How Host Organizations Prepare for and Learn from Expatriate Assignments

Executive Summary

This article reveals what goes on inside host organizations prior to and during expatriate assignments. On the basis of analyzing organizational documents and conducting 43 interviews with host country nationals (HCNs) and expatriates in 30 Vietnamese organizations that host external foreign assignments, we provide a detailed account of HCNs' experiences and unearth sophisticated preparation and management activities designed to maximize these organizations' learning. We depict what we call 'a host organization lifecycle' and extract five lessons: 1) Host organizations prepare carefully in advance to learn as much as possible from expatriates; 2) HCNs experience quite dramatic adjustments and burdens during expatriates' placements; 3) Mutual trust between expatriates and HCNs is a pre-requisite for HCNs' learning; 4) Most of HCNs' learning occurs informally via interactions with expatriates or observing how they work; 5) Host organization managers actively manage HCN-expatriate relationships. Our findings outline a 'wish list' of practices that expatriate-using organizations could consider deploying for expatriate assignments that focus on the benefit of the host organization's development.

KEYWORDS Host organizations, Host country nationals, Learning and organizational development, External foreign assignments, Expatriates, Host organization lifecycle

Anthony Fee (corresponding author)
UTS Business School
University of Technology Sydney
PO Box 123 Broadway, NSW 2007 Australia
Email: Anthony.fee@uts.edu.au
Phone: +61 2 9514 3395

Snejina Michailova
The University of Auckland Business School
12 Grafton Rd, 1142 Auckland New Zealand
Email: s.michailova@auckland.ac.nz
Phone: +64 9 373 7599

Research into international work assignments has traditionally focused on expatriates, defined as people who live and work temporarily outside their home country. Yet expatriation has undergone a quiet revolution in the past two decades (Collings & Isichei, 2018). No longer is an expatriate assignment characterized by some of the trends that dominated the last half of the 20th century; namely, that expatriates were primarily middle-aged, white collar professional males transferred from head office to supervise host country nationals (HCNs). While some of these features remain (McNulty & Selmer, 2017), contemporary notions of global mobility are refreshingly diverse. The duration, destinations, design and intents of international assignments are changing to reflect evolving business needs and mobility patterns (Teagarden, 2010). For instance, organizations are now more likely to use expatriates to mentor local staff and foster knowledge sharing within host business units than to control them (Lakshman & Lakshman, 2017). Expatriates are increasingly being assigned to non-traditional locations, including a variety of developing economies (Kim & Tung, 2013), or rotated through multiple short- and long-term placements (Suutari, Tornikoski, & Mäkelä, 2012). Moreover, organizations are now making use of self-initiated expatriates who independently seek fixed-term offshore projects, attracted by career opportunities, adventure, and/or a desire to develop a global career (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016).

Academic interest in helping organizations oversee their expatriate placements has led to noticeable improvements in the ways multinational corporations manage expatriate staff, as evident in the annual Brookfield Global Relocation Surveys (BGRS, 2016). In contrast, the experiences of organizations and individuals that *host* expatriates have been sorely overlooked. These organizations include multinational subsidiary business units that host expatriates deployed from headquarters, as well as local and multinational organizations that recruit expatriate staff from sources external to the organization (Arp, Hutchings, & Smith, 2013). Host organizations manage expatriates on a day-to-day basis and assume primary responsibility

for decisions about how best to capture expatriates' knowledge and skills. Yet we know little about what happens inside these local offices before and after an expatriate arrives. How do local organizations and their staff prepare for and manage an expatriate placement, and what can be done to ensure the expatriates' knowledge and skills are shared among local staff? This is especially important because of the trend toward using expatriates strategically to develop the capabilities of host offices (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). For these types of organizational development roles, the host organizations – and the individuals within them – have a limited window of time within which to capitalize on the learning and development opportunities that the expatriate's presence brings. It seems likely, therefore, that they would shed important insights on managing the expatriate placement on the ground.

Driven by this objective, we set out to discover what goes on inside organizations that host expatriates. We did this by examining organizations' operational and strategic practices before and after an expatriate arrives, with an emphasis on the ways that HCNs (both managers and employees) try to maximize the knowledge and skill dividend of the placement. Our study therefore inverts the expatriate-centric focus of existing research by turning attention directly to the experiences of host organizations and HCNs. We position our analysis as important phenomenon-driven research that aims to offer insight and provide structure to an un(der)-studied phenomenon in order to inform both practice and future theoretical and empirical investigations.

Our research involved in-depth case studies of 30 organizations based in the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam (Vietnam) that use externally-hired expatriates as a means to improve their capabilities and practices. Our findings distil an account of how these organizations manage in order to learn from the expatriates they host, and contribute important insights into the somewhat opaque activities of host organizations. We unearth sophisticated preparation activities designed to maximize the value of the expatriate placement to the local organization,

and document how these organizations help facilitate HCNs' work relationships with the expatriates so that learning is encouraged. While several of the host organizations' concerns and practices reflect the culture of these Vietnamese organizations, we identify five emerging features that, we believe, are readily transferable to similar expatriate-HCN relationships in other cultural settings where the primary focus is organizational development and HCN learning.

Before detailing our research approach and findings, we briefly outline insights from the literature on HCNs and their experiences during expatriate assignments.

What Does the Literature Say about HCNs - A Brief Overview

Decades of research have resulted in an accumulated wealth of knowledge about managing expatriates and their international assignments (Harvey & Moeller, 2009), from pre-departure (e.g. selection, training), to placements (e.g. adjustment, learning, coordination, knowledge sharing) and redeployment when the expatriate returns (e.g. social and professional (re)integration). This expatriate-centric perspective is understandable; it is expatriates who cross borders, whose assignments are relatively costly, who are tasked with a range of strategically important responsibilities during their placements, and whose successes or failures are highly visible. Yet, beginning early this century, a well-documented epoch in employee mobility has seen expatriates increasingly used as strategic conduits of knowledge and learning. This role, deeply connected with a 'resource-based' perspective of organizations, foregrounds expatriates as "strategically oriented toward knowledge transfer/organizational development" (Caliguiri & Bonache, 2016, p. 130). Consequent research, while nascent, tends to place expatriates as protagonists of change and has focused on particular forms of supervision, knowledge sharing or structured training interventions introduced by expatriates that are believed to facilitate learning within host organizations (Law, Song, Wong, & Chen, 2009).

Yet surprisingly overlooked by research has been the other half of the learning equation – namely, the role of organizations and HCNs in ensuring expatriates' expertise is embedded within the host organizations' staff and systems. The few academic studies that involve HCNs remain grounded in features of the experience that serve expatriates' – rather than the local business units' or their own – interests. For instance, a suite of studies has examined HCNs' roles in supporting expatriates' success through providing information, camaraderie or succor (van Bakel, Gerritsen, & van Oudenhoven, 2016; Varma et al., 2016), and how working in multinational organizations and under the supervision of foreign managers can shape HCNs' professional identities (Hong & Snell, 2008; Smale et al., 2015). Others have broached HCNs' attitudes towards and relationships with expatriates via differential pay structures (Toh & DeNisi, 2003) or expatriates' management approaches (Al Ariss, 2014). Studies examining learning and/or development of local staff during expatriate placements are sparse. Those studies addressing the issue are similarly expatriate-centric, focusing on expatriates as agents of change via organized mentoring, training and knowledge transfer initiatives (Riusala & Suutari, 2004; Wong & Law, 1999), with the bulk of activities driven by and intended to benefit a distant head office. We found no studies of what local managers and host organizations do to ensure the exchanges between expatriates and HCNs are optimal from a learning and development perspective, nor what HCN staff encounter when their office hosts an expatriate.

