**1. Introduction**

Due to globalization, it has been noticed that it is not enough for companies to be successful just in the national market.So,there has been an increased desire for these companies to think about international investments, mergers and acquisitions so that they could be competitive in the global market.

Consistent with the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), the sustained competitive

advantage of multinational corporations (MNCs) is their ability to move capital, products,

technology, knowledge and people across international borders (Hocking et al., 2004:565-586).In this way, there has been a necessity of sending employees abroad to fulfill international assignments through the system of expatriation.Therefore,expatriation is seen as “the process of sending employees to another country to run a subsidiary of a multinational organization”(Dictionary of Human Resource Management 2001,p.120).It is worth saying that people who are concerned with expatriation are seen as “expatriates”, that is to say individuals who, irrespective of their national origin, are transferred outside their native country to another country specifically for employment purposes(Edstrom&Galbraith,1977a).

It is obvious that working abroad leads to be concerned with cultural differences which undoubtedly may influence expatriates’ international assignments performance.Expatriates’highly commitment to headquarters way of doing things leads them to inculcate the host country operation with the required organizational values and practices, resulting in potential cultural conflicts with host country nationals that may undermine effective control (Paik&Sohn, 2004:61-71).In this research study, my focus is specifically on expatriates and the research problem of this thesis aims at investigating the cultural challenges that expatriates encounter while doing their assignments abroad, more precisely in the Republic of Congo. In order to fully investigate the research problem, the study focuses on the following questions:

**-What are the cultural challenges faced by expatriates while doing their assignments abroad, how do these challenges influence their professional performance, how do expatriates overcome the challenges and what should be done to avoid them?**

The answers to these questions will help us understand the challenges that expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo face while doing their international assignments and how they cope with.

**1.1.Purpose of the study**

In addition to the answer to the research question, this thesis could help multinational companies’ managers to know what to do when they decide to send their employees abroad for international assignments. It obvious that many researches have been done in the domain of International Human Resource Management but I think this thesis draws its importance provided that the case under study of cultural challenges encountered by expatriates during their international assignments is mainly concerned with the Republic of Congo, a country which presents in some extent similar cultural characteristics with other sub-Sahara African countries, a part of the world that is still unexplored and worth to be investigated.

**1.2. The thesis’ procedure**

This thesis is made of five sections which are divided into sub-sections, alongside with appendices. The first section deals with the introduction, the problem formulation, the profile of the Republic of Congo, the thesis’ procedure and the limitations of the study. The second one is concerned with the methodological approach and the methods that I have chosen to collect data for this thesis. Section three at its turn deals with the theoretical approach and the concepts I found relevant for the thesis. Section four focuses on the analysis of the data gathered on the basis of primary and secondary sources, followed by a discussion with a direct connection to the research questions. Finally, the last section is mainly concerned with the answers to the research questions, the conclusion and eventually some recommendations.

**1.3. Limitations of the study**

It is worth saying that this study faced limitations. The first limitation is related to the fact that I could not return to Denmark after the internship semester and this obviously was one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced in my life. This situation deeply influenced my work and it was difficult to concentrate on my research when trying to find a solution to the problem regarding my visa to re-enter Denmark.So,I spent most of my time in travelling from my country to Benin and Burkina-Faso, two western African countries, where I had to submit my visa application. This is one of the reasons which could explain why I carried out interviews through social media instead of using other forms of interviews such as face-to-face interviews or by telephone, in addition to participants ‘refusal of having their voices recorded. After exchanging our Facebook and Skype accounts,I had to contact them first by phone and decide together on the day and time to be connected on social media for carrying out interviews. This gave me opportunity to carry out these interviews even when I was outside the Republic of Congo where the phenomenon under investigation in this research takes place.Unfortunately,I am still fighting for getting that visa which could allow me to return to Denmark for my thesis defense.

The second limitation is concerned with interviews. I could not reach the number of interviews I initially expected to carry out. On the basis of information that was given to me by the Congolese Chamber of Commerce,I especially sent questionnaires to HR managers of the firms that employ expatriates. Due to the fact that not all the firms which employ expatriates mentioned their contact information,I randomly selected those I could easily get in touch with and they were fourteen in total. These firms are located in the two biggest cities of the Republic of Congo which are Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, and they are mainly concerned with oil production and construction.So,I sent questionnaires to their HR managers but contrary to what I expected, none of them responded to me.I was then obliged to go and meet physically expatriates to their workplaces but only seven of them accepted to grant me interviews. Unfortunatelywhen it came to carry out interviews, two of those who accepted to participate (HR managers of Panalpina and ENI) refused to grant me interviews as promised, the others (5 of them) refused to have their voices recorded and I did not understand their main reason. Therefore, we all decided to carry out these interviews on Facebook and Skype and I was obliged to give up the idea of face-to-face interviews as I initially planned.I think the results of my research would be better than what they are now if I HR managers I contacted accepted to be interviewed.Unfortunately,they considered me as a “spy” who wanted to investigate on their companies.I spent many hours for waiting for interviews they promised me in the corridors of their companies’ buildings but in vain.So,missing to collect data from HR managers that I could add to those collected from expatriate employees has influenced the results of this research.

The third limitation is concerned with the small number of interviews.I think it would be very interesting if I was granted more interviews than what I carried out in this research. Despite their small number, interviews on which I focus in this research allowed me to gather necessary datafor writing my thesis since qualitative research methods necessitate that the researcher makes use of small samples for seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population.(Hancock.1998:3).

The fourth limitation refers to time. The time allocated to write the thesis was not enough for me to do more than what I expected since think I did not personally have much time for concentrating on my thesis writing because I was disturbed by my situation with the Danish immigration services as I mentioned it earlier. Without these problems,I think the results of my research would be better than what they are now.

**1.4. Profile of the Republic of Congo**

I find it very important to focus on the profile of the Republic of Congo to help readers of this thesis to locate the country which represents the case study of the phenomenon I investigate. This is also important to understand why expatriates encounter cultural challenges while doing their international assignments in the Republic of Congo since its population is linguistically and ethnically diverse.

The Republic of Congo, which is sometimes referred to as Congo-Brazzaville or French Congo, should not be confused with its neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, sometimes referred to as Congo-Kinshasa or Belgian Congo. It is a country located in Central Africa, particularly in the central-western part of sub-Saharan Africa, along the Equator. The Republic of Congo is surrounded to the south and east by the Democratic Republic of Congo, to the west by Gabon, to the north by Cameroon and the Central African Republic, to the southwest by Cabinda(Angola) and the coast of the Atlantic Ocean.Brazzaville,the capital of the Republic of Congo, is located on the Congo River in the southern part of the country, immediately across from Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, making both cities to be considered as the closest capital cities in the world[[1]](#footnote-1).

As for its history, the Republic of Congo presents the same characteristics with other former colonies.Bantu-speaking peoples who found tribes during the Bantu expansions largely displaced and absorbed the earliest inhabitants of the region, the pygmy people about 1500 BCE.The Bakongo, a bantu ethnicity that also occupied parts of present-day Angola, Gabon and Democratic of Congo, formed the basis for ethnic affinities and rivalries among those countries. Several Bantu kingdoms such as the Kongo, the Loango and the Teke kingdoms, built trade links leading into the Congo River basin. In 1484, the Portuguese explorer Diego Cao reached the mouth of the Congo[[2]](#footnote-2).Commercial relationships quickly grew up between the inland Bantu kingdoms and European merchants who traded various commodities, manufactured goods, and slaves captured from the hinterlands. Forcenturies, the Congo River served as a major commercial hub for transatlantic trade. However, direct European colonization of the area began in the late 19th century and eroded the power of the Bantu societies in the region[[3]](#footnote-3).The north area of the Congo River came under French sovereignty in 1880 as a result of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza’s treaty with Makoko of the Bateke.This colony became known first as French Congo, then as Middle Congo in 1903 and became also a member of French Equatorial Africa(AEF) organized by France in 1908,comprising Gabon, Chad and Oubangui-Chari(known as Central African Republic nowadays)[[4]](#footnote-4).Brazzaville became the capital of this organization and when Germany occupied France during World War II,it also became the symbolic capital of Free France from 1940 to 1943.In 1958,the country became the Republic of Congo and after publishing its first constitution in 1959,it received full independence from France on August 15,1960[[5]](#footnote-5).

The economy of the Republic of Congo is a mixture of village agriculture and handicrafts, an industrial sector based largely on petroleum extraction that has supplanted forestry as the mainstay of this economy and support services.The Republic of the Congo also has large untapped base metal, gold, iron and phosphate deposits[[6]](#footnote-6).

