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Towards a theory of effective cross-cultural capacity development: the experiences of Australian international NGO expatriates in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Capacity development (CD) partnerships between highly qualified expatriates and host-country counterparts are a commonly used tool by non-government organisations (NGOs) working in international development. This article reports on an empirical investigation of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of these interpersonal cross-cultural CD relationships. Using a variant of the critical incident technique, we explored 40 such relationships (20 effective and 20 ineffective) reported by 20 expatriates from an Australian international NGO who were embedded in international and domestic NGOs and government organisations in Vietnam. From our analysis, we propose a theoretical model that identifies the features of effective cross-cultural CD relationships. The model is intended to lay the foundation for future research as well as strategic action by organisations. It identifies shared trust between expatriate and counterpart as central to effective CD, supported by five enabling conditions relating to the perceptions, abilities and attitudes of participants, the way the work roles are structured, and the way that leaders in the host organisations manage the context of the relationship.

KEYWORDS

Capacity development; cross-cultural; expatriate development professionals; expatriate–HCN relationship; international non-government organisation; knowledge sharing; NGO; non-government organisation

Introduction

The international aid and development sector is complex, incorporating a diverse body of stakeholders, from powerful global bureaucracies (e.g. multinational agencies and policy institutions) to tens of thousands of domestic and international grass-roots non-government organisations (Lewis, 2005; Union of International Associations, 2014).

The objective of international development is to help individuals, groups, and communities become sustainably self-reliant (Remenyi, 2004). In recent decades, international development theories have progressed away from centralised, government-led initiatives and models that tended to imitate western development trajectories (McKay, 2004) towards viewing international development as being collaborative and empowering, centred on equal relationships between donor and recipient (Rhodes, 2014). These philosophies underpin major global agreements on the delivery of development, including the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG), the 2005 *Paris Declaration on the Effectiveness of Aid* and the 2008 *Accra Agenda for Action*, which outline a series of conditions under which the mechanisms of aid should operate (e.g. inclusive partnerships, built on notions of alignment and mutual accountability).

A central plank of contemporary approaches to international development is 'capacity development'. While the term lacks an agreed definition and is contentious (Eade, 2007), it is generally seen as a process of increasing and maintaining the capabilities of individuals, teams, organisations and communities in order to achieve a range of positive sustainable outcomes (OECD DAC, 2006; Rhodes, 2014). The concept arose from the narrower term 'technology transfer' used commonly in development literature in the 1970s and 1980s. A key element of capacity development (CD) is working in partnership with local communities and building on existing capacities. Various levels of CD have been identified, ranging from capacity at the structural level (e.g. establishing cross-sector decision-making forums) to the individual level (e.g. developing knowledge, skills and confidence in individuals) (Potter & Brough, 2004).

In recent years, interpersonal 'horizontal' approaches to CD have gained prominence (Sherraden, Stringham, Sow, & McBride, 2006). These approaches build on existing capacities, and involve close collaboration between development staff – often skilled expatriates from donor nations – and host-country organisations and communities. One commonly used method is to embed technically skilled expatriates within organisations in recipient communities. Through this, the expatriate has the opportunity to support and facilitate the work of host-country national staff (HCNs), and so develop their counterparts' knowledge, skills and confidence (Potter & Brough, 2004; Rhodes, 2014). Central to the success of these initiatives is the ability of the expatriates to forge effective interpersonal working relationships with HCN counterparts and local communities (Eyben, 2013; Lough & Matthews, 2013). Doing so requires expatriates to bridge a number of interpersonal, cultural and, in some cases, professional barriers. To date, research has yet to identify what makes these cross-cultural CD relationships effective, and what approaches might help to bridge some of these barriers.

This article reports on a study examining the experiences of Australians expatriates from a range of professions, including health, business, management, and engineering, working on CD projects in Vietnam. The study addresses two overarching research questions: (1) what features characterise effective cross-cultural

CD relationships? and (2) what strategies do expatriates use to help them forge more effective relationships? Underpinning the study is our aim to lay the foundation for a model that will enable researchers and human resource practitioners who design and oversee expatriate placements to view the CD relationship more systematically.

Our study makes a number of contributions to theory and practice. It focuses on the individual participants in international development, often overlooked in research in this sector (e.g. Long, 2001), and employs an innovative variation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) that allowed us to explore both effective and ineffective CD relationships. These results provide a platform for initial theory building into cross-cultural interpersonal CD that is currently absent. At a practical level, a better understanding of this phenomenon is likely of interest to HR professionals in organisations operating in international development – multinational agencies which provide, fund and support international assignees, and the host organisations in which these expatriates are placed – as well as the individuals themselves.

We present our research in four sections. We start by reviewing the diverse literature that has informed this study. Next, we summarise the research context, design and method, and follow this with the study's findings. We conclude by considering the implications of our results for practitioners and researchers.

Literature review

Like expatriates in the corporate sector, those working in the government and non-government sectors are critical to the success of their organisations, and confront a range of challenges and opportunities similar to those in the corporate sector (Lambell, Ramia, Nyland, & Michelotti, 2008). International NGOs have long used expatriates as tools for development (Eyben, 2013), and their role of engaging with local communities and individuals is acknowledged as a central part of contemporary CD approaches (Fechter & Hindman, 2011). Empirical studies of the expatriate–HCN relationship are limited, despite recognition of its importance (Lough & Matthews, 2013). Consequently, the nature of interpersonal CD is not well documented. What can be inferred is that, at the organisational level, expatriates' collaborative relationships with HCNs typically involve two forms of CD (Rhodes, 2014). The first comes from structured sharing of knowledge, skills and capabilities with HCN counterparts via, for instance, briefings, workshops or formal training. The second is by applying expertise to improve or develop organisational processes, strategies and services. In the latter case, the focus of the expatriates' work is on tangible outcomes (e.g. a new information management system) that contribute to the capacity of the organisation.

In both cases, through expatriates being embedded in locally staffed host organisations, HCNs (and expatriates themselves) have opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, insights and attitudes via unstructured and sometimes unplanned

learning. This 'informal' learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), common to varying degrees in all workplaces (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), often goes unnoticed and occurs in day-to-day situations like interactions and discussions, trial-and-error experimentation, observation, or role modelling (Eraut, 2004). Expatriates involved in interpersonal CD, therefore, likely perform a composite role that involves, at various times, being a mentor, coach, trainer, and sounding board, as well as supervisor and/or colleague to HCNs (Lough, McBride, Sherraden, & O'Hara, 2011). Their role may be most recognisable to HR practitioners and researchers as akin to performing an organisational development role (Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977) where expatriates contribute towards a process of 'localisation' (Law, Song, Wong, & Chen, 2009).

