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## The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children

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## ***Chapter 9***

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*The concluding chapter of this thesis comprises discussions about intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children. This chapter begins with the author's personal experience while staying in the Netherlands (continuing the account from Chapter 1), followed by a summary and discussion of the major findings of the present thesis. Next, recommendations for further studies are outlined. Finally, we will end with practical recommendations and advice to expatriate spouses, expatriate children, expatriates, and international companies.*

*Author's Personal Experience while Staying in the Netherlands  
(Continued from Chapter 1)*

*In October 1998, Prof. Ghauri and Prof. Sanders extended an invitation to me to write a P.h.D dissertation at the University of Groningen. In March 1999, I found myself setting foot again in the Netherlands, this time, physically and mentally, better prepared. A year before that, I was in the company of students who were struggling with their studies and now I had to mix with lecturers and work in the same building with them! During the first two years of my stay, I tried hard to make friends but alas, to no avail. Tired with the effort of trying to make friends, I stopped. Even some of my colleagues were cold towards me. My African friends complained that their colleagues did not always answer their greetings and that upset them. In addition, hearing some problems raised by the expatriate spouses while volunteering at ACCESS in The Hague/Den Haag made me feel even more discouraged. Many spouses complained that they had invited neighbours and Dutch friends to their homes for tea, parties, and dinner, but sadly, seldom were invitations reciprocated. Hearing about these anecdotes and other similar experiences which my friends had undergone influenced me to some extent. From an outgoing and extroverted person, I slowly found myself becoming introverted. I limited my interactions to my close friends only and a few acquaintances. Sometimes I wonder whether by acting that way I was unconsciously adapting to the individualistic Dutch culture and leaving my collectivist culture behind?*

*Not only at the office did I have a hard time making friends but also in the neighbourhood where I live. I didn't even know my neighbours' names and I had the feeling that they did not even bother to know mine — later I came to understand that that was how Dutch respect the privacy of others. Hence, contact with neighbours was limited only to greetings. At that time I wished my command of the Dutch language were better so that I could have a conversation rather than just an exchange of greetings and small talk with my colleagues and neighbours. This situation brought me to the idea that in order to make intercultural interaction a success story, it is not only the sojourners, but both sojourners and local people have to cooperate and participate. After I stopped trying to make friends and to be accepted, I suddenly found myself happier. My ability to speak Dutch improved overtime (it is still not good but I manage) and I started to make more friends and get acquainted with my neighbours (the present study found that the ability to speak the local language contributes to expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation). I enjoy thoroughly the way Dutch people greet each other and I have followed suit. It is fun to greet everyone that I meet, especially with "Goedendag", "Dag", "Prettige dag verder", and "Tot*

*ziens” in daily encounters, “Prettig weekend” every Friday before leaving the office, and not forgetting, “Eet smakelijk” before eating.*

*My mother freaked out when I first told her that I wanted to continue my studies in the Netherlands. She pointed out the history of how the Dutch conquered Indonesia and Malaysia. She was afraid that they would treat me badly. Moreover, there are a few old Malay proverbs about the Dutch, which are biasly related to the Dutch. Luckily in my own experience, nobody had treated me badly. Of course, there are a few things about the Dutch that are different from my fellow countrymen. At times, I find the Dutch too direct and they do not always consider others. One common example that I face and which is rather annoying is that the Dutch say, “That is your problem” when they cannot help me when I approach them. Another example is when people buy tickets or show their bus passes to the bus driver. They know beforehand that they are going to board the bus but it is only when they step into the bus that they then busy themselves for a minute or two looking for the bus tickets in their pockets or in their bags, or searching for money to pay for the fare. I also find that in general the Dutch talk too loudly in the inappropriate places. I am used to the way the Chinese communicate with one another but I think the Dutch sometimes can be louder. For example, the Dutch talk loudly in the train and also in their gardens or backyards during the summer till late at night without considering that their neighbours are trying to get some sleep. I sometimes do not understand why people at 6 o’clock in the morning talk so loudly in the train about renovating the bathroom as if to let everyone in the train know about that, and not to mention the young ladies who giggle and talk at high pitch with one another. I remember a story told by a good friend of mine. She was travelling in a fully packed train and three ladies were seated beside her. They were talking loudly to one another and my friend turned on her walkman a little bit louder. One of the ladies tapped her on her knee and mentioned that the walkman was too loud. Well, how loud can a walkman be compared to three ladies talking on top of their voices! By the same token, I am always fascinated and amazed by the energy that the Dutch have in talking and discussing. I think that is the reason why the Netherlands is such a developed country is because information, knowledge, and ideas are discussed and passed to one another, which is in contrast to my culture where people tend to keep quiet and where reticence is a virtue.*

*Living in a rich country like the Netherlands, I find the cost of living quite prohibitive. It became worse when the Euro was introduced. Living on a monthly scholarship, I found my purchasing power becoming less and less and that puts a damper on things. One day I argued with a butcher because he increased the price of one-kilogram meat drastically. I am also afraid of*

*visiting my dentist — not I fear the treatment — but because of the fees that the dentist will charge me (my basic student's health insurance does not cover all health costs). Interestingly, the present study also indicated that the better the economic situation in an expatriate family, the better the adaptation of the expatriate spouse.*

*I try to keep myself in the “honeymoon period” most of the time by acting like a tourist. I do a lot of sightseeing in the Netherlands and also in the neighbouring countries. I visit museums and seldom miss the chance to catch events that are not found in my home country (e.g. the Summer Parade in Rotterdam, flea markets, Koninginnedag— the Queen's birthday celebration on the 30th of April, Keukenhof — the tulip garden, and a lot more). Whenever I feel bored and low, I visit my friends and also invite them to my place. At the same time, I keep in touch with developments in Malaysia by checking the news through the internet and also listening to the Malaysian radio via the internet. These two activities have considerably reduced my homesickness.*

*There are many little things that contribute to my socio-cultural adjustment to living in the Netherlands. Being able to get all the spices and ingredients, I cook Malaysian food. Once again, having friends who can cook delicious Malaysian meals helps. I do not mind Dutch food. Of course, I am now addicted to eating “patat” (French fries) and cheese! As much as I do not mind Dutch food, I also don't mind the Dutch weather. It has become a common complaint and it is a good topic to start a conversation with someone. Nevertheless, I enjoy seeing the change seasons: from the windy fall to the wet and gloomy winter and from the colourful spring to the joyful summer. Over time, I have developed a few new hobbies: visiting museums, walking down the streets of the beautiful cities and towns, and collecting antiques (only the small ones that I can afford to buy). On top of that, I am very fortunate that I have the opportunity to live in an old typical Dutch row house in Den Haag (the house will be 100 years old in 2006) and to fill it with a few Dutch antiques — what better way is there to feel like a Dutch man than to live in a house decorated like other typical Dutch houses! I also keep myself updated with the things happening in the Netherlands by watching news on TV and reading the free newspapers (Spits and Metro) that I get every time I travel by train. Furthermore, I am glad that while completing this thesis, I have met many wonderful people, both Dutch and expatriate. Having the opportunity to become their friend and working with them add colour to my daily life. Life here would not have been easy without the support that I received from them.*

*Having said all that, the experiences of living in the Netherlands have opened my eyes to the importance of intercultural adaptation to a sojourner. I never paid much attention to cultural differences among people from the different countries in the world until I came to the Netherlands. In short, I highly appreciate and value the experience gained while living in the Netherlands. If I could turn back the clock, I would have chosen to study in the Netherlands much earlier.*

## 9.1 Introduction

International relocation is not an easy undertaking. Numerous studies (e.g., Black & Stephens, 1989; De Ciere et al., 1991) indicate that expatriate spouses' adaptation was related to the success of international business assignments. With such studies in mind, the present thesis was based on the assumption that the adaptation of expatriate family members is crucial to successful fulfillment of international business assignments. Numerous researchers (e.g., Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Usunier, 1998) have studied the determinants of expatriates' success. However, the studies that explicitly focussed on expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation are relatively few in number (e.g., De Cieri et al., 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Copeland & Norell, 2002). We tried to obtain insight in the determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children. Data were obtained from expatriate spouses, expatriate children, and also expatriates.

## 9.2 Summary of the Major Findings from Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8

In this section, we summarize the major findings of the present study.

Chapter 4 introduced the theoretical model of the present study. Among the determinants of intercultural adaptation studied in the present research were personality characteristics (Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Social Initiative, Emotional Stability, and Flexibility), family characteristics (Family Cohesion, Family Adaptability, and Family Communication), Expatriates' Work Characteristics (Support from Company and Expatriates' Work Satisfaction) and finally, Attachment Styles (Secure, Dismissive-avoidant, and Ambivalent Attachment Styles). The Attachment Styles variables were examined among expatriate children only.

The first part of the present study focused on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. Personality characteristics, family characteristics, and expatriates' work characteristics were examined as the determinants of the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses. In the study described in Chapter 5, indicators of expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation were Psychological Well-being, Intercultural Interaction/Interaction with Locals, and Socio-cultural Adjustment. Among a sample of 248 expatriate spouses it was first shown that in particular the personal characteristics of Open-mindedness and Emotional Stability were associated with expatriate spouses' adaptation. In addition, Family Cohesion and Family Adaptability were also found to have an impact on expatriate spouses' adaptation. Of the

variables related to expatriates' work, both Support from Company and Expatriates' Work Satisfaction were significantly related to spouses' intercultural adaptation. Finally, the influence of a number of demographic variables was examined. Particularly the duration of expatriation, command of the local language, having visited the country prior to relocation, and the expatriate family's economic well-being seemed to contribute to expatriate spouses' adaptation.

A follow-up study after a year's interval was performed among a sample of 50 expatriate spouses. This study showed that expatriate spouses' personality characteristics dominated as the determinants of their intercultural adaptation in a host country. Open-mindedness was significantly related to expatriate spouses' interaction with the local people whereas Open-mindedness, Social Initiative, and Flexibility were significantly related to expatriate spouses' Socio-cultural Adjustment in a host country. Family characteristics and expatriates' work characteristics did not show any effects on the three indicators of intercultural adaptation. The results indicated that personality characteristics, particularly Open-mindedness, Social Initiative, and Flexibility sustained as "long-term" determinants of successful adaptation to a host country.

Next, we were interested in the influence of the expatriate spouses' original culture on their adaptation and also the importance of the model predictors (Chapter 6). First, we investigated the effect of cultural background in terms of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions on intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses who have been expatriated in the Netherlands. In general, we expected that expatriate spouses from cultures similar to the Netherlands would adapt more easily to the Netherlands than expatriate spouses from different cultures. This was only weakly supported for expatriate spouses from Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. As predicted the determinants of intercultural adaptation differed across cultures. For example, Flexibility was found to be a more important determinant of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures as compared to Individualistic cultures and Flexibility was also more important to adaptation of expatriate spouses from strong as compared to weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. We also found that family characteristics were more important among expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures and that personality as well as expatriates' work characteristics were more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures. Results from this study, however, should be considered cautiously because of the imbalance in the number of respondents scoring high and low on each of Hofstede's cultural dimension.

Furthermore, we examined the influence of both expatriates' and their spouses' Work-home Interference (WHI) and Home-work Interference (HWI) on spouses' intercultural adaptation. Due to increased demands at work expatriates may have less energy to help their spouses with tasks at home. Moreover, high demands in their own work situation may interfere with tasks at home and vice versa. Take for example an expatriate who has to fetch his/her children home from school while at the same time an important meeting has been scheduled. Previous studies have proven that resources and demands at home and in work situations affect work-home interference. Ninety-four expatriates and their spouses participated in the study. First, expatriate spouses' adaptation was found to be affected by resources and demands they experienced at home, particularly among the non-working spouses. Second, both positive and negative interference between home and work roles affected working spouses' level of adaptation. Third, the negative spillover effects of roles at home impacted on the work of their partners, i.e., the expatriates affected their spouses' in a negative manner. Furthermore, negative spillover effects reported by expatriates were significantly negatively related to their spouses' intercultural adaptation. Interestingly, expatriates' home demands in the presence of negative home-work interference had a negative effect on spouses' adaptation.

An expatriate spouse once told the author,  
*It is a sin to have a child while expatriating.*

How bad it is to bring a child or children along while expatriating? In the study described in Chapter 8, the influence of a number of determinants of expatriate children's intercultural adaptation was examined. The same model variables as we studied among expatriate spouses were employed. In addition, expatriate children's attachment styles were studied and regarded as the determinants of their adaptation in a host country. One hundred and four children participated in the present study. With respect to the family characteristics, Family Cohesion, Family Adaptability, and Family Communication appeared to be important predictors of expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. Of the five personality characteristics, Social Initiative and Emotional Stability indicated significant effects on children's general and psychological health as well as socio-cultural adjustment and satisfaction with the living conditions. In addition, Open-mindedness showed a significant relationship with expatriate children's general and psychological health. Among the determinants, the attachment styles of expatriate children dominated as the strongest predictor of expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. Both an Ambivalent Attachment Style, and a Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style displayed negative significant effects on expatriate children's general and psychological health, and also on

their socio-cultural adjustment/satisfaction with the living conditions. As expected, the Secure Attachment Style of expatriate children positively affects both indicators of intercultural adaptation. In terms of the parents' work characteristics, only Expatriates' Work Satisfaction was found significantly related to both indicators of expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. Finally, demographic data such as participation in decision to relocate and whether expatriate children felt that their parents really considered their opinions regarding the relocation were both positively related to expatriate children's general and psychological health. Command of the local language and having siblings in the host country contributed to their socio-cultural adjustment/satisfaction with the living conditions.

### **9.3 The Role of Personality Characteristics, Family Characteristics, Expatriates' Work Characteristics, and the Attachment Styles on Expatriate Spouses' and Children's Intercultural Adaptation**

The main purpose of the present thesis was to examine the determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children. The present thesis has succeeded in highlighting a few determinants that contribute to expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation.

#### **Personality Characteristics**

Hofstede (1991) stated that Emotional Stability is the most important trait for sojourners to adapt successfully in a different culture. In the present study, it was found that Emotional Stability was important for expatriate spouses' as well as expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. The results of the present study confirmed Hofstede's contention that Emotional Stability is crucial for sojourners' intercultural adaptation. A person has to be emotionally stable to face the cultural differences in a host country and to take on the challenge of the process of adapting to living in a host country.

In addition, Open-mindedness was also revealed as a main determinant for expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. An unprejudiced attitude towards out-group members and towards different cultural norms and values seems crucial for an expatriate to live in harmony in a host country. Expatriate spouses need to be open-minded since most of them have to maintain direct contacts with local people in their daily life in the host country. When an expatriate spouse from Malaysia was asked about her attitude towards Dutch cultures, she replied,

*I knew beforehand that Dutch people have a different culture than mine. I already expected to see and face many differences but I am O.K. with them. I can accept that. I also can accept the Dutch the way they are, both good and bad, and I don't make a fuss about it.*

Besides Emotional Stability, among children, Social Initiative was shown to be an important determinant of success. Expatriate children need to show initiative in their social lives since they spend most of their time at school meeting other expatriate or local children, facing the difficult task of making new friends despite cultural and language differences.