As for its demographics, the population of the Republic of Congo is mainly concentrated in the southwestern part of the country, leaving the vast areas of tropical jungle in the north virtually uninhabited. This country is one of the most urbanized countries in Africa since 70% of its population live in a few urban areas, particularly in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, or in the small cities and villages that line the 534 kilometres railway which connects the two cities[[7]](#footnote-7).

In addition to the official language which is French and the two national languages, Kituba and Lingala, the Republic of Congo has several ethnic groups and languages. Officially, 62 spoken languages are recognized in the country and each of them represents an ethnic group and its culture. It is worth mentioning that these languages can be divided into three main groups: the Kongo, the Teke and the Boulangui.The Kongo, who live in Brazzaville (the capital), Pointe-Noire (the second largest city which is located on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean) and other regions of Southern Congo, are the largest ethnic group and represent half of the Congolese population. TheTeke, who live in the north of Brazzaville, are the second largest ethnic group which represents 17% of the population. As for the Boulangui (also referred to as Mboshi), they live in northwest and in Brazzaville and represent 12% of the population. It is also necessary to take into consideration pygmies who represent 2% of the Congolese population.Religiously, the Congolese population is a mainly made of Christians, in particular Catholics and Protestants. The majority of Christians are Catholics who represent 50.5% of the population and Protestants who account for 40.2%.It is important to mention that there are also several other Christians denominations, animists (2.2%), Baha’i (0.4%),Muslims (1.3%) and others (2.2%).Muslims are particularly made of merchants from the western part of Africa and Arab countries. Their percentage of 1.3% of the population is due to an influx of foreign workers into the urban centers[[8]](#footnote-8).

Here below is the map of the Republic of Congo and its location on the African continent map[[9]](#footnote-9).

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| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a7/Republic_of_the_Congo_%28orthographic_projection%29.svg/250px-Republic_of_the_Congo_%28orthographic_projection%29.svg.png | http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/11/Republic_of_the_Congo_-_Location_Map_%282011%29_-_COG_-_UNOCHA.svg/280px-Republic_of_the_Congo_-_Location_Map_%282011%29_-_COG_-_UNOCHA.svg.png |

 **2. Methodological approach**

This section is mainly concerned with the methodological approach I have chosen for the study of the topic of my thesis and the way the methodology is applied in the research. This thesis makes use of qualitative research design where qualitative methods are employed to collect data which are then analyzed by the use of qualitative content analysis and interpretation. This section also focuses on my position in relation to philosophy of science since its role in the research process is very important.

**2.1. Research design and research strategy**

Research design plays an important role in the research process .As posited by Bryman (2012:46), research design aims at providing a framework for the collection and analysis of data. It explains the way researchers will collect data, what methods they will use for collecting these data, how to use them and how they will analyze the collected data.

Bryman & Bell (2007) posit that research strategy is simply a general orientation to the conduct of business research. Research strategy may be either qualitative or quantitative. There is a difference between qualitative and quantitative researchers mainly on the basis of quantification and measurement of the result but also on the basis of epistemological and ontological foundations (Bryman &Bell, 2007, p.28).

**2.2. Qualitative research**

Qualitative research can be seen as a research strategy that usually focuses on words rather than quantification when it comes to the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012:36).Hancock states that qualitative research is mainly concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. It aims to help people to understand the world in which they live and why things are the way they are (Hancock, 1998:2).He adds thatqualitative research also aims at finding the answersto questions which begin with: why? How? In what way? (Ibid).Qualitative research is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data. It describes social phenomena as they occur naturally and there is no attempt to manipulate the phenomenon under study simply because understanding of a situation is gained through a holistic perspective (Ibid).In addition, Hancock asserts that data collection in qualitative research is time consuming and it necessitatesthe use of small samples. Qualitative sampling techniques are concerned with seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population (Ibid). Qualitative method is mostly used in inductive approach where emphasis is on the generation of theories. Qualitative research is more interpretivist in nature when it comes to epistemological orientation and constructivist in nature in relation to ontological consideration (Bryman &Bell, 2007).Qualitative research allows the use of a small sample for seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population. Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research is less generalizable and very low level of replicability. (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 28).In the same way, Hancock (1998:3) adds that generalizability of the results to a larger population is not an aim in qualitative research.It is worth mentioning that data in qualitative research are generally collected through direct encounters with individuals, through one to one interviews, group interviews or by observation (Hancock. Ibid).

**2.3. Quantitative research**

Quantitative research is more concerned with questions such as how much? How many? How often? To what extent? (Hancock, 1998:2).Contrary to qualitative research, quantitative research is deductive in the fact that it tests theories which have already been proposed (Ibid).In quantitative research, analysis of the result is mostly in numbers and quantify.Sampling seeks to demonstrate representativeness of findings through random selection of subjects (Ibid). Another characteristic of quantitative research is the very largesize of the sample. Quantitative research is subject to a very low level of biasness in the interpretation from the researchers as statistical tools are used for analysis of the results. Quantitative research is more generalizable. Quantitative research is in general more positivist as far as its epistemological orientation is concerned and objectivist in ontological orientation (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 28).

**2.4. Epistemological and ontological considerations**

According to Bryman (2012:6), the research process is influenced by the assumptions and views about how it should be conducted.Bryman (2008) states that there are three epistemological positions: positivism, realism and interpretivism.For the purpose of this thesis find it important to adopt the interpretivist epistemological approach in relation to the creation of knowledge and the description of social reality. This can be explained by the fact that qualitative research is primarily subjective and seeks to understand and explain the way things are in the world in which we live since individuals are never isolated in the society but they continually engage in interaction with the surrounding world (Hancock.1998:2).Individuals have particular experiences of reality that differ from one to another in terms of how each of them views and interacts with humanity, objects and nature(Ibid).In addition, qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena without attempting to manipulate them (Ibid).

According to Bryman, ”interpretivism is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning of social action”(Bryman.2012:30).He also states that assumptions about the nature of the social phenomena also influence the research process.Therefore,I also find it important to adopt the social constructionist ontological approach based upon the view that social reality is described as “continually being ‘constructed ‘by social actors (Bryman.2012:33).It is important to mention that social constructionist paradigm focuses on the way individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. In the same context, Burr posits that social constructionism requires individuals to take a critical stance toward their taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including themselves (Burr.1995:2-5).Furthermore, he also adds that“social constructionism leads us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yields its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world” (Ibid).It is observed that individuals construct their knowledge of the world between them through their everyday interactions in the course of social life. He also indicates that our shared versions of knowledge are constructed during the practices of goings-on between people in their daily lives. (Ibid).In addition, the view of an individual about truth may be understood as his current accepted way of understanding the world. This isin fact a product of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other but not of objective observation of the world (Ibid).Social constructionism is seen as an approach which considers reality as the result of social construct, social phenomena and their meanings as results of social interactions of people between themselves (Ibid).Baxter and Jack, citing Crabtree&Miller,1999, posit that one of the advantages of social constructionist approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant while enabling them to tell their stories through which they are able to describe their views of reality and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants ’actions(Baxter and Jack,2008:545).

In regards to the research questions, I found the qualitative research to bethe most suitable approach where words rather than numbers and figures are used for the analysis of the data collected during the investigation. Qualitativeresearch is used in this thesis along with its methods, more precisely qualitative interviews or semi-structured interviews to investigate cultural challenges that expatriates encounter while doing their assignments abroad. In this study, the research focuses on both primary and secondary data collected through individual semi-structured interviews to get insight into the participants’ experiences in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. Provided that the investigated phenomenon occurs in a particular geographical area, I find it necessary to apply the case study in order to have a deep understanding of the participants’ feelings, opinions and experiences about cultural challenges they are confronted to while doing their assignments abroad, more precisely in the Republic of Congo. Then, the data collected will be subjected to qualitative content analysis and interpretation. The relevant concepts and theories will be employed in the analysis of data to give answers to the research questions. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn on the basis of answers to the research question.