Cross-cultural CD relationships are punctuated by several barriers, each of which may make the relationship and its CD purpose more challenging. Most obviously, expatriates bring cultural values, attitudes and workplace behaviours that may be unfamiliar to HCNs. While cultural differences can be beneficial in some circumstances, they also create fault-lines that limit knowledge sharing and inhibit effective communication (Bird, 2001; Primecz, Romani, & Sackmann, 2011).

Theories of social psychology have added much to the discussion of such barriers to interactions between individuals and groups from different cultures (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew, 1998). Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, in particular, identifies a number of boundary conditions that provide opportunities for stereotype correction during intergroup interactions (e.g. Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003), including both parties perceiving status equality; willing and voluntary interaction and information exchange between participants; cooperation towards a common objective; interactions that enable participants to develop meaningful relationships; and having the interaction sanctioned by institutional support, including by authority figures such as organisational leaders. However, these boundary conditions have not been considered in the specific context of cross-cultural CD, even though researchers have called for the theory to be applied to a greater variety of 'mundane, seemingly unimportant encounters that constitute the overwhelming majority of everyday contact experiences' rather than focusing on the 'prejudice problem' (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005, p. 703; Hewstone & Swart, 2011).

Empirical studies of cross-cultural CD relationships within INGOs, while limited, highlight the potential barriers created by perceptions of power and status differences, stemming from disparities between HCNs and expatriates in relation to control of finances, knowledge levels, remuneration and benefits, and expatriates' outsider status (Girgis, 2007; McWha & MacLachlan, 2011). Such perceived imbalances – whether accurate or not – according to expatriates, can inhibit the trust necessary for CD (McWha, 2011).

Cross-cultural CD relationships also create added pressures for both expatriates and HCNs. Expatriates involved in CD at the organisational level are often the

sole foreigner in a host organisation. Their status as outsiders may be met with mistrust, resistance, higher levels of scrutiny, or active undermining from HCNs who may be apprehensive about the expatriate's allegiances (Arp, Hutchings, & Smith, 2013; Lough et al., 2011; Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Further, under-resourced NGOs may be poorly managed (Zhu & Purnell, 2006) or lack funds, skills or staff (Fee & Gray, 2011), all of which can inhibit productive relationships.

While the impacts of these factors on CD are yet to be examined directly, literature from a range of areas suggests that these may present challenges. Trust, for instance, which has been identified as fundamental to collaboration and knowledge sharing (Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2002; Lai, Singh, Alshwer, & Shaffer, 2014), can be especially complex in cross-cultural relationships (Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005), and may be diluted by, among other factors, perceptions of (non) proficiency in language (Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014) and differences in values (Murphy & Arenas, 2010).

Studies offering possible solutions to these challenges are even more limited. Research with expatriates in INGOs highlights the importance of the non-work side of the relationships (see, for instance, Fechter, 2012), and the role that friendship and social interactions can play in overcoming the complexity of cross-cultural CD relationships (Girgis, 2007; McWha, 2011). While trust has received little attention in the research of intercultural encounters (Li, 2013), authors have noted the importance of trust-building strategies (e.g. repeated interactions and information exchange, flexible adjustment to differences) that can bridge cultural distance and lead to the development of shared patterns of meaning (Johnson & Cullen, 2002; Li, 2013). Exploratory studies within INGOs highlight the importance of expatriates adjusting the way they communicate. Girgis (2007), for instance, suggests a variety of communicative techniques that might help expatriates to nurture relationships with HCNs, including negotiation, suggestive dialogue (to allow the HCN to consider ideas and translate them to a local context), and acknowledging local knowledge and capacity. Similarly, McWha (2011) found that relationships (and hence capacity building) between expatriate and HCN aid workers in Cambodia were facilitated by attention to active listening, and through open, honest and clear communication approaches.

While the above studies focus on specific elements of the CD relationship (e.g. power, relationship building), the current study seeks to work towards an integrated and holistic discussion of the conditions that characterise effective cross-cultural CD relationships. To this end, our study was underpinned by two broad research questions:

RQ1: From the perspective of expatriate development workers, what features characterise effective cross-cultural capacity development relationships?

RQ2: What strategies do expatriate development workers use in order to achieve more effective cross-cultural capacity development relationships?

Research methodology

Research overview and context

This study used an inductive, exploratory research design. The empirical data were collected via in-depth case studies of a purposive sample of 20 Australian development professionals who undertook a CD placement in Vietnam.

The expatriates were embedded in host-culture organisations for the duration of their placement in a range of urban and rural regions throughout Vietnam, including Red River Delta (*Đồng bằng sông Hồng*), South Central Coast (*Nam Trung Bộ*) and Mekong Delta (*Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long*).

Vietnam is classified as a lower middle income country (The World Bank, 2014) and seen as somewhat of an economic and social miracle, having recovered from the ruins of the 'Resistance War against America' (*Kháng chiến chống Mỹ*), which ended in 1975, and long-term economic sanctions imposed by the United States, which were only lifted in 1994.

The foundation stone of modern Vietnam is generally attributed to the central government's decision in 1986 to introduce wide-ranging political and economic reforms (*Đổi Mới*). These are credited with contributing to rapid improvements in per capita income, education levels, health outcomes and living standards (Euromonitor International, 2014). Despite this, per capita income remains below US\$1500 annually (The World Bank, 2014), and the country is still one of the world's largest recipients of foreign aid, receiving over US\$4.1 billion in development aid (over 3% of GDP) per year (OECD DAC, 2014). This aid is directed at a range of priority areas, including infrastructure, health, environment and human resource capabilities.¹

Large cultural differences exist between Australia and Vietnam (Hofstede, 2010). While caution must be exercised in making generalisations (Tuan & Napier, 2000), high power distance societies like Vietnam tend to more readily accept inequality in the distribution of power than egalitarian societies like Australia. Thus, Vietnamese organisational structures are, on the whole, more hierarchical, subordinates more deferential to superiors, and status differences more acutely attended to than in Australia. In contrast to Australia, Vietnam is also a highly collectivist culture, with a relatively stronger emphasis on social relationships, harmony among in-group members and interdependence (Thang, Rowley, Quang, & Warner, 2007).

The assignments of the expatriates in this study were coordinated by Australian Volunteers International (AVI), a Melbourne-based INGO that specialises in people-centred development projects.² AVI has managed almost 11,000 placements in 79 nations across a 50-year period. It is one of the largest administrators of development expatriates in Asia. Global in its operations and scope, at the time of this study, AVI simultaneously managed 418 expatriate placements globally, 32 (8%) of which were in Vietnam. Since it began operating in Vietnam in 1985, the organisation has overseen 478 expatriate placements in the country.

