

Transcription Lesson 6: Culture shock

Figure 16.4 on page 455 in the prescribed book depicts the various stages of culture shock an expatriate experiences in an unfamiliar culture. Similarly, this figure depicts four phases of adjustment that expatriates on an international assignment go through: elation/honeymoon, resistance, adaptation and biculturalism.

Expatriates will often begin to experience culture shock a few weeks after moving. The elation phase (or honeymoon period as described in the prescribed book) is characterised by feelings of excitement for the expatriate, who finds the new surroundings and culture to be exotic and stimulating. However, after a while, the pressures of work become a reality and the expatriate begins to miss home. This is the resistance phase, in which the employee makes frequent comparisons between the home and the host country and seeks out reminders of home. The expatriate may be frustrated by the differences in language, culture and routine. Once this period passes, and the expatriate becomes more familiar with the local culture, gains language skills and a new social life, they enter the adaptation phase. Some expatriates may even reject their own culture and embrace life overseas. In the final phase, biculturalism, expatriates embrace the new culture and appreciate their former life at home as much as their new life overseas. Many of the problems associated with expatriate failures such as family life and cultural stress, have diminished and the employee may even wish to stay longer when the assignment ends.

The prescribed book recommends some dos and don'ts for the expatriate moving through the phases of adjustment. Importantly, in Table 16.2 on page 456, Peng and Meyer (2019) stress that the employee should not blame their spouse or family, the company, or the host nationals for their stress. Instead, employees are encouraged to engage in physical exercise or meditation, find 'stability zones' and become part of local expat groups, reflect and modify expectations on the job, and to decorate their new home with items that reinforce their own culture or heritage.

References: Peng, MW & Meyer, KE. 2019. *International business*. 3rd edition. Andover, United Kingdom: Cengage Learning.

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