IDENTITY NEGOTIATION OF EXPATRIATES (HIGH-SKILLED IMMIGRANTS) IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract:
In the industry world, a successful business is highly dependent on effective globalization (Toomey, 1999:4). Effective globalization is linked with a diverse workforce and workers from diverse cultural backgrounds. It opens up many opportunities, especially for high-skilled immigrants or expatriates, but at the same time, it also provides room for uncertainty in how individuals construct their identities. This uncertainty may trigger tension between individuals in their daily interactions. This study aimed to determine how high-skilled immigrants negotiate identity in a culturally diverse work environment. The framework of thought in this research was mainly Stella Ting-Toomey's theory of identity negotiation. The method used in this research was phenomenology. The primary data of this study were the results of interviews with employees in culturally diverse companies. Secondary data from direct observations at the research site supported them. The main findings of this study include how the values of a culturally diverse company provide a climate that supports the identity negotiation process among high-skilled immigrant individuals within it.
Keywords: Identity, Expatriate, Work Group, Multicultural.

INTRODUCTION

Changing and evolving technology and social norms significantly transform the characteristics of the working world. Digital platforms make coordination in the working world even more limitless, efficient, and convenient. It then results in various new forms and fields of work. This limitless coordination will open possibilities for an individual to experience career transitions across companies, sectors and even countries.

As cited from the mckinsey.com page, in 2017, about 247 million people lived in countries where they were not born, which has almost tripled in the last 50 years. Most of them were drawn to places where they believed they would find a better jobs. More than 90 percent have moved voluntarily, and about half have moved from developing to developed countries. From 2000 to 2014, migration contributed to about 40 percent of the labor force growth in Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Cross-border migration is a natural consequence of conditions where people must find attractive job opportunities in their home countries. At the same time, other countries need to fill the existing skills gap adequately. Migration increases global productivity, but workers from these countries often fear the consequences, often facing disconnected domestic labor markets and a lack of well-paid jobs.

In the development of the working world, a successful business is highly dependent on effective globalization (Toomey, 1999:4). Effective globalization is linked with a diverse workforce

and workers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Many positive things may arise from this phenomenon. However, as with other social phenomena, it will also be accompanied by negative consequences, which are part of the development of the condition. One of them is the space of uncertainty in how individuals construct their vulnerable identities, causing tension in interpersonal relationships.

Understanding identity is becoming increasingly important because of all the changes that have occurred due to global migration and labor relocation mentioned above. The world has become more connected, including in the movement of people from their place and culture of origin to other foreign places. Communication plays an essential role in identity-related issues.

One of the global companies that embrace diversity is Nike. One of Nike's missions is to be inclusive and open to all, not only concerning its consumers but also its employees. As quoted from the Nike Impact FY18 report, Nike does this by building a creative and diverse global team, positively impacting the communities where we live and work, and making products more responsibly while maintaining an ecological balance.

Identity refers to the process by which individuals agree on "who is who" in their relationship. The individual is expected to maintain their respective roles when this agreement occurs. Identity negotiation provides the "glue" that holds the relationship together.

Ting-Toomey argues that the satisfying outcome of identity negotiation is: "feelings of being understood, respected and supported" (Toomey, 1999:46). These feelings will arise if one interacts with similar individuals, but, in this day and age, individuals are more likely to interact with individuals who are dissimilar more often. Although everyday culture can be adapted, it is difficult to demand someone to leave their background, and this background is the result of an interpersonal relationship.

Social identity can include ethnic or cultural identity, gender identity, sexual orientation identity, social class identity, age identity, disability identity, or professional identity. Personal identity can include the unique attributes we associate with our characteristics relative to others. In a collective group-oriented culture, for example, one will pay more attention to group membership-based issues (Marsella, De Vos, & Hsu, 1985 in Toomey, 1999:28). In an individualistic culture, a person will focus more on issues based on individual identity.

The concept of negotiation is defined as a transactional interaction process in which individuals in an intercultural situation try to impose, define, change, challenge, and support a desired self-image of themselves or others. Identity negotiation is a communication activity. It is interesting to see the global movement of the workforce, especially expatriates or high-skilled workers. According to Byron G. Adams & Fons J.R. van de Vijver, expatriates have more freedom in adjusting to the host country's company and society than other types of migrants.