AVI manages its expatriate placements via an approach commonly used in INGOs (Keesbury, 2003). An in-country manager, based in Hanoi, worked with Vietnamese host organisations to jointly scope the roles and to create job descriptions. Day-to-day oversight for the expatriates' work and performance rested with the host organisation. AVI provided all expatriates with pre-departure training, in-country orientation and ongoing support where required. Training focused on assisting expatriates to adapt to the relocation, work role and different cultural contexts. It covered a diverse range of topics, including personal safety and health, and country-specific briefings relating to Vietnamese culture and society (e.g. language, culture, economy).

Several characteristics of the assignments undertaken by these expatriates are worth noting. First, all expatriates instigated the assignment themselves, applying for a pre-defined international development position through AVI's Melbourne office. Second, while the term 'volunteer' is reflected in AVI's title, the expatriates in this study were, in fact, paid development workers, albeit receiving substantially lower remuneration than their expertise would typically demand. Third, these expatriates were embedded within a host organisation for the duration of their placement, reporting to a line manager (often a CEO) within the host organisation. In most cases, they were the sole expatriate, a feature that differentiates this group from many mainstream expatriate placements (Arp et al., 2013). The expatriates interacted with a range of HCNs. Most expatriates had one or more designated HCN counterparts with whom they worked most regularly. The overarching objective of each placement differed and included, for example developing organisational processes and systems, governance, marketing, corporate planning, or other operational and strategic objectives, as well as up-skilling HCN staff. Most respondents identified multiple CD outcomes (average 2.2 per respondent). Around two-thirds of these (64%) related to developing personal knowledge and skills of their counterparts (e.g. technical/professional knowledge and skills, critical thinking, problem-solving skills), while the remainder focused on tangible outcomes like policy documents or handbooks (20%) and organisational processes and strategy (16%). In short, if equated with the mainstream expatriate literature, these expatriates would be classified as well-qualified and professional self-initiated expatriates undertaking organisational development roles within highly localised host organisations.

Sample and data collection

Table 1 summarises features of the sample and their placements.

As the table shows, half of the respondents were women. Ages (pre-departure) ranged from 29 to 70 years (mean = 51.5). Participants undertook placements ranging from 9 to 42 months (mean = 19.3) over the period 2007–2014. Most were embedded in Vietnam-based international NGOs (9/20, 45%) or domestic NGOs (7/20).

Table 1. Research participants.

Code	Age	Gender	Employer organisation (type)	Professional category ^a	Place-ment com-mence-ment (year)	Place-ment duration (months)	Interview medium
1	65	M	Government	Education	2007	42	Tele- phone
2	64	M	Government	Education	2009	13	Tele- phone
3	40	F	Domestic NGO	Capacity building adviser	2010	11	Skype (video)
4	35	M	International NGO	Design, Engineering, Science & Transport Management	2009	18	Tele- phone
5	65	F	Domestic NGO	Management	2011	24	Skype (video)
6	52	F	Government	Health	2010	28	Tele- phone
7	62	M	International NGO	Business, Human Resources & Mar- keting	2012	12	Face-to- face
8	38	F	International NGO	Design, Engineering, Science & Transport	2012	12	Skype (video)
9	70	M	Domestic NGO	Education	2012	9	Skype (video)
10	63	M	Domestic NGO	Business, Human Resources & Mar- keting	2011	23	Skype (video)
11	50	F	Government	Education	2011	24	Skype (video)
12	59	F	Domestic NGO	Legal, Social & Welfare	2012	18	Skype (video)
13	40	F	International NGO	Design, Engineering, Science & Transport	2011	24	Skype (video)
14	31	M	International NGO	Legal, Social & Welfare	2012	12	Tele- phone
15	29	F	International NGO	Legal, Social & Welfare	2011	31	Skype (video)
16	66	M	Domestic NGO	Business, Human Resources & Mar- keting	2012	18	Tele- phone
17	61	F	Domestic NGO	Business, Human Resources & Mar- keting	2013	12	Tele- phone
18	52	M	International NGO	Health	2012	13	Face-to- face
19	33	F	International NGO	Design, Engineering, Science & Transport	2009	18	Tele- phone
20	56	M	International NGO	Management	2013	24	Face-to- face

^aAustralian Bureau of Statistics: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO).

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews using a variation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). Respondents were asked to identify two relationships with HCN counterparts: one that they perceived to be effective in terms of achieving CD outcomes, and one that they perceived to be ineffective. Thus, the sample for analysis comprised 40 CD relationships: 20 effective and 20 ineffective. Interviews focused on expatriates' perspectives of the main outcomes of, and contributors to, the effective and ineffective relationships.

Interviews were conducted via video-conference (Skype), telephone or in person and ranged in duration from 40 to 75 min. Eighteen of the 20 interviews were recorded and transcribed in full; for the remaining two, researchers took and collated detailed notes.

Data analysis

Data coding was a collaborative and iterative process involving the two lead authors. Initially, inductive themes were drawn from the data and formed the basis of 'case memos' that summarised each individual respondent's experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As patterns began to emerge, these themes were reconciled with existing theories. This thematic analysis commenced while data collection was ongoing, enabling emerging themes to be identified and tentative propositions to be 'tested' at subsequent interviews. The most obvious example of this was contact theory (Allport, 1954), which emerged as a guiding framework early in the data collection process and informed subsequent interviews. This meant that the analytical process was iterative, with researchers alternating between data collection and analysis as a way to enhance process validity, as well as to critically examine the researchers' understanding emerging from responses (Andersen & Skaates, 2004). Data were coded to descriptive and thematic categories for both effective and ineffective relationships, allowing quantification of data as a means of comparing the patterns of responses. Within-category themes were then mapped out and compared against the content of each individual's case memo to ensure that the themes remained true to the expatriates' overall experiences. Cross-category comparisons (e.g. gender, age, employer organisation, placement duration) revealed no apparent differences; for example, female respondents were equally likely to identify conditions and report using particular strategies as male respondents. As a final check of internal validity, all respondents were emailed a draft of our analysis and results, along with a request to provide feedback and/or suggest amendments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the twelve respondents who replied, just one suggested changes (relatively minor wording). Thus, we conclude that the findings presented below are generally representative of the experiences of respondents.