**2.5. Qualitative research methods**

 According to Bryman (2012:46), a research method can be simply seen asa technique for collecting data. To collect data for the purpose of this thesis decided to make use of qualitative methods which are very common and widely known, especially in social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln.2005:9).Qualitative research methods are useful in providing a way of “capturing the complex and fluid of events taking place” in services involving people (Robson, 2000:63).Qualitative research methods aim at helping people to understand the world in which they live and why things are the way they are. According to Hancock, qualitative research methods are concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer the why, how and in what way questions (Hancock.1998:2).Qualitative research methods also aim at describing social phenomena as they occur naturally without attempting to manipulate them(Ibid).It is worth mentioning that qualitative research methods help us to understand the way human beings create their sociologic reality and try to understand a social phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives. This is one of the characteristics that make qualitative methods suitable to get a whole picture of experiences and situations of few individuals (Ibid). Furthermore, Creswell posits that qualitative methods aim at interpreting and analyzing the participants’ experiences from their point of view. So, there is a necessity to have a good interview guide that could help the participants to discuss the day-to-day reality they find themselves in (Creswell.1998).Though qualitative research methods offer many advantages to researchers who adopt them, they have also been criticized for several points. The first one is the fact that collecting data in qualitative research takes too much time in comparison with quantitative.Therefore,it necessitates that the researcher makes use of small samples for seeking information from specific groups and subgroups in the population. The second point that makes qualitative research methods to be criticized is the lack of generalizability. As stated by Hancock, generalizing the results of qualitative research to a larger population is not an aim (Hancock.1998:3).

**2.6. Case study**

As I mentioned earlier, case study is employed in this research to get a deep insight into expatriates ‘experiences while facing cultural challenges during their assignments in the republic of Congo. It is important to mention that qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts(Baxter and Jack,2008:544).It allows the researcher to explore individuals ororganizations, simple through complex interventions,relationships,communities,or programs(Yin,2003) and supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena. Qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter and Jack.op.cit).This approach ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Ibid).It is worth mentioning that a case study design is used when the researcher seeks to answer questions such as “how” and “why” and when there is no possibility for manipulating the participants ‘behavior (Yin, 2003).Case study design can also be used in the situation in which the researcher expresses the desire to cover contextual conditions he finds relevant to the phenomenon under study but also when the boundaries between this phenomenon and context are not clear (Hancock, 1998:6-7).Hancock also states that case study design claims to offer a richness and depth of information which are not usually offered by other methods.Therefore,the case study may identify how a complex set of circumstances come together to produce a particular manifestation by attempting to capture as many variables as possible(Ibid).

Yin (2003) differentiates between single, holistic case studies and multiple-case studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008:547).According to Bryman (2008), the case study design enables the researcher to make a detailed analysis of a single case. Hancock posits that the case study helps the researcher to describe and explore deeply an entity that forms a single unit, may it be a person, an organization, an event, or a phenomenon, etc. (Hancock.1998:6).It is necessary to say that the case study has many advantages as a research design but it has also limits. This stems from the fact that the case studied in this research design does not obligatorily represent similar cases and the results of this type of research may not be generalized. That is why Hancock states that the case study is particularistic and contextual by nature (Hancock,1998: 7).With the case study, generalizing the case studied to similar cases is not an issue for the researcher who is involved in a specific situation but it is an issue for the readers who want to know whether the results of the research can be applied elsewhere, to decide whether the phenomenon under investigation is similar to their own local situation (Ibid).In this thesis I use the case study to investigate a phenomenon that occurs in a particular geographical location and context, and is concerned with a particular group of people.Otherwise,the case study is applied in this thesis to investigate cultural challenges expatriates encounter while doing their assignments abroad, particularly those who work for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo, and the way they cope with.

**2.7. Data collection and analysis**

According to Bryman, collecting data is the key point of any research (Bryman, 2012:12).Therefore, I chose to employ qualitative methods of data collection for the purpose of this thesis in order to gather necessary and relevant information to give answer to research questions.So, through qualitative interviews I got insight into the participants ‘experiences and opinions.I want to specify that interviews I use in this thesis were not performed as face-to-face interviews but through social media, particularly through Facebook and Skype. This can be explained by the fact that all the expats I contacted for carrying out interviews did not accept me to record their voices for reasons I even do not know. Then, I was obliged to perform individual interviews through social media after meeting physically expatriates who accepted to participate to my research. As I previously mentioned it,I agreed with each of the participants to carry out interviews on Facebook and Skype by respecting their rights, anonymity and confidentiality. To do so, they gave me their Facebook and Skype accounts so that I could send them friendship requests for establishing connection. Collecting data by using social media is a method that does not present the same advantages researchers can benefit if they use other forms of interviews such as face-to-face, mail or telephone. But, the context in which my research was done gave room to the use of Facebook and Skype as the most suitable method of data collection. The advantage of this method is that the researcher could carry out interviews even if he is not in the same geographical area with participants. They just decide on the time they can connect on these social media whenever they want. This is what I did for carrying out interviews even when I was outside the Republic of Congo. The interviews were performed in French and translated into English before being subjected to the content analysis.

**2.8. Interviews**

Interviews play a very important role in the data collection process in qualitative research. They enable researchers to describe the participants ‘life-world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the phenomenon that is being described (Kvale, 1996:124-143). The personal relationships created between the participants and the interviewers, are invaluable, and can often change the interviewers’ vision of the research itself (Ibid).Interviews involve a one to one direct interaction with individuals (individual interview) or a direct interaction with individuals in a setting group (focus group interview).The interaction between the interviewers and the participants is generally a face to face one but it could also be a conversation on telephone, Facebook, Skype, etc.Individual interviews help interviewers to use prompts for asking for elaboration and explanation. At the same time, interviewees are given the opportunity to become familiar with the needs and objectives of the interview (Witkin and Altschuld.1995:4).Since many people are not used to talking in public, the advantage of individual interviews is simply the fact that they allow individuals to offer important information about the discussed topic that would not be possible in the case of focus group interviews. The biggest issue with this type of interview is that it is time consuming and does not allow researchers to interview small groups of people at the same time like it happens in focus group interviews.Focus group interview is a style of interview technique which is designed for a small group of unrelated individuals formed and led by an investigator in a particular discussion or topic and it generally involves at least four participants (Bryman, 2008:473).Participants ‘discussions during the focus group interview allowsresearchers to get more valuable information about the topic and to get a deep insight in it when their conclusions are similar. Critics have been raised towards this type of interview and it is concerned with the fact that some participants may influence others ‘opinions during discussions.

Interviews can be highly structured, semi structured or unstructured (Hancock, 1998:9-10). Structured interviews consist of the interviewer asking each respondent the same questions in the same way.A tightly structured schedule of questions is used, very much like a questionnaire. Bearing in mind the cost of conducting a series of one to one interviews, the researcher planning to use structured interviews should carefully consider the information could be more efficiently collected using questionnaires(Ibid).As for semi structured interviews, they involve a series of open ended questions based on the topic areas researchers want to cover.Therefore,the open ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewers and interviewees to discuss some topics in more detail(Ibid).This type of interviews enables the interviewer to use cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further if he has difficulty answering a question. Hancock furthermore posits that in a semi structured interview, the interviewer is open and receptive to unexpected information from the participant and this can be particularly important if a limited time is available for each interview and the interviewer wants to be sure that all the key issues will be covered(Ibid).). Unstructured interviews allow the researcher to go through the interview with the aim of covering a limited number of topics and generate new questions on the basis of the responses the interviewee gave to the previous questions. In this type of interviews, there is no preconceived plan or questions to find out about the topic covered by the investigation (Hancock.1998:10). The difference with semi structured interviews is that in a semi structured interview the interviewer has a set of broad questions to ask and may also have some prompts to help the interviewee but the interviewer has the time and space to respond to the interviewees ’responses (Ibid). It is important to state that I choose to use qualitative interviews to collect necessary data for the purpose of thesis. Hancock posits that qualitative interviews are semi structured or unstructured(Hancock,1998:10).They should be fairly informal so that interviewees should feel as though they are participating in a conversation or discussion rather than in a formal question and answer situation of the quantitative methods like surveys, etc.(Ibid). For the purpose of this thesis find it necessary to use semi structured interviews because they allow me to deeply explore the phenomenon under investigation by getting closer to participants’ experiences and views about it.Therefore,semi structured interviews enable researchers to use an interview guide made of several questions for collecting data .The interview-guide I use in this thesis to collectdata about the studied topic is mainly concerned with questions about the cultural challenges that expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their assignments, the way they cope with and the strategies that should be used to avoid them. The questions used in the interview-guide evolve the participants’ experiences and opinions about the challenges. It is worth mentioning that participants are expatriateswho work for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo as I have stated above.

**2.8.1. Selection of participants**

I did not select participants beforehand. Their selection was made randomly since I sent e-mails with an attached questionnaire to Human Resource Managers of Multinational Companies operating in the Republic of Congo such as Socotec Bassin du Congo (subsidiary of Socotec International Group operating in Construction and safety control), Panalpina on 6 continents (Maritime transports and Logistics), Baker Hughes (Oil production), ENI (Oil exploration and production)and Total E&P(Oil exploration and production),to help me meeting their expatriate employees but in vain. Then, I was obliged to go to these companies’ headquarters to contact myself expatriates who accepted to participate to the interviews as I mentioned it earlier. Selection of participants was based on the criterion that asserts that they must all be expatriate employees working for Multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo, regardless their race,nationality,sex or age.

