Who adapts better to Brazil: Expatriates from developed or Latin American countries? Revisiting cultural distance

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Abstract
This study aimed to compare transcultural adaptation for expatriates from Latin American countries with those from developed countries, with the intent of evaluating the premise of a negative association between cultural distance and adaptation for the Brazilian context. A final valid sample of 217 cases was reached. Our results suggest that the theory of cultural distance as a predictor of difficulties in transcultural adaptation cannot be generalized for the Brazilian expatriate host environment context. Participants’ responses show that expatriates originating from developed countries adapt in a more satisfactory manner than Latin American expatriates, even though they are more culturally distant.

Keywords
Brazil, cultural distance, expatriates, foreignism, Latin America, transcultural adaptation

Introduction
When individuals are expatriated by their companies, they face the daily challenge of adjusting to a new distinct cultural environment (Kumar et al., in press). Many researchers have been investigating the factors that foster expatriate adjustment (Ren et al., 2016; Selmer and Lauring, 2015), and one of the assumptions from this field of research is the idea that cultural differences between home and host cultures (cultural distance) are negatively related to expatriate adjustment (Wang and Varma, in press). This assumption is based on an intuitively reasonable presumption of symmetry (Selmer et al., 2007). However, using distance as an antecedent of adjustment implies that the flow of the direction is irrelevant. Some studies have been contesting this presumption (Selmer et al., 2007,
Shenkar, 2001), but there is a need to better understand which factors make the symmetry presumption unreliable. One way to do so is to study indigenous aspects of a specific host culture that can make it more welcoming to expatriates from more distant cultures. As individuals from that country would not necessarily find such when they expatriate to other cultures, this would help to challenge the often taken from granted symmetry assumption.

To fill this gap in the literature, this article aims to compare transcultural adjustment for expatriates from Latin American countries with those from developed countries, with the intent of evaluating the premise of a negative association between cultural distance and adaptation for the Brazilian context. We theorize that some specific cultural traits from the host culture can turn cultural distance into a factor that fosters cultural adjustment of the expatriates that live in their territory. In the case of this study, we suggest that Brazilian foreignism, a fixation of foreigners from developed countries (Araujo et al., 2014), makes them less receptive from Latin American expatriates (low cultural distance) and more open to expatriates from developed countries (high cultural distance). This study is important as it addresses indigenous aspects of a host culture as a factor that can challenge an intuitively plausible but vulnerable theoretical presumption from the expatriate adjustment literature.

Literature review

Expatriate transcultural adaptation

Transcultural adaptation refers to the degree of ease or difficulty expatriates possess in relation to various topics linked with living and working abroad (Lee and Van Vorst, 2010). It involves reducing uncertainty by developing greater comfort with and living in harmony in a new culture (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Black et al. (1991) proposed that expatriate transcultural adaptation consists of three dimensions: general (psychological satisfaction, climate, cuisine, shopping and housing), work adaptation (meeting work expectations, performance standards, and relative values of host locations) and adaptation to interactions (psychological comfort related to communication and interpersonal behaviours used in host cultures). These dimensions have been employed as categories of analysis in research into expatriate cultural adaptation, including for the Brazilian context (Araujo et al., 2014). Due to the growth in expatriation and the high costs inherent in international assignments, expatriate adaptation has become ever more critical to organizations (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Among the various factors that might influence transcultural adaptation, Black et al. (1991) and other studies highlight decision-making autonomy in the new assignment (Takeuchi et al., 2008); methods for selecting expatriates (Sparrow, 2007); individual abilities (Henderson et al., 2018; Kumar et al., in press); nonwork-related factors, such as family influence (Chen and Shaffer, 2018); and the influence of cultural relationships between countries of expatriate origin and destination (Colakoglu and Caligiuri, 2008; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011; Selmer et al., 2007; Wang and Varma, in press), commonly studied using the cultural distance concept.

