

**A PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXPATRIATE-LOCAL
INTERACTIONS IN MALAYSIA**

ADAM EVAN POTTER

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2024

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXPATRIATE-LOCAL INTERACTIONS IN MALAYSIA

by

ADAM EVAN POTTER

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

March 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am honored to be walking the well-worn path to creating new knowledge. As I continue to grow as a researcher and person, I would like to thank my wife for her continued support, my supervisor for his gentle, intelligent leadership and encouragement, and Universiti Sains Malaysia for creating an atmosphere conducive to academic excellence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiv
ABSTRAK	xv
ABSTRACT	xvii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Problem Statement	6
1.4 Research Objective.....	8
1.5 Research Questions	9
1.6 Scope of the Thesis	10
1.7 Significance of the Study	12
1.7.1 Theoretical significance.....	12
1.7.2 Practical significance	15
1.7.3 Methodological significance.....	16
1.8 Definition of Key Terms	16
1.9 Structure of the Thesis.....	18
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 What is Culture?.....	21

2.3	Intercultural Communication and Meaning	21
2.4	Meaning Construction in Human Interaction: Constructivism and Constructionism	23
2.5	Cultural perspectives in IHRM Research.....	24
2.6	Comparative Method and Interpretivist Traditions	27
2.7	Etic Perspectives in International Human Resources Management	28
2.7.1	ELI cannot be fully understood with etic approaches	30
2.8	Emic Perspectives in International Human Resources Management	31
2.9	Expatriate-related International Human Resources Management Research ..	33
2.10	Culture and Expatriation	34
2.10.1	Cross-cultural training for expatriates	34
2.11	ELI-specific International Human Resource Management Research	35
2.11.1	Individual antecedents and outcomes	37
2.11.2	Dyadic Antecedents and Outcomes	39
2.11.3	Group antecedents and outcomes	41
2.11.4	Societal antecedents and outcomes.....	43
2.12	Malaysia-specific ELI Literature	44
2.13	Under-researched Areas of ELI.....	45
2.14	Malaysia as an Appropriate Context for ELI Research.....	48
2.15	Malaysia-specific Expatriation Literature	50
2.16	Implications of the Literature Review	50
2.17	Conclusion.....	52
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....		55
3.1	Introduction	55
3.2	Research Approach	56
3.3	Choices of Research Methods: Qualitative	59
3.4	Research Design	61
3.5	Research Strategy: Phenomenology of Practice.....	62

3.6	Time Horizon	64
3.7	Data Collection.....	64
3.7.1	Phenomenological interviewing	66
3.7.2	Bracketing, thoughtfulness, and reflexivity in phenomenology of practice	69
3.7.3	Respondent inclusion criteria	72
3.7.4	Participant demographics	73
3.8	Preliminary Study Procedure and Findings.....	75
3.9	Ethical Considerations for Research Involving Human Participants	76
3.10	Access to Subjects and Number of Respondents	78
3.11	Research Setting.....	80
3.12	Data Recording Explanation	81
3.13	Data Analysis	82
3.13.1	Data Analysis in phenomenology of practice.....	83
3.13.2	Line-by-line and holistic reading approach explanation	85
3.13.3	Presenting findings with phenomenological writing.....	92
3.14	Validation Criteria in Qualitative and Phenomenological Research.....	95
3.15	Reliability and Rigor for Phenomenology of Practice	96
3.16	Generalization for Phenomenology of Practice	97
3.17	Conclusion.....	98
	CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	99
4.1	Introduction	99
4.2	A Phenomenology of ELI in Malaysia: Experiencing the Body.....	99
4.2.1	Heuristic Introduction to a phenomenology of the body in ELI.....	99
4.2.2	Initiating physical contact in ELI	100
4.2.2(a)	Anecdote 1: “The handshake” (Bill, expatriate)	100
4.2.2(b)	Anecdote 2: “Talking about touching” (Bill, expatriate).....	101

4.2.3	The language of the body in ELI	102
4.2.3(a)	Anecdote 3: “Body language” (Bill, expatriate)	102
4.2.4	Physical presence during ELI	103
4.2.4(a)	Anecdote 4: “Immediate presence” (Jenifer, HCN).....	103
4.2.5	Thematic description summary of experiencing the body in ELI ..	104
4.3	A Phenomenology of ELI in Malaysia: Language and Speech	105
4.3.1	Heuristic introduction to language and speech in ELI	105
4.3.2	Unclear professional expectations in ELI.....	106
4.3.2(a)	Anecdote 5: “Difficult cross-cultural communication” (Jenifer, HCN).....	106
4.3.2(b)	Anecdote 6: “Uncomfortable communication” (Raj, HCN).....	107
4.3.2(c)	Anecdote 7: “Work meetings with expatriates” (Daniel, HCN).....	108
4.3.3	Different and unclear professional feedback in ELI.....	109
4.3.3(a)	Anecdote 8: “Yes culture” (Parker, Expatriate)	109
4.3.3(b)	Anecdote 9: “On the job ELI indirect feedback” (Peter, Expatriate).....	110
4.3.4	Language and Speech in Personal ELI	111
4.3.4(a)	Anecdote 10: “A failed joke” (Peter, Expatriate).....	111
4.3.4(b)	Anecdote 11: “Misunderstanding expectations” (Parker).....	112
4.3.5	Thematic summary of issues of language and speech in ELI.....	113
4.4	A Phenomenology of ELI in Malaysia: Experiencing Surprise	115
4.4.1	Heuristic Introduction to a phenomenology of surprise in ELI.....	115
4.4.2.	Positive Personal Surprise in ELI.....	116
4.4.2(a)	Anecdote 12: “A surprisingly great experience” (Bill, Expatriate).....	116
4.4.2(b)	Anecdote 13: “A local with American cultural interests” (Emery, Expatriate).....	117

