment is for a developed country, the trend is for a positive initial reaction. And it is negative when the destination country is less developed than the expatriate’s country of origin, as illustrated by the statements:

Positive impact:

“I had never been to London. I think the first impact is the issue of organization; I particularly found the English extremely polite [...] the impact was of surprise for seeing that it was a country that welcomes everyone very well. (Pedro)

Negative impact:

“I arrived at night and could not see the city outskirts. When I woke up on the second day, I was in a wonderful home [...] and the environment was an all muddy street with open sewers and stilt houses without the minimum hygienic conditions. Therefore that impacted me as, ‘How can this society be so mixed, a rich people’s house surrounded by such a poor area?’” (Francisco)

Although not extreme negativism situations have been reported, it was evident that for some of the respondents, according to Joly (2012, p. 90), “tensions arise between the personality drives.” It transpires, for example, in the speech by one of them the “feeling of being a foreigner” as the higher **estrangement**:

“I liked being there. But after a while, you know, I had the feeling that there was not my place. I know that it would have to be fleeting, because I do not feel part of it.” (Beatriz)

The difficulties with the language (Gallon, Garay and Bittencourt, 2012), climate, and food differences, ignorance about the site, were evident in several reports like this one:

“My biggest difficulty was in speaking with the Argentines, because I do not speak any Spanish. I was embarrassed, kind of sheepish. I was afraid of going to the market to buy things but then I dared by miming.” (Jayme)

We note integration efforts instead of isolation (Joly, 2012) in most reports. For example, attending local festivals, using costumes, and adopting habits of the local culture were mechanisms that helped the insertion into the host culture.

6.2 Dimensions of the intercultural adaptability

It was identified in the results that the greatest difficulty was related to the “General Adaptability” dimension (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991), as illustrated by this testimony:

“My first difficulty was in relation to communication, although we spoke Portuguese [...] we have a serious language problem. Some things are simple for us Brazilians but for them they are not because what is said is interpreted to the letter. [...] We had a situation where I was sitting at a restaurant having dinner with a friend. He ordered a dish and then I turned to the waiter and said that I wanted the same dish. To my surprise, only one dish came. And when I questioned the waiter, he claimed that I had said that I would be going to eat from the same dish. And here in Brazil, this means that I would eat a dish like my friend’s. There would be two dishes and not only one dish.” (Francisco)

A facilitator element was the **family’s** role, considered essential for being the expatriate’s base of comfort and emotional control. As stated by Tanure, Evans and Pucik (2007), when the expatriate is not accompanied by their family, the sense of **longing** emerges in the respondents’ statements:

“That part was hard because I felt very homesick. I would call every day [...] Only it would not help much, because you cannot hug your wife, your son, this was upsetting. In the end, I was crazy to return.” (Antônio)

In the **Individual Adaptability** dimension, respondents expressed having as main features for expatriation: **“curiosity,” “flexibility,” “ease of communication,” “diplomacy,” “humility,” “having an open mind to absorb what other cultures can bring us in terms of knowledge and personal life and professional experiences”, “being polite,” “an extrovert,” “being flexible,”** being **“persistent,” “engaged,”** and **“pragmatic.”** In order to illustrate, a testimony follows:

“I have a personal characteristic [...] my pragmatism. What I saw, I tried to do. I knew I had a mission there and work objectives to be accomplished and had to adapt as best as

possible. Instead of reproducing Brazil in France, I tried to enjoy as best I could what that country had to offer me, instead of regretting that there were no beaches as in Rio de Janeiro. I embraced a physical characteristic of that city, which were the mountains. Therefore, I would walk in that mountainous region, which was the locals' habit, who loved doing that." (Osiris)

Regarding the type of **Interactive/Professional Adaptability**, we can mention the expatriate professionals' efforts in adapting to the organizational structure and overcoming the challenges until feeling comfortable in the new workplace on issues such as professional attitude:

"When I started working, language was a barrier. Another one [...] the issue of attitude. I am very outgoing, therefore I kind of... when I started working, I struggled to control myself to not have this behavior here [...] I thought I had to fit in to the culture." (Marcos)

In the **Organizational/Cultural Adaptability**, it was found that nine of the expatriates felt "reasonably" served in terms of social support and logistics:

"The support that the company gave me was not perfect, but it was pretty great and my adaptation was easier in this period of expatriation [...] They did all the bureaucratic proceedings, helped me with housing [...] helped me with a car. This was very good because it gave me autonomy and facilitated displacement, despite the public transportation being very good. Since I initially did not know the city, the car was a facilitator for me." (Osiris)

However, the IHRM area must give a properly planned support to the expatriate and their family. Follow-up mechanisms are needed, since there have been reports of inadequate service by brokers who took care of housing for expatriates and/or luggage and furniture shuttle.