Cultural distance

Diverse authors systematize differences between national cultures in quantitative terms (such as Hagenaars et al., 2003; Hall, 1959; Hofstede, 1980; Inglehart et al., 2004; Kluckhohn and Strodbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1997; Trompenaars, 1993). Some of these systemizations have been used to measure cultural distance, which is the degree to which a country’s basic cultural aspects, including values, beliefs, rituals, customs and legal, political and economic systems, differ from other countries’
(Sousa and Bradley, 2006). For example, White and Tadesse (2008) calculate cultural distance between countries by using World Value Surveys and European Values Surveys (Inglehart et al., 2004). Other authors (Ait Ouarasse and Van de Vijver, 2004; Suanet and Van de Vijver, 2009) adopt a strategy of employing instruments that measure individuals’ perceived cultural distance.

Despite the plurality of approaches, the majority of studies that operationalize the concept of cultural distance adopt Hofstede’s (1980) measures of cultural dimensions. To Hofstede, culture is a collective mental programming that distinguishes members of different groups. Using data of almost 100,000 IBM employees across 40 countries, Hofstede identified four dimensions that differentiate national cultures: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism (vs. collectivism) and masculinity. The validities of these factors have been confirmed by various researchers, including Søndergaard (1994) and Van Oudenhoven (2001). Based upon his research data, Hofstede established a rating for each of these dimensions for each country studied. Other countries and a fifth dimension, short-term/long-term orientation, were subsequently added to research data.

Kogut and Singh (1988) proposed an index for measuring the degree of cultural distance between countries based upon Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions. Emerging from the profusion of transcultural management studies, Kogut and Singh (1988) provided a useful alternative for measuring such a complex and intangible (Selmer et al., 2007) and relate it to other variables. Some investigations that have employed Kogut and Singh’s (1988) index subscribe to the following idea: the greater the cultural distance between two countries, the greater the uncertainty involved in relationships between them. This tends to complicate business activities between culturally distant countries. Other authors have tested hypotheses suggesting greater cultural distance results in greater differences in terms of human resources (Gong, 2003; Wilson et al., 2006), psychological well-being (Kashima and Abu-Rayya, 2014), relationship conflicts between partners in joint ventures or other types of partnerships (Wilson et al., 2006), greater probability of adopting entry modes based upon joint ventures (Gollnhofer and Turkina, 2015; Kogut and Singh, 1988) and greater incidence of problems involving inter-organizational trust and communication (Nes et al., 2007).

Despite being widely disseminated in the literature, the notion that cultural distance complicates expatriate adaptation is contested. When using cultural distance as an antecedent that complicates adaptation, the literature considers the adaptation directions as irrelevant: a Brazilian expatriate in Japan is presumed to face the same degree of difficulty as a Japanese expatriate in Brazil. However, empirical results and logic indicate otherwise (Selmer et al., 2007; Shenkar, 2001). Furthermore, particular cultural traits found in specific countries make it possible that cultural proximity doesn’t necessarily mean easier adaptation. Results of research undertaken with expatriates residing in Brazil (Araujo et al., 2014; Araujo and Teixeira, 2013) suggest that, depending upon their origin, expatriates receive distinct treatment in Brazil. While expatriates coming from developed countries are often treated with deference and even submission, those that come from developing countries often report they are subject to discrimination or neglect. This suggests that the culture of an expatriate’s host county can present peculiarities that derail the potential generalizability of the theory that cultural distance between countries explains expatriate transcultural adaptation.

Hypotheses formulation

As previously stated, a common idea found in the literature is that the greater the cultural distance between norms and values of an expatriate’s countries of origin and destination, the greater difficulty in adaptation to the international assignment (Selmer et al., 2007). Parker and McEvoy (1993), for example, in an investigation of 169 adults working in 12 different countries, identified a negative
relationship between cultural distance and expatriate transcultural adaptation. Since expatriates coming from developed countries in North America, Europe, Oceania, and Japan are more culturally distant from Brazil than Latin American expatriates, it would be reasonable to expect Latin Americans would adjust better to Brazil than those from developed countries.