4.4.2(c)	Anecdote 14: “A remembered birthday” (Fuzzy, HCN)...	118
4.4.3	Positive Professional Surprise in ELI	119
4.4.3(a)	Anecdote 15: “Experiencing a first work trip” (Emery, Expatriate)	119
4.4.3(b)	Anecdote 16: “I never experienced anything like this” (Jenifer, HCN)	120
4.4.3(c)	Anecdote 17: “Whole new ballgame” (Jonathan)	121
4.4.3(d)	Anecdote 18: “Great design collaboration” (Yunus, Expatriate)	123
4.4.4	Negative Professional Surprise in ELI	124
4.4.4(a)	Anecdote 19: “Different culture’s jokes” (Raj, HCN)	124
4.4.5	Thematic Summary of Experiencing Surprise in ELI	125
4.5	Conclusion	126
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION		128
5.1	Introduction	128
5.2	On Noesis	128
5.3	Phenomenological Insights with van Manen’s Four Existential Categories of Reflection	130
5.3.1	Relationality	130
5.3.1(a)	Inceptual reflection on relationality	133
5.3.2	Corporeality	134
5.3.2(a)	Inceptual reflections on corporeality	135
5.3.3	Spatiality	136
5.3.3(a)	Inceptual reflections on spatiality	139
5.3.4	Temporality	139
5.3.4(a)	Inceptual reflections on temporality	142
5.4	Theoretical contributions to International Human Resources Management	143
5.4.1	Findings comisurate with existing ELI literature	143
5.4.2	Contrarian and Novel Findings	146

5.4.3	Mindfulness of the physical body.....	146
5.4.4	Languages of trade.....	148
5.4.5	Previous similar experiences and interests	150
5.4.6	Positive surprise.....	150
5.4.7	Outcome over ego mindset for expatriates	151
5.5	Practical and Managerial Contributions	152
5.5.1	Cross-cultural leadership and teamwork	152
5.5.2	Cross-cultural communication (CCC)	153
5.5.3	Cross-cultural training	154
5.5.4	Managerial implications for the body at work.....	157
5.6	Conclusion.....	157
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION		159
6.1	Introduction	159
6.2	Evaluating phenomenology of practice and this thesis	159
6.2.1	Heuristic questioning.....	160
	6.2.1(a) Example: Opening paragraph, experiencing the body in ELI	161
6.2.2	Descriptive richness.....	161
	6.2.2(a) Example: Fuzzy's birthday remembered	161
6.2.3	Interpretive depth.....	162
	6.2.3(a) Example: Thematic analysis from language, speech, and meaning in ELI.....	162
6.2.4	Distinctive rigor	162
	6.2.4(a) Example.....	163
6.2.5	Strong and addressive meaning	163
	6.2.5(a) Example: Thematic analysis from experiencing the body in ELI	163
6.2.6	Experiential awakening	163

6.2.6(a) Example: Taken from inceptual reflections on temporality	164
6.2.7 Inceptual epiphany.....	164
6.2.7(a) Example: Inceptual reflections on relationality	164
6.3 Implications	165
6.3.1 Grounding the results in Phenomenology of Practice: <i>Epoché</i> and Reduction	165
6.3.1 (a) The researcher's phenomenological attitude (<i>epoché</i>).....	165
6.3.2 Participant experiences within the philosophical framework.....	167
6.3.3 Effects of context and researcher background on participant responses.....	167
6.3.4 Reflexivity on preunderstandings and biases	168
6.3.5 Participant's ability to narrate effectively	169
6.4 Addressing Conceptual Assumptions in Phenomenology of Practice	169
6.5 Generalization for Phenomenology of Practice	170
6.6 Limitations	171
6.7 Recommendations for Future Research	172
6.8 Conclusion.....	175
REFERENCES.....	177
APPENDICES	
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1	Eight Steps of the Research Design62
Table 3.2	Study Participant Demographics74
Table 3.3	Line by Line Anecdote Analysis.....89
Table 3.4	Holistic Reading Approach Findings Example.....90
Table 3.5	Draft Types in Phenomenological Writing94
Table 3.6	Evaluation Criteria for Phenomenological Writing96

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 3.1 An Excerpt from Bill's Interview	96
Figure 3.2 Lived Experience Description from Bill	96
Figure 3.3 Bill's Handshake Anecdote.....	97

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MNE	Multinational Enterprise
ELI	Expatriate-Local Interactions
HCN	Host-Country Nationals
IB	International Business
IM	International Management
HRM	Human Resource Management
IPS	Institut Pengajian Siswazah
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
AE	Assigned Expatriates
SIE	Self-initiated Expatriates
CCT	Cross-cultural Training
LED	Lived Experience Descriptions
IHRM	International Human Resources Management

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	ETHICAL APPROVAL
APPENDIX B	CONSENT & PERMISSION FORMS
APPENDIX C	PERMISSION LETTER
APPENDIX D	DEMOGRAPHICS
APPENDIX E	INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
APPENDIX F	LINE-BY-LINE READING ANALYSIS FINDINGS
APPENDIX G	HOLISTIC READING APPROACH FINDINGS