Findings

All respondents were able to identify at least one effective and one ineffective CD relationship. Consistent with earlier research, shared trust between expatriate and HCN was identified as most crucial to the effectiveness of cross-cultural CD relationships. This was raised proactively in a range of contexts by 13 of the 20 expatriates and confirmed as a central tenet of effective CD by the remaining seven. Expatriate #13, for instance, described trust as 'an entry point for everything you want to do'. Supporting this, problems that impeded CD were attributed to the

Table 2. Conditions of cross-cultural capacity development relationships (summary).

Condition	Features of effective relationships (RQ1)	Strategies to build effective relationship (RQ2)	Example responses (effective CD relationships)	Example responses (ineffective CD relationships)
(1) Perceived similarity and equality	• Participants perceive each other as equal in terms of status. • Expatriate and HCN share similar values and outlook.	• Participants use communicative strategies to minimise status differences.	• 'I consciously make every effort to have her on the same level as me, that we both have skills and knowledge, and we are working together to find the commonality' (#12).	• 'We found out later that (expatriates were) being paid more than (HCNs) ... and there was a bit of a friction between those two different statuses' (#19).
(2) Mutual openness and two-way learning	• Both sides motivated to participate in the relationship • Participants are motivated to learn.	• Participants are explicit in acknowledging learning from each other.	• 'I'm here to learn, and the most fruitful relationship that we can get out of this is I learn something from you - you learn something from me. Together we find a kind of a fruitful sort of partnership' (#07).	• 'He didn't put any effort into helping achieve the goals of the project ... wouldn't do anything, unless there was money in it' (#04). • 'In her mind ... I was apparently an expert and she was there to learn whereas I was saying that actually I wanted to learn' (#05).
(3) Close and interdependent cooperation in work role	• Working relationship characterised by close and interdependent cooperation. • Participants possess compatible knowledge, skills and abilities.	• Achievement of tangible success early in the relationship ('quick win').	• 'It was very focused on not just delivering results, but on (me) teaching her how to do things' (#10).	• 'With [the counterpart] I'm just doing the (work) by myself and it's actually easier for me that way. ... But the [relationships] where I've (collaborated) are really the ones that ... I'd done a better job and learnt along the way too' (#11).
(4) Opportunities for social interaction and friendship	• Opportunities for informal, non-work interactions. • Participants confident communicators in a common language.	• Participants undertake field trips together.	• 'If you simply have a transactional relationship with your colleagues, then that's what you'll end up with, a transactional relationship ... as you share experiences together, as you do things together, as you share yourself, you will build relationships' (#10).	• 'They did know some English but they were just not confident enough to use it' (#19). • '(We) didn't really hit it off ... he would avoid meetings first of all and ... he'd sort of just cut me out' (#04).
(5) Supportive organisational environment and leadership	Formal processes to guide the relationship, including orientation and facilitating interactions.		• '(The manager) was at great pains to include (expatriates and HCNs) in everything ... he took photos (of us together) ... it never occurred to me [why he did that] ... I think probably as a way of getting me involved' (#16).	• 'The complete lack of structure, the complete lack of real concern about what you did' (#07). • 'I felt like we never had that opportunity to see ourselves as working together ... there wasn't clarity for us about what our working relationship should be and how we should work together and how we should collaborate together' (#15).

absence of shared trust. This was best summed up by expatriate #15, who stated that ‘When problems arise largely for me I see it as being because of a lack of trust’.

Respondents were conscious of multiple barriers – e.g. cultural, professional, linguistic – that existed between themselves and HCNs, and these came up frequently in discussions of both effective and ineffective relationships. Expatriates saw the use of trust-building strategies to dismantle these barriers as essential to their effectiveness as capacity builders. As one respondent (expatriate #18) described it:

There were layers of relationships, and trust was a big thing ... on the first level (HCN staff) are very friendly, but there’s other layers ... if you build that trust you might be able to get more things done, ... you have to work on that, otherwise you’re just some foreigner that comes (and goes).

Much of expatriates’ discussion of their relationships with HCNs revolved around ways to develop or maintain this shared trust, especially in the early stages of their assignment. Indeed, expatriates’ responses suggested that they often viewed effective CD relationships and trusting relationships as synonymous. In the mind of respondents, the primary benefit of trust to CD was its ability to ‘open the door’ to giving and sharing information like an insider (‘They started telling me things, like the gossip around the office,’ expatriate #11).

These responses by expatriates lead us to make an over-arching proposition that, in general:

Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when high levels of shared trust exist between participants.

Supporting this proposition, our analysis distilled five conditions which, according to the expatriates, distinguished effective CD relationships from ineffective ones: (1) perceived similarity and equality of participants, (2) mutual openness and two-way learning, (3) close and interdependent cooperation, (4) opportunities for social interaction and friendship and (5) a supportive organisational environment and leadership.

Table 2 summarises the key elements of each of these conditions, identifies strategies that expatriates used to promote these conditions, and provides exemplar quotations from descriptions of both effective and ineffective relationships. We discuss each condition below.

Perceived similarity and equality

The CD relationships that expatriates saw as successful were characterised by similarity and equality; expatriates believed that their efforts were most effective when status differences were minimised, and when they worked with a counterpart whose cognitive frame of reference overlapped with theirs.

Most prominently, expatriates emphasised how, in effective CD relationships, they were accepted by their HCNs as a ‘peer’ rather than a subordinate or (more commonly) superior. For instance, expatriate #14 noted, ‘I was anxious to be seen as a peer and I’d like to think that I was.’ In contrast, expatriates attributed

ineffective relationships to differences between themselves and their HCNs. Most common (e.g. expatriate #01, #02, #05, #11, #12) was perceived inequality in status, manifest through HCNs' deference to expatriates' professional expertise, which limited knowledge sharing opportunities and made some HCNs more reactive in their contributions to the relationship (e.g. 'I tended to get ... a lot of, 'You're the expert, so you can do it', expatriate #11).

This sense of inequality was commonly attributed to culturally derived status markers, notably gender, qualifications and age (e.g. 'There's two really important features of working in Vietnam, one is age and the other is qualifications or experience', expatriate #10). Perhaps because of this, demographic and experiential markers of similarity were identified as important to building effective CD relationships, as the following interview extracts exemplify:

We're all females and our marital status (is the same) ... I think actually that's quite a big thing. (expatriate #15)

They didn't respect me because I was younger. (expatriate #04)

Additionally, effective CD relationships were with HCNs who, according to expatriates, possessed a recognisably similar outlook and values to their own. Seven expatriates (#01, #04, #06, #07, #08, #11 and #16) attributed the success of their most productive CD relationship primarily to counterparts who were bicultural, or who demonstrated or were open to what some described as a 'Western' mindset (#01), while the inability or unwillingness of HCNs to understand an expatriate's perspective was seen as a prominent feature of ineffective relationships:

(The counterpart) had a lot of exposure to Western people ... she's lived in New Zealand ... her understanding of Western culture (is excellent). (expatriate #08)

Based on these findings, we make the following propositions:

Proposition 1a: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants perceive each other as equal in terms of status for the purpose of the interaction.