Theoretically, hosting expatriates has the potential to increase HCNs' work burdens (Vance, Andersen, Vaiman, & Gale, 2014; Vance, Vaiman, & Anderson, 2009) as well as their cognitive and emotional loads as a result of the more frequent cross-cultural and cross-language interactions (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). In line with this, we argue that while HCNs do not cross geographical borders, the arrival of an expatriate may instigate new types of intercultural interactions and professional demands that present both opportunities and challenges. If poorly managed, local staff may be skeptical of expatriates' intentions, resent their interference, avoid contact with them, or actively resist their ideas and unfamiliar practices (Al Ariss, 2014; Reiche, 2007). On the other hand, well prepared staff and thoughtfully managed placements offer the potential to maximize the learning opportunities and therefore the return on the sizeable investment associated with expatriate placements. Decoding how that can be achieved seems especially pertinent given the growing use of expatriates as change agents, with intentions to infuse knowledge and skills into host organizations.

Taking this as a starting point, our research aimed to uncover what host organizations and HCNs experienced when hosting an expatriate, and how they prepared in order to make the most of the expatriates' knowledge and expertise in the limited time they have with them.

How the Study Was Conducted

Consistent with the study's objectives, we focused our analysis on 'typical cases' of organizations that operate in multiple industries and contexts and that host expatriates with objectives centered particularly on learning and knowledge exchange. This was not easy – most expatriate assignments have a bundle of objectives that overshadow the 'organizational development' role. To overcome this, we identified 30 organizations that use external expatriates specifically to develop the capabilities of local offices through improved structures, policies and systems, as well as staff development. Thus, the external expatriates' roles were unambiguously, and in most cases exclusively, development-focused. By 'external expatriates', we mean expatriates recruited externally by the organization rather than those transferred from within the head office or other business unit of the same organization. In these cases, expatriates' knowledge and expertise needed to transcend organizational, as well as cultural, borders to be successfully embedded in the host organization staff and systems. The developmental opportunities provided by these expatriates were akin to those arising when an external (foreign) consultant is embedded in a host organization for an extended period; the

sort of environment where the capture and retention of the visitors' expertise is paramount. We also sought organizations working in a context where building the capabilities of local staff was central to the business culture and likely to be widely embraced. To achieve this, the first author travelled to Vietnam, one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia Pacific region (Euromonitor International, 2018b; World Bank, 2017) and home to rising numbers of expatriates (Việt Nam News, 2017) who are recruited (mainly from the West) to build local knowledge and expertise.

Vietnam presents an interesting research context. It is beyond the scope of this article to pay justices to its multidimensionality and richness; instead, we will touch upon a few features that are important to our study and that respondents referred to. It is essential to emphasize that Vietnamese culture and business practices reflect idiosyncratic combinations of external and internal forces that, collectively, defy easy description or comparison (Ralston, Terpstra-Tong, Maignan, Napier, & Nguyen, 2006; Thang, Rowley, Quang, & Warner, 2007). The country has been shaped by Chinese Confucianism, French colonialism, Soviet-era socialism, and more recently Western capitalism. Vietnamese organizations have a record of blending foreign practices with local conditions and traditions (Quang & Thang, 2004; Zhu & Verstraetan, 2013). Among the features believed to have an influence on how HCNs think and behave are Confucian traits like high regard for loyalty, tradition, and stability (Borton, 2000; Meyer, Tran, & Nguyen, 2006), respect for hierarchy and status (Borton, 2000) and eschewing interpersonal conflict in favor of harmony (Ralston et al., 2006). Other important cultural characteristics include an orientation toward collectivist values manifested through strong and clearly delineated in-group bonds, high regard for personal relationships, indirect and context-dependent communication, and saving and giving 'face' to others (Meyer et al., 2006; Zhu, Collins, Weber, & Benson, 2008). At the same time, changes in cultural values and organizational behaviors have been associated with economic development and openness to foreign products, people and practices (Nguyen, Teo, & Ho, 2018). Young Vietnamese and people in the South are believed to be especially influenced by 'Western' values of individualism and consumerism (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Rowley & Truong, 2009), although at least one empirical study has challenged this assumption (Ralston, Van Thang, & Napier, 1999).

Productivity levels in Vietnamese organizations are improving but are generally poor, hampered by constrained access to technology and skills (Euromonitor International, 2018b), and by employment practices that reflect a mix of socialist traditions (e.g. labor relations) – more common in state-owned enterprises – and Western human resource management approaches, more evident in hiring and training practices and in privately-owned enterprises (Zhu et al., 2008). Despite this, it is worth noting that the Vietnamese government remains an important influence on business activity. The economy combines central planning and market-oriented features (Kerkvliet, 2018). While central government influence on business practice has diminished (SarDesai, 2005) and is hampered by the comparatively large number of relatively autonomous provincial/municipal administrative units (Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2018) – 63 provinces compared to just 34 in all of China – the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam controls many aspects of business practices. Economic and political freedoms are constrained (Euromonitor International, 2018a; Reuters, 2019). Moreover, while declining substantially in recent years (Nhan Dhan Online, 2018), the number and relative power of State-owned enterprises remains an important part of the economic landscape (Zhu & Purnell, 2006), especially in sectors involving natural resources and telecommunications.

We applied several sampling criteria when identifying and choosing the case organizations. First, all had to host expatriate placements that focused on developing the organization and its HCNs – we searched for organizations that made this focus clear and

explicit. At the same time, we wanted our cases to have variety in terms of their geographical dispersion and industry in which they operated, to have a proven record hosting external expatriates, and to have overseen a diversity of placements in terms of expatriates' professions and areas of expertise.

A Hanoi-based associate helped us recruit organizations in Vietnam by making contact with managers and passing on Vietnamese-language information sheets, after which we were able to confer directly with managers and employees. We also received help tracking down expatriates from an international agency that had worked with the bulk of organizations in question by providing recruitment and selection advice and services for hiring expatriates (e.g. recruiting and short-listing candidates against host organizations' selection criteria). From this, we were able to negotiate participation from 30 organizations satisfying these criteria (of 38 that were approached), most based in or around Hà Nội (Hanoi) and Đà Nẵng (Da Nang).

The sample organizations operated in a range of industries – from health to forestry to engineering – and included corporate, non-government and government organizations. Most organizations were staffed predominantly by HCNs working with a single expatriate at any one time, although small numbers of other expatriates did work in some organizations for periods of time.

The expatriate placements were equally diverse, comprising a mix of knowledge-intensive professions, including marketers and managers, scientists and speech therapists, and economists and educators. The placements ranged from nine to 42 months (mean 17.5 months). The common characteristic of all, however, was the organizational development focus of the expatriates and the host organizations' desire to capitalize on this during the expatriate assignment. Studying these types of organizations allowed us to gain relatively unimpeded insights into practices intended to take advantage of the expatriates' expertise. It also removed

elements that may inhibit organizational development in other settings where this objective was less prominent.

We conducted 43 interviews – 20 with expatriates and 23 with HCNs. Six of the latter were senior executives of host organizations; they oversaw expatriates and HCN workers. All had vast experience hosting and managing several external expatriates, ranging from two to eight (mean 3.74) across a period that averaged 33 months of sustained contact with expatriates. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, rendering nearly 300,000 words for analysis. We were also able to study various organizational policy documents that included training schedules, job descriptions, staff guidelines, orientation programs, and end-of-assignment evaluations, and to discuss the outcomes of our findings with managers of these organizations.