FENOMENOLOGI INTERAKSI EKSPATRIAT-TEMPATAN DI MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana interaksi di antara ekspatriat dan orang tempatan (ELI) di mana ekspatriat dan rakyat Malaysia yang bekerja bersama dalam perusahaan multinational (MNE). Tesis ini menyumbangkan pengetahuan asli dan pengetahuan yang terkandung dalam ELI kepada pengurusan sumber manusia antarabangsa (IHRM) dan menerangkan bagaimana pengalaman ELI secara fizikal, dan pengalaman dalam isu bahasa dan pertuturan, bagaimana ekspatriat dan penduduk tempatan mengalami kejutan secara positif dan negatif. Hubungan unik ini dan interaksi yang merangkumi mereka adalah medium untuk pemindahan pengetahuan dua hala, bantuan dalam pelarasan atau rintangan dalam bentuk pengkategorian yang tidak membantu. ELI sering menjadi titik pertemuan antara MNE HQs dan anak syarikat dan saluran untuk visi syarikat dan dasar HR. Projek ini mengikuti fenomenologi alam Van Manen sebagai panduan falsafah dan metodologi kearah pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang ELI, sesuatu yang kurang dalam kesusasteraan yang sedia ada. Melalui temubual, segala penceritaan mengenai ELI dikumpulkan dari 13 orang, dianalisis dan dibentangkan menunjukkan bukti bahawa terdapat kepercayaan antara ekspatriat dengan penduduk tempatan yang membantu kepada tingkah laku, keinginan untuk membina kapasiti baharu dalam kalangan rakyat Malaysia membawa kepada pembinaan kapasiti, keperluan untuk latihan silang budaya di kalangan tuan rumah – warga negara, dan bagaimana ekspatriat dalam jawatan pengurusan boleh membentuk persekitaran mereka sendiri.

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXPATRIATE-LOCAL INTERACTIONS IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to understand how expatriate-local interactions (ELI) are experienced for expatriates and Malaysians working in multinational enterprises (MNEs). This thesis contributes original and embodied knowledge of ELI to international human resources management (IHRM) literature and describes the relationship between ELI and the physical body, the role of language and speech in ELI, and the ways in which expatriates and locals experience both positive and negative surprise. These unique relationships, and the interactions that comprise them, are the medium for two-way knowledge transfer, assistance in adjustment, or resistance in the form of unhelpful categorizations. ELI are often the touch points between MNE headquarters and subsidiaries and the conduits through which company vision and HR policies flow. This study follows Max van Manen's phenomenology of practice as a philosophical and methodological guide toward a more in-depth understanding of ELI, something lacking in extant literature. Accounts of ELI were gathered through 13 interviews with local Malaysian and expatriates who had cross-cultural experience though not necessarily with each other in dyads, and were then analyzed to uncover evidence that trust between expats and locals leads to helping behaviors, desires to build new capacities among Malaysians lead to capacities being built, the need for cross-cultural training among host-country nationals, and how expatriates in management positions can shape their own environments. Contrary to extant literature, this study showed that communication barriers in ELI have a negative effect on local workers and rigorous cross-cultural training often fails to provide the

desired socio-cultural adjustment for expatriates. Instead, languages of trade, or similarities in professional or educational background between expatriates and locals, along with shared experiential knowledge of geographic locations were shown to produce nearly instantaneous friendship and create a cohesive work environment. These findings suggest that changes to selection and training for both expatriates and locals are needed to increase effectiveness in ELI.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the background of the study, including theoretical and practical justification for further research into expatriate-local interactions (ELI) in the Malaysian context. Then, the key terms used in this study are defined, the problem statement is given, and the research question are presented along with an overview of the research approach and philosophical underpinnings of the study. Finally, the contributions and scope of the study and the structure of these are explicated.

1.2 Background of the Study

International human resource management (IHRM) scholars explore unique areas of business that arise by people working in international contexts, crossing borders, languages, or cultures (Dickmann & Watson, 2017; Ghauri et al., 2021; Hofstede, 1984). This type of research seeks to shed light on the complicated phenomena encountered when human capital is deployed across borders and cultures to conduct business and management activities.

Expatriation continues to be one of the central foci of IHRM literature (D. Welch & Björkman, 2015). Business expatriates can be defined as "legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization or by self-initiation, or directly employed within the host country"

(McNulty & Brewster, 2017, p. 31). This unique type of professional crosses national boundaries in order to explore new markets, fill gaps in technical expertise at the subsidiary level, or communicate policy and expectations from multi-national enterprise (MNE) headquarters (Bebenroth, 2015; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Researchers continue to examine the factors associated with expatriate success in order to better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with international assignments and reduce the costly incidences of expatriate failure (Guttormsen et al., 2018; Littrell et al., 2006a).

Expatriates are the human link between MNE headquarters and their subsidiaries. Recent research has explored how the various types of expatriates, like the traditional assigned expatriates (AS) and self-initiated expatriates (SIE) fill strategic positions around the world as part of what has been termed a global “war for talent” (Baruch et al., 2016, p.2). AE are those who are assigned or transferred from one part of a MNE, typically the home country, to a subsidiary of the MNE in a different country (Mello et al., 2023). SIE take an assignment from outside of an organization typically as a new hire in a country that is different from their home country (Brewster, 2022).

According to Welch and Björkman’s (2015) review, research on expatriate assignments has been a phenomenon in leading IHRM journals since the 1980s. The existing streams of research tend to focus heavily on expatriates and their families rather than taking a more holistic approach to include other important stakeholders, namely subsidiary employees who are often referred to in expatriate-related literature as host country nationals (HCN). Interactions between these other stakeholders and expatriates are called expatriate-local interactions or ELI (Reade & McKenna, 2022;

van Bakel, 2019; C.H. Wang & Toh, 2023) Extant research and recent literature reviews have highlighted the need for further inquiry into the effects that HCN have on MNEs due to their role in expatriate acculturation in the areas of social support, organizational knowledge transfer, MNE subsidiary absorptive capacity, and context-specific business norm modeling (van Bakel, 2018; Aldaheri et al., 2022; Vance, Vaiman, & Andersen, 2009) Specifically, the antecedents and outcomes of ELI are largely unexplored, specifically at the dyadic, group, and societal units of analysis (van Bakel, 2018). These calls define an empiracle gap in ELI research, suggesting that more work should be done to uncover how antecedents and characteristics like frequency, depth, and breadth of ELI effect outcomes.