However, the idea of a negative relationship between cultural distance and expatriate adjustment relies on an assumption of symmetry (Selmer et al., 2007). This assumption suggests that the cultural distance between the host and the home countries on reciprocal transfers should be identical. Although this an intuitively plausible idea, it ignores the idea that some cultures can show indigenous aspects than can make them more opened and hospitable to foreigners, but such aspects can be irrelevant when it comes to adjusting to another culture.

In this article, we study the specific case of Brazil. One of the Brazilian widely known cultural traits is foreignism, which is a fixation on foreigners. The lack of a paternal reference in the Brazilian mindset is often pointed out as a cause of the Brazilian trend of fixation on people from other countries (Araujo et al., 2014). Holanda (1995) argues that, upon arriving in Brazil, the Portuguese colonists mixed with people with different cultural backgrounds (Indians, Blacks and immigrants from other European countries) to develop a nation with a plural national identity without its on national references. Moreover, as Brazil, like other Latin American countries, was a colony of exploitation, not of development, the mixed-race people who came to inhabit their territory lacked their own causes in their historical development. Over the years, other countries have come up with the goals of exploiting the country’s wealth, such as England, France and the United States, and it is recurrent the understanding that individuals from these countries were seen as valued and admired father figures in the Brazilian cultural imaginary (Araujo and Teixeira, 2013). On the other hand, neighbouring countries have been seen as less admired because of their similar status as an ex-farm colony and a less developed country. This scenario leads to a differentiation in the treatment offered in general terms, at work and social to expatriates, depending on their country of origin (Araujo et al., 2014).

Despite being seen as more open to expatriates from developed countries than from culturally closer countries, such as their Latin American neighbours, it makes no sense to suggest that the adjustment of Brazilians expatriates would also be facilitated by the cultural trait of foreignism. Even if this trait could generate a predisposition in Brazilians to adapt to the culture of developed countries, it seems illogical to imagine that Brazilian foreignism would have a symmetrical positive effect on the adjustment of Brazilian expatriates abroad. This understanding puts in check the assumption of symmetry in the relationship between cultural distance and transcultural adaptation (Shenkar, 2001). Since the assumption of symmetry has already been challenged in a previous study (Selmer et al., 2007), in this article, we seek to reinforce the negative relation between cultural distance and the different dimensions of transcultural adaptation (general, interaction with locals and work) by testing whether expatriates from more culturally distant countries would adjust better to Brazil than those from Latin American countries.

Thus, we suggest that:

\textbf{H1:} In Brazil, expatriates from developed countries present a higher degree of general adaptation than Latin American expatriates.

\textbf{H2:} In Brazil, expatriates from developed countries present a higher degree of adaptation than Latin American expatriates in regard to interacting with locals.

\textbf{H3:} In Brazil, expatriates from developed countries present a higher degree of adaptation than Latin American expatriates in regard to work.
Methodology

Sample

Data were collected from expatriates resident in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Research involving expatriates often experience low response rates, which can result in bias. To avoid this problem, we used a convenience sample, obtained through personal contacts with sources for obtaining data. This is a strategy used in other research involving expatriates (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Using the snowball technique, where respondents were asked to suggest new participants, we developed successive waves of data collection.

Two hundred thirty-two responses to a questionnaire made available on the Internet were received. Four responses were eliminated for having repeated more than 77 per cent of the responses, resulting in a sample of 228 cases. Of these, a further 11 were eliminated due to the fact that their countries of origins were not included in Hofstede’s (1980) study or his more recent updates. In this way, a final valid sample of 217 cases was reached, of which 141 expatriates came from developed countries and 76 expatriates came from developing Latin American countries. Even though Brazil is much closer geographically to Latin American countries than European, North American and Asiatic countries, a majority of expatriates from developed countries in these areas were expected, since they are more highly represented in terms of executives that are trained and assigned to foreign countries (BGRS, 2011).

Measures

The degree of expatriate transcultural adaptation was measured by applying Black’s (1988) scale, which is composed of three dimensions: general (psychological satisfaction, climate, cuisine, shopping and housing), work adaptation (meeting work expectations, performance standards and relative values of host locations) and adaptation to interactions (psychological comfort related to communication and interpersonal behaviours used in host cultures). The questionnaire consisted of 11 assertions using 7-point Likert-type scales, with ‘1’ representing ‘not adapted’ and ‘7’ signifying ‘very well adapted’. The scale was applied in English, since subjects comprising the study’s target population primarily speak this language.