Time is often discussed among these high-skilled immigrant individuals in a company. The punctuality of starting and ending meetings, whether online or face-to-face, to when the meeting is held is an example of a situation where identity negotiations might occur. Individuals from India, for example, who are not used to having lunch at 12 noon may invite individuals from other cultural backgrounds at that time. Where in most institutions in Southeast Asia, 12 o'clock is generally the time for a lunch break. Alternatively, people from Europe only consider lunch a regular meal of the day where they must allocate specific time. They will usually buy a light meal, eat them briefly, and then continue their work. If individuals from both backgrounds schedule a meeting at 12 noon, the invitees will likely decline the meeting invite. It could cause misunderstanding that leads to tension because the person who invites could feel that they do not have the support of their co-workers. In comparison, the other parties will think that their time is not being appreciated. Moreover, many other examples of negotiating identities might take place daily.

It would be naive to think that the interacting individuals are equal agents who can express problems and get others to agree on the identity they want in the given context; in the negotiation of cultural identity, hierarchical values and power inequalities are inherently embedded (Collier 2005, Piller 2011 in Malgorzata 2013).

An expatriate is a person who moves abroad for work assignments (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen & Bolino, 2013 in Adams & Vivjer. Compared to permanent residency, expatriates have more freedom in dealing with society than the host, which allows them more opportunities to adapt and negotiate their identity.

The term identity is used in identity negotiation as a reflection of self-conception or self-image obtained from the socialization process of our gender, ethnicity, and culture. Ting-Toomey (1999:39) asserts that the emphasis of identity negotiation theory lies in the understanding that identity or reflective self-conception is seen as an explanatory mechanism for intercultural communication. Identity is a reflective self-image constructed, experienced, and communicated by individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation. Ting-Toomey expresses that the satisfying outcome of identity negotiation is feeling understood, respected, and supported.

According to Ting-Toomey (1999:40), there are 10 core theoretical assumptions from the Identity Negotiation Theory:

1) The primary dynamics of one's membership identity in a group and personal identity are formed through symbolic communication with others.
2) People in all cultures or ethnic groups have a basic need for motivation to gain identity comfort, trust, involvement, connection, and stability at individual and group levels of identity.
3) Everyone will experience a comfortable identity in a familiar cultural environment, and vice versa, will experience a vulnerable identity in a new environment.
4) Everyone tends to feel identity trust when communicating with other people with the same or almost the same culture and vice versa, identity shakiness when communicating on themes bound by different cultural regulations.
5) A person will tend to feel part of the group if the expected membership identity of the group gives a positive response. On the other hand, they will feel different/foreign when their desired group membership identity gives a negative response.
6) Individuals expect interpersonal connection through meaningful close relationships (e.g., in situations that support close friendships) and will otherwise experience identity autonomy when they encounter different relationships.
7) People will gain identity stability in predictable cultural situations and find identity change or shock in unpredictable cultural situations.
8) The cultural, personal, and situational dimensions influence the meaning, interpretation and assessment of these identity themes or issues.
9) Satisfaction resulting from identity negotiation includes feeling understood, valued, and supported.
10) Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the importance of integrating intercultural knowledge, motivation, and skills to communicate satisfactorily, accurately and effectively.

Geoffman in Griffin (2012:62) claimed that we are all involved in ongoing negotiations with other people to openly lay out our identity or nature or context of the situation at hand. Meanings are exchanged, and then at a certain point, the interactional reactions will coordinate their activities harmoniously in a shared situation.

According to Mead, there is no "me" at birth. "Me" is formed through continual symbolic interaction – first with the family, then with playmates, in institutions such as schools, etc. Mead makes us think about "I" as a society organized within the individual (Griffin, 2012:61).

In the context of intercultural work group communication, John Oetzel wrote a theory about the importance of communication behavior in work groups of diverse backgrounds. He considered its impact on visible and 'embedded' diversity.

The work environment has its context in intercultural communication, and it has its distinct features. A work environment is where many people organize their efforts to achieve a specific goal. With its transactional and symbolic nature, communication becomes very instrumental in organizing everyone.

The characteristic that distinguishes the working group from other groups is the common goal that unites the group, which in the context of this research is the business aspect of a company. A working group is a formal group that has sub-groups in it. If the group is permanent, it is usually called a command group or functional group. An example is the sales department in a company. Temporary groups are usually referred to as task groups. These groups are formed by management on a temporary or permanent basis to complete assigned tasks.