Various issues associated with expatriation have been examined in the Malaysian context, and while not as voluminous as research associated with more economically influential nations such as China, Japan, and Singapore, the extant literature is significant. The corpus of expatriate research in the Malaysian context mirrors that of the greater body of literature in that the emphasis is on the experience and perspective of the expatriates, their adjustment, and their work performance (Abdul Malek & Budhwar, 2013; Ming Tiong & Cheng, 2017; Richardson & Wong, 2018; Sambasivan, Sadoughi, & Esmaeilzadeh, 2017). These research studys have examined common issues related to expatriates, such as how personality traits influence adjustment and how different types of expatriates and assignments, like expatriate academics and SIE, differ from traditional assigned expatriates. To date, only a limited number of research studys like that of Zulkifly and colleagues (2019) have been structured to approach expatriate issues in Malaysia from a perspective that includes the voices of HCN. For this reason, empiracle ELI research in the Malaysian context can be viewed as limited (i.e., van Bakel (2018) found just three

empirical studies in a systematic literature review) yet ideal for further empirical inquiry since the extant literature illustrates that ELI occur regularly. Limited additional research on the topic in Malaysia has been published since van Bakel's review from an expatriate-local dyadic perspective (Ren et al., 2020)

Extant IHRM literature has traditionally applied research philosophies and methodologies that trend towards a positivist understanding of phenomena, defining ELI by its antecedents and outcomes. This trend is mirrored in the Malaysian context where most studies are positivist or positivist-leaning. This historical emphasis represents a knowledge gap in ELI research worldwide and specifically in the Malaysian context. A phenomenological perspective generating a specific type of knowledge is needed to increase what is known about ELI. Few research studies in IHRM literature seek in-depth understandings of ELI, focusing instead on antecedents and outcomes of ELI. Researching lived experiences with a broad range of methodologies allows for aspects of the experience of the physical body, the bodies of others, and a broad range of feelings and emotions to be examined.

This study seeks to examine a specific type of human experience in depth because IHRM scholars do not understand ELI outside of what precludes and follows the phenomenon. ELI must be examined in depth in order to open what van Bakel calls the "black box" of ELI (van Bakel, 2018, p. 23). van Bakel's black box is not one whose lid is difficult to open with a change in vantage point. To give an illustration, ELI is more like the moon. The moon can be understood in terms of the light that reflects off its surface and bounces towards earth and our eyes. In this way, the moon's surface and its coloring and craters are understood. What is needed now is not a telescope fostering a better view from the same vantage point but a new

perspective allowing us to see the dark side of the moon for the first time. Similarly, current research methods only provide one vantage point for examining ELI. What is needed is a different philosophical perspective that generates a different kind of knowledge—embodied perspectival knowledge. Embodied knowledge is a type of knowing where a person recognizes and integrates relevant propositions, procedures, perspectives, and previous participations into situationally appropriate action.

This knowledge gap persists because of a lack of a specific type of knowledge, embodied knowledge of ELI. This study makes a knowledge contribution by addressing this knowledge gap through applying phenomenological philosophy and methodology to produce embodied knowledge of ELI in the Malaysian context. The study contributes a narrative knowing, where knowledge about the phenomenon is embedded in experiences as they are lived, giving the possibility for expatriates and HCN to know at a deeper, more integral level (Küpers & Statler, 2008). This avenue of research has important implications for expatriate success, cross-cultural training (CCT), MNE embeddedness, knowledge transfer, HRM policy implementation effectiveness, and overall organizational success in addition to the personal and professional well-being of expatriates, HCN, and their families (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2008; Potter & Richardson, 2019; Stoermer, Haslberger, Froese, & Kraeh, 2018; Vance et al., 2009; Vance & Ensher, 2002; Wang, 2002).

The foundational philosophical underpinnings of a research study into human interactions should be examined and defined early on in the thesis. Extant mature social theories provide the backdrop for research into lived experiences and frame the understanding of what types of knowledge are included in extant literature.

Herbert Blumer introduced the notion of symbolic interaction, positing that humans react to their own interpretations of other's actions, rather than reacting to the actions themselves (Blumer, 1986; Luckmann, 2023). This understanding is the basis of social constructivism, the belief that reality is created by, or constructed, by human interactions. The biological processes in play are objectively measurable, but the meaning of reality is a subjective construction by those involved in human interactions. These philosophical views link closely to the chain of phenomenological philosophical thinking of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and modern phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Max van Manen. Phenomenology has advanced from its introduction by Husserl into hermeneutic phenomenology, a deeper exploration of how meaning is created by human interaction, especially interaction with written text, to advanced phenomenologies of the modern philosophical era, like Max van Manen's (2014) phenomenology of practice and existential phenomenological method for studying lived experiences and exploring the meaning of human interactions.

1.3 Problem Statement

The central problem addressed by this research study is that the nature of ELI is not yet well understood phenomenologically, meaning that only certain dimensions of knowledge have been uncovered through academic research. The extant knowledge of ELI tends to be propositional as uncovered through research with largely positivist perspectives (Adler & Aycan, 2018). The lack of integral and embodied knowledge leaves significant knowledge gaps. ELI are complex social interactions that lead to meaning construction for participants (Luckmann, 2023). Knowledge of them must be embodied, integral, and inclusive of pathic knowledge

to understand ELI holistically. Expatriates and HCN need this type of knowledge to know how to interact with wisdom in novel social situations (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015; Tanaka, 2013). This research study addresses this knowledge gap by contributing a new type of knowledge, rooted in phenomenology, to what is already known about ELI.