**2.8.2. The interviews’ details**

This thesis focuses on five individual interviews involving expatriate employees working for Multinational companies operating in the Republic of Congo. All the interviews were carried out on social media, more precisely four interviews on Facebook with Brice, Ronan, Gilles and Dramane, and one interview on Skype with Ismail. Participants are respectively from four different countries: Brice from France (Interview 1), Ronan from Switzerland (Interview 2),Gilles from Belgium(Interview 3),Dramane from Italy(Interview 4)and Ismail from France(Interview 5).I carried out interviews with expatriates who are from different countries because I wanted to get diverse points of view about the phenomenon under study. Although participants are all expatriates but they do not have the same cultural background since they are not from the same country and do not experience cultural challenges in the same way. As I previously mentioned, participants ‘names have been changed to keep their privacy. In addition, I use the codes “I” and “P”to refer to “Interviewer and Participant”.

**2.9. Data content analysis**

According to Maryng,qualitative content analysis defines itself as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification(Maryng,2000).Other definitions of content analysis are stated by Hancock(1998) and Krippendorf(1969).The first one defines content analysis as a procedure for categorizing verbal or behavioral data, for the purposes of classification, summarization and tabulation(Hancock,1998:17-18).On the other hand,Krippendorf posits that content analysis is the use of replicable and valid method for making specific inferences from text to other states or properties of its sources(Krippendorf,1969:103).It is necessary to mention that content analysis may adopt different approaches since it may be descriptive or interpretative.So,the descriptive approach is considered as the basic level of analysis focusing on what was actually said with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it.As far as the interpretative approach is concerned, it can be viewed as the higher level of analysis where content analysis involves techniques such as coding and classifying also referred to as categorizing or indexing. The aim of this approach is to identify from the interviews transcripts the informative data that researchers can use for the analysis and to discover hidden messages from the mass interviews. One of the characteristics of content analysis is the possibility it offers researchers to revisit continually the data and review their categorization until they are sure that the themes and categories they used to summarize and describe the findings really reflect the data (Hancock, 1998:17-18).Maryng states that content analysis analyzes not only the manifest content of the material as its name may suggest(Maryng,2000).He furthermore suggests that the object of qualitative content analysis can be all sort of recorded communication, such as transcripts of interviews, protocols of observations, video tapes, discourses, documents, etc.(Ibid).

Based on the information above, I find it necessary to focus on the qualitative content analysis along with its interpretative approach as a platform for the analysis of data I collected through semi-structured interviews for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, content analysis will allow me to create subcategories in the data analysis process by using methods such as reducing and displaying data. The first step is reading interviews transcripts over and marking similar words and concepts. The second one is reducing data for narrowing down the results and coding to generate relevant themes from data. Then, the themes will be combined with the relevant theories which are experiential learning theory and social constructionist theory for analyzing data. In the end,I shall display data to index the results up and make them accessible and easy to compare.

**2.10. Ethics in research**

It is very important that researchers consider ethical issues in any research process because participants express their need of protection.Gillepsie posits that ethics emerge from value conflicts which are expressed in research by individuals ‘rights to privacy versus the undesirability of manipulation; openness and replication versus confidentiality, future welfare versus immediate relief, and others(Gillepsie,1987).Researchers must try to minimize risks to participants, colleagues, and society while attempting to maximize the quality of information they produce(Ibid).As aresearcher,I have the personal obligation to ensure participants or people from whom I collected data for my thesis that their individual rights to privacy will be respected. Provided that it was difficult to get participants ‘trust towards me,I assured them that I was not putting them in a risky situation may it be physical or psychological.So,I assured them that their privacy will be protected through anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore,I use anonymity in this thesis when I decide to not use participants’ true names as they are in interviews transcripts. This means that their true names are replaced by other popular names so that it could be difficult to identify them. By using confidentiality, it was necessary to assure participants that information they provided me and details about their personalities will not be made available to people who are not directly concerned with this research. Since interviews were performed through Facebook and Skype,I also assured them that their profile pictures will be deleted.

 **3. Theoretical approach**

This section of my thesis will illustrate the theoretical approach that was undertaken in order to conduct my research. This section is further divided into two sub-sections. In the 1st sub-section present and define the concepts I find relevant to my research. In the 2nd sub-section, I introduce the main theories I find necessary to debate and that I find relevant to the research problem.

**3.1. Concepts**

According to Bryman, concepts are seen as the building blocks of theory and represent the points around which the social research is conducted (Bryman, 2008:143).They are the way we make sense of the social world; they facilitate thinking and more discipline about what is to be investigated and at the same time help with the organization of research findings (Ibid).So, for the purpose of our research problem I take into consideration concepts such as globalization, culture, culturalidentity, in-group-out-group and socialization.

**3.1.1. Globalization**

The concept of Globalization has been defined in different ways but in this thesis I am going to mention just a few of them, particularly those I find relevant to my research problem. The first definition considers Globalization as processes of international integration that arise from the interchange of world views,products,ideas,and other aspects of culture(Al-Rodhan &Stoudmann,2006).According to Albrow and King, globalization refers to all processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society(Albrow &King,1990:8).TheSwedish journalist, Thomas Larsson posits that globalization can be seen as the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer. It pertains to the increasing ease which allow people from different sides of the world to interact to mutual benefit(Larsson,2001:9).In the same vein, Held states that globalization can refer to those spatial-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human activity across regions and continents(Held,1999).As for Giddens, he defines the concept of globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa(Giddens,1991:64).The other definition to take into consideration here comes from Kiely and Marfleet who assert that globalization is a world in which societies,cultures,politics and economies have, in some sense, come together(Kiely and Marfleet.1998:3).The variety of definitions clearly shows that it is difficult to find a common definition to the concept of globalization. The main characteristics of these definitions is that they all refer to integration, cooperation between people or states,development,progress,stability but also to neo-colonialism, destabilization and regression(Al-Rhodan&Stoudmann,2006:5).

Globalization has four basic aspects as identified by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2000 and they are presented as trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration and movement of people and the dissemination of knowledge[[10]](#footnote-10).Among these four basic aspects, migration and movement of people is the main feature of globalization we focus on in this thesis since my research problem is concerned with expatriates’ experiences during their assignments abroad. They leave their home countries for others’ in order to fulfill their assignments as required by their companies. This is possible nowadays thanks to the phenomenon of globalization that makes things easier than what they were in the past when it comes to move from one part of the world to another, leading to cultures’ meeting.

**3.1.2. Socialization**

According to Clausen,socialization is a concept that is used to refer to the lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within his or her own society.So,it is ‘the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained’(Clausen,1968:5).Pinker views socialization as a process which may lead to desirable, or ‘normal’, outcomes in the opinion of said society(Pinker,2002).He furthermore posits that individual views on certain issues, such as race or economics, are influenced by the view of the society at large and become a “normal”, and acceptable outlook or value to have within a society(Ibid).As for Billingham,socialization can be seen as the process by which human infants begin to acquire the necessary skills to perform as functioning members of their society, and is the most influential learning process one can experience(Billingham,2007:336).In contrast with other living species whose behavior is biologically set, humans need social experiences to learn their culture and to survive(Macionis&Gerber,2011).It is worth mentioning that the most fundamental expression of culture is found at the individual level and this can only be seen after an individual has been socialized by his or her parents, family, extended family, and extended social networks.So,this reflexive process of both learning and teaching is how cultural and social characteristics attain continuity(Ibid).

**3.1.3. Ingroup-outgroup**

The concept of in-group refers to a social group to which an individual psychologically identifies himself as being a member whereasan out-group is seen as a social group to which a person does not identify(Tajfel et al.1971:149-178).According to them, people may find it psychologically meaningful to view themselves according to their race,culture,gender or religion(Ibid).They furthermore posit that people can form self-referencing in-groups within a matter of minutes and that such groups can form even on the basis of seemingly trivial characteristics, such as preferences for certain paintings(Ibid).

McLeod posits that the fact of having the in-group and out-group concepts leads to the division of the world into “them” and “us” by being based on the process of social categorization[[11]](#footnote-11).Furthermore, he thinks that individuals’ sense of identity is related to their membership to a particular group since this constitutes an important source of pride and self-esteem(Ibid).Then, he adds that the concept of social identity theory explains the discrimination of the out-group by the in-group which enhances its self-image. This is to say that individuals belonging to the in-group seek to find negative aspects of the out-group members and undoubtedly enhance their self-image (Ibid).The main consequence of this fact is that it leads members of the in-group to stereotype the out-group members. Such consideration is one of the major causes that lead members of a particular group to face more challenges.