On the other hand, differences were evident between the company headquarters and the branch:

"The daily routine is quite different from being in the corporate headquarters, then there [in England] I had more autonomy [...] Here in the headquarters we are much more interrupted by other people's priorities [...] we have more corporate duties [...] and more interruptions. And there I could focus on my work." (Beatriz)

The understanding and experience of the **"four cultural scopes and movements"** proposed by Fraga and Esteves (2004), illustrated on Chart 1, were

expressed in the results because expatriation enabled a better understanding of "other people."

"There are two key learning processes. One is cultural diversity [...] It is different when you know it, you experience it [...] Understanding the richness of this cultural diversity, coping in multicultural environments was a fantastic learning process [...] Another great learning process [...] is getting to know myself in Brazil." (Celso)

Another point highlighted by most respondents is that the experience of expatriation allowed them to experience cultural diversity.

6.3 Policies and practices for the international management of people

All respondents reported the existence of some actions by the company to inform them about the new country. However, it was only basic information, provided on a primer. The cultural aspect by means of an Intercultural Training Program, as suggested by Fraga (1998), Tanure, Evans and Pucik (2007), was not worked on with the interviewees. Although some reports about some training initiatives that addressed cultural aspects were considered "informal," "botched" and too brief, according to the statements below:

"Just technical [...] the cultural part is zero, nonexistent." (Tiago)

"Intercultural courses and training lectures... there has never been." (Antônio)

Only after questioning about the cultural aspect is that they realized that this information was lacking in the expatriates' adaptation. Although the initiative of a trip providing the place of expatriation with the company of the family was seen as positive.

On the **selection process**, simplification was noticeable, focusing technical criteria, as pointed out by Manzon, Jaeger and Kato (2010), as well as the nature of "position of trust" to the detriment of people with behavioral and intercultural skills (Tanure, Evans and Pucik, 2007; Corsetti, 2013).

"We shall never expatriate a refinery operator or a maintenance engineer. It makes no sense to expatriate because these professionals as they can be found in the country where the company branch is located. We expatriate those who are in the so-called critical positions, where trust has to be total." (Celso)

Moreover, according to the interviewee (Beatrice), who has occupied a strategic level position with “international exposure,” the fact of her being “experienced” and “mature” enabled her to be chosen for a mission to a country in Europe.

The **lack of a repatriation policy** was evident, consisting with Lima and Braga (2010). Organizations neglect the return of expatriates, weaken the people management framework, and show disregard for the situation of returnees. Thus, they show unpreparedness in planning and the nonexistence of a **career plan** after the expatriation. The feeling by some respondents is that the company does not fulfill the role of monitoring, which should be continuous, as illustrated by the following statement:

“The company headquarters place you here and then demand results. Nobody asks if you are OK [...] There is a lack of sensitivity from the headquarters in noticing this.” (Irineu)

In case of lack of an organizational structure for repatriation, it is necessary to consider harm beyond personal/professional issues, as the company also loses in terms of the know-how needed for advances in the internationalization process.. Here Chanlat (2012), Fraga (2009), Wood, Tonelli and Cooke (2012), Gaulejac (2007) should be highlighted due to drawing attention to what is “human” in globalization and international education.

6.4 “Brazilians” characteristics that have helped in the adaptation process

All interviewees highlighted that Brazilians are **friendly, communicative and adaptable**. They also highlighted that Brazilians’ **flexibility** is a key characteristic for success in expatriation. They stated that such **ease of communication** by Brazilians helps them bear problems and cultural shocks, besides missing their next of kin. (Tanure, Evans and Pucik, 2007):

I am a flexible person. I would say I have a quite open mind, I am open minded to many things. I still have my prejudices, many were dashed because we end up dealing with differences, otherwise you do not exchange information and lose the opportunity to meet people. (Hélio)

I had the opportunity to travel through regions within China, seeing and tasting exotic dishes (donkey meat, salt jelly, etc.), learning the table manners, etc. The willingness to accompany the companies and share lunch or dinner with their

representatives greatly cheered the Chinese, broke some barriers and certainly facilitated future business. (Antônio)

Another obvious characteristic from Brazilians is their **optimism**. All respondents, even when facing many problems during the expatriation process, enjoyed the experience and would return to repeat it.