Numerous stages of content analysis and validation led us from over 400 pages of raw data to the findings we report in this article. This involved multiple readings of interview transcripts and organizational documents, and extracting relevant themes over a 24-month period of data coding, reflection, discussion, and distillation. We initially used the expatriate lifecycle (i.e. issues and processes prior to and after expatriates' arrival in the host organization) as an organizing framework against which to map the various HCN experiences and organizational initiatives. As our analysis progressed, this crystallized in the five aggregated themes presented in the next section.

In all cases, we sought to validate our findings via triangulating within and across individual sources (including informant category), data source (interview/document) and organizational category (including location and sector). To ensure the validity of our analysis, we conducted deviant case searches for each theme and member checks with staff from all 30 case study organizations. Managers of two organizations were contacted after initial data collection to seek clarification of parts of interview transcripts and additional supporting documents. The fact that some of the organizations we studied have already begun sharing the

practices reported here as part of their staff orientation programs, gives us confidence in the conclusions. In effect, our findings may represent a 'wish list' of what host organizations would do if they had the luxury of structuring and managing expatriate assignments for the sole benefit of the host organization's development.

Findings: Five Key Lessons about How HCNs Learn from Expatriate Assignments

Our analysis led us to identify five themes that permeated the way host organizations managed the local side of expatriation, and that were generally perceived as contributing favorably to the success of these expatriate placements. We summarize these in Table 1 and elaborate on them further below. Each theme is illustrated with examples from the case study organizations, including reflections by host organization managers, HCNs and expatriates.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Finding #1: Host Organizations Prepare Carefully in Advance to Learn from Expatriates

All 30 organizations were fastidious in their awareness of the opportunities that the expatriate placement offered them, and implemented preparatory initiatives to configure their offices, people and systems before the expatriates' arrival. Lead times varied due to externalities like visa processing times and expatriates' prior work schedules. Nonetheless, most host organizations began their preparations well before the successful candidate was selected, and in most cases at least four months before arrival.

Although no manager actually used the term 'learning capacity' we believe that it best encapsulates the state of readiness these organizations aimed to achieve. By 'learning capacity', we mean the ability of the organization to benefit from the expatriates' presence and the potential learning that this provides. When we sought feedback on our interim findings, one manager observed: '*It's true. The organization doesn't just want another set of hands. We want something more*'.

Organizations' interest in learning capacity was formalized with the creation of the expatriates' job descriptions, which invariably referenced learning or development in one form or another. The following are typical exemplars:

> *To increase the [local organization's] capacity to both improve existing resources and provide and develop relevant information and communication services that match the on-going strategic change of the Center.*
> *To develop and train staff in database systems.*
> *To provide support and advice to a team of Vietnamese jurists working in the areas of labor law, workplace cooperation and labor dispute resolution.*

Supporting these formal objectives, a prominent intervention by all 30 organizations was to surround the expatriate with staff able and motivated to capitalize on the learning opportunities that expatriates' presence provided. Several organizations hired or promoted local staff with particular characteristics and abilities that made them compatible counterparts to learn from the expatriates' expertise. In some organizations, this was effectively a work-shadowing role with HCNs as protégés focused on learning from the expatriate 'mentor'. One Vietnamese CEO who had overseen 10 expatriate assignments explained:

> *I think that's what we learned from the early days, when we just threw the expatriate into a team and then you have a general supervisor but you don't assign a particular staff that is working alongside or supporting that expatriate ... it needs someone to really help and work alongside them.*

Because most expatriates were poorly versed in Vietnamese culture and language, most commonly it was the counterparts' bilingualism and/or prior cross-cultural experiences that were prominent selection criteria. One benefit of this skill was that it helped HCNs disseminate the expatriates' ideas and expertise to other HCNs within the host organization. In some cases, compatibility between the counterpart and expatriate involved finding the right combination of professional expertise to facilitate this. For instance, one health-based international non-governmental organization in Da Nang province promoted an Information Science graduate, fluent in Vietnamese and English, to work with an expatriate health professional. The reason?

She was more open to the need for changing the way that the organization treated patients than some of the more senior rehabilitation staff, and would serve as a good mediator to explain and champion the techniques introduced by the expatriate. According to the Director:

We assign specific staff to work along with expatriates during their placement. I think that also affects the value that the expatriate can contribute or local staff can learn ... this is the expertise that we really need, we help them do the best that they can, and everybody can benefit.

Several organizations took steps to upskill more distal HCN staff to be able to absorb the expatriates' expertise. Managers discussed a range of pre-arrival briefings and training interventions that were of value. Those included informing HCNs about individual expatriates and how to work with them, and scenario training to help HCNs manage cross-cultural conflict situations. The most extreme preparation that we encountered was a textile design and vocational training college necessitating all staff to complete a six-month English language-training program prior to the commencement of a single 12-month expatriate placement. The program, funded by the organization, required all staff to attend after-hours lessons and to achieve a minimum grade. Staff attendance and performance was attached to the organization's performance management system. While this was a point of disquiet for some local staff with whom we spoke, it nevertheless shows the length to which some organizations go in order to make the most of hosting expatriates. For the same reasons, the Hanoi office of an international public health agency provided training to HCNs who would be working with expatriates in ways to '*engage the expatriates into the organization.*' A different organization (disability services) surveyed staff about the main learning that they felt was important to gain from the expatriate and structured the placement so that HCNs would benefit from expatriate's knowledge. The manager explained:

That is our aim because when you work with expatriates you learn as much as possible so that when they leave you already learn something from them so you can actually (apply it to) the program without them. So that's our aim. It's not just they are working side-by-side with you all the time on a daily basis and then they leave ... it's really about improving the local staff's skill.

Interestingly, host organizations' efforts to prepare expatriates tended to focus on their cross-cultural adjustment, with cultural and language training programs varying from cursory to comprehensive (e.g. four-five days of intensive Vietnamese language and culture-specific orientation). This was typically outsourced and conducted at the commencement of the placement, combined with an (internally-managed) socialization program. Two organizations offered ongoing language training for expatriates, while several expatriates reported undertaking language training of their own accord. Despite this, a number of HCNs suggested more was preferable. Pertinently, while the knowledge sharing focus of the role was an important part of the organizations' selection processes, none of the organizations provided training for expatriates in skills relating to mentoring, feedback, knowledge sharing techniques, or cross-cultural elements of these. One expatriate, who believed better preparation may have helped him share his skills more effectively, observed: '*I'm sure I said and did things which did not fit in with cultural norms. [...] Developing local staff is the most difficult thing; it's very much learning on the job'.*

Other organizations prepared in different ways. The manager of an anti-corruption advocacy organization who has overseen numerous expatriate placements shared her preparations for an expatriate human resource executive by noting: '*I have in my mind before the expatriate comes, how we should change the flow of information and how decisions would be made'.* She decided to structure opportunities for staff to have '*[m]ore chance to discuss with the expatriate [...] more discussion, more time and better quality [...] sitting in a small area and discussing'.* As these examples show, laying the ground work by establishing a baseline of learning capacity was a well thought through starting point for most host organizations.

Finding #2: HCNs Experience Quite Dramatic Adjustments and Burdens during an

Expatriate Assignment

A second theme evident in the data was that HCNs underwent psychological and behavioral adjustments starting well before the expatriate set foot in their offices. HCNs reported a raft of emotions in the lead up to the expatriates' arrival, ranging from – in their own words – *'excited'* and *'hopeful'* to *'stressed', 'uncertain', 'worried'* and *'confused'*. Two contrasting emotional states underpinned these feelings. The first was excitement about the opportunities that working with an expatriate might present – for HCN staff this was the learning opportunities, for managers it was the improved performance possibilities. The second was anxiety associated primarily with cross-language and/or cross-status interaction, and the potential embarrassment or confusion arising from this. Several HCNs reported experiencing simultaneously excitement and anxiety, suggesting that these were not mutually exclusive emotions.