Proposition 1b: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants share similar values and outlook.

In relation to expatriates' strategies (RQ2), critical to the effectiveness of CD partnerships was the way in which the expatriates managed these perceived status differences. Several reported consciously re-negotiating HCNs' power expectations (e.g. 'I'm constantly rearranging that (power) balance because it's handed over to us in sometimes uncomfortable ways', expatriate #12). To achieve this, a range of quite sophisticated communication techniques were identified, most of which were new to (or previously infrequently used by) expatriates. These techniques included expatriates verbally reinforcing their position at the same or a lower status level (e.g. expatriate #01, #14, #17), explicitly positioning the counterpart as a peer (in-group) (e.g. #05, #12), using more tentative language when sharing knowledge (e.g. #17, #18, #19), self-deprecating humour (e.g. #01) and withholding some advice to avoid being seen as overly directive (e.g. #14, #20). The most

common (e.g. #05, #14, #17, #19, #20) were different variations of ‘suggestive dialogue’ (Girgis, 2007), whereby expatriates put forward provocative questions or subtle suggestions and ideas for HCNs to explore and build upon, rather than giving direct advice or instruction. Below are two of the many examples of these:

I will tend to put myself in a position where I’m asking for people’s approval to do things ... it just makes it seem a little bit like I’m working for them. (expatriate #14)

I was conscious that I wouldn’t just go in and say, ‘No, we’ll do it this way’ ... I’d try and adopt a more gentle position where I’d suggest that we do this or ‘How about we do this’. (expatriate #19)

Drawing on these findings, we propose that

Proposition 1c: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants use communicative strategies like suggestive dialogue designed to counteract status differences.

Mutual openness and two-way learning

Five expatriates identified the enthusiasm and motivation of their counterpart towards the relationship as the major factor in an effective relationship (#04, #09, #11, #17, #18) and several others acknowledged its importance (e.g. ‘They were very eager. ... couldn’t wait for me to get there and they wanted to learn’, expatriate #17). In this regard, the openness of HCNs to the expatriates’ ideas and suggestions was seen as critical to successful CD relationships (e.g. ‘It was her openness to new ideas that was the clincher’, expatriate #01). Supporting this, six respondents (#04, #05, #06, #11, #13, #14) attributed ineffective relationships to counterparts who lacked motivation, or who were unwilling to share knowledge or learn. Expatriates’ perceptions of the reason for this varied from personality (e.g. ‘He’s just lazy and doesn’t care’, expatriate #11), resentment towards the expatriate (e.g. ‘Local full time workers are being denied opportunities ... it had become, no doubt in my mind at all, a source of some resentment’, expatriate #07), or the HCNs’ non-voluntary participation in the relationship:

There was definitely pressure (on him to be my counterpart) ... I don’t think (the counterpart) liked the job. (expatriate #06)

Directly related to HCNs’ openness was the need for learning to be two-way rather than just one-way, and the need for the expatriate (not just counterpart) to be motivated and open to learn. Sixteen expatriates spoke at length about their own learning from their effective (and in some cases ineffective) CD relationships; terminology like ‘two-way learning’ and ‘mutual learning’ were common:

(It’s important) that you are interested and they can teach you something different ... it’s got to be mutually beneficial ... (expatriate #11)

In addition to their own increased knowledge, expatriates attributed two additional benefits to their learning, both relating to how this was perceived by HCNs. The first was the importance to trust-building of expatriates demonstrating an

open mind, free of 'preconceived ideas' (expatriate #02). The second benefit came from reinforcing shared and equal power in the relationship, a point noted by five expatriates (#01, #07, #11, #14 and #16). Expatriate #16, for instance, was blunt in asserting 'Learning (had to be) a quid pro quo'.

These findings lead us to two further propositions:

Proposition 2a: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when both sides are motivated to participate in the relationship.

Proposition 2b: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants are motivated to learn from each other.

While expatriates were keen to point out how they used the (primarily cultural) knowledge learned from HCNs, the chief mechanism used to promote this two-way learning (RQ2) was, in fact, to ensure that HCNs were aware of the contribution that they were making to expatriates' learning. To achieve this, five expatriates (#01, #07, #08, #12 and #15) reported taking the effort to explicitly acknowledge counterparts' contribution to their (expatriates') learning. Expatriate #01 captured some of the essence of this when he noted:

It wasn't contrived but I made it known to my counterpart that ... it has to be a two-way learning process. Your counterparts need to have that sense (that) it's a two-way learning experience.

This leads us to our next proposition:

Proposition 2c: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants are explicit in acknowledging their learning from each other.

Close and interdependent cooperation in work role

Effective CD relationships were characterised by work roles that structured and supported close and interdependent cooperation between expatriates and HCNs. This manifested in several ways. The first was the intensity and nature of the work relationship. In general, regular, sustained and sometimes intensive one-to-one collaborations – where expatriates and HCNs worked jointly on problems, projects or tasks (expatriates #03, #09, #10, #11, #12, #13, #14, #16, #17, #18) – opened opportunities for discussions and shared activities that were platforms for informal learning (e.g. 'I was able to share new ways of interacting with each other and doing things', expatriate #03). The most commonly reported mentoring technique was role modelling appropriate behaviours and attitudes during these collaborative activities:

I'm not teaching in a formal forum, it's sort of (working) together and learning by example more than anything. (expatriate #11)

It was really important for me always to model really good, respectful practice ... modelling of positive approaches. (expatriate #12)

In contrast, ineffective relationships were punctuated by work roles or office spaces that isolated the expatriate from HCNs (e.g. expatriate #05, #11), or where HCNs

did not recognise the value of collaborative work ('It was difficult because he just wanted me to tell him what to do', expatriate #08). In some cases, this appeared to stem from broader philosophical differences about what effective CD involved or mistrust about the expatriates' motivations. In one case (#05), an HCN went as far as actively avoiding collaboration:

He didn't trust me in lots of ways; he really didn't understand why I was there or why I wanted to be there ... I discovered that he was staying outside the office doing all the organising ... so when he came to the office he'd actually done his work.