Contributing a new type of knowledge is accomplished by addressing the knowledge gap with appropriate, novel methodology. Phenomenology of practice has not been used to generate knowledge of ELI in the field of IHRM, creating a methodological gap. This methodology developed by van Manen (2014) has been rigourously followed, paving the way for more phenomenological research contributing to what is known about ELI.

The extant research on ELI in the Malaysian context is limited, representing an empiracle gap and an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to what is known about ELI in Malaysia. Fewer than five ELI-related studies have been conducted in Malaysia and published in leading IHRM journals, leaving much to be discovered. Malaysia has received less attention from scholars interested in the phenomenon of ELI but is a suitable context for such studies due to the documented fact that ELI are often important aspects of work and life for expatriates in Malaysian-based MNE subsidiaries. This study addresses this gap by contributing knowledge of ELI in the Malaysian context.

While many studies have a focus on ELI, they often gather information about ELI only from expatriates. This lack of inclusion of host-country voices in ELI research represents a demographic gap. This research study includes interviews with both expatriates and local Malaysians, and the phenomenology of ELI was

constructed inclusive of local perspectives. This inclusivity in study respondents allows for a more holistic phenomenology of ELI rather than the more commonly researched phenomenology of expatriate experiences.

1.4 Research Objective

This study sought to accomplish the following overarching research objectives in response to the identified knowledge and empiricle gaps in ELI understanding. The research obejctive guides the entire research study, informing every aspect of the research plan.

Research Objective 1 – to gain in-depth, embodied, phenomenological knowledge of ELI in Malaysia and to gain a general understanding of the meaning structures of the phenomenon.

This research objective focused the academic inquiry on the collection and presentation of embodied knowledge. This study presents novel findings related to ELI in the Malaysian context, contributes a more in-depth understanding of ELI, and uncovers the essence of ELI as experienced by Malaysian HCN and expatriates. The research centered on the hallmark question of phenomemology, which seeks to discover what lived experiences are like (van Manen, 2017). Thus the lived experiences ELI for Malaysian HCN as well as the essence of these interactions were discovered and examined. The knowledge uncovered is presented in the form of narrative, embodied knowledge, sometimes defined as perspectival knowledge. The research objective was to make a vital theoretical contribution, as most extant research presents propositional knowledge related to ELI and expatriation (van Bakel, 2019). A philosophically aligned phenomenological inquiry was conducted

and applied to business and organizational research to provide a model for future phenomenological inquiry in business-related social sciences.

1.5 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions phrased to align with the paradigm of phenomenology.

RQ1 – How are ELI experienced by Malaysian HCN and expatriates working in Malaysia?

This study is an in-depth phenomenological inquiry into the meaning of ELI in Malaysia. Narrative accounts of ELI were used in phenomenological reflections. Insights gained from reflection and analysis are shared in essay form.

RQ2 – How do individual experiences of ELI give meaning to the broader phenomenon?

The focus of this study was embodied experience as lived by expatriates and local Malaysians. Lived experience descriptions were collected and analyzed following phenomenology of practice methodology.

RQ3 – What are the essential general meaning structures of the experience of ELI in Malaysia?

A full phenomenology of ELI presented in chapters 4 and 5 shares detailed, in-depth, and narrative knowledge of ELI. The findings show how examining individual accounts can uncover the general structure and meaning of the phenomenon of ELI.

These questions directly address the problem statement and are crafted to align with the philosophical framework of the study.

1.6 Scope of the Thesis

This study is situated within IHRM research generally and ELI expatriate research specifically. The phenomenological inquiry into the nature and meaning of ELI yielded a deep and nuanced understanding of ELI in the Malaysian context and general descriptions of the phenomenon that are meaningful for a broader audience of scholars and practitioners. This study did not test any theories in a positivistic sense and took on a philosophical perspective rather than a theoretical framework built around a middle theory; therefore, issues beyond the phenomenon itself were outside of the scope of this study. A middle theory would be any explanatory or theoretical framework that seeks to define and explain the phenomenon. Studies grounded in middle theory are non-phenomenological in nature (van Manen, 2017). Quantitative questions like “how much” or “how often,” are not typically used to guide phenomenological inquiries, and the goal of this research was not to offer theoretical explanations. The methodology selected to address the existing research gaps is not designed for or suited to statistical sampling and generalizations to larger populations. Sampling strategies based on respondents’ representativeness to a larger population are irrelevant since sampling in phenomenology asks respondents the question: “Do you have the experience that I am looking for?” (Englander, 2012, p. 19). Most importantly, this study did not intend to examine how antecedents influence ELI or to find the outcomes of ELI. Examples of this would include questions like, “How does shared religion between expatriates and HCN affect expatriate adjustment?”. This question would examine the antecedent of religion and

the effect or outcome of adjustment. Both questions and the results therein, along with any questions related to antecedents, outcomes, and generalizations to a larger population, are beyond the scope of this study. A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was applied to examine the phenomenon of ELI in the Malaysian context, as explained by expatriates and HCN. Phenomenology is an atheoretical philosophy by nature, meaning that researchers do not apply middle theory of any kind as a lens to examine the phenomenon (Aagaard, 2017). Rather, the researcher seeks to describe and give insights about the phenomenon as it is, or as it presents itself to be (Finlay, 2012). Concrete narrative descriptions of the phenomenon are acquired through in-depth interviews with a limited number of selectively chosen respondents (van Manen, 2017). This concrete description of the phenomenon in question can then be analyzed by the researcher in its written form to uncover the essential units of meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014; Willis et al., 2016). These normative elements of the phenomenon are then analyzed and discussed in a phenomenological writing that gives the readers further insights into the meaning of the phenomenon by describing it generally (Englander, 2012). These presented writings remain largely narrative to retain the procedural and embodied nature of gathered knowledge so that the findings remain useful for problem solving by practitioners and contextually understood by readers. The research paradigm and plan, along with further justification for choosing phenomenology, will be presented and discussed in detail in chapter 3.