Most local managers were aware of the emotional responses of their staff, and pointed to several pre-arrival activities intended to offset HCNs' uncertainties. The most common was ensuring staff were informed via regular updates in the lead up to the placement (*'At weekly staff meetings we update everyone about what's happening next'*), and making efforts to reinforce expected benefits the expatriate would bring. Expatriates' résumés were shared and expatriates themselves sometimes connected to office meetings via video-conference before their arrival, an initiative that allayed anxieties for HCNs and the expatriate. Some organizations took this further by involving HCNs in the process of recruiting and selecting expatriates, while others involved local staff to scope expatriates' job descriptions. For at least one organization, involving local staff in interviewing expatriates came as a result of previous unsatisfactory placements. One organization shared with us an 'information guide for expatriates' that had been prepared by local staff, detailing useful practical and cultural information. According to the manager, this served the dual objectives of supporting

expatriates' adjustment and helping placate HCNs' anxieties. Importantly, it also gave HCNs a stake in the expatriates' success.

According to HCNs, once the expatriate arrived, the psychological adjustments of working with the expatriate also impinged their productivity in noticeable ways, most prominently in the early stages. Fatigue, tension and delays were common consequences of HCNs adjusting to working with expatriates. Some HCNs reported frustrations at devoting energy to establish relationships with expatriates *'who would be leaving again in six months'*. The most cognitively taxing behavioral change was being required to communicate in a non-native language for large periods of the day (in this case, English), something that was recognized as both a blessing (for the learning opportunities it provided) and a curse (for the interruptions, frustrations and misunderstandings that it exacerbated). One HCN, describing how she and other HCNs experienced the early stages of an expatriate placement, revealed:

> *I'm not really sure that HCNs can recognize the benefits [of expatriates' suggestions] because at first they're just thinking about how comfortable they are working with a foreigner. They want to be comfortable, they just want to do their job [...] (but) they are really stressed and tired. They use a lot of energy.*

Interacting with expatriates required HCNs to make other changes too, including modifying their work schedule to suit the availability or habits of expatriates, or being willing to communicate more bluntly and informally, something that they attributed primarily to the expatriates' cultural preferences for more direct (low-context) communication. Although initially uncomfortable communicating this way, more than one HCN reported that this was – in the words of one senior executive – *'now my characteristic when working with other people'*. In contrast, other HCNs who were less linguistically adept reported actively avoiding expatriates in some situations (e.g. lunch rooms) or withholding information from expatriates if they lacked confidence communicating the right degree of nuance. Several expatriates attributed such counterproductive behaviors to culture or a relationship breakdown, but such issues highlight the importance of some of the preparation activities that we alerted to earlier.

Most substantially, HCN counterparts were also expected to take on a variety of additional roles that came directly from supporting expatriates, the overwhelming majority of which fell outside HCNs' formal job descriptions. For most HCNs, these additional roles contributed substantially to the demands of their job and increased stress levels. One manager of a disability services and health care organization described his role mediating between local health workers and a Western expatriate over contrasting attitudes towards appropriate health care that stretched across several weeks. In describing the toll it took on him, he says:

> Sometimes it's hard to accept and hard for both sides to come to the right decision, the same decision. Sometimes we talk like over two hours and then, for the next week, we are all too tired.

Importantly, most of these contributions went largely unrecognized by HCNs' employers – a point acknowledged in our interviews with managers. All 23 HCNs shared examples of ways that they had assisted the expatriate acclimatize to or cope in their community, from motorbike shopping to settling disputes with landlords, which fell outside their job descriptions. In contrast, just three managers we interviewed had designed expatriate support activities into HCNs' formal work roles.

Although organizations were less diligent in measuring the impact of their efforts to manage the adjustment of their local staff – a malady common to expatriate assignments across the board – most felt that these adjustments served valuable roles in facilitating both the expatriates' adjustment and the HCNs' professional development. From the HCNs' perspective, while they recognized the difficulties expatriates encountered when entering a foreign culture, they were adamant that adjustment was a two-way process. In the words of a HCN: 'both sides have to compromise in the ways that work best for them.'

Finding #3: Mutual Trust between Expatriates and HCNs is a Pre-requisite for HCNs' Learning

Managers were adamant about the need to put in place structures to ensure an initial period of relationship- and trust-building between the expatriates and key HCN staff in the early stages of the placement. This was also the principle that was most strongly endorsed by all expatriates and HCNs. Expatriates associated the emphasis on relationship-building with the collectivist nature of Vietnamese culture. Some went as far as attributing the failure of particular projects or relationships to their initial impatience in wanting to start making an impact too soon, before investing sufficiently in establishing trust with HCN colleagues. An expatriate business adviser in the tourism industry cautioned:

> It's all about the relationship. Nothing matters, none of your job matters, until you've got the relationship right ... I realized that I've got a good relationship with individual people when they started telling me things, like the gossip around the office.

HCNs also saw a strong relationship as central to their learning from expatriates. When asked to characterize the most effective working relationships with expatriates, metaphors like 'family' and 'brothers' were representative responses. Others described 'a mentoring relationship.' Numerous HCNs acknowledged that relationship-building was at the heart of their willingness to help expatriates settle in, to devote extra time to socializing with expatriates, and to adapt their practices to suit expatriates. A Vice Director stressed:

> The most important thing is the relationship; to establish the relationship that we have as friends. We believe in each other, we trust each other. And when the expatriate is a member of the family, if they come to my house, they know who we are. They understand me, they can know my daily life and they can see how I live with the other people, and they can understand me.

An important plank in this trust-building was a formal orientation program and socialization activities for the expatriate that involved HCNs and that covered features related to the local culture, business environment, industry/sector, and organization. HCNs were often tasked with planning these, and were regularly used as ongoing 'cultural informants' for expatriates in the early stages of the placement. To supplement this, managers sought to curate structured opportunities for expatriates to learn more about the work of other staff (and vice

versa). A manager who has overseen multiple expatriate placements had a philosophy of involving expatriates at the very start of a placement:

> ... in everything that the organization is doing, in meetings, in discussions, in planning, to make them feel they're part of a team. And then local staff feel that, okay, there's a new team member, you need to really consider them as a part of the whole team rather than just a foreigner coming in. I encouraged a recent expatriate to set aside time for weekly staff meetings so she can hear what other teams are doing, even though it has nothing to do with her, and she can share what she is doing with them ...

Another effective approach to support trust consistently mentioned by both expatriates and HCNs was creating opportunities for social interactions. Managers were aware of the benefit that arose from providing opportunities for their staff to socialize with expatriates during the trust-building phase. The types of non-work activities, especially prominent in the early stages of the placement, varied greatly and included socializing during meals, parties, excursions, and cultural events – sometimes sponsored by the organization but more often volunteered and arranged by the HCNs. Some organizations planned business trips that partnered expatriates with HCN personnel. According to the managers we interviewed, the trips were designed to enable more organic knowledge sharing between HCNs and expatriates, and to solidify relationships and trust that they saw as foundational to HCNs' learning. Such excursions were reported by expatriates and HCNs alike as being particularly beneficial. Of note is that, on the whole, HCNs tended *not* to associate these interactions with the stresses that hampered some other forms of contact with expatriate (*'It's enjoyable. And she feels the same [...] we can understand each other more'*).