Control variables

Seven control variables that relate to transcultural adaptation were included in the study: company country of origin, expatriate nationality, age, civil status, sex, time (in months) living as an expatriate in Brazil as of answering the questionnaire and cultural distance. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to verify whether the seven control variables and each of the assertions found in Black et al. (1991) instrument differ between the two groups studied (Latin American and developed country expatriates). ANOVA was chosen as it is a parametric test used when it is necessary to verify whether there are differences between the averages of a variable in relation to another that is a predictor variable with two or more categorical levels. With the exception of cultural distance, all of the other control variables were evaluated via participant responses, obtained through category (company country of origin, expatriate nationality, civil status and sex) and continuous (age in years and duration of expatriation in months) data. Calculation of cultural distance between Brazil and expatriate countries of origin was realized using the index proposed by Kogut and Singh.
Taking Brazil as a reference, the index was calculated based upon the following formula

$$DC_j = \frac{1}{4} \sum_{i=1}^{4} \left( \frac{(I_{ij} - I_{iu})^2}{V_i} \right)^2$$

This index is based upon the deviation each country’s rating in relation to Brazil’s rating for each of Hofstede’s (1980) four cultural dimensions, where the index for the \(i^\text{th}\) cultural dimension of country \(j\), is the cultural difference between \(j\) and Brazil. Hofstede’s fifth cultural dimension, short-term/long-term orientation, wasn’t included in the calculation, because at the time of this research Hofstede had only published the scores of a few countries for this last dimension. This index is often criticized for not allowing a mutual comparison of distance between various countries; it only allows measuring the cultural distance for each country in relation to a single reference country (Evans and Mavondo, 2002; Tanure et al., 2009). However, this criticism isn’t a problem for this research, since we indeed do want to understand adaptation by expatriates from various countries specifically in relation to Brazil alone.

Of the seven control variables, the following had differences between the groups: age \((F = 6.23, p < 0.05)\), sex \((F = 9.25, p < 0.01)\), time in Brazil \((F = 6.81, p < 0.01)\) and cultural distance \((F = 161.82, p < 0.001)\).

### Analysis of results

The purpose of this research is to compare transcultural adaptation of expatriates from developed countries with those from developing Latin American countries. This objective stems from the assumption that Latin countries are culturally closer than developed countries to Brazil. Thus, the sample was divided into two groups: expatriates from developed countries and expatriates from developing Latin American countries. Table 1 presents the cultural distances between the countries of origin for each expatriate group and Brazil. These calculations were made using Kogut and Singh’s (1988) cultural distance index.

To verify whether these two groups of countries are significantly different in terms of cultural distance from Brazil, we employed a test to compare averages. This test indicated that cultural distances for the developing Latin American countries found in Table 1 are significantly different \((F = 13.75, p < 0.01)\) from those of developed countries. The countries comprising group 1 show an average cultural distance of 0.4 from Brazil, while the average for countries from group 2 is 1.65. Note that within group 2, only Portugal (0.56), France (0.48) and Spain (0.21) show smaller cultural distance indices compared to Brazil than the country from group 1 that is most distant as compared to Brazil (Venezuela at 0.64).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for latent first-order variables for the ‘Transcultural Adaptation’ construct and the four control variables that differ between groups of research participants. All of these variables (age, time in Brazil, sex and cultural distance) show significant correlations with at least one dimension of transcultural adaptation, as expected. In general, we can say that the expatriates are reasonably adapted in general terms and in terms of interaction with locals (an average of 4.64 for both, on a 7-point scale). However, adaptation in relation to work proved to be less satisfactory (an average of 3.57 on a 7-point scale). The degree of adaptation encountered is lower than that reported in similar studies of other countries (Black, 1988; Peltokorpi...
and Froese, 2009), consistent with the results of BGRS (2011), which identified how Brazil stands out as one of the most challenging countries for expatriates to adapt to.