This research study sought to gather, analyze, and present rich narrative descriptions of how ELI are experienced in the Malaysian context contributing procedural embodied knowledge to extant expatriation and cross-cultural management literature.

1.7 Significance of the Study

1.7.1 Theoretical significance

The central contribution of this study is adding new knowledge of ELI in the Malaysian context to the scholarly discourse on expatriation in IHRM literature. The findings presented in chapter 4 and 5 are integrated and embodied rather than factual or propositional in nature. They are sensitive to pathic regions of knowledge and presented as narrative anecdotes and rich descriptions that remain close to the experiences as lived. This perspectival knowledge is a vital theoretical contribution because most extant research presents exclusively propositional and factual knowledge related to ELI (van Bakel, 2019). Readers of the phenomenology of ELI in Malaysia will understand the findings in their original social context as lived by expatriates and HCN, as opposed to themes, codes, non-narrative, or quantitative knowledge that has been decontextualized and disembodied from lived experiences. The phenomenological essences and insights will be the only extant contribution to expatriation literature from the philosophical perspective of phenomenology of practice.

In this study, ELI was examined from a different philosophical perspective than most previous research yet found further evidence for some of the same features. Further evidence and support for the idea that trust between expats and locals leads to helping behaviors was found, possibly due to shared religion. Examples were uncovered where desire to build new capacities among Malaysians lead to capacities being built, and further examples that highlight the need for CCT among HCN were observed. Further evidence for how expatriates, particularly those

in management positions can shape their own environments were observed as well as how corporations can both formally and informally dictate workplace culture, even from half a world away. These findings further bolster existing literature.

This study has also uncovered findings that are contrary to common themes in extant expatriation literature. The study reveals acute examples where rigorous CCT failed to achieve its desired outcome—appropriate social-cultural adjustment, specifically behavioral adjustment. While extant research identifies the presence and effects of communication barriers for expatriates, this study has found that the effects might be far more severe for HCN, who shared story after story about the stress and challenges involved in communicating with their expatriate bosses. Finally, in tension with van Bakel's findings that relationships with local friends and mentors take significant time to develop, this study found examples where the opposite occurred. In situations where an expat and local shared previous professional background and training, like engineering, or had previously lived in the same places, nearly instant friendship, comradery, and ability to work together were observed. Some expatriates and locals had previous experiences that prepared them for a type of instant fit, with shared narrative history and languages of trade.

The type of knowledge that this study contributes is relatively unique in expatriation literature, making novel contributions. This phenomenology of ELI provides embodied knowledge of ELI, describing with care and depth the nature of ELI, the centrality of the physical body, the challenges of language and speech, and the manner in which surprise is experienced in ELI. The thing itself, the phenomenon of ELI, is now more clearly seen and understood.

Another novel contribution is the idea of languages of trade, near instant task cohesiveness and effectiveness due to previous similar (though not shared) experiences. This creates tension with ideas of cultural distance as previous similar experience created a kind of confluence, making differing cultures and personal characteristics less relevant—a positive surprise indeed.

Additionally, an outcome-over-ego mindset among expats who had learned to focus on outcomes and see the local “path” towards the desired outcome instead of insisting on a western way of doing things. A novel methodological contribution is made by applying van Manen’s phenomenology of practice to ELI research, the first example in IHRM.

This study yielded a detailed phenomenology of the body in ELI. While issues of language and speech are more common in the literature, knowledge of how the body is experienced in ELI is not. The study contributes an in-depth understanding of how the physical body is experienced in ELI.

The experience of surprise, specifically positive surprise is novel in expatriation research. Negative organizational scholarship tends to be normative, yet this study reveals a type of serendipity as cultures merge. The notion that unmet expectations can be immensely positive is confirmed and explicated in the phenomenology of surprise presented in chapter 4.

This study contributes a more in-depth understanding of ELI and uncovers the essence of ELI as experienced by Malaysian HCN and expatriates. The knowledge gained is presented in the form of narrative, embodied knowledge, sometimes defined as practical wisdom. Since the essences related to phenomena are general in nature, the findings of this study are meaningful and formative for a wide

cross-section of expatriates and those managing and working with expatriates in a variety of contexts.

1.7.2 Practical significance

The phenomenological insights from this study can be meaningful and transformative for expatriates and HCN living and working specifically in Malaysia but also in a variety of contexts that may have similar experiences with ELI due to the general nature of descriptive phenomenological findings. Narratives of ELI communicate knowledge situated in its original social context, a powerful tool for communicating practical wisdom about a phenomenon. The lived experiences and their accompanying analysis presented by this study are useful for expatriate and local CCT in that they communicate not only how others have lived but open the possibility that the way the reader lives might change for the better. Readers of these findings are more likely to learn appropriate actions for complex social situations compared to readers of propositional knowledge related to ELI in the Malaysian context. Managers should be sure to include training activities in expatriate CCT where expatriate and locals physically act out appropriate behaviors so that they know what to do with their bodies during ELI. Managers may consider the concept of languages of trade in selecting expatriates with shared professional training with HCN to facilitate rapid collaboration and knowledge transfer. In this way, this study presents practical wisdom for human flourishing.