While strong friendships outside the workplace are recognized as helpful for an expatriate's enculturation and success in a new country (Claus, Maletz, Casoinic, & Pierson, 2015), the consequences for HCNs are seldom acknowledged. Yet the HCNs we interviewed identified their non-work interactions with expatriates as one of the most effective lubricants of learning. As they described it, the comfort and confidence that they garnered from socializing, questioning, and joking with expatriates about non-work matters in social settings

fed directly into their confidence to be similarly forthright with expatriates in relation to important work issues. It also helped that, in social settings in the host culture, HCNs were typically 'the experts' and expatriates were the novices; a subtle yet important inversion of the regular power dynamics that dominated their workplace exchanges. A medical coordinator who worked with several expatriate medical professionals explained:

> If we have a good relationship, it helps a lot in our work, in our job. Of course, if we understand each other it means the number of conflicts will be reduced, but (at the same time) if we have a different opinion we will talk with each other, feel free to share, try to find out the best solution, not keep it in our mind and then not speak to each other.

On top of this, many of the learning outcomes that HCNs viewed as most valuable, like a deeper understanding of contrasting professional practices between Vietnam and other countries, more openness to differences, and greater self-awareness came from social interactions in cafeterias, restaurants, or each other's homes where learning was not the intended objective. The bedrock of this trust building was the desire for managers of the host organizations to 'in-group' the expatriates as quickly and smoothly as possible. By 'in-group', we mean the process of making the expatriate feel – and be perceived by local staff as being – an accepted and valued part of the host organization. One Vietnamese respondent used the term *'crossing the line'* to capture the sentiments of expatriates gradually transitioning from an outsider to *'one of us'*. Expatriates spoke fondly about the *'inclusive organizational culture that local managers were able to create'*, and tended to attribute its importance to the highly collectivist values of Vietnamese organizations (Zhu et al., 2008). Host organization managers were less culturally deterministic, but shared several approaches that they used to ease this transition for expatriates, from involving expatriates in traditions, celebrations and office rituals, even when conducted in Vietnamese language, to a shared orientation program that focused on HCNs as much as expatriate staff (described further in Finding 5). One organization took the effort to order a custom-made work uniform so an expatriate would feel a 'part of the team.' The uniform required alteration to suit the expatriate's body shape, took several days to

organize and, as far as we could gather, was never worn professionally. This effort was made even though the uniforms were designed to be worn by some service staff only, not those in the expatriate's position. Its utility, therefore, came not from its function as a garment but in the symbolism inherent in its offering.

Finding #4: Most of HCNs' Learning Occurs Informally via Interacting with Expatriates and Observing How They Work

When asked what they felt their major contribution to the host organization had been throughout their placement, most expatriates zeroed in on technical knowledge or skills, detailing the frequency or success of workshops that they had convened, the training programs that they had delivered, or the policy documents, databases and office procedures that they had painstakingly prepared for the host organization. In expatriates' minds, these 'formal' knowledge programs and artefacts were the clearest evidence of their placement's success. Yet the perceptions of the local staff and managers were somewhat different.

HCNs certainly appreciated and benefitted from formal training activities. However, from their perspective the most valued mode of learning was experiential, arising from day-to-day interactions with expatriates. This preference for 'learning on the job' rather than 'learning in the training room' transcended organization type and sector. For instance, we asked HCNs to describe particularly valuable specific learning episodes that they had experienced during their time with the expatriate. Only 5% of these occurred during formal training, and just 20% occurred during other activities that expatriates intended to be developmental for local staff (e.g. planned developmental feedback, or structured consultations where knowledge transfer was the main purpose).

Another significant way HCNs took advantage of expatriates' placement was through opportunities to informally seek their advice or counsel on work issues. HCNs appreciated the access to expertise without the formal power structures that framed their interactions with supervisors. Typical of many responses were the observations of one manager of a professional association resource center, who pointed out that the most productive relationship with expatriates was when '*I feel that we're not supervised in what we do. When we have something we don't know, you just come to ask them*'. In short, our results provide support for the view that expatriates are often most effective transmitters of knowledge and skills when they just get on with their job of working with local staff, helping them solve problems, being available for questions, and role modelling professional workplace practices.

The type of learning outcomes that HCNs attained from these approaches varied. All respondents reported enhancing their domain-specific knowledge and practices, which tended to be the category most clearly articulated in expatriates' job descriptions. However, myriad additional, and in some cases unexpected, learning outcomes were reported and highly-valued by HCNs. The most frequently mentioned category of learning outcomes we label 'personal development', which comprised capabilities like flexibility, self-confidence and openness to different perspectives. Another large group of responses addressed proficiency in 'role management', like having a more professional attitude toward one's job, client relations or improved organizations skills. Several HCNs reported strengthening their communication and interpersonal skills.

What did the host organizations do to ensure that they could capitalize on these informal learning opportunities? As well as the strategic use of designated HCN counterparts (Finding 1), HCN managers became active in facilitating and encouraging interactions and learning opportunities that resulted from such interactions. Of particular interest to some managers were HCNs who may have been resistant to some of the expatriates' approaches to work, or ideas for change. One manager explained about a particular HCN:

He's a doctor and rehabilitation specialist. But in a way I consider him old school because the rehabilitation medicine that we learn is way back and it's very theory-based and not practical. So I do encourage them to interact with the expatriate a lot.

Similarly, the head of a training college described the evolution of regular informal meetings between HCNs and expatriates involving '*nearly 40-50 people*' where HCNs could '*share ideas and get the expatriate's advice*' in an environment that suited HCNs' learning. Several host organizations focused on the physical office environment by bringing in additional resources or particular equipment that expatriates could utilize and demonstrate for local staff in their work units. One organization went as far as reconfiguring the seating arrangements prior to the expatriate's arrival so the expatriate would be located centrally and easily accessible for consultation, feedback and role modelling opportunities for as many local staff as possible. Two managers reported receiving requests from local staff to use workspaces in the same room as the expatriate so that they could observe and learn. Similarly, a project manager explained efforts by the local organization to ensure staff could learn informally by:

[...] allocating staff who work in the expatriate's department (to) all sit in the one room, so they can share any time [...] there's like a learning exchange.

Finding #5: Host Organization Managers Actively Manage Expatriate-HCN Relationships

A final prominent feature of the organizations we studied was the relatively strong 'hands on' role played by local managers in overseeing expatriates' relationships with local staff. One of the defining elements of this was the degree to which they took an active interest in facilitating and supporting the relationships between expatriates and HCNs. Managers regularly set up or participated in meetings between expatriates and local staff, became actively involved in helping to resolve differences of opinion or misunderstandings, saw part of their role to steer or guide the relationship, and actively championed the contributions or developments that emerged from these expatriate-HCN collaborations within the wider organization. In fact, all the managers we interviewed acknowledged that they devoted more time to managing local

staff members' relationships with expatriates than other relationships. One manager explained: '*From day one maybe you spend serious time, several days, just to explore and plan with each other. That could expedite the process [later on]'*, while another observed:

It's so important because of the language and cultural differences. Sometimes it is easy to create misunderstanding. We need to utilize the expatriates, we want to create a good environment for them to work and try to utilize the time they work for us.

A key reason for managers' hands-on style was to allay HCNs' lack of confidence in managing the interpersonal side of their relationship, a substantial cause of the anxieties reported earlier (Finding 2). Two related factors come into play here: HCNs' lack of confidence navigating interpersonal cross-cultural relationships, and a cultural preference for conflict-avoidance that HCNs felt was at odds with their expatriate counterparts. Expatriates, however, expressed more reservations about managers' interventions. In short, expatriates were very supportive of the role of managers advocating for their work ('*He was very personable [...] such a champion for (my work)*'), but they tended to support the principle that expatriate-HCN collaborations needed guidance to build trust, but that this could be left to the dyads once the foundations had been established.