According to John R. Schermerhorn, Jr., James G. Hunt, and Richard N. Osborn (2002: 43), "Organizational or corporate culture is a system of shared actions, values and beliefs that develop within an organization and guide the behavior of its members." While John W. Newstrom (2007:87) states "organizational culture is a set of assumptions, beliefs, values, and norms that members of the organization share".

Social interaction in the work environment always starts with the work tasks that arise. A work environment is where many people organize their efforts to achieve a specific goal. Coordination, division of labor and structure produce a functioning system within an organizational environment.

The organization will only exist with communication. With communication, work coordination will occur properly. Communication within the organization is a form of interaction that exchange messages between members of the organization, both verbal and non-verbal communication that has a function in terms of conveying information about the organization, core values and things that become the rules in a company, namely what is become a culture within the company. In organizational communication, the terminology inherent in the context is communication and organization. According to Karl Weick's theory, an organization is not formed by positions and roles, but by communication activities. It is more appropriate to say "organized" than "organization". Humans achieve the organization through continual communication (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009:364).

The essence of the failure of business communication in the global era is the difficulties in understanding the communication ethics that must be faced by the people involved due to differences in the cultural expectations of each person. Human behavior is not random. The more we know another person's culture, the more skilled we become at predicting and meeting that person's expectations. These expectations and how we fulfill them are based on what has gone before. After many repetitions, we can usually be sure of what will happen, so we find it impossible to break that rule or norm (Mulyana from Hopper and Whitehead, 1979:168-169).

Based on the elaboration above, there are several problems that the researcher wanted to answer: 1) What is the process of identity negotiation of a high-skilled immigrant in a culturally diverse work environment? Moreover, 2) How flexible is the negotiation space of the high-skilled immigrant in negotiating their identity in that work environment?

METHODS

The approach used in this study is the qualitative approach. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is a multi-focus method that involves an interpretive and reasonable approach to each subject matter. Qualitative research works in a natural setting, which seeks to understand and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people give to them.

This study aimed to seek an explanation of experience, not to quantify a condition. Thus, the researcher used phenomenology as the research method. At the beginning of its development, phenomenology is a set of approaches in philosophical and sociological studies, as well as the study of art (Edgar dan Sedgwick, 1999:271 in Hasbiansyah). It also focuses on personal experience, including how every individual experiences it (Littlejohn, 2009:13).

In this study, the researcher strove to understand the experience of each individual who underwent the identity negotiation process due to the demands of their work in a culturally diverse company, whether it is due to their migration from their home country due to the offer of better job opportunities, transfers at the company's decision or individuals who must carry out the identity negotiation process because they are employees in the host country.

Phenomenology comes from the Greek *phaenesthai*, which means to show itself, to show, or from the word *pahainomenon*, which means "symptom" or what has manifested itself so that it is accurate to the observer. The phenomenological method pioneered by Edmund Husserl has the motto: *Zuruck zu den sachen selbst* (back to the things themselves) (Dister Ofm, in Suprayogo and Tobroni, 2003:102 in Habiansyah, 2005:4).

Phenomenology used varied methods, including interviews, dialogue, observation, research, meeting, and journal or private text analysis. This methodology was designed to be less structured and more open to encourage participants to share more details about their experiences. Surveys and questionnaires usually used in other research methods to collect information from participants were more structured, giving participants little to no opportunity to share freely.

Phenomenological research generally follows four stages as follows:

1. *Bracketing* – A process of identifying and observing all forms of beliefs, opinions or ideas on the phenomenon under study. In this process, the researcher 'bracketed out' or set aside any presuppositions to view the study from an unbiased perspective. This process is essential for phenomenological reduction, that is, isolating and separating a phenomenon from what is already known about it.
2. *Intuition* – It requires the researcher to be wholly absorbed in the study and phenomenon and to stay open to the meaning of the phenomenon as described by those who experience them. The process of intuition produces an understanding of the phenomenon and will require the researcher to vary the data collection method or question until that level of understanding emerges.
3. *Analysis* – A process of analyzing data, involving the researcher being wholly absorbed in the data and using coding and categorization to organize data. The goal was to develop a theme that can be used to describe the experience from the perspective of the person experiencing it.
4. *Description* – This was the final phase of the process. The researcher used their understanding of data to describe and define the phenomenon and communicate it to other people.