**3.1.4. Culture**

The concept of culture has many definitions that I cannot use all of them here but I focus just on what I find necessary to my thesis. Citing Roberts (1970), Kuada asserts that ”culture represents the shared values and norms that bind members of a society or organization together as a homogenous entity”(Kuada,2008:7).This view indicates that the conduct of people living within a particular setting is regulated by a consensual aspiration, universal values and universal orientation[[12]](#footnote-12).As for Hoebel, culture is viewed as an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that characterize the members of any society and that are not the consequence of biological inheritance[[13]](#footnote-13).

It is worth mentioning that resisting to be part of a multiculturalist environment may be one of the causes of cultural challenges that expatriates may be confronted to since they consider themselves as different from others. This view is explained by Sachman when he states that members of a particular group share a common frame of interpretation and understanding and this fact leads them to consider themselves as different from other people (Sachman, 1992:140-161).It is true that expatriates may be from different countries but the fact that they belong to the same group makes them share common beliefs, norms and values in the new environment. This makes them to differ themselves from nationals because they do not share the same views, values, norms and beliefs. Due to the importance of the concept of culture, I find it necessary to consider the concept of cultural identity.

**3.1.5. Cultural identity**

The concepts of identity and culture are tightly related to each other since the second one is an important factor in shaping the first one (Pratt, 2005:69-86).Therefore, cultural identity can simply be seen as the identity of culture or the one of a group or of an individual. This stems from the fact that an individual is influenced by his belonging to a particular culture or group (Ibid).

According to Holliday, several cultural complexities define how people operate with the cultural realities in their lives(Holliday,2010:177).He further states that nation is a large factor of the cultural complexity, as it shapes the foundation for individual’s identity but it may contrast with one’s cultural reality.So,cultural identities are influenced by several different factors such as one’s religion, skin colour,ancestry,class,language,education,profession,family and political attitudes,skill.Then,he concludes that all these attitudes contribute to the development of one’s identity(Ibid).

The concept of cultural identity refers to those values which enable an individual or a group of individuals to consider themselves as different from others.Consequently,the individual’s natural desire to retain culture leads him to resist to other cultural realities when it comes to live in environments that involve people from diverse cultural backgrounds[[14]](#footnote-14).It is true that the meeting of different cultures undoubtedly may raise several issues like the need for multicultural management, cultural exchange,understanding,blending,but also misunderstanding and sometimes rejection or division. This is due to the fact that individuals involved in that situation may fail to show a high level of cross-cultural intelligence[[15]](#footnote-15).So, this fact may help us to understand the reason why most of expatriates encounter challenges that are related to their cultural differences with national employees since they perceive cultural identity as a way to preserve and fulfill their ways of life, beliefs and values[[16]](#footnote-16).

**3.2. Theories**

According to Kuada, theories may be defined as series of systematic inter-related statements or generalizations that explain and anticipate developments in a specific context or phenomenon(Kuada,2011:37).He also states that theory provides the language, the concepts and assumptions that help the researcher to make sense of the phenomenon that he seeks to investigate.So,it enables the researcher to connect the issues he or she is investigating to the existing body of knowledge in the area(Ibid).

 As for Strauss and Corbin (1998), cited by Kuada (2011), theory is seen as a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:15).

The theories I have selected for the purpose of this thesis constitute the platform upon which the analysis of the collected data and discussion arebased. Therefore, they guide our comprehension of the investigated topic, our analysis of the data I collected, as I have mentioned above, and my conclusion. This thesis focuses on two main theories I find relevant to my research problem: experiential learning theory and social constructionist theory.

**3.2.1. Experiential learning theory**

One of the main theories in use in this thesis is the experiential learning theory that Itin (1999) describes as the process of making meaning from direct experience, i.e., ”learning from experience”(Itin,1999:91-98).Experiential learning theory was popularized by the American educational theorist, David A. Kolb, and it focuses on the individual’s learning process. To illustrate his theory, Kolb focuses on the example of learning how to ride a bike. According to him, in the “concrete experience” stage, the individual who is learning to ride a bike physically experiences it in the “here-and-now”(Kolb,1984:21).He also posits that the experience of learning how to ride a bike constitutes the basis for observation and reflection and this gives the opportunity to the individual to consider what is working or failing(reflective observation),and think about how to improve on the next attempt made at riding the bike(abstract conceptualization).So, every new attempt to ride is informed by a cyclical pattern of previous experience, thought and reflection, process considered as active experimentation(Ibid).Below is the illustration of Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model(ELM).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | → | Concrete Experience | ↓ |  |
| Active Experimentation |  |  |  | Reflective Observation |
|  | ↑ | Abstract Conceptualization | ← |  |

Figure 1 – Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model (ELM)[[17]](#footnote-17)

From this model,I tried to make a comparison with the expatriates’ experiences when they integrate a new cultural environment. This idea is illustrated in the figure below:

Reflective impression

First impression

New impression

Outcomes

Figure 2:Students’personal conception.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Experiential Learning theory is implied here to give us a clear view about the different steps that expatriate employees go through while doing their assignment abroad and in a cultural environment that differs from theirs. The new cultural environment is represented in this thesis research by the Republic of Congo. Interpreting the figure above, the first step that expatriates go through is referred to as first impression[[19]](#footnote-19). It is the step when expatriates have their first physical contact with the new cultural environment without knowing the existence of challenges they may face. The second step is that expatriates’ daily experiences lead them to observation and reflection so that they begin to contemplate what it is conform to their prior knowledge of the challenges and what is not. This step is referred to as reflective impression. As a consequence, on the basis of the observation and reflection, expatriate employees develop new ideas or new impression on the challenges they begin to encounter and to think about the way they can cope with successfully or unsuccessfully(this third step refers to new impression).In the end, expatriate employees draw conclusions on the basis of their experiences and each new challenge they face is informed by a pattern of previous thoughts,experiences,reflection and the way to manage it.This is the fourth and last step that is referred to as outcomes[[20]](#footnote-20).

Itin(1999) asserts that experiential learning can exist without a teacher and it is related to the process of making meaning of the individual’s direct experience(Itin,1999:91-98).He furthermore states that even if knowledge is usually gained through an inherent process that occurs naturally, the occurrence of a genuine learning experience is subjected to the existence of certain elements(Ibid).In the same context, Merriam et al.(2007),citing Kolb, posit that knowledge is continuously gained through both personal and environmental experiences.So,gaining genuine knowledge from an experience requires the existence of certain abilities.First,the learner must be willing to be actively involved in the experience and be able to reflect on that experience.Secondly,the learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience.Thirdly,the learner must possess skills for making decisions and solving problems so that he or she could use the new ideas gained from the experience(Merriam et al.2007).

The second example for illustrating the Experiential Learning Theory comes from Mc Carthy and Mc Carthy (2006) who see it as going to the zooand learning through observation and interaction with the zoo environment, as opposed to reading about animals from books. This strategy helps the individual to make discoveries and experiments with knowledge firsthand, instead of hearing or reading about other people’s experiences (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006:201-204).

**3.2.2. Social Constructionist theory**

Social constructionist theory is based on the view that social phenomena result from social constructs through individuals ‘interaction in society.

According to Hacking, social constructivism is based on human understandings, experiences and interpretations (Hacking, 1999:6-12).He further adds that social construction is first of all a practice that turns into the construct of a particular group. Thus, social constructs are generally viewed as the by-products of countless human choices rather than laws that come from nature or divine will but that do not imply a radical antideterminism (Hacking, 1999:6-12).Paul Boghossian thinks that” to say of something that is socially constructed is to emphasize its dependence on contingent aspects of our social selves. It is to say: This thing could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it at all, at least not in its present form. Had we been a different kind of society, had we had different values, needs, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently”[[21]](#footnote-21).Then, he adds that the inevitable contrast is with a naturally existing object, something that exists independently of us and which we did not have a hand in shaping. There are certainly many things and facts about them that are socially constructed in the sense specified by this core idea, such as money, citizenship and newspapers. So, none of these things could have existed without society and each of them could have been constructed differently had we so chosen[[22]](#footnote-22).Talking about social constructionism, Beaumie Kim posits that its core idea is to unravel the various ways in which individuals and groups constructtheir perceived social reality[[23]](#footnote-23).This is true that expatriates are from societies that have cultures which differ from those in the host country. The differences of cultures are then expressed by individuals when interacting in society and by the way they construct their social reality. So, social constructionist theory is used in this thesis to help us to know the cultural challenges expatriates encounter, to know how these challenges influence their professional performance, to know how they handle them and what should be done to avoid them.