More traditional human resource management practices were also turned on their heads. Several host organization managers put their own twist on formal orientation and socialization programs for expatriates by supplementing these with a 'shared orientation' that brought together key HCN staff and expatriates aiming to ensure that everyone understood each other's roles and objectives. Some managers used these meetings to reinforce expectations about each other's work and to agree on processes for dealing with conflict or misunderstandings. At least two commenced this via video chat prior to an expatriate's arrival, and in one case it was introduced in response to the failure of a previous expatriate who had unrealistic expectations ('*The most important thing we want to avoid is (them) feeling stressed out when they come to work here, (so) we give them an alarm, really. It's good to have the meeting with them so they*

know what we are doing, we know what to try to avoid'). According to HCNs, this shared understanding with expatriates was one of the primary contributors to making the placement beneficial for their professional development. One HCN manager explained this as '*a learning opportunity for local staff, a factor of career development for our staff.*'

Pertinently, in most cases supervisors' support was planned and structured by the supervisor rather than responsive to HCNs' requests (just three HCNs and one expatriates reported reaching out to supervisors in helping to manage the relationship). The vast experience of these organizations hosting expatriates suggests that this 'top down' approach may have evolved over time. Managers approached this in very different ways; for instance, from highly structured ('*We meet every Monday afternoon at 2:00pm. It's an official regular meeting'*) to highly responsive ('*It takes us some time to really understand and see how his experience in (his home country) can adopt into this policy system in Vietnam'*). The availability and capabilities of managers also influenced how these roles were enacted; notably, the managers who were perceived as most proficient (English language) communicators were those most enthusiastic about being directly involved, whereas two relied on other staff members to assist managing and supporting the expatriate-HCN relationship.

Finally, in spite of the care that went into designing expatriates' job descriptions, these were readily modified – in some cases quite radically – at various times during the expatriates placement, to the chagrin of some expatriates ('*There wasn't a realistic sense of what (we) could do'; 'It wasn't very clear what (the changes) meant … they needed somebody with the experience in the disability section and around policy making (but) I didn't have much experience (in that)'*). For local managers, these modifications aimed to take advantage of the expatriates' strengths (or overcome weaknesses), to suit changing circumstances, or to better address the compatibility of the expatriates' and HCNs' skills. By way of example, one manager gradually expanded the expatriates' and HCNs' roles as they became better adjusted

to working together. Another – after extended consultation and more than 6 months into a two-year placement – re-wrote the job description of an expatriate human rights lawyer to better match her skills to the organization's needs. The manager of a multinational disability services provider initially hired an expatriate health worker to develop a training curriculum and conduct formal staff training in a '*lecture-style*' setting, but soon realized that the organization would benefit most from the expatriate doing '*home treatment to patients and so do hands-on training for the practitioners*'. While this was an unexpected disruption, he observed:

> *I thought, we need to shift so that she can do the best, and so that we can benefit the most from her experience […] (we) need to be flexible and adjusting along the way.*

Across the Key Findings: The Host Organization Lifecycle

Our empirical investigation of the strategies and practices employed by host organizations to prepare for and manage expatriate assignments reveals experiences of local organizations and staff not discussed in detail in the existing literature, and thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of HCNs and host organizations. We provide evidence of HCNs being simultaneously engaged and disrupted by expatriate placements; hungry to take advantage of the opportunities to develop professionally that come with the expatriates' presence while simultaneously facing their own burdens, anxieties, and frustrations that can destabilize their work (and non-work) patterns.

A key insight from our study is the extent to which host organizations take seriously the planning and commitment needed to extract benefit from expatriate assignments. Rather than assuming that learning will somehow naturally transpire, host organizations configure and manage both HCNs and expatriates to help orchestrate interactions that are beneficial to the organization's development. While it has been assumed that self-initiated expatriates 'receive no organizational support' coping with the host culture and organization (McDonnell &

Scullion, 2013, p. 144), we found that, for expatriates with organizational development objectives, a suite of activities were in place to support their assignment success.

As a means of clarifying the breadth of practices used by host organizations, Figure 1 maps the main activities outlined in Findings #1-5 into three chronological phases: (a) enhancing the learning capacity of the host organization and staff, (b) facilitating trust between HCNs and expatriates, and (c) curating interactions between HCNs and expatriates that facilitate knowledge exchange and learning. The figure relates these phases to periods prior to and after the expatriates' arrival (left and right sides respectively). It identifies some of the primary practices that organizations associate with each phase, and which form the basis of the themes reported earlier. Given the vast experience that the case study organizations have hosting organizational development expatriates, we posit that Figure 1 presents a practical 'host organization lifecycle' for getting the most out of expatriate placements. It articulates activities that, in combination, contribute directly or indirectly to the ability, the motivation, and/or the opportunity of their local staff to learn from an expatriate's presence.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The relatively under-studied nature of HCNs' and host organizations' experiences renders our findings particularly insightful for organizations hosting placements with an overt learning and development agenda. In the same way that human resource departments plan, support and monitor expatriates' experiences carefully to avoid failure, our data – summarized in Figure 1 – elucidate similar practices that can be deployed at different stages of the host-organization lifecycle in order to extract the most benefit from the expatriate assignment. Collectively, these suggest that HCNs working closely with expatriates may require as much support and consideration as the expatriates themselves.

Implications for Host Organizations and Expatriates

In our view the most pressing and simplest improvement for expatriate-using organizations is to begin by acknowledging the many burdens, stresses, and adjustments that an expatriate's presence can place on HCNs (Findings #1, 2) and on managers of local offices, who may need to more actively involve themselves in managing the intercultural interpersonal relationships between HCNs and expatriates (Findings #1, 5). Related to this, host organizations would be wise to recognize – and perhaps measure – the (usually hidden) benefits that their investment in expatriate placements is returning, and to ensure appropriate behaviors are instilled in their expatriate cadre through recruitment, training, rewards, and other performance management levers. This involves considering HCNs' experiences when designing and budgeting expatriate assignments, including being cognizant of the consequences – both favorable and counter-productive – of HCNs' adjustment and extra-role behaviors (Finding #2). While efforts have been made to progress models that measure the return on investment of expatriate placements (McNulty & Inkson, 2013; Moeller, 2014), none of these, to our knowledge, consider the direct burdens, anxieties and opportunities experienced by HCNs that we document in this study.

If the case study organizations have blind spots in how they *'manage in order to learn'* from expatriate placements, the primary area for improvement, identified at the very bottom of Figure 1, relates to the support and resources required to ensure HCNs are fully equipped to take on the many additional demands that go along with hosting expatriates (Finding #2). These would include taking steps to train, recruit and/or prepare HCN staff who can effectively build trust with, support, and learn from expatriates, and who have the ability and motivation to champion and share this new knowledge with others in the organization (Findings #1-4). On balance, host organizations would also benefit from formalizing these activities as part of HCNs' work plans and, potentially, career trajectories. We see additional value in providing HCNs more structured support to cope with their own adjustment (Finding #2), including providing access to emotional and informational support, and taking steps to remove

extraneous stresses and anxieties from HCNs, both prior to expatriates' arrival and during the important phase of trust-building with them. This would be similar to what the expatriation adjustment literature suggests for expatriates themselves (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005).