This study used triangulation in data testing, especially methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation uses multiple methods to examine a single problem or program, such as interviews, observations, structured questionnaires, and documents (Patton, 2002). This study was conducted by checking the data to the same source with different techniques, for example, by

conducting observations, interviews or documentation. If different results were found, the researcher confirmed with the data source to obtain data that were considered correct.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In contrast to tourists or sojourners, immigrants or refugees usually aim to stay permanently or for a longer time in a new country. Although there are some common patterns of adaptation (initial stress and culture shock) in these groups, there are differences in motivational patterns in their goals and objectives of adaptation can be observed (Toomey, 1999:234).

Migrating to a new country and integrating into a new society means leaving a world where one is already known personally, both socially and culturally and has to start all over again to gain a place in the new place. Whether due to their own will or voluntarily for study purposes, company needs, business opportunities, or coercion, the whole process of migration to a new country can be stressful and even traumatic for immigrants of all ages.

Some migrants and immigrants may reach the "third cultural perspective" (Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer, 1977 in Toomey) in the pros and cons of their home culture and the new culture. Such a perspective allows individuals to integrate best practices and approaches from both cultures and solve relational tasks and problems in a synergistic and creative way.

Culture is a complex thing owing to its changing forms. For example, migrants must adapt to the new values and ideas of their places. Migrants will preserve values and ideas from their places of origin, but they will also borrow from and adapt to their new places, known as acculturation. Culture does not come from a vacuum; it is highly influenced, connected, and dependent on other parts of a system.

Giddens (2020) argued that the hallmark of globalization is the existence of a new form of 'distance' of time and place, a powerful and complex process that describes "world relations" as local events influenced by things happening elsewhere or vice versa. This new notion of the "place" of a state, along with the availability of perfect communication space, challenges the traditional forms of a state's social and political structure. In turn, this leads to a complex form of detachment from the cultural traditions of an individual and the "removal" from the social structure.

There are many aspects that make up a person's culture: religion, economy, politics, and language. With globalization, the world becomes smaller and can be reached mainly through technology, the global village, to quote a term coined by Marshall McLuhan. Humans can share, communicate, and access information anytime and from anywhere.

Establishing effective communication is the responsibility of every community member. There is a tendency to blame each other when a statement is not heard, misinterpreted, forgotten, and ignored. So, everyone must keep an eye on how the communication process occurs and resolve issues as expected. It is a direct application of the definition of communication as transactional, complex, and symbolic.

Identity negotiation has been described as a transactional interaction process in which people attempt to impose, define, alter, challenge, and support a desired self-image on themselves or others in an intercultural setting. Identity negotiation is a communication activity.

Research has shown that group members who are exposed to a variety of opinions and perspectives, including beliefs that differ from those of the majority, can make better decisions and solve problems more effectively than individuals who are not exposed to minority opinions (Nemeth, 1992 from Oetzel, 2009: 215).

Toomey explains that identity negotiation theory focuses on the motives of identity security vulnerabilities. It is essential to understand the motives of identity security vulnerabilities in intercultural interactions for the following reasons: First, individuals carry a "self-image" or

"identity" in various communicative interactions. Cultural, personal, situational, and relationship factors strongly influence this identity.

In this research, Nike is considered an arena and a miniature of a culturally diverse work environment. This study intended to look at the individuals in it in a personal context rather than representing their position in the company because the researcher wanted to look at interpersonal communication rather than in the context of organizational communication.

The workplace culture in their host country can contribute to a person's decision-making and independence. Suppose their first work experience in the host country is under an authoritative leader. In that case, they will need to understand the idea of autonomy and freedom in the workplace as in American culture. Countries like India, China and Malaysia in Asia (to name a few), and other African countries, adopt an authoritative leadership style.

Employees are told what needs to be done and how. They are given a deadline to complete a job. They do not get a pat on the back or the freedom to choose how they do their job. The organizational hierarchy and employees' roles in the organization are made clear. Leaders have titles and authority and, of course, maintain a power distance. Only recently these are starting to change; in many IT-based industries in India, young workers are given a voice and asked to participate and not just follow: "Infosys Technologies in Bangalore, India, started the Voice of Youth program, which gives seats to top-performing young employees on its management board." (Griffin et al., 2010: 307).

In today's globalized world, it is no longer just one factor that dominates personality. Because, for example, children in India watch children's shows on television from America, Australia and England. They are no longer influenced just by the culture in which they were born, but by everything they witnessed in their growing-up years.