**4. Data analysis and discussion**

This section is devoted to the analysis of data I collected on the basis of cultural challenges that expatriates encounter while doing their international assignment abroad, particularly those who work for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo. To achieve this goal, I have grouped the variousanswers that interviews participants give to each of my research questions and which are as expressed in the interviews into distinct themes which are applied to the concepts and theories I select for the purpose of this thesis. To do so, data analysis focuses on answers given to the following questions: what cultural challenges do expatriates face, their effects on expatriates’ professional performances, how do they overcome them and what should be done to avoid them.Therefore,this research has generated the following themes: encountered cultural challenges, the impact of cultural issues on expatriates ‘professional performances and strategies used to overcome cultural problems.

**4.1.1.Encountered cultural challenges**

The first research question asks what cultural challenges expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their international assignment. Answers to this question show clearly that expatriates face various cultural challenges which are due to cultural differences. These cultural challenges mainly refer to language, interpersonal relationships, and the notion of time. It is obvious that problems or challenges related to difference of cultures occur when people from different cultural backgrounds meet. Brice (Appendix A, int.1) declares that”… this kind of problems usually occurs when you come to a foreign country, when you come to a continent you just discover, when you meet lovely people but with a different way of life from mine, different beliefs, values, etc.”. This statement explains the fact that meeting of cultures may undoubtedly lead to challenges that are due to cultural differences as I have previously stated. The first cultural challenge to consider here is related tolanguage. Research findings show that language is one of the cultural challenges faced by some of the expats working in the Republic of Congo. Although French is the country’s official language used in the administration and educational institutions, Congolese people are used to speaking their two national languages and various ethnic groups’languages.This behavior is usually observed even in the work or professional environment may it be in the absence of expatriate colleagues or not. This is justified by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) when he asserts that:”You know, the Republic of Congo is a country made of a mixture of ethnic groups and each of them has its own culture, its own language, in addition to the two national languages that are spoken by all the Congolese people. I’m talking about obstacles because the others, I mean Congolese people, can talk to each other in their national languages which we can’t understand anything. We can’t forbid them to use their languages although the languages of work in the company are French and English. This situation pushes expatriates to form their own group instead of being together with nationals so that they could easily communicate between them and well understand each other”. This observation is shared by Brice (Appendix A, int.1) who posits that:

”I want to say that despite French is used as the work language since it’s also the official language in the Republic of Congo, it happens times that national employees use Congolese languages when communicating between themselves.I see this fact as a big challenge because we don’t share the same communication code and we don’t understand what they tell each other”.

In the same way, Dramane (Appendix A, int.4) indicates that:”There is for example the problem related to language because Congolese people like other Africans, in addition to French language, use their national and other ethnic languages. Sometimes one may feel excludedfrom the group when Congolese employees use their national languages”.

 Although the fact of using their national languages in the professional environment may not be done by Congolese people on purpose, it constitutes a real challenge for expatriates. This falls in line with Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) when he declares that:

” The main challenge I faced is language since Congolese people often use 2 national and several ethnic languages in addition to French which is the official language. This constitutes the main cultural challenge I’m confronted to in Congo even though there are other challenges that are concerned with people’s way of life, customs and values or difference in the way expats and local engineers view the world”.

The challenge related to language leads expatriates to feel like they do not belong to the same group with Congolese employees in particular and Congolese people as the whole. Such behavior may be explained by the ingroup-outgroup concept which, according to Tajfel et al., is referred to as a social group to which an individual psychologically identifies himself as being a member and as a social group to which a person does not identify (Tajfel et al.1971:op.cit).I observe that by using their national languages that expatriates could not understand instead of using French or English, Congolese employees want to express the desire to view themselves as belonging to the same group that differs from the one of expatriates. This argument is justified by Tajfel et al. who state that “people may find it meaningful to view themselves according to their race, culture, gender or religion” (Ibid).To do so, Congolese employees use their national languages for this purpose since language is one of the elements of culture.

The second challenge which has been identified in this category is concerned with the notion of time. The way it is viewed or considered by expatriate employees differs from the way their Congolese counterparts view it.This is justified by Gilles (Appendix A, int.3) when he observes that:

”Concerning time, it’s common to notice that most of people don’t view the concept of time as it is in France.You have just to see at what time they come to work, to appointments or to work meetings. Most of them are used to come 1h later. Infact, it’s difficult for many of them to be on time even in their daily lives.I think it’s rooted in their culture, it’s their behaviour, and it constitutes a cultural shock for people who come from a different cultural environment”.

This point of view is shared by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) when he observes:

**“**There is also the problem related to the concept of time because Congolese people have a different view about it.You can see for instance employees stay for several minutes in corridors during the work time just for chatting and start working later on without respecting time”.

From the above statements I understand that the way Congolese people view the concept of time may be explained by the fact that time is not valued in their culture in particular and in African culture in general. Respecting the notion of time as it is in Western culture is not an essential factor in the daily life. This argument is highlighted by Brice(Appendix A,int.1) when he indicates that” I have noticed that most of national employees don’t have the same way of viewing time with us from the western world where that time is very precious as people say : »Time is money ».That’s really a cultural shock”. What I observe here is that this statement does not only highlight the difference in viewing the concept of time but it also leads to consider the concept of ingroup-outgroup since expatriates express their desire to single themselves and to consider their way of viewing time is better than the one of national employees. It is obvious that the concept of ingroup-outgroup goes along with the idea of the division of the world into “them” and “us”, as posited by McLeod, by being based on the process of social categorization[[24]](#footnote-24).According to Mc Leod, individuals express their sense of identity through the fact of belonging to a particular group which is therefore considered as an important source of pride and self-esteem (Ibid).He also thinks that the concept of social identity leads the in-group members to discriminate the out-group members and enhance their self-image by seeking to find negative aspects of the out-group members(Ibid).As a direct consequence, out-group members are stereotyped by in-group members and this is justified by Gilles’ observation(Appendix A,int.3) which asserts that:”Most of them are used to come 1h later. Infact, it’s difficult for many of them to be on time even in their daily lives.I think it’s rooted in their culture, it’s their behavior”.

It is necessary to mention that cultural differences may favor the exclusion of a category of people by the in-group members. This is what usually happens to expatriates while doing their international assignments in cultural environment that differs from the one they have in their home countries. The justification of this argument is made by Dramane(Appendix A, int.4) who states that”As far as I’m concerned,I feel as if I’m misunderstood and considered as someone who is different from them since I have some different cultural values”.

The third challenge to emphasize on here is concerned with the type of interpersonal relationships. The way people interact in the professional environment and in society is undoubtedly influenced by their culture. So, it is common that expatriates are surprised to see that people in their host countries, in particular their colleagues, behave in the way that they are not used to in their home countries. This argument is illustrated by Brice (Appendix A, int.1) when he declares that “the type of interpersonal relations is totally different from what we have in France since in the Congo people are obliged to use titles such as Mr. X or Mrs. In France, interpersonal relations between employees are mainly professional and are not necessarily friendly like they are here”. He further observes that”….national employees are very close to each other and beyond the professional environment, it seems like they have been close friends before working in the same company”(Appendix A,int.1).It is true that things which may be normal or not acceptable in one society may not be it in another society. So, this may be considered as a challenge by people who are from a different cultural environment. That is why expatriates are confronted to such a challenge since they are mainly from Western countries where social life is based on individualism. In contrast, African societies are centered on the fact that an individual lives in community with other individuals so that they could help each other. Therefore, Congolese culture allows people to be closer to each other regardless the place where they can be. This shows clearly that the type of interpersonal relations people have in Congo is a matter of their culture. This is illustrated by Gilles (Appendix A, int.3) when he declares that:**“**I want to say that people here are warm-hearted, open-minded, they are always ready and available tohelp others, contrary to what we see in France where everyone is for himself first.I think this is due to the fact that French society like other western societies is based on individualism whereas in Congo, like in other African countries, society is based on collectivism. Social life is based on mutual help and solidarity, and this also influences interpersonal relations within the company. People are very close to each other and I like it”. He furthermore compares the type of interpersonal relationships in Congo to those they have in France. That is why he posits that”In France, for instance, interpersonal relations between employees don’t necessarily lead to friendship or brotherhood as we see it here, they remain just professional relations as defined by the word” (Appendix A, int.3).The difference in interpersonal relationships is also observed by Brice (Appendix A, int.1) who declares that” In France, interpersonal relations between employees are mainly professional and are not necessarily friendly like they are here”. Expatriates also point out the Congolese way of life as one of the cultural challenges they are confronted to. This is sustained byGilles (Appendix A, int.3) when he states:”I know well that the difference of ways of life and culture is one of the first challenges an expat has to face in his host country”. This point of view is shared by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) and this leads him to assert that”The different way of life is one of the first challenges an expat faces in the host country. It is common here to greet everyone even those who’re not your acquaintances”. Considering the way of life as a challenge may stem from the fact that most of expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo are from western countries. So, it is obvious that Congolese way of life is based on the way African societies are structured and it is true that they are totally different from western societies. Based on this view, one cannot be surprise to notice that the way of life constitutes one of the cultural challenges encountered by expatriates. It has been observed that these expatriates also face challenges which are related to work organization and structure. This observation is highlighted by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) when he argues:”Another problem is related to the way work is organized because people, here, are used to wait for orders from managers or hierarchy before doing something. This contrast to what happens in the western world because employees know what is their daily work is like instead of waiting for orders from hierarchy. There is also the problem of offices”.