Our findings also hint at simple yet effective ways for expatriates to better prepare for their assignments and to better support host organizations' objectives rather than just their own success. To do this, expatriates would need to develop awareness that their very presence in the host organization can be (and often is) stress-invoking for HCNs (Finding #2), and to understand and appreciate that even mundane interactions with HCNs can be (and typically are) salient learning episodes (Finding #4). As much as expatriates prepare their formal presentations and pre-plan their encounters, HCNs found their spontaneous and accidental interactions with expatriates far more valuable (Finding #4). On this point, expatriates should be aware that their demeanor and professional standards are continually being observed and scrutinized by local staff keen to learn. Successful expatriates, therefore, will be those who are comfortable role modelling exemplary professional and ethical standards, participate in hands-on collaborations with HCNs, and are available for HCNs to observe, consult, and imitate. Because of this, we suggest that there should be more targeted pre-departure training that accentuates expatriates' interpersonal competencies and relationship building skills.

We emphasize that while our recommendations may seem onerous, especially when they relate to building on parallel support activities already in place for expatriates' adjustment and performance, there are important complementarities in terms of the management of HCN and expatriates. In other words, efforts to support expatriates' adjustment and performance may also assist HCNs' adjustment and learning and vice versa. Examples of this include ensuring the quality of the expatriate-HCN relationship (Finding #3) (van Bakel et al., 2016), making use of bilingual HCN protégés keen to learn and able to mediate expatriates' interactions with

local staff (Findings #1, 2), and involving HCNs in supporting expatriates' pre-arrival adjustment (Finding #1).

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Our focus on externally-hired, self-initiated expatriates and development-focused expatriate assignments conspired to curate specific conditions and a distinctive context, and we are aware this is likely to limit the generalizability of our findings. At the same time, we emphasize that these types of expatriate assignments are becoming increasingly common as the demographics, destinations, and objectives of expatriate assignments morph toward placements in developing markets, with knowledge- and learning-focused objectives, and comprising self-initiated expatriates (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). We used multiple cases, conducted an extensive number of interviews with both HCNs and expatriates, and analyzed a wide-ranging array of documents in order to increase the robustness of our analysis. Yet, we are convinced that future studies examining host organizations' practices with different forms of expatriate assignments and/or in different contexts are needed in order to understand better what goes on in host organizations prior to expatriates' arrival and during their assignments.

We also note that several features of the approaches that our 30 case organizations took – for instance, the efforts to 'in-group' expatriates, or the very high priority placed on relationship building – are likely exacerbated by some of Vietnam's cultural characteristics mentioned earlier. While some of our respondents felt that the preference for learning informally reflected a uniquely Vietnamese style, this pattern was consistent with other studies we have conducted in similar organizational environments in more than 40 other countries (reference omitted for review purposes) and so appear not to be unique to HCNs from one nation; rather, our findings may be especially pertinent to contexts influenced by Confucian philosophies and collectivist values like many in East and South-East Asia. We note that while

cultural contexts may amplify the importance of some features, the principles we derive from these cases are increasingly pertinent as expatriate assignments become more learning-focused and knowledge-oriented. We also caution that Vietnam's political and economic ecosystem presents a rather distinctive operating environment for these organizations. This includes direct or indirect government influence on the operations of government agencies and, in the case of NGOs, the State-civil society nexus (Vu, 2017; Zhu & Purnell, 2006). While no respondents commented directly on these, the extent to which State-directed policies predispose practices of these organizations or respondents is unknown.

Moreover, while the purpose of our investigation was to identify the practices intended to foster HCN learning, the research design did not allow us to examine the efficacy of particular activities or the programs as a whole. Thus, studies that examine the impact of HCNs' preparation activities on HCNs' work productivity and/or performance are an important next step that may allow expatriate-using organizations to target resources toward activities that are most beneficial. In a similar vein, our emphasis on the practices of host organizations left a range of other variables unaccounted for, including expatriates' motivations. As our awareness of the important role of expatriate-host organization 'fit' develops, these features should be considered and their relationships examined.

Notwithstanding these limitations, as a window to the ways in which HCNs experience expatriation, our findings provide opportunities for a range of future theoretical and empirical extensions, as well as a helpful blueprint for organizations to both prepare and manage HCNs and curate successful expatriate placements. While the specific levers that organizations use may vary to suit the particular circumstances in which expatriates are placed, our findings go a long way towards guiding host organizations that want to cushion the arrival of an expatriate, and to assist HCNs to take advantage of the 'expatriate dividend'.

References

Aichhorn, N., & Puck, J. (2017). "I just don't feel comfortable speaking English": Foreign language anxiety as a catalyst for spoken-language barriers in MNCs. *International Business Review, 26*(4), 749–763.

Al Ariss, A. (2014). Voicing experiences and perceptions of local managers: Expatriation in the Arab Gulf. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 25*(14), 1978–1994.

Arp, F., Hutchings, K., & Smith, W. A. (2013). Foreign executives in local organisations: An exploration of differences to other types of expatriates. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research, 1*(3), 312-335.

BGRS. (2016). *Breakthrough to the Future of Global Talent Mobility: 2016 Global Mobility Trends Survey*. Woodridge, IL: Brookfield Global Relocation Services.

Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*(2), 257-281.

Borton, L. (2000). Working in a Vietnamese voice. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 14*(4), 20-29.

Caligiuri, P., & Bonache, J. (2016). Evolving and enduring challenges in global mobility. *Journal of World Business, 51*(1), 127-141.

Claus, L., Maletz, S., Casoinic, D., & Pierson, K. (2015). Social capital and cultural adjustment of international assignees in NGOs: Do support networks really matter? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 26*(20), 2523-2542.

Collings, D. G., & Isichei, M. (2018). The shifting boundaries of global staffing: Integrating global talent management, alternative forms of international assignments and non-employees into the discussion. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 29*(1), 165-187.

Euromonitor International. (2018a). *Business Dynamics: Vietnam*. Retrieved from https://www.portal.euromonitor.com (Last accessed: January 2019)

Euromonitor International. (2018b). *Economy, Fiannce and Trade: Vietnam*. Retrieved from https://www.portal.euromonitor.com (Last accessed: January 2019):

Harvey, M., & Moeller, M. (2009). Expatriate managers: A historical review. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 11*(3), 275-296.

Hong, J. F. L., & Snell, R. S. (2008). Power inequality in cross-cultural learning: The case of Japanese transplants in China. *Asia Pacific Business Review, 14*(2), 253-273.

Kerkvliet, B. J. T. (2018). An approach for analysing state-society relations in Vietnam. *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia, 33*(1), S156-S198.

Kim, H. D., & Tung, R. L. (2013). Opportunities and challenges for expatriates in emerging markets: An exploratory study of Korean expatriates in India. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24*(5), 1029-1050.

Lakshman, S., & Lakshman, C. (2017). The dynamic charge in expatriate roles: Strategy type and stage of internationalization. *Management Decision, 55*(8), 1770-1784.

Law, K. S., Song, L. J., Wong, C.-S., & Chen, D. (2009). The antecedents and consequences of successful localization. *Journal of International Business Studies, 40*, 1359-1373.

McDonnell, A., & Scullion, H. (2013). Self-initiated expatriates' adjustment: A neglected terrain. In V. Vaiman & A. Haslberger (Eds.), *Talent Management of Self-Initiated Expatriates* (pp. 136-155). London: Palgrave McMillan.

McLeod, M. W., & Nguyen, T. D. (2001). *Culture and Customs of Vietnam*. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press.

McNulty, Y., & Inkson, K. (2013). *Managing Expatriates: A Return on Investment Approach*. New York: Business Expert Press.