As with Peltokorpi and Froese’s (2009) research, duration of expatriation positively correlates with general adaptation. We can say that expatriates who are in Brazil longer are better adapted in general terms than expatriates who have been in the country for less time. This result was expected, since transcultural adaptation is frequently viewed as a time-related process (Black, 1988). Another result that was expected based upon the logic that motivated this research is a positive correlation between cultural distance and the dimensions related to general adaptation and to interaction with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural distance from Brazil</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents within group (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1 – Developing Latin American countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>México</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colômbia</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>76</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.40</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard deviation</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.13</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2 – Developed countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.65</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard deviation</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.92</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
locals. This means that expatriates coming from countries more culturally distant from Brazil adapt better than those coming from countries more similar to Brazil in cultural terms. This result suggests that applying a theory positing that cultural distance impedes transcultural adaptation is not appropriate to the reality of Brazil as a host country for expatriates. These correlations also suggest that female expatriates show better adaptation than male expatriates in terms of interacting with locals. This result is different from that found in Selmer and Leung’s (2007) study. In addition, our data suggest that younger expatriates adapt better in terms of interaction with locals.

We conducted multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the variables ‘age’, ‘cultural distance’, ‘months in Brazil’ and ‘sex’ with the co-variables to test for the differences in relation to expatriate adaptation in both groups. MANCOVA indicated that, in global terms, there are significant differences between the groups in terms of transcultural adaptation ($F = 41.86, p < 0.001$): expatriates from developed countries showed higher indices of transcultural adaptation. Next, we performed an ANCOVA to evaluate the differences between the groups for each dimension of Black et al. (1991), transcultural adaptation model. The results indicated that expatriates from developed countries are significantly more adapted than Latin American expatriates in terms of general adaptation ($F = 52.41, p < 0.001$), leading to support hypothesis 1. Expatriates from developed countries also showed significantly superior adaptation to Latin American expatriates in terms of interaction with locals ($F = 68.16, p < 0.001$). This result supports hypothesis 2. However, the adaptation to work dimension does not show significant difference between the groups, thus rejecting hypothesis 3. The ANCOVA results are displayed in Table 3.

### Discussion

In this research, we sought to test whether a negative relationship between cultural distance and expatriate transcultural adaptation holds true for the Brazilian context, a country with cultural traits that value that which is foreign and disregard for that which is Brazilian (Motta et al., 2001). Previous research (Araujo and Teixeira, 2013; Araujo et al., 2014) has shown that expatriates from different origins report different adaptation experiences. While expatriates from developed countries frequently relate an excessive demand for affective demonstration and the need for approval on the part of Brazilians, Latin American expatriates often cite situations in which they feel Brazilians act