From the above statement, I understand that Congolese employees may still be influenced by habits inherited from the colonial period when French colonizers had to prescribe first what colonized people should do. Therefore, regardless how work is organized or structured in an organization, it is common to see people behave in the way that is pointed out here.Furthermore, Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) also points out the problem that is concerned with offices. That is why he indicates that**:**”It’s common here to see offices that are occupied by one person only whereas in USA, the organizational system requires people to work in open spaces, I mean in large rooms where many people can work together, each of them having his desk, his chair, etc., as an office. Everyone can see each other and know who does what but here, someone may be hidden in his office and what can’t know what he or she is doing inside. Most of the time they are asked to let offices doors opened but in vain. They go on doing it every day and I was even told that this is rooted in their culture. They can’t get rid of it now, it’s in their daily behavior”. This statement leads us backin some extent to the concept of in-group-out-group with an emphasis on stereotyping. This is due to the fact that Ronan (Appendix A, int.2)relates the way offices are used by Congolese employees to their culture. So, this gives room to what I have previously considered as the division of the world into “us” and “them”. It is important to mention that cultural challenges expatriates encounter are the results of their interaction with Congolese people in general and with their Congolese counterparts in particular. To explain it, the use of social constructionist theory plays a very important role since it is based on the view that social phenomena result from social constructs through individuals ‘interaction in society. Expatriates consider things they find to be different from what exists in their own cultures as challenges. This stems from the fact that they focus on their own understandings, experiences and interpretations. We should know that expatriates experience these challenges because they socially interact with Congolese people who have a different cultural background. Their perception of social reality is then based on their individual experience and interpretation of things resulting from their social interactions. Hacking posits that social construction is first of all a practice that turns into the construct of a particular group and that social constructs are generally viewed as the by-products of countless human choices rather than laws that come from nature or divine will but that do not imply a radical antideterminism(Hacking,1999:6-12). Considering cultural differences as challenges depends on expatriates’ individual perception of the social reality and because they think it could be so.It is also up to them to consider these cultural differences in the different ways or to not consider them as challenges. Therefore, PaulBoghossian indicates that “This thing could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it at all, at least not in its present form. Had we been a different kind of society, had we had different values, needs, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently”[[25]](#footnote-25).It is very important here to take into consideration the concept of cultural identity to understand why expatriates consider their cultural differences with Congolese people as cultural challenges. Pratt defines cultural identity as the identity of culture, of a group or of an individual (Pratt, 2005:69-86).He further adds that the fact of belonging to a particular culture or group has an influence upon an individual (Ibid).In the same way, Holliday posits that religion, skin colour,ancestry,education,language,class,skill,political attitudes, profession and family, are the main factors that influence cultural identities(Holliday,2010:177).This helps me to understand that cultural identity represents values through which individuals consider themselves as different from each other.Therefore,they express the desire to remain tightly linked to their culture and identity even if they live in a cultural environment that differs from theirs.So,considering cultural differences as challenges shows clearly that expatriates want to keep their own ways of life, their own values, by preserving their cultural identity.

**4.1.2. The impact of cultural issues on expatriates ‘professional performances.**

This theme results from my second researchquestion: how do these cultural challenges influence your professional performance? To do so, various answers are given to respond to this question and they depend on each expatriate’s individual experience and interpretation. It is important to mention that cultural challenges expatriates encounter may influence either positively or negatively their professional performances. This depends on the way each of the expatriates experiences them. Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) asserts that: “I think all the cultural exchanges we have during expatriation have a very positive impact on professional performance or outcome and this depends on each individual’s capacity of adaptation to the new cultural environment. As for me, these cultural challenges have helped me to better adapt myself to Congolese culture and they have a positive impact on my professional performance”**.** This statement shows clearly that cultural challenges may influence positively an expatriate’s professional performance when they constitute a stimulus that helps him to adapt to the new culture. This is highlighted by Gilles (Appendix A, int.3) when he declares that: ”First of all, I’d like to say that difficulties expats face for adapting themselves to the new cultural environment may lead them to fail their assignments abroad. In contrast, succeeding to adapt themselves in the new culture may lead them to success. This shows clearly that cultural challenges expats encounter while doing their assignments abroad influence their professional performances. As for me, these challenges have been a stimulus that pushed me to do more than I could, to find solutions, to increase my independence.I think without these challenges, things would be boring here because they pushed me to think more about how to find solutions……..”. Inaddition, cultural challenges have a positive impact on expatriates’ performances when they succeed to adapt to the host country’s culture since this could allow them to fulfill successfully their missions. In contrast, cultural challenges may also influence negatively expatriates’ professional performances and constitute an obstacle to the fulfilment of their missions abroad. This is due to the fact that the lack of understanding and harmony between expatriates and local employees may prevent them to work in teams as effectively as possible for the success of their organization or company. This argument is illustrated by Brice (Appendix A, int.1) when he indicates that:”Yes, these problems influence my professional performance since the cultural difference leads to misunderstanding and lack of harmony at work. It seems like we spend much time for trying to understand each other, to understand the new culture, and it’s a waste of time. We can for example plan something to do together but it happens that national employees usually come late. This is a big problem mainly when it comes to work in teams because we can’t move forward as it should be”.

The above statement falls in line with Ronan‘s (Appendix A, int.2) justification when he posits that: “You know that cultural difference may lead to misunderstanding and cause failure to a project.I tell you the truth that many expats fail to their mission or international assignment not because they are not professionally competent but because they don’t succeed to adapt themselves to new cultural environments. To adapt oneself to the new culture requires patience, will, motivation, although it’s not as easy as we think. As expats, we have to fulfill the mission for which we are sent abroad by the company. Therefore, failing to adapt oneself to the host country’s culture may lead to the rejection of the expats by national employees and cause conflict between them and us. The immediate consequence of this is failure to do one’s assignment abroad. What I know is that Congolese people welcome those who adapt themselves to their culture”. In the same vein, Dramane (Appendix A, int.4) also sustains that cultural challenges constitute an obstacle which often prevents expatriates to share their knowledge with their Congolese colleagues but his adaptation to the host country’s culture is an advantage that allows him to do his international assignment successfully. He further points out that the difference in culture pushes his Congolese to consider him as someone who does not belong to their group. This brings us back to the ingroup-outgroup concept which gives room to the division of the world into “us” and “them”. That is why he declares that:

“I can say it’s more or less but not as it is with other expatriates I see here and who can’t transfer their knowledge to Congolese employees because of cultural challenges. As far as I’m concerned,I feel as if I’m misunderstood and considered as someone who is different from them since I have some different cultural values.But,I usually do my best to adapt myself to the new situation and fulfill my expatriation mission as it should be”.

I understand that each expatriate expresses his own experience on the way cultural challenges impact or influence his professional performance. Social constructionist theory, like I previously mentioned it, views social phenomena as things that result from what individuals construct through interactions they have between them in society.Beaumie Kim asserts that social constructionism plays an important role for explaining the various ways in which individuals and groups construct their perceived social reality[[26]](#footnote-26).This explains why the ways expatriates’ professional performances are diversely influenced by cultural challenges and differ from one expatriate to another. This results from the fact that they do not perceive social reality in the same way since each of them depends on his individual experience and interpretation of things.

**4.1.3. Strategies used to overcome cultural challenges.**

To overcome cultural challenges they face while doing their international assignment in the Republic of Congo, expatriates use various strategies on the basis of their individual experiences. The first illustration comes from Brice (Appendix A, int.1) who indicates that:

”It’s not easy but we always try to find a solution to. For instance, we often seek to integrate cultural circles or centres exclusively reserved to expats and where we can make friends. It’s very important for us since we feel comfortable to meet many people who face the same challenges like us. We usually exchange our experiences. My wife and children have made friends there. My children go to the French consular school where they can learn in an environment that is similar to the one in France”.