McNulty, Y., & Selmer, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Research Handbook of Expatriates*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Meyer, K. E., Tran, Y. T. T., & Nguyen, H. V. (2006). Doing business in Vietnam. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 28*(2), 263-290.

Moeller, M. (2014). Examining the philosophy of expatriate return on investment. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 56*(6), 589-591.

Nguyen, D. T. N., Teo, S. T., & Ho, M. (2018). Development of human resource management in Vietnam: A semantic analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management, 35*(1), 241-284.

Nhan Dhan Online. (2018, 19 January). Vietnam sees decline in number of State-owned enterprises. *Nhan Dhan*. Retrieved from http://en.nhandan.com.vn/business/economy/item/5785902-vietnam-sees-decline-in-number-of-state-owned-enterprises.html

Quang, T., & Thang, L. C. (2004). HRM in Vietnam. In P. Budhwar (Ed.), *Managing Human Resources in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 173-199). New York: Routledge.

Ralston, D. A., Terpstra-Tong, J., Maignan, I., Napier, N. K., & Nguyen, V. T. (2006). Vietnam: A cross-cultural comparison of upward influence ethics. *Journal of International Management, 12*(1), 85-105.

Ralston, D. A., Van Thang, N., & Napier, N. K. (1999). A comparative study of the work values of North and South Vietnamese managers. *Journal of International Business Studies, 30*(4), 655-672.

Reiche, B. S. (2007). The effect of international staffing practices on subsidiary staff retention in multinational corporations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 18*(4), 523-536.

Reuters. (2019, 09 January). Vietnam says Facebook violated controversial cybersecurity law. *CNBC Online*. Retrieved from https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/09/vietnam-says-facebook-violated-controversial-cybersecurity-law.html

Riusala, K., & Suutari, V. (2004). International knowledge transfers through expatriation. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 46*(6), 743-770.

Rowley, C., & Truong, Q. (Eds.). (2009). *The Changing Face of Vietnamese Management*. London and New York: Routledge.

SarDesai, D. R. (2005). *Vietnam: Past and Present, 4th edn*. New York: Routledge.

Smale, A., Björkman, I., Ehrnrooth, M., John, S., Mäkelä, K., & Sumelius, J. (2015). Dual values-based organizational identification in MNC subsidiaries: A multilevel study. *Journal of International Business Studies, 46*(7), 761-783.

Suutari, V., Tornikoski, C., & Mäkelä, L. (2012). Career decision making of global careerists. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 23*(16), 3455-3478.

Teagarden, M. B. (2010). Expats, halfpats, glopats, and other emerging forms of international work. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 52*(4), 261-262.

Thang, L. C., Rowley, C., Quang, T., & Warner, M. (2007). To what extent can management practices be transferred between countries?: The case of human resource management in Vietnam. *Journal of World Business, 42*(1), 113-127.

Toh, S. M., & DeNisi, A. S. (2003). Host country national reactions to expatriate pay policies: A model and implications. *Academy of Management Review, 28*(4), 606-621.

van Bakel, M., Gerritsen, M., & van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2016). The importance of relationship quality: Maximizing the impact of expatriate contact with a local host. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 58*(1), 41-54.

Vance, C. M., Andersen, T., Vaiman, V., & Gale, J. (2014). A taxonomy of potential contributions of the host country national local liaison role in global knowledge management. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 56*(2), 173-191.

Vance, C. M., Vaiman, V., & Anderson, T. (2009). The vital liaison role of host country nationals in MNC knowledge management. *Human Resource Management, 48*(4), 649-659.

Varma, A., Aycan, Z., Budhwar, P., Pichler, S., Uygur, U., & Paluch, R. (2016). Host country nationals' support to expatriates: An investigation in Turkey. *European Journal of International Management, 10*(6), 605-623.

Việt Nam News. (2017, 21 June). Number of foreign workers in Việt Nam on the rise. Retrieved from http://vietnamnews.vn/society/378649/number-of-foreign-workers-in-viet-nam-on-the-rise.html#Hb2SjxFrmQgw4UM9.97

Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (2018). The Provincial Competitiveness Index. Retrieved 15 January 2019 http://eng.pcivietnam.org/

Vu, N. A. (2017). Grassroots environmental activism in an authoritarian context: The trees movement in Vietnam. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 28*(3), 1180-1208.

Wong, C. S., & Law, K. S. (1999). Managing localization of human resources in the PRC: A practical model. *Journal of World Business, 34*(1), 26-40.

World Bank. (2017, 13 April 2017). The World Bank in Vietnam: Overview. Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview

Zhu, Y., Collins, N., Weber, M., & Benson, J. (2008). New forms of ownership and human resource practices in Vietnam. *Human Resource Management, 47*(1), 157-176.

Zhu, Y., & Purnell, D. (2006). Multinational NGOs and expatriation: A case study of a NGO in Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Business Review, 12*(4), 529-546.

Zhu, Y., & Verstraetan, M. (2013). Human resource management practices with Vietnamese characteristics: A study of managers' responses. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources, 51*(2), 152-174.

TABLE 1: Summary of key findings

Theme	Features of HCN experience	Prominent organizational activities that supported learning (examples)
1. Host organizations prepare carefully in advance in order to learn from expatriates	Involvement in preparation activities, including training to develop skills/knowledge necessary to learn from the expatriate and to help establish relationships with expatriates that will facilitate learning	• Invest resources to develop the learning capacity of the host organization and its staff prior to expatriates' arrival via, for instance, language or cultural training for HCN staff • Articulate HCNs' learning as an explicit outcome in expatriates' job description • Designate HCN counterparts to work with expatriates in order to capture and share learning opportunities within the organization
2. HCNs experience quite dramatic adjustments and burdens during an expatriate assignment	Substantial changes to work practices to cater for expatriates, including behavioral and structural adjustments and performing additional work roles; preceded by a period of anxiety and/or anticipation prior to expatriates' arrival	• Recognize and take steps to mitigate HCNs' anxieties relating to anticipated and actual foreign-language and cross-cultural interactions • Provide regular information updates to HCNs about the expatriates and their roles to placate HCNs' anxieties and generate favorable affect towards the placement • Involve HCNs in selecting expatriates and supporting expatriates' pre-arrival adjustment
3. Mutual trust between expatriates and HCNs is a pre-requisite for HCNs' learning	Lengthy relationship building with expatriates - including through social interactions in non-work settings - to establish trust that underpins knowledge exchange and learning	• Invest resources in the initial phase of the relationship building between expatriates and pertinent HCN staff in order to establish mutual trust • Structure opportunities for social interactions between expatriates and HCNs • Make efforts to 'in-group' expatriates via involvement in office rituals and meetings • Facilitate combined (expatriate-HCN) socialization activities as part of a shared orientation program
4. Most of HCNs' learning occurs informally via interacting with expatriates and observing how they work	Ongoing informal learning through direct and indirect interactions with expatriates	• Designate HCN counterparts to work with expatriates in order to capture and share learning opportunities within the organization • Facilitate and advocate interactions between expatriates and HCNs that allow learning • Organize workspaces to facilitate interactions between HCNs and expatriates • Surround expatriates with staff who are motivated and able to learn
5. Host organization managers actively manage expatriate-HCN relationships	The desire for and reliance on more supervisor support to manage interpersonal work relationships with expatriates	• Actively support expatriate-HCNs relationships by facilitating regular meetings, helping to resolve differences, and clarifying roles • Implement and oversee a shared (expatriate-HCN) orientation program to help clarify relationship roles and boundaries • Be willing to update or modify expatriates' job descriptions to suit conditions

FIGURE 1: The host organization lifecycle - Key stages in getting the most out of an expatriate placement