I think I am the first to encourage people to do what I did, not only abroad, but also outside their state. (Hélio)

We realize that the Brazilians’ positive predisposition is a facilitator of the adaptation process, a trait which in itself is already an advantage in a challenging process as expatriation.

6.5 Opportunities, challenges and learning experiences from expatriation

Among the **opportunities**, according to Bianchi (2011), professional and personal growth was evidenced in the emergence of a **new way of looking, less prejudiced** regarding “others.” Similarly, participants reported an improvement in how they related to people and an **increase in self-esteem** in the professional environment. Experiencing another culture and exercising **self-criticism** from the culture itself was considered some gain for expatriates. In this sense, the four movements proposed by Fraga and Esteves (2004) were experienced in greater or lesser extent by the respondent expatriates:

The overall balance was positive. I can say that there I had the opportunity to live in a more organized country that works better than here and where people are more respected. (Marcos)

Among the **challenges**, the need for intercultural training programs to facilitate the expatriates’ “smooth engagement” is highlighted, which Fraga and Esteves (2004) characterize as a transcultural situation by the various countries in which they operate as well as appropriate repatriation policies. It should be noted that most expatriates report the lack of contact with family and friends as one of the biggest challenges they face abroad, according to Bianchi (2011). Difficulties with the language were reported as an obstacle to establishing contacts with people of the local culture. The variety of “accents” show the perception of subcultures and multicultural ambiances in the same city.

As basic **learning processes**, the possibility of dealing with cultural diversity, acquiring intercultural

skills and having a less jaundiced view of the “others” have been mentioned (Fraga and Esteves, 2004).

Today, I can live with different people, I can work with different people (Francisco).

We note that the interpersonal relationship is inseparable from the expatriation process and it is precisely in the interaction that the phenomenon of otherness takes place.

6.6 Sensory dimension, feelings and emotions

The experience abroad has given rise to the expression of several feelings and emotions: “**agony,**” “**anguish,**” “**nervousness,**” “**surprise,**” “**happiness,**” “**insecurity,**” “**loneliness,**” “**tiresomeness,**” “**fatigue,**” “**discomfort,**” “**euphoria,**” “**emotional labor.**” Feelings that surfaced in each of the phases of adaptation mentioned by Joly (2012). With regard to the senses, it became clear that it is by them that we get to know the world. The following testimony illustrates the sensations, feelings and desires felt and experienced in another place and culture:

I am very sensitive to smells [...] people’s smells bring me good memories, tastes. I can tell you good things about the food [...] sound would be interesting from a glacier [...] The view, nature, [...] a 20-meter glacier, something from beyond, God’s creation, all I saw, even the (Peru) Talara desert, the sunset, I keep it as a memory; [...] Textures, touches, for example, what I felt, a feather coat, I felt embraced by the coat, it warmed my heart, you are far from everyone, it is important, hugs were very important. (Larissa)

The feeling of **loneliness** is clearly expressed in this testimony. The need for human contact through hugs is a specific feature in Brazilians and it appears in almost all statements. Metaphorically, the feather coat transmits to the interviewee the “**warmth**” necessary for her to feel her “heart warm.” Since she felt she was “away from everybody.” It can be seen that “there is a predominance of affection” in Brazilian culture. (Alencar-Rodrigues, Strey and Pereira, 2007).

When analyzing this research results, what stands out from the reports is the fragility of the organizational relationship within the company the respondents work for, with the needs related to the development of intercultural skills for global services. It is clear that the experiences are limited to the personal scope of each expatriate because companies’ initiatives in cultural issues were not

revealed at any point in the process, that is, not in the previous phase, or during or at the return from the expatriation. It is possible to infer weakness or perhaps even momentary lack of organizational policies on human resource development (Tanure, Evans and Pucik, 2007).

Today, this gap is as much a risk (or burden) as a waste. In the first case, it is clear that the lack of preparation can lead to losses for the company’s international contacts and business. The second case reveals both financial as image burden or even professional and human problems for the expatriates involved. In the third and final aspect, waste is shown in the complexity of a failed mission in which everything is lost, even shaking the image and blocking future possibilities for the company, as well as early fears for future expatriates (Nogueira, Barreto and Delgado, 2013).