Interdependence was amplified when expatriates and HCNs possessed compatible skills and knowledge (e.g. #09, #14, #15, #19). In effective CD relationships, projects were organised such that HCNs' knowledge of the local context, culture and stakeholders complemented expatriates' technical knowledge and skills. By way of example, expatriate #09's most significant contribution came through needing to work with an HCN translator who helped with an iterative process of needs analysis, development and refinement of training documents and materials. It was the expatriates' absence of Vietnamese language skills that triggered this CD opportunity.

One benefit of this compatibility was that it forced closer collaboration that provided opportunities for shared problem-solving and learning. This leads us to make the following propositions:

Proposition 3a: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when the working relationship is characterised by close and interdependent collaboration.

Proposition 3b: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants possess compatible knowledge, skills and abilities that contribute to the success of a project.

Importantly, the characteristics contributing to these conditions appear to have emerged primarily from the structure of the work, nature of the project and office environment. This limited the extent of 'control' that expatriates could exert over this condition. However, one approach that, according to expatriates, contributed to perceptions of interdependence was being able to achieve small tangible markers of success, especially early in the relationship (e.g. #02, #08, #10, #15, #17). While focusing on short-term outcomes may not align with the long-term philosophies of CD (Fechter & Hindman, 2011), accomplishing 'small achievable tasks' (expatriate #08) was seen to 'establish credibility quickly' (expatriate #02) and provided 'an early platform (for) working together' (expatriate #17). Thus, it was an important contributor to trust and a sense of interdependence. A university lecturer, for example, helped a counterpart to revise a subject curriculum ('you've got to pick something that will work really well for you and that you can demonstrate you're bona fide' - #02). A marketing consultant helped a counterpart prepare and present a corporate presentation ('She absolutely laid them in the aisles!', #10). In both these cases, it was only in retrospect that the benefit (greater trust and sense of shared accomplishment) was apparent to the expatriate. This leads us to propose:

Proposition 3c: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when expatriates are able to demonstrate the value of their contribution early in the relationship via achieving short-term, tangible outcomes.

Opportunities for social interaction and friendship

The fourth theme characterising expatriates' accounts of successful CD relationships was having sufficient time and space to interact and build friendships outside 'formal' work relationships. Twelve expatriates emphasised the importance of informal social discussions to building the CD relationships. Several reported consciously using social interactions – for instance, accepting or extending invitations to coffee, meals, karaoke, holidays, drinking sessions, and parties with HCNs – in the early stages of their placement as a mechanism to foster trust and understanding. Less successful relationships, in contrast, were characterised by a more superficial engagement, with little or no interactions outside work (e.g. #14).

Expatriates offered different explanations for why these non-work exchanges with counterparts were beneficial; several (e.g. #01, #04, #05, #11, #12, #18) attributed this directly to the priority given to relationship building in Vietnamese culture:

The Vietnamese way of life is about relationships ... you work the people, rather than work the issues ... (expatriate #04)

In Vietnam ... you need to start building the relationships with people ... (without that) you can't do anything in terms of the objectives of an assignment. (expatriate #05)

On this note, some expatriates observed that developing friendships with HCNs contributed to a 'virtuous cycle' that promoted CD opportunities as HCNs gained confidence in drawing on expatriates' contributions:

(It was when) we became buddies (that HCNs) would actually come to me and ask me for advice on projects. (expatriate #13)

I think once colleagues start seeing that you build a close relationship with one or two people ... it helps to build a relationship with others. (expatriate #15)

Besides this, field trips to rural communities, outstations or conferences were identified as particularly potent opportunities to get to know counterparts, build trust, and strengthen the friendship in ways that flowed across to the workplace (e.g. #11, #13, #14, #15, #17, #18):

We were all there away from the office and (away) from work ... I think that helped to build that relationship. After that, anything I wanted or anything I needed I could ask ... and it would just happen. (expatriate #18)

It helped amazingly to build the relationship ... on the buses together and on motor-bikes together ... we just got to know each other ... rather than just being in the office every day ... (expatriate #17)

Not surprisingly, crucial to developing friendships was the counterparts' English language skills (or in a minority of cases, the expatriates' competence in Vietnamese language). This was the most frequently mentioned HCN characteristics that contributed to effective or ineffective CD (raised by 14 expatriates) through limiting or enabling social interaction. From these points, we distil two more propositions:

Proposition 4a: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when opportunities are provided for informal non-work interactions, including field trips.

Proposition 4b: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when participants are confident communicators in a common language.

Supportive organisational environment and leadership

The final condition of effective CD relationships was an organisational context that supported and encouraged interactions between expatriates and HCNs. In particular, leaders of the host organisation were crucial in providing the structure and authority to sanction and facilitate this interaction. Expatriates felt that HCNs were more committed to the relationship – and so CD was more effective – when organisational leaders visibly and verbally endorsed the role and contributions of the expatriate through, for instance, explicitly praising expatriates in front of HCN staff (e.g. ‘(The manager) would say to the other (staff), “You’re so lucky to have (her)”’, expatriate #11), visibly collaborating with expatriates themselves (e.g. expatriate #20), and consciously trying to include expatriates as organisational ‘insiders’ despite their temporary tenure (e.g. expatriate #16).

Leaders who supported effective CD relationships were better organised in creating opportunities for knowledge sharing between expatriates and HCNs (e.g. orchestrating meetings, designing collaborative projects, scheduling regular progress reviews). They also assisted by providing greater guidance to both expatriates and HCNs on the nature of their working relationship (‘(He helped us to) understand the ground rules ... from day one, so that we’re all on the same page’, expatriate #02). Expatriates also recognised the important role of organisational leaders in creating opportunities for expatriates (and HCNs) to clarify responsibilities and the boundaries of the relationship:

(The manager) encouraged me on my arrival to sit with each of (the staff) for an hour or two as the best way of understanding their job. I sat next to them ... just learning about what they did and it did teach me a lot. (expatriate #16)

One feature that expatriates found especially important was a clear induction or orientation to clarify issues like objectives, expectations and responsibilities (#03, #04, #10, #12, #16); a feature absent in several ineffective relationships (#14, #15, #17, #18), as the following interview extracts show:

I felt like we never had that (orientation), the opportunity facilitated by the organisation to see ourselves as working together. (expatriate #15)

There was no (induction) at all ... they took me to the office and left me there. It was just like a tin shed ... on a main highway. (expatriate #17)

This leads to our final proposition:

Proposition 5: Cross-cultural capacity development relationships will be more effective when host-organisation leaders have formal processes to guide the expatriate–HCN relationship, including an orientation process and mechanisms for facilitating expatriate–HCN interactions.