### Table 2. Averages, standard deviations and correlations between variables ($n = 217$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – General adaptation</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Adaptation to interaction</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.257**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Adaptation to work</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.148*</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Age</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>-0.194**</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Time in Brazil</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>0.392***</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – Sex</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.150*</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>-0.116</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – Cultural Distance</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.257**</td>
<td>0.381**</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>-0.128</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Sex was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.
in an arrogant manner. This Brazilian cultural characteristic, an impetus for our research, results in a
certain disregard for Latin America and admiration for countries thought to be in positions of ‘ideal
father-figures’ (Araujo and Teixeira, 2013) in the Brazilian imagination.
Our research, in turn, was based upon the hypothesis that depending upon the dimension of
cultural adaptation (Black, 1988), cultural distance or foreignness approaches might be more
adequate for explaining transcultural adjustment. Our results suggest that the theory of cultural
distance as a predictor of difficulties in transcultural adaptation cannot be generalized for the
Brazilian expatriate host environment context. Participants’ responses show that expatriates origi-
nating from developed countries adapt in a more satisfactory manner than Latin American
expatriates, even though they are more culturally distant. This result can be interpreted in a way that
positions foreignness, reflected in the privileges that expatriates from developed countries receive to
a greater extent than do Latin American expatriates (Araujo and Teixeira, 2013), as a more deter-
ministic cultural characteristic than cultural distance in terms of explaining executive adaptation
during international assignments to Brazil. Controlling for the differences between Latin American
expatriates and those from developed countries, we observed that these two groups primarily dif-
ferentiate in how expatriates from developed countries are significantly more adapted in general and
in interaction with locals.
The greater general adaptation by expatriates coming from developed countries as compared to
those from Latin American countries adds credence to the results reported by Araujo et al. (2014),
which identified that Latin American expatriates feel treated differently by organizations, which is
reflected in less assistance given to help them adapt to Brazil. Araujo et al. (2014) stress that expatriates from Latin American countries report a certain level of shock regarding the high cost of living in Brazil compared to other Latin American countries and that the support received for relocating and settling in to Brazil is insufficient for their needs. While North American and European expatriates receive other fringe benefits, such as international schools for their children comparable to those of their home countries, relocation assistance, cars, training in transcultural adaptation and language, this is not always the case for other Latin Americans. Thus, it is understand-
able that expatriates from developed countries show a greater adaptation to cuisine, shopping,
transportation and other aspects of quotidian life in Brazil.
Adaptation in terms of interacting with locals was also significantly greater for expatriates from
developed countries than those from Latin American countries, divergent from that hypothesized
using existing literature as a basis. It has been thought that the similarities in terms of climate and
language, for example, make the interaction process with locals easier for Latin Americans. In
reality, our results were contrary to these expectations. Theories about relationships between

| Table 3. Comparison of the degrees of adaptation by dimension and group. |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                         | Group 1                | Group 2                |
|                         | \( n = 76 \)           | \( n = 141 \)          |
|                         | Average | Standard deviation | Average | Standard deviation | F value |
| General adaptation      | 3.73    | 0.71               | 5.12    | 0.94               | 52.41*** |
| Adaptation to interaction| 3.93    | 0.84               | 5.01    | 0.78               | 68.16*** |
| Adaptation to work      | 3.58    | 0.94               | 3.56    | 1.03               | 0.10    |

***p < 0.001.
cultures and results from previous research can help clarify this result. Brachfeld (1951), for example, proposed the theory called ‘Gulliver’s Complex’, which said that people from a given country might have inferiority complexes related to some countries and seek to compensate for these feelings by a posture of superiority over still other countries. Araujo and Teixeira (2013) interpreted that foreignness, which is grounded in a feeling of inferiority regarding certain people – in the Brazilian context, depending upon period, the Portuguese, British, French and today Americans (Motta et al., 2001) – can manifest itself not only through extreme admiration for people from developed countries but also through further efforts at compensation for these feelings via actions directed towards other groups from developing countries. Araujo and Teixeira (2013) and Araujo et al. (2014) all identified that while European and North American expatriates regard Brazilians as a solicitous and receptive people, Latin American expatriates frequently see Brazilians as arrogant. Thus, foreignness can be understood as a bipolar dimension of Brazilian culture, where one pole represents Brazilian solicitude towards the ‘foreign ideal-father’ (Araujo and Teixeira, 2013) and the other pole represents an arrogant behaviour towards those that Brazilians feel are similar to themselves. This latter relationship consists of efforts at compensating for feelings of inferiority, understood from the theoretical approach of Gulliver’s Complex (Brachfeld, 1951).

Differences between expatriates groups in terms of work adaptation were not identified. Parker and McEvoy (1993), in a study of expatriates from 12 different countries working in the same environment, also did not report any significant relationship between cultural distance and work adaptation. Peltokorpi and Froese (2009), when comparing transcultural adaptation between organizational and volunteer expatriates, also did not encounter any significant differences in adjustment between executives. This recurring pattern of results seems to suggest that expatriate adaptation to expectations, performance standards and relative work values of the host culture is little influenced by external factors such as cultural distance. The practices, techniques, and work standards adopted by different cultures have shown to be very similar, which might mean that expatriates do not need to go through significant adaptations in these regards when on international assignment.