1.7.3 Methodological significance

Finally, this study explains and exemplifies a philosophically aligned research paradigm of phenomenological inquiry that is rarely applied in IHRM scholarship. To date, van Manen's phenomenology of practice has not been used to examine ELI. This specific application of the phenomenological approach of enquiry allows for a novel contribution of embodied knowledge of ELI. The length of this thesis also allows for a more detailed methodology discussion compared to a journal article, scholarly essay, or academic research notes.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Business Expatriate – “legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation, or directly employed within the host country, some of whom are paid on enhanced terms and conditions to recognize their being foreigners in that country” (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, p. 17).

Host Country Nationals (HCN) - “a person with the nationality of the host country” (van Bakel, 2018, p.3). In the case of this research study the host unit includes Malaysian citizens who are employed by the same MNEs as the expatriates that they have previously or are currently interacting with at the time of this research.

Expatriate-Local Interactions (ELI) - any human interaction occurring between individuals fitting the definitions given for expatriates and HCN who are employed by the same MNE. HCN is interchangeable with the “local” portion of ELI. These interactions do not have to be face-to-face to qualify, and they can be

either in the working environment or outside of work. This is a more focused rendering of the working definition used in the organizing framework for ELI research discussed in chapter 2 (van Bakel, 2018).

Multinational Enterprise (MNE) – a firm that owns outputs of goods or services originating in more than one country (Buckley, 1985; Casson & Casson, 1982). This definition is sufficient because MNEs are not the focus of phenomenological inquiry itself but rather the context in which many ELI occur. The context of MNEs contextualize the research in IB.

Phenomenology of Practice –the meaning and practice of phenomenology in professional contexts, such as psychology, education, and health care, as well as the practice of phenomenological methods in contexts of everyday living (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological philosophy that undergirds this research study is that of philosopher and human sciences researcher Max van Manen (van Manen, 1997, 2014; van Manen, 2017). This phenomenology is aligned philosophically with the thinking of its founder, the descriptive phenomenologist philosopher Edmund Husserl in that it seeks to see a lived experience as it is in its life and in its life world (van Manen, 2014). One key difference in van Manen's philosophy from that of Husserl is the view that the researcher cannot be separated from the subject nor the described experience and is therefore always interpreting. Further nuances of van Manen's phenomenology and how its attributes guide the research methodology will be presented in detail in chapter 3.

Embodied Knowledge - a type of knowing where a person recognizes and integrates relevant propositions, procedures, perspectives, and previous participations into situationally appropriate action.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis has the following structure. Chapter 2 is a critical literature review. A thorough examination of relevant literature was undertaken to prepare for this research study. A variety of literature both directly and indirectly related to the phenomenon of ELI, as well as literature related to research philosophy, epistemology, ontology, and methodology, were reviewed to locate this study within the IHRM scholarly discourse, to address a significant research gap with the appropriate research tools, and to ensure that the study is philosophically aligned. This chapter will show the existing research gap within the IHRM research domain by critically synthesizing existing literature.

Chapter 3 explains the philosophical views and research paradigm that underpin the study, followed by a description of the research methodology selected to investigate the research question. The research methodology includes further explanation of the specific method of phenomenological inquiry that was employed, explains how the method guided selecting and interviewing respondents, and demonstrates the manner in which the role of the researcher is to be understood. A detailed research methodology is explained step by step, including specifics about the research context, how the participants were accessed, how the data was gathered, and how lived experiences were analyzed.

Chapter 4 will present the narrative and descriptive findings of the research along with a thematic analysis. The core findings are anecdotes of lived ELI experiences.

Chapter 5 will present the reflective phenomenological writings that are also important results of a phenomenological inquiry in van Manen's descriptive-oriented

perspective, known as phenomenology of practice. The findings and analysis will be situated in broader phenomenology using van Manen's (2014) six existentials framework and evaluated using philosophically aligned criteria. The meaning of interactions between Malaysian HCN and expatriates will be explicated, and the relationships between the findings and broader literature will be explored. Practical insights, such as the study's contribution to expatriate and local CCT, are given as well. Chapter 5 will end with a review of the thesis and concluding remarks.

Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis, reviewing key contributions, insights, implications, and key areas where more research is needed and review the theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will show how this study is positioned within the corpus of IHRM literature generally and ELI research specifically through a traditional literature review. Historic developments of theory and thought in social sciences are synthesized as a foundation for examining ELI-specific literature. Literature both directly and indirectly related to ELI is critically examined to show this study's position within IB scholarship and to justify the empirical, demographic, and geographic gaps that the current study seeks to fill. The following is a synthesis of literature pertaining to ELI and closely related social science. ELI are a unique subset of cross-cultural interactions between individuals who belong to the same work group but different societal groups. Therefore, a variety of literatures and theories must be brought in to focus on specific ELI research. This literature review begins generally with a synthesis of literature on culture, cross-cultural interactions, and the construction of meaning through human interaction and then focus more specifically on how IHRM scholars have drawn on this body of work and applied it in their field. This literature review especially critiques the types of knowledge, largely propositional and positivist-leaning, contributed by various studies. The final section of this chapter shows existing research gaps within the IB subfield of ELI research, justifying the need for further research into the phenomenon of ELI. Work on ELI must examine extant scholarship on each of ELI's fundamental components: expatriates, HCN, and cross-cultural interactions in general before examining ELI research specifically.