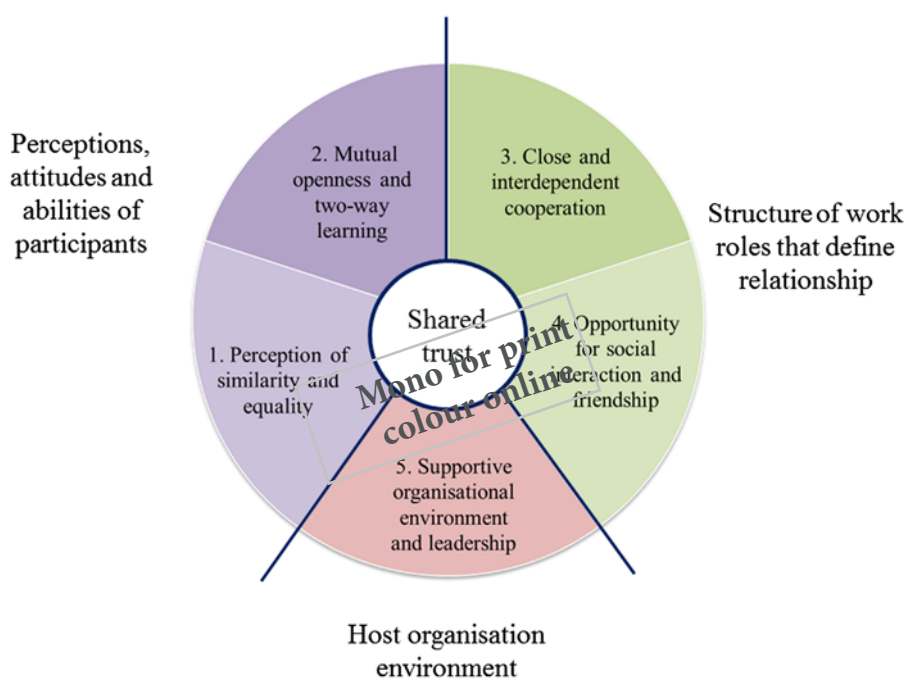


Figure 1. A proposed theoretical model of effective cross-cultural capacity development relationships.

Discussion and conclusions

This study examined expatriates' perceptions of the factors contributing to effective and ineffective cross-cultural CD relationships between Australian expatriate development professionals and their Vietnamese HCN counterparts. Our explorations highlighted the central role played by shared trust, and unearthed five conditions that, according to the expatriates, enabled them to build effective CD relationships.

Elements of the findings will be familiar to human resource scholars and practitioners. Isolated studies have highlighted the importance, in a cross-cultural context, of several of the enabling conditions identified here. For instance, the importance of two-way, rather than just one-way, learning between expert and protégé is consistent with recent advances in the mentoring and coaching literature, which have begun to recognise the benefits of dialogic rather than one-directional approaches (Armstrong, 2012). Similarly, the value of coordinated induction programs (Anderson, 1999; Hutchings, 2005), socialisation (Feldman & Bolino, 1999) and trust-building mechanisms (Saunders, Dietz, Gillespie, & Lewicki, 2010) to cross-cultural work relationships are all well supported in the international HRM and/or management literature.

The main theoretical contribution of our study comes from bringing these disparate features together under a cogent model specifically focusing on CD, a

core role of international NGOs. In this regard, we suggest that the propositions outlined above begin to articulate a tentative (and empirically testable) theory of interpersonal cross-cultural CD. This theoretical model is presented graphically in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 indicates, shared trust plays a central role in cross-cultural CD relationships and is enabled by the five conditions outlined in our findings. In drawing these ideas together, we note several characteristics of the boundary conditions we identify. Conditions 1 and 2 reside primarily in individuals, and relate to the perceptions, attitudes and abilities of participants; conditions 3 and 4 are influenced most strongly by the structure of the work roles that define the relationship, while condition 5 relates chiefly to the host organisation and its leaders. Thus, achieving optimal conditions is likely to require a holistic approach that encompasses a range of stakeholders and interventions at different levels. Similarly, while we articulate five separate conditions, we stress their interdependence in practice. For instance, efforts by the host organisation to provide structure to support the expatriate–HCN relationship (condition 5 in Figure 1) are likely to promote collaboration and interdependence (condition 3); opportunities for friendship (condition 4) are likely to emerge more frequently when parties are open to and interested in learning from each other (condition 2). This suggests that relatively minor improvements in – or problems relating to – one factor have the potential for more substantial impacts on CD outcomes.

While the outcome of interest to our study is the CD of HCNs and/or the host organisation, we note several similarities between the conditions articulated above and the prejudice reduction conditions identified in Allport's contact theory (1954). At one level, this may be unsurprising. Researchers have begun to draw a range of benefits from Allport's 'optimal contact conditions' that go beyond prejudice reduction and include, for instance, increased levels of trust, empathy and perspective-taking between culturally different groups (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009). Contact theory's original premise views intergroup contact as the mechanism to correct inaccurate scripts and stereotypes about out-group members that were the roots of prejudice and conflict (Brewer & Kramer, 1985). According to the theory, optimal conditions facilitate this by enabling participants to increase their knowledge of the out-group (Eller & Abrams, 2004), reduce processes that create negative affect (e.g. anxiety) and increase positive affect processes like empathy (Hewstone & Swart, 2011). It is feasible that the five conditions identified in this study play similar roles in facilitating the knowledge sharing necessary for CD; that is, greater empathy, lower anxiety and heightened out-group awareness also provide the platform for the trust and, ultimately, the CD outcomes that these expatriates achieved. Thus, our model of interpersonal cross-cultural CD may, in fact, represent an extension of the principles of contact theory to a different outcome and context. While contact theory has been criticised for being unrealistically elaborate for most day-to-day interactions (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000) and

thus lacking practical relevance (Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010), our results, while preliminary, suggest that similar conditions may have genuine practical relevance for interpersonal cross-cultural contact.

While CD has its roots in international development theory, research into expatriate–HCN relationships in the corporate sector is similarly underdeveloped, despite interpersonal relationships being recognised as central to the successful integration of firms’ international operations (Lai et al., 2014). For instance, an increasingly prominent role of corporate expatriates is developing the knowledge and skills of HCNs (Kimmo & Vesa, 2004; Vance & Paik, 2005), a role that shares similarities in purpose and form with the CD experiences of development workers. At the same time, we caution that two contextual features may limit the transferability of our results. First, individuals’ perceptions of the affiliations that other people belong to can shape the nature of the relationships that they develop (Tajfel, 2010), and research suggests that ‘volunteers’ like those in our study may develop different types of relationships with HCNs than other groups (e.g. paid consultants) (McWha, 2011). Second, the relationships reported in this study occurred in organisations with objectives, principles and cultures that may differ from corporate firms (Vaux, 2001). At the same time, we note the prevalence of MNEs that actively use ‘corporate volunteering’ programs in order to develop skills of their staff (Pless, Maak, & Stahl, 2011), suggesting that the types of challenges, activities and relationships involved in CD partnerships with NGOs may, in fact, share important similarities with those in the corporate workplace (Riusala & Suutari, 2004). Consequently, we cautiously foreshadow that our efforts to begin building theory in this important area have implications outside international development, and may lead to a ‘reverse diffusion’ of good HR practice from the not-for-profit to corporate sectors.