Furthermore, it is worth stressing that when on international assignment, an expatriate is usually assigned to a subsidiary of the company for which they work and, thus, tends to already be familiar with the work characteristics. Such results allow proposal of the idea that expatriate adaptation to work is much more closely related to expatriates’ capacities for adjusting to global expectations and standards of their companies and assignments than to the values relative to working in different countries. As such, the results suggest that Latin American expatriates and those from developed countries have similar abilities to meet work expectations assigned them by their companies.

In general, our research results show that the theoretical proposal declaring that cultural distance impedes the transcultural adaptation process cannot be applied to the Brazilian context. Despite a lack of empirical evidence, it is apparent that the logical and intuitive character of this proposal has led to it being assumed as true and generalizable in various previous research studies (Selmer et al., 2007). This research points out a fact that specificities in relationships between one countries and other countries or blocs of countries might invalidate the generalizability of the negative association between cultural distance and expatriate adaptation. In the Brazilian case, the cultural characteristic of ‘Foreignness’ seems to be just such a specific element that invalidates this generalization.
Final considerations

Limitations

This study has limitations. As all of the data came from self-evaluation, responses might suffer from social desirability bias, which could be avoided in future research by including other individuals that might be able to evaluate expatriates’ adaptation (e.g. work partners). The small sample size also can be seen as a limitation, since it reduces the potential generalizability of the results. Even so, our sample could be considered a research strength in that it encompassed 26 nationalities, including a relative balance between the two groups being studied (developed countries and developing Latin American countries). In this sense, the sample was superior in nature to those used in similar studies published in highly credible journals (i.e. Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009; Selmer et al., 2007). The broad range of nationalities comprising our sample allows for a general applicability of results to expatriates in Brazil.

Future research

The research also illuminates opportunities for future research. While the term ‘Foreignness’ has not been used in the literature regarding other Latin American countries, there are indications that a fixation on that which is foreign is not an exclusively Brazilian characteristic. According to Brachfeld (1951), Latin Americans tend to manifest feelings of extreme submission and admiration to cultures from developed countries and disregard of aspects of their own culture and people. Thus, we recommend that this study be replicated in other Latin American countries in a way to allow for theoretical advancement of the effect host country cultural conditions have on the executive transcultural adaptation process. In this sense, we also suggest the undertaking of comparative studies focusing on expatriate transcultural adaptation for two or more countries with distinctive cultures (e.g. one country with cultural traits related to fixation on foreignness and another country without). We believe that such investigations can enable extended generalizability of theories regarding moderating effects of cultural characteristics from specific countries or blocs of countries with respect to the relationship between cultural distance and expatriate transcultural adaptation.

Managerial relevance

Our results suggest that managers should avoid assuming as truth the theoretical generalization that expatriates from countries more culturally similar to the host country will experience better transcultural adaptation. The primary practical implication for professionals from the International Human Resource Management area refers to the fact that expatriate training and benefits policies should not be based on the cultural distance between origin and host countries. Even though it is intuitive to imagine that expatriates coming from more culturally distant countries inevitably face greater adaptation difficulties and, as a consequence, need greater organizational support, we suggest that managers take into consideration that different combinations of cultural characteristics can demand specific expatriate support policies. Therefore, we advise that companies review the differences between expatriate benefits policies offered to executives of Latin American origin, since, both in this research and in another recent study (Araujo et al., 2014), there is evidence that inferior organizational support offered to Latin American expatriates in Brazil might be resulting in adaptation challenges for these professionals. Given the fact that today Brazil occupies a strategic
position as an expatriate destination, including for Latin American professionals, we believe that this recommendation be enacted in the various companies that make use of expatriation.

**Theoretical contribution**

This study provides empirical evidence that contest the sometimes taken for granted negative association between cultural distance and expatriate adjustment. Our findings contribute to the current debate on the use of the cultural distance index as a predictor in cross-cultural management studies, by showing a situation where this relationship is not true. We also challenged the symmetry assumption to explain our counterintuitive results. Thus, our study can stimulate reflections about the importance of understanding possible asymmetric characteristics between two countries involved in an expatriation process, and also in other cross-cultural processes, such as joint ventures and other forms of partnerships.

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