7. Final Considerations

This article discusses Brazilian expatriates’ experiences to uncover the challenges and opportunities that are faced in other cultures. First, the reports about the expatriation processes show positive connotations in terms of professional and personal opportunities in international missions. For example, some respondents were satisfied with the experience and willing to face a new process of expatriation. However, based on the results, we highlight the fragility of the so-called early adaptability, the return strategies, and repatriation with implications for the career plan. Besides, it was noticed that expatriates do not necessarily go through the “dazzle” phase. The main **challenges** highlighted by expatriates were: the need for intercultural training programs to prepare them properly, the lack of contact with family and friends, difficulties with the language, insecurity upon returning due to the absence of repatriation policies, and the lack of a career plan for them.

Among the **opportunities and learning experiences from coexisting**, professional and personal growth was observed as initially “realigning values” to deal with cultural diversity, with the gain of having acquired intercultural skills that enabled them to have a new view, less biased with respect to “others.” Thus, understanding and experience of the “**four cultural scopes and movements**” as well as early adaptability and adaptability within the host country

(as shown in Figure 1) were corroborated either by their presence or by their absence.

Many of the respondents see expatriation as a turning point, both in personal and professional lives. Therefore, the family's role is important and necessary to take care of the preparation for the international mission in order for it to be successful. Regarding the Brazilians' characteristics as **facilitators** of the adaptation process, stand out: **flexibility, ease of communication** and **optimism** which, according to the interviewees, are characteristic of the Brazilian people.

We have shown that the IHRM area initiatives are still timid and although there is a primary concern in companies with regard to the legal aspect of social and logistical support, compensation and benefits, in order to deal with the expatriation processes, actions for preparation, that is, for intercultural training and development, considered important by respondents, when added to repatriation proved insufficient.

Regarding the selection process, primacy of technical criteria was noticeable as well as the nature of "position of trust" to the detriment of people with behavioral and intercultural skills. It is concluded that the IHRM area also has the opportunity to take advantage of expatriates' rich experience to reshape its policies and practices at the international level, benefiting from the global mindset of their executives.

Experience abroad has raised the expression of different feelings and emotions that surfaced in each of the stages of adaptation, among which may be mentioned: "agony," "anguish," "nervousness," "surprise," "happiness," "insecurity," "loneliness," "tiresomeness," "fatigue," "discomfort," "euphoria," and "emotional labor," deserving attention from IHRM in preparation, follow-up and repatriation. Sensations, feelings and longings reported, experienced by expatriates, enabled them to sharpen the senses from the international experience and corroborated the need to "humanize the globalization process" because they are essentially "people" and not just "goods" or "financial capital" those who engage in it.

This paper contributes to the literature about IHRM due to the evidence of Brazilian type management in an area of knowledge colonized by Anglo-American hegemonic practices. At the same time, it contributes to the debate about rescuing the

human dimension in international management. On the other hand, in practical terms, the article suggests ways that may interfere with MNCs' performance in the internationalization processes, particularly for managers involved in international activities, people management professionals, consultants and expatriates.

We consider it essential that future research focused on IHRM in Brazilian companies recognize that the expatriation phenomenon is multifaceted and therefore requires a multidisciplinary approach for better understanding it. To do this we must promote a dialogue with the Social Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology and Intercultural Communication fields. Among the topics to be privileged, we highlight issues of gender, family adaptation, intercultural adaptation and repatriation according to an approach that emphasize the human dimension.

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Gestão internacional de recursos humanos: Adaptabilidade intercultural na expatriação de brasileiros

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RESUMO

Este artigo problematiza as experiências de brasileiros expatriados para desvendar os desafios e as oportunidades com os quais se deparam em outras culturas. Com base na literatura, destacamos a necessidade de humanizar o processo de internacionalização porque a expatriação é fenômeno multifacetado que requer abordagem multidisciplinar. Em termos empíricos, analisamos dados coletados por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com dezesseis expatriados. Os resultados indicam que o processo de expatriação é uma questão a ser tratada com mais atenção pela área de Gestão Internacional de Recursos Humanos. Destacamos os desafios da fragilidade da chamada adaptabilidade antecipada, das estratégias de retorno, do repatriamento e suas implicações para o plano de carreira, assim como, a necessidade de programas específicos de treinamento intercultural. Por outro lado, os relatos dos expatriados registram conotações positivas as oportunidades profissionais e pessoais das missões internacionais. Ao considerar estes resultados, a área de Gestão Internacional de Recursos Humanos poderia aproveitar a intensa experiência dos expatriados para reformular políticas e práticas e, conseqüentemente, usufruir do *mindset* global.

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