On the issue of culture, it is prudent to consider the ways in which the specific cultural context of the relationships we examined – Australian expatriates in Vietnam – may have contributed to the resulting framework. On the one hand, the primary cultural differences between these countries – social and power orientations (Hofstede, 2010) – are consistent with patterns that exist between the so-called ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations (Punnett, 2004), and so may be typical of interactions between donor-country expatriates and recipient-country counterparts. Thus, the apparent preference of collectivist societies for relationship building suggests that features of our model (e.g. condition 4) will be important in most aid recipient countries. Yet as the previous section highlights, the specific cultural traits and values of participants may contribute to dispositions towards certain conditions or the preference and/or use of particular strategies. For instance, one possible explanation for the apparent success of these expatriates in addressing status inequality (condition 1) may be the large difference in power orientation (Hofstede, 2010) between the two cultures, and the culturally derived skills of Australian capacity developers at deploying status minimisation strategies. It is feasible that markers of status difference may be less salient to expatriates

from cultures other than Australia, which is recognised for its egalitarian cultural values. What is pertinent, however, is that in spite of the contrasting power orientations between Australia and Vietnam at the national-level, respondents reported that interpersonal relationships of power equality were seen as most effective, apparently inconsistent with the dominant (national) culture values of their Vietnamese counterparts (Hofstede, 2010). There may be multiple explanations for this apparent inconsistency – including intra-cultural diversity and/or cultural paradoxes (e.g. Tuan & Napier, 2000; Tung, 2008) – and so this anomaly provides an intriguing window for further exploration and testing.

Also limiting the transferability of our findings is that our study examined these relationships solely from the perspective of expatriates. While previous studies examining one side of a relationship have produced results that are relatively robust (e.g. Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Seak & Enderwick, 2008), a clearer and more objective picture of the relationship requires the voice of HCNs to be incorporated. In a similar vein, our study drew on retrospective cross-sectional data, and as such was unable to capture the dynamic nature of the relationships and the conditions that shaped them across the duration of the relationship. Longitudinal panel studies of participants in these CD relationships might assist in more finely delineating the variables that we have identified from our exploratory research.

Implications for practice

The results are likely of interest to human resource managers in INGOs like AVI or host organisations responsible for managing expatriate–HCN partnerships, as well as to expatriates and HCNs themselves.

Extant literature highlights the barriers and challenges to making expatriate–HCN relationships work, especially in highly localised settings (Arp et al., 2013). The proposed theoretical model outlined in Figure 1 points to a number of initiatives that could assist in these contexts. Notably, the findings have implications for the way that expatriates and HCNs are recruited and selected for CD partnerships. For instance, rather than focusing solely on individuals' attributes, our study suggests benefits in organisations considering complementarity between participants in terms of shared values and outlook (condition 1) or compatibility of knowledge, skills and abilities (condition 3). It may be that involving HCNs in the decision to select an expatriate, for instance, can lead to a better expatriate–HCN 'fit' for the purposes of CD. This focus on the relational dimension is consistent with recent research highlighting the need to consider not only expatriates', but also HCNs' skills, knowledge and support for the success of expatriate placements (Mahajan & De Silva, 2012).

The results suggest a range of possible training and preparation activities for expatriates – and for HCNs – that are yet to be broached in the international HRM literature but are likely to benefit the CD relationship. For expatriates, this might include raising awareness of and skills in status minimisation strategies like

suggestive dialogue (condition 1), and in identifying the mechanisms and triggers underpinning informal learning (Fee & Gray, 2011), so that these can be recognised and appropriately acknowledged for the benefit of HCNs (condition 2). Involving both expatriates and HCNs in some pre-contact priming is likely to encourage mindsets of status equality conducive to CD (Cohen & Roper, 1972).

At the host organisational level (condition 5), our findings support previous research showing the importance of in-country support to complement expatriation strategies (Hutchings, 2005). In particular, our study draws attention to the role that the host organisations' leaders play in actively facilitating expatriate–HCN interactions; from providing inductions and clarifying roles and responsibilities, to visibly affording legitimacy to the expatriate's assignment and efforts. In this regard, we suggest that the conditions and associated strategies outlined in our findings can provide practical utility to leaders of host organisations by (a) guiding the facilitation of expatriate and HCN counterpart interactions and/or (b) diagnosing (and correcting) dysfunctional CD relationships.

Supporting this, we anticipate an important role for INGOs in helping host organisations to deploy our findings. Host organisations most in need of interpersonal CD may also require support for leaders, who may lack the experience, training or time to create and monitor supportive environments (condition 5). Thus, INGOs that place expatriates in host organisations might consider providing some targeted 'pre-arrival training' and support for host-organisation leaders in activities like conducting effective inductions, enacting explicit in-group behaviours towards expatriates, or understanding the conditions that support effective cross-cultural CD relationships.

Similarly, our findings suggest that INGOs might help facilitate better CD outcomes by working with host organisations towards expatriate work roles that involve high levels of interdependence and collaboration with HCNs (condition 3). One specific example is the consideration of trust-building opportunities (e.g. through joint field trips and 'space' for non-work dialogue) as part of the placement planning.

Finally, while our findings are most relevant to organisations in the international aid and development sector, expatriates in the corporate sector are commonly asked to play similar roles as mentors, trainers and capacity developers for HCNs when 'localising' subsidiary operations (Law et al., 2009). Thus, it is feasible that the implications discussed above may be equally applicable in corporate settings, and might contribute further to the 'reverse learning' from INGOs to MNEs, both of whom share interests in knowledge sharing and CD that crosses cultural boundaries.

Notes

1. See, for example: Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 'Overview of Australia's Aid Program to Vietnam' <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/vietnam/>

development-assistance/pages/development-assistance-in-vietnam.aspx, and US Aid 'About Vietnam' <http://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work/asia/vietnam> (last accessed 11 June 2015).

2. The expatriates in this study were placed through AVI under the *Australian Volunteers for International Development*, an Australian Government initiative.

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