No study compares traits between each country in Southeast Asia, nor does this study intend to compare the forms of identity negotiation of people from these countries when living in the country or abroad. However, studies on Low Context vs. High Context in Cross-Cultural Communications are often used to understand cross-cultural communication, especially in a culturally diverse workplace.

Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (2009) expressed that those symbols, rules and meanings produced by the process of community communication are a force that can influence others and can be taken by others. The distinctions and forces in question include skin color, nationality, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, regional issues, income level, and other aspects of identity. For children with diverse cultural and language backgrounds, maintaining a flexible identity and integrating various aspects of the self is a vital self-ability.

Changes in labor globalization will indeed affect the dynamics in society, especially in the context of communication. A theory that can account for a phenomenon occurring over a period of time and within a particular societal structure is only sometimes adequate to account for a phenomenon that occurs in other periods and structures of society.

For example, at first, communication was carried out using paintings or art in caves in ancient times, then evolved to writings and now entering the digital era where virtual forms of communication appear. It requires us to evaluate a theory constantly.

It was explained earlier that Nike is a company that values inclusiveness and diversity in culture. This principle started at their headquarters in Portland and is applied to all Nike branches worldwide. It creates a powerful multicultural atmosphere in the daily interactions of all employees.

The research location in Singapore also provides an additional dimension of this form of multiculturalism so that both employees from other countries, and those from Singapore themselves, enter the communication arena where the level of cultural diversity is consistent and tends to start the process of negotiating their identity already from the start.

Contemporary culture, or the modern world, is now a world of culture. People will influence each other in politics, culture, or economy. However, it is also true that the ideal of a universal community comes with implications in the religion, economic system and acts of communication that exist in modern society. The ideal is there as a direction in human history. It implies evolution towards an ideal goal and informs how humans should behave.

This study has areas for improvement in methods and delivery of information. Therefore, it should be used to improve and perfect future studies. Future studies may focus on identifying what factors that influence identity negotiation in individuals with a profile such as high-skilled immigrants. The studies should have public benefits considering that most people are exposed to the same globalization phenomenon.

In addition to methodological suggestions, the study also put forth practical suggestions that may be beneficial, especially for workers in the high-skilled immigrant category or a company that employs many immigrants in that category. Global migration is a real social phenomenon and will only continue to develop in the future. This study is expected to provide a new understanding of what happens with high-skilled workers undergoing migration. This understanding will later help prevent or reduce potential interpersonal communication conflicts. Intercultural or cross-cultural work experiences can create a dynamic, knowledge-rich and creative work environment, but only when viewed positively by all parties involved.

CONCLUSION

Due to academic background, professional expectations and company culture, high-skilled immigrants have distinct characteristics compared to other immigrants that make them respond to and communicate with others differently, especially in the process of identity negotiation in a culturally diverse work environment.

In identity negotiation theory, a fundamental need for newcomers to a foreign culture is to overcome the insecurity or vulnerability of identity. The more competent new migrants manage their level of identity threat, the more they will be able to promote effective adaptation outcomes. Migrants can mitigate threats to their identity by (a) increasing their motivation to learn about a new culture; (b) keeping their expectations realistic and increasing their familiarity with various aspects of the new culture; (c) improving their language fluency and learning why, how and in what situations specific phrases or gestures are appropriate, plus an understanding of core cultural values associated with certain behaviors; (d) seeking their tolerance for ambiguity and other flexible personal attributes; (e) developing strong bonds (close friends) and weak bonds (acquaintances) to manage identity stress and loneliness; (f) using a variety of mass media to understand the symbolic complexity of the host culture; and (g) paying attention to their interpersonal behavior and delaying premature evaluation of the host or newly adopted culture (Toomey, 1999:260).

A high-skilled immigrant's cultural competence background and professional skills become a differentiator and expand the space for identity negotiation in a culturally diverse work environment. Their cultural competence also gives high-skilled immigrants control of the information received, processed, and retransmitted. Moreover, there is an effort to make communication occur properly, namely by influencing or educating their environment through their identity.

High-skilled immigrants who work in a culturally diverse environment do not view race or nationality as complicating identity negotiations. This type of immigrant no longer categorizes 'newcomer' or 'host' culture. It can happen due to the condition of the company that places diversity as an essential value to instill, with Nike as an example. The creative and diverse global team builds a conducive environment for the individuals in it to carry out the identity negotiation process.

Communication climate in good condition within the organization can influence the behavior and participation of employees in the company. And this will be able to affect the organization's efforts in achieving its goals.

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