This statement makes me understand that some expatriates prefer creating connections which allow them to meet people who are in the similar situation with them and which exclude national employees. This also brings us back to the ingroup-outgroup concept since consideration is given to the division of the world between “them” and “us” as expressed by Brice that they integrate cultural circles exclusively reserved to expatriates for overcoming cultural challenges they are confronted to. In contrast, other expatriates prefer adapting themselves to the new cultural environment to overcome cultural challenges. Therefore, Gilles (Appendix A, int.3) asserts that:

”To me, the best way for overcoming these challenges is to adapt oneself to the new cultural environment and keep his own cultural values; to learn from others and try to share his own experience with them by being humble.I for instance talked about the importance of time for work and other activities in France, the kind of interpersonal relations between employees, etc., and they also explained me how things go on here.Finally, we started to understand each other and everything is ok now”.

 This strategy is similar to Ronan’s (Appendix A, int.2) when he declares that:

 “…..I think the best way for overcoming these challenges is to integrate oneself into the new cultural environment, to socialize, in order to make things easy. It’s true that I can’t get rid of my culture because I was born and I grew up in but I can adapt myself to the new situation in order to better fulfill my mission.Therefore,I’m doing my best to learn many things about Congolese culture, the way of life, people’s behavior,etc.My chauffeur helps me learn many things about Congolese culture and it’s the same to my wife who has made acquaintance with Congolese women from whom she is also learning many things.I think this is an important way for being closer to Congolese people and facilitate our integration into their society in order to fulfill our mission as easy as possible”.

I understand that expatriates use the strategy of adapting themselves to the new culture without forgetting their own culture. They do their best to learn about the host country’s culture so that they could facilitate their integration into the society and do their international assignments as easily as possible. Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) shares the same view point when he posits that:

”To overcome these challenges, expatriates must adapt themselves to the new culture, collaborate with nationals, and learn their culture by keeping their own cultural identities. They have to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment within which they are for expatriation and this depends on each expatriate’s capacity since some of them can do it in few weeks (that’s my case) whereas others do it after years or fail to do it.Those who succeed to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment usually succeed their assignments abroad. In contrast, those who can’t adapt themselves fail their mission”.

The above statement shows clearly that expatriates adapt themselves to the new cultural environment by learning their host country’s culture and through interactions with local population. This leads me to take into consideration the concept of socialization which is defined diversely like I mentioned it in the third section of this thesis.I here focus on Billingham’s definition which considers socialization as the process by which children begin to acquire the necessary skills to perform as functioning members of their society, and is the most influential learning process one can experience (Billingham, 2007:336).This goes along with Macionis &Gerber’s view point which asserts that humans need social experiences to learn their culture and to survive in contrast to other living species whose behavior is biologically set(Macionis & Gerber,2011).This helps me to understand that cultural challenges expatriates encounter while doing their international assignments allow them to begin to learn about the culture of the country where they are sent to. Adapting themselves to the new cultural environment, expatriates are considered as members of this society since they learn from what they experience through their diverse social interactions. To explain the strategy that expatriates use for overcoming cultural challenges they are confronted to,I here make use of experiential learning theory which is described by Itin as the process of making meaning from direct experience,i.e learning from experience(Itin,1999:91-98).Experiential learning theory is illustrated by Kolb(1984:21) when he focuses on the example of learning how to ride a bike. Kolb’s experiential Learning Model shows that the experience of learning how to ride a bike gives room to observation and reflection but also to the opportunity to the individual to consider what is working or failing. This is referred to as reflective observation. The experience of learning how to ride a bike also thinks about how to improve on the next attempt made at riding the bike and this is referred to as abstract conceptualization. Kolb posits that every new attempt to ride the bike is informed by a cyclical pattern of previous experience, thought and reflection. This is referred to as active experimentation (Ibid).I make a comparison between Kolb’s experience learning model and a model I illustrate in the third section of this thesis. On the basis of the interpretation of that model, I understand that expatriates are concerned with four steps of the process of experience learning when they are sent to do their international assignments in a new cultural environment. New impression is the first step of this process during which expatriates establish their first physical contact with the new cultural environment without knowing the existence of challenges they may be confronted to. It is important to mention that expatriates may have learned about the host country’s culture through books but they did not have a physical contact with it yet. So, they may not expect to face these cultural challenges. On the basis of their daily experiences, expatriatesobserve, reflect and contemplate what is conform to their prior knowledge of the new culture and what is not. This is the second step of the experience learning which is referred to as reflective impression. During this step, expatriatesobserve and contemplate what goes on in the new culture. They compare what they experience in their daily lives with their prior knowledge of Congolese culture. Then, on the basis of observation and reflection, expatriates discover cultural differences which they consider as challenges. This leads them to develop new ideas about the challenges they begin to encounter and think about how they can cope with successfully or unsuccessfully. This is the third step which is referred to as new impression. During this step, expatriates think about strategies to use for overcoming cultural challenges they are confronted to and this is based on each individual’s experience. These strategies may be either successful or unsuccessful since they are subjected to each individual’s capacity. The fourth and last step of the experience learning process is referred to as outcomes. It is concerned with the fact that expatriates draw conclusions on the basis of their experiences and each new challenge they face is informed by a pattern of previous thoughts, experiences, reflection and how to manage it.This step makes me understand that on the basis of what results from strategies they use for overcoming cultural challenges they face, expatriates draw conclusions which could help them to know how to manage such challenges in the future or to know how to avoid them. In addition to Kolb’s experience learning model,I also focus in my data analysis on another illustration of the Experiential Learning Theory which comes from McCarthy and McCarthy(2006).They considers this theory as the fact of going to the zoo and learning through observation and interaction with the zoo environment. This differs from the fact of reading books to know about animals (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006:201-204).I understand that expatriates should not learn their future host countries’ cultures by reading books but they should have a physical contact with the new cultural environment. So, their observation and interaction with the new cultural environment will help them to know the realityof their host countries ‘cultures. Since books are written by people who focus on their own experiences, it is important that expatriates learn their host countries ‘cultures on the basis of their individual experiences too. That is why McCarthy and McCarthy posit that this strategy helps the individual to make discoveries and experiments with knowledge firsthand, instead of hearing or reading about other people’s experiences (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006:201-204).

**4.2. Discussion**

Data analysis reveals that expatriates are confronted to cultural challenges such as language, interpersonal relationships, the notion of time and the organization of work or offices. This is due to cultural differences since most of the expatriates who participated to interviews which allowed me to collect data do not have the same cultural background with their Congolese counterparts. Language is considered as the first challenge expatriates encounter because Congolese people use several national and ethnic groups’ languages in addition to the official language which is French. It is important to mention that English is used as work language in addition to French in most of the multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo. Yet, language would not be considered as a cultural challenge by expatriates if these multinational companies ‘managers set rules for obliging all their employees, expatriates and nationals, to use only English and French in the work environment. This could help expatriates to avoid considering language as one of the cultural challenges they encounter while doing their international assignments in the Republic of Congo. It is true that they may be confronted to such a challenge while interacting with Congolese people in the society but it could not constitute an obstacle in their professional environment. As for the notion of time, though it is not valued as it is in the western world by Congolese people due to their culture, it would be necessary to multinational companies to impose their organizational culture. Organizational culture requires employees to conform to the culture of the organization. They should set rules which regulate their organizations in relation to the notion of time, the type of interpersonal relationships in the professional environment, the organization of offices, etc. This is to say that employees should adapt themselves to the culture of the organization regardless their cultural backgrounds so that cultural differences will not be considered as challenges by expatriates in the work environment.It is true that multinational companies have their organizational cultures but it is necessary that they control whether their employees respect them. Although expatriates I selected as participants in this research consider cultural differences as challenges, some of them think that this could not be considered as big challenges. The reason is simply the fact that they have been in physical contact with other cultures before their expatriation in the Republic of Congo. This is illustrated by Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) when he declares that:

”Generally speaking, I’m not confronted to big difficulties since my father is a diplomat.So,I lived in Japon,Belgium and in some African countries, in addition to Morocco where I first worked as an expat like I’ve previously said”.

The other reason is that some of the expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo are originally from Africa although they have got western countries’ nationalities nowadays. So, thisfact gives them many opportunities to avoid facing cultural challenges since cultures of African countries have many similarities but they differ slightly. That is why Dramane (Appendix A, int.4) asserts that:

”Personally, I notice there is