2.2 What is Culture?

Culture has been studied by scholars, authors, poets, and philosophers, and references to culture and differences between cultures can be found both in ancient literature, from sources such as Galileo and the Bible, as well as the most contemporary scholarship (i.e., Biagioli, 2018; Bryant, 2016; Korczynski, 2015; & Moore, 2019). According to Bochner (2013), scholars have created and debated hundreds of unique definitions of culture. This research study follows Bochner's suggestion that in order to avoid fruitless debates about the meaning of terms, one should simply refer to an individual's "cultural identity" as their culture (Bochner, 2013, p.7). Rather than presenting one understanding of culture, culture can be viewed as a nestling of interconnected belonging to groups, such as family, professional settings, region, society, or nation (Bochner, 2013). This view, known as open systems theory, allows researchers to simply pick which type of group is best for analysis while understanding that the individual(s) being studied belong to a variety of groups (Bochner, 2013). An individual's cultural identity is often related to his or her ethnic identity, though personal identities can be quite fluid due to external forces like immigration and globalization (Cleveland et al., 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2015).

2.3 Intercultural Communication and Meaning

Cultural differences, however they are defined, constitute barriers to communication and knowledge transfer between individuals and organizations (Warren, 2005). For immigrants and expatriate managers alike, "Central to [the] adaptation process are one's ability to communicate in accordance to the norms and practices of the host culture and continuous and active engagement in the interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host society" (Kim, 2017,

p.1). Social sciences research into intercultural communications can be grouped into two broad categories: positivist research that views cross-cultural competency building as measurable and largely linear and postpositivist schools of thought that view interactions as non-linear connections where third places and hybrid cultures immerge (Holliday, 2020). With a variety of philosophical perspectives borrowed from more developed social science fields, IRHM researchers examine how cross-cultural communication and interactions affect a variety of work activities, including leadership styles, negotiation, multicultural teams, and expatriation. Postcolonial studies use the past as a guide for understanding how interactions occur, why that might be, and what differentiates between right and wrong, as with other popular critical social theories (R'boul, 2022). The leading perspective in management literature, is that when cultural differences are understood they can be managed (Chapman et al., 2008). Therefore, there is a distinct and pragmatic aim in IHRM research, especially in expatriation research. While many areas of expatriation, such as the adjustment of individual expatriates, are well-researched, the dyadic nature of ELI requires that the perspectives of HCN be included. To date, IHRM research, even research into ELI, heavily focuses on individual expatriates, and their experiences, as the unit of analysis. This demographic gap has recently resulted in more of a focus on HCN and their roles in ELI (Adler & Aycan, 2018; Ciuk & Schedlitzki, 2021; Vulchanov, 2020). Across all units of analysis, ELI have been most commonly examined from positivist perspectives and quantitative methodologies that do not part meaningfully from attempting to fulfill quantitative standards of validity, somewhat blunting their explanatory and narrative potential (Mahadevan & Moore, 2023)

2.4 Meaning Construction in Human Interaction: Constructivism and Constructionism

New cultural scholarship in IB is being influenced by the cognitive sciences as culture begins to be viewed as variable networks of knowledge rather than a static, objectively measurable phenomenon (Adler & Aycan, 2018). These theories are influenced by a constructivist or constructionist worldview and thus resist positivistic notions of objective reality and meaning (Alanazi, 2019; Luckmann, 2023). These perspectives do have significant differences beyond the fact that constructivism flows out of psychology. Social constructivism tends to emphasize how individuals grapple with reality and form meaning while constructionism focuses on how meaning is created through language and symbolic interaction. Research founded on constructionist and constructivist philosophical views emphasize knowledge about the local context, as created and understood by individuals or insiders. Examples of constructivist-influenced cross-cultural interaction theories are the cultural frame shifting paradigm, the situated dynamics framework, and the intercultural interaction space framework (Adler & Aycan, 2018). These frameworks are different, but all emphasize the influence of the unique context, either relational or psychological, in determining appropriate behavior, application of cultural values, and ability to shift between value systems to interact effectively across cultures. The key shortcoming in this body of literature is that the presentations of findings are not situated pedagogically to help expatriates and locals interact well. Thus, the link between scientific research and behavioral formation is weak. Instead, these theories are complex lenses applied to a context, yielding more abstract information instead of narrative embodied knowledge that is helpful for expatriates and locals in learning how to interact with one another. This is propositional knowledge where, in many

cases, embodied and perspectival knowledge is more suitable. Viewing meaning creation from a constructionist perspective is more conducive to understanding human interactions as the phenomenon in question, ELI, begins with physical and linguistic interactions. Meaning-giving methods that examine meaning created by multiple individuals are needed to advance the study of ELI.

2.5. Cultural perspectives in IHRM Research

Much of the import of cross-cultural research into management research is rooted in Peter Buckley's seminal works related to MNE theory, leading to foundational theories and much empirical research related to internationalization (Buckley, 1985, 1989; Buckley & Casson, 2016). The why and how of internationalization, firms crossing geopolitical and cultural boundaries to enter new markets, naturally brought the cultures of different countries and regions into focus. IB scholars began to theorize and research at the intersection of business and culture. Cultural differences between countries, regions, and ethnic groups are one of the key differentiating factors between general business, management disciplines, and IHRM as managers engage the complexities of "doing business abroad" (Meyer & Peng, 2016, p.5). Cultural differences and how they affect conducting business across borders and between different cultural groups have been central topics of research in IB. Early examples include the Uppsala model that was presented by Johanson and Vahlne in 1977, Geert Hofstede's "Culture's consequences" (1980), and the foundational works of anthropologist Edward Hall on high and low context cultures and "m" vs "p" time orientations (Bluedorn, 1998; Lawson & Shepherd, 2019). The Uppsala model views firms as the unit of analysis, theorizing that firms internationalize to countries with cultures most similar first, then as they gain