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2000) was developed in order to predict multicultural success among international employees. The present data show that the five dimensions have predictive value for the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children. The instrument seems useful to international companies in the diagnosis and prediction of employees' and their family members' ability to adapt to different culture. A specific version aimed at children was designed for the purpose of the present study and is available in Dutch and English.

### **Family Characteristics**

When asked about the relationship with his children, one male expatriate spouse with a son and two daughters told the author,

*I have nothing much to do except taking care of the children, doing household chores and groceries and laundry. To think of that, yes, I think that the children are now closer to me compared to when we were back home.*

The present thesis found that Family Cohesion and Family Adaptability were important for expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation, which is consistent to findings of studies by Forster (2000) and Copeland and Norell (2002). Forster revealed that Family Cohesion, Family Adaptability, and Family Communication contributed to positive outcomes of international assignments. Copeland and Norell (2002) showed that Family Cohesion contributed to expatriate spouses' adaptation in a host country. In the present study among expatriate spouses, Family Communication did not show any significant effect on indicators of

intercultural adaptation. Family communication may serve as a dimension that facilitates adaptability and the same may hold for family cohesion (Olson et al., 1984). All family-related variables were found to be important for expatriate children's intercultural adaptation.

Thus, the present data suggest that expatriate spouses and their children have to maintain a healthy level of family cohesion, adaptability, and communication. If problems were detected among the family members before the relocation, international companies and their families may benefit from family therapy in which all the family members are involved.

The present study relied on the Family Inventories scale (Olson, McCubbin et al., 1992). The scale proved to be useful in measuring family characteristics among children and spouses. However, we agree with Copeland and Norell (2002) who stated that the scale needs a few adjustments in terms of the questions asked in order to suit the samples of study. The scale was developed to measure family characteristics in a normal family situation. In the present study we used only the items that were relevant to expatriates' family situation and whenever necessary adjusted them slightly in order to make them pertinent to expatriate spouses and children.

### **Expatriate Work Characteristics**

Two aspects of expatriates' work characteristics that would contribute to expatriate spouses' and children's adaptation were considered: support that the family receive from the company and also expatriates' work satisfaction. Company assistance with the relocation seems to be a strong predictor of psychological adjustment of an expatriate's partner, particularly in the early stages of the expatriation (De Ciere et al., 1991). In the present study, support received from the company was indeed found to be related to expatriate spouses' psychological well-being but the same factor did not show any significant association with expatriate children's adaptation. This result makes sense since expatriate children were seldom aware of the support given by the company to the family and they would have thought that almost everything they had was from their parents. An observation volunteered by one expatriate spouse written at the back of a completed questionnaire,

*The company of my husband is not really taking care of people, and the family!*

which literally echoes Forster's (1997) study which showed that most of expatriate spouses were dissatisfied with the relocation support provided by the companies.

Consistent with the pattern of results for company assistance, expatriates' work satisfaction was significantly related to all three indicators of expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation and was found to be related only to expatriate children's general and psychological health. A male expatriate spouse told us,

*I would rather not hear about my wife's problems at work. There are already a lot of dissatisfactions about living in this country and I don't want her story to be part of the dissatisfactions...*

The results of the present thesis indicate that having a partner or a parent who is happy with his/her work life in the host country positively influenced family members' intercultural adaptation. Thus, international companies should pay more attention to expatriate spouses and children needs and demands during the expatriation process and at the same time support them in every possible way so as to make their process of adaptation smoother. In addition, companies have to pay attention to the well-being of the expatriates and their working environments in the host country because the benefits are felt by not only expatriate themselves but also their partners and children.

### **The Attachment Styles**

In the present thesis, the attachment styles of expatriate children were found to be the strongest predictor of expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. A Secure Attachment Style positively affected both indicators of intercultural adaptation. Cohen et al. (2002) reported that the Secure Attachment Style can be regarded as an inner resource that facilitates adjustment and improves well-being in adverse situations.

Both the Ambivalent Attachment Style and the Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style of expatriate children were negatively related to indicators of intercultural adaptation. These styles have been referred to as Insecure Attachment by Cohen et al. (2002) and are viewed as risk factors that may detract from individual's resilience in time of stress. It must be noted that the Ambivalent Attachment Style is related to the personality characteristic of emotional stability. Both Ambivalent Attachment Style and emotional stability are characterized by anxiousness, hostility, and distress in stressful

situations (Kobak & Sceery, 1998; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). However, regression analysis revealed the effects of Attachment Styles sustained after controlling for Emotional Stability. Expatriate children with Ambivalent and Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Styles may find it hard to adapt to the new environment in a host country and this group needs professional help in terms of counseling together with their parents so as to build the children's confidence.

Parents are encouraged to empathize with the situation of their children who may probably face difficulties in adapting to the new environment of the host country. Taking time to talk, listening, and showing that they care about the phases that the children are going through will make major differences to the children. Consequently, with the help and support of their parents, a Secure Attachment Style can be consolidated in expatriate children.

#### **9.4 Recommendations for Further Studies**

The present thesis has managed to shed light on a number of determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children. Nevertheless, the present thesis also suffers from a number of weaknesses.

During evaluation interviews, the expatriate spouses suggested that there was an additional important determinant of intercultural adaptation, i.e., support that they received from other expatriates especially from their own home country. Interestingly, Copeland and Norell (2002) indicated that expatriate spouses reported higher levels of adaptation when they received more support from local rather than long-distance providers. Future research could focus on the influence of support from other expatriates from their home country on adaptation as compared to support from local people or friends and relatives at home country. Further studies may also examine the local people's attitude towards expatriates and the issues in cross-cultural communication. Local people may have negative ideas about the expatriates and under those circumstances, it will not be easy for expatriates to engage in interactions with the local people. Hofstede (1991) for example argued that local people also have their own cycles of adjustment of accepting the sojourners in their neighbourhood (see Hofstede, 1991, p. 211 for a complete discussion).

Future work can also overcome limitations of the present thesis in terms of the number of respondents. In order to reach a higher response rate, especially among expatriate children, we suggest offering incentives for

completing the questionnaires, for example in the form of small presents. We would also like to suggest longitudinal studies on expatriate children's intercultural adaptation and further studies on the relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and expatriate children's intercultural adaptation.

As described in Chapter 7, we examined the effects of Work-Home Interference and Home-Work Interference on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. However, most of the respondents of the study were not working. Future research may include dual career expatriate couple who relocate to a host country. It would be interesting to obtain insight into the differences in adaptation between expatriate spouses who are working and not working.

Finally, we would also like to suggest future studies to test the present thesis's Model of Intercultural Adaptation among expatriates. Most of the variables in the model have been derived from the literature on expatriates' adaptation to the general living conditions in a host country. It could be useful to examine their relative importance among this group.

## **9.5 Recommendations and General Advice to Expatriate Spouses, Expatriate Children, Expatriates, and International Companies**

Besides the recommendations that have been given at the end of Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, we have compiled recommendations from our own evaluation and other researchers and present them here. We hope that the recommendations presented below will provide some guidelines to successful expatriation of expatriate spouses, expatriate children, expatriates, and the international companies.

### **Recommendations for Expatriate Spouses**

Results of the present thesis indicated that a visit to the host country prior to the relocation positively influenced the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses. Hence, we would like to suggest that expatriate spouses take the opportunity to visit the host country prior to the relocation. Visiting the country will allow expatriate spouses to get first-hand experience of the culture of the host country. Furthermore, prior to the relocation, we would like to recommend that expatriate spouses gather information about the host country (in terms of its history, people, culture, economic, and etc.) by

referring to books, articles, and the internet. We would also strongly advise expatriate spouses to get in touch with the other expatriate spouses in the host country by becoming members of international expatriate spouses clubs via the internet. A few examples of the websites that are worth checking are [www.goinglobal.com](http://www.goinglobal.com), [www.talesmag.com](http://www.talesmag.com), and [www.expatexchange.com](http://www.expatexchange.com). These websites present experiences of other expatriate spouses in specific host countries. In addition, in their forum columns expatriate spouses all over the world can contact each other and ask questions about almost everything concerning a host country. Expatriate spouses in a particular host country can give accurate and practical advice to future expatriate spouses and also to other expatriate spouses since they have first-hand experiences of living in the host country. In the present study, command of the local language influenced expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. Therefore, we would strongly suggest that expatriate spouses enroll in a language course prior to the relocation or during the first few months in the host country. We always hear expatriate spouses saying that they were already too old to learn a new language and that it would be easier for children to learn a new language. However, the aim of language courses is not fluency or linguistics expertise in the local language. We would like to suggest that expatriate spouses at least try to master the language at a level that enables them to function effectively in the daily life (e.g., Crusner & Brislin, 1996).

Furthermore, we would like to recommend expatriate spouses in the host country to join clubs and associations that are both exclusively and not exclusively organized for expatriate spouses (see Appendix F for addresses of the clubs and organizations). Active membership and participation in the activities are recommended. Expatriate spouses can at the same time include their partners and children in the activities. Besides taking local language courses, we recommend expatriate spouses to take other courses such as writing poetry, painting, and other creative activities. These activities will keep expatriate spouses occupied, and by doing so, expatriate spouses can create new contacts by meeting new people and find avenues to express themselves. We also encourage expatriate spouses to pick up new hobbies or maintain old ones. Most of the host countries have their own specific and unique appeal, for example, Malaysia and Indonesia are well known for batik and batik painting courses are available or the Netherlands which is famous for its Delft Blue pottery. Finally, our recommendation to expatriate spouses is that whenever expatriate spouses feel down and low, venture out — sight-see, picnic, or just sit in the cafes — with family members or friends and put themselves back in the honeymoon period or the time that they feel the happiest — and enjoy!

## Recommendations for Expatriate Children's Betterment

The present thesis showed that family functioning significantly influenced expatriate children's intercultural adaptation. The results indicate that parents should play an important role in guiding their children to adapt to the different culture of the host country. We would like to advise parents to talk to their children prior to the move and explain to them the reasons for and consequences of the relocation. Tell the children that they have to change schools and say good-bye to their friends. Some children may not agree with the decision to relocate to another country. Sadly, an expatriate child wrote at the end of the questionnaire,

*Even if I would say no to the move, I would have had to follow anyway.*

Parents then may explain to children about the purpose of the relocation and tell them about the advantages and opportunities that the children will have while staying in a host country. Nonetheless, parents should involve their children in the decision making to relocate since the present study indicated that this contributes to their intercultural adaptation.

Expatriates, spouses, and their children together can make the cultural preparation themselves in terms of gathering information about the host country and its people. Preferably the children should be actively involved in this process of searching and reading about the host country. Make it as a fun process and something that the whole family can enjoy doing. If possible, expatriates are encouraged to bring both their spouse and children along on a visit to the host country prior to the relocation. Once in the host country, expatriates and/or spouses should encourage their children to get to know more about the host country. Bring them to local restaurants, shops, markets, and events so as to expose them to more about the local culture and the people. Visiting museums and other interesting places would also increase the knowledge about the host country. Parents should also encourage their children to mix with local children and other expatriate children at school. In addition, we encourage expatriate children to learn the local language since the present thesis reveals a significant relation between children's ability to speak the local language and high levels of socio-cultural adjustment and satisfaction with the living conditions in the host country. De Leon and McPartlin (1995) recommended that parents take decisions about the schools for their children seriously. If international schools in the host country are not suitable, alternative options such as local schools, home study schemes or boarding school in the home country may

be considered since dissatisfaction with schools may lead to a lower level of intercultural adaptation among the children.

### **Recommendations for Expatriates**

One of the respondents mentioned in the questionnaire,

*My husband has no time to do things with us.*

The present thesis has indicated that expatriates' work satisfaction and negative Home-Work Interference influenced expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. We understand that expatriates are occupied with work and appointments. Nevertheless, we would strongly suggest expatriates to explicitly plan time to spend with the family members, to bring their spouses and children to visit museums and other interesting places, as well as attending events and ceremonies in the host country. Expatriates at the same time should encourage their spouses and children to interact with the local people and to participate in the local events. Moreover, if expatriates feel that the problems at home interfere with their work they should try to resolve this by sharing their concerns with their spouses and children and involve them in finding solutions together.

### **Recommendations for International Companies**

It is very important for international companies to take steps in supporting expatriate spouses and children. The present thesis has proven that support from companies is important for the intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children. The international company that sends the expatriate family abroad is clearly the main body in charge that can provide solutions to the many needs expatriate spouses may have. We would like to suggest that international companies involve the spouses and children in the selection procedure. During the selection process, the Human Resource Department could make use of psychological tests not only for expatriates but also for their spouses and children. The MPQ is a good example of an instrument that may be used to measure the ability of an expatriate spouse or an expatriate child to effectively adapt to new cultural environments.

Once the expatriates, spouses, and their children have been selected for the relocation, it is recommended that international companies provide pre-departure intercultural training which has been proved to be positively related to intercultural adaptation (see De Cieri, Dowling, & Taylor, 1991)).

In the present thesis, on-site visit prior to the relocation and command of the local language were also shown to be important indicators of expatriate spouses' adaptation. Hence, we would like to recommend international companies to finance a short visit for the expatriates and their spouses and children to the host country prior to the relocation. In addition, we strongly urge international companies to enroll expatriate spouses and children in local language courses prior to the relocation or during the first few months of their arrival in the host country. Interestingly, Punnett (1997) had outlined the major needs of the expatriate spouses from the pre-assignment stage to the post-assignment stage that can be met by the international companies (see Appendix G.1).

Once in the host country, international companies are strongly recommended to have expatriates, their spouses, and children to attend a pre-departure training program. It is important to continue the cross-cultural training in the host country to increase cultural sensitivity and to make sure that the expatriates, spouses, and children reserve their judgment about the host country until the local culture has been properly and fully experienced (see De Leon and McPartlin, 1995; Selmer, 1995). In addition, Teagarden and Gordon (1995) and Selmer (1995) recommended that international companies establish a network through which past, present, and future expatriate children can regularly meet and discuss their experiences. They added that international companies are encouraged to provide mentors both at the corporate headquarters and local office so that expatriates and their family members can refer to these mentors when advice is needed. We would like to subscribe to this recommendation and add that support in the host country should not only be provided to the expatriates but also to the family members who seem to be excluded from company's support.

(See Appendix G.2 for more recommendations to international companies regarding expatriates' and their family members' adaptation.)

## **9.6 Concluding Remarks**

The main objective in the present thesis was to examine personality characteristics, family characteristics, expatriates' work characteristics, work-home interference, home-work interference, and attachment styles as determinants that may influence expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation. The present thesis research has managed to show the importance of a number of determinants of intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) and De Leon and McPartlin (1995) suggested that expatriate spouses and children need

their “own” theory and models of intercultural adaptation. In that regard, with the present thesis we have contributed to the field of intercultural adaptation by developing a new model of intercultural adaptation for expatriate spouses and children. Furthermore, we hope that the suggestions we have presented may give new directions to the international companies in upgrading their policy regarding the international relocation. It is clear that both expatriate spouses and children play an important role in the success of expatriates’ international business assignments and it seems important to acknowledge this role both in theorizing and in taking managerial decisions on how to organize and prepare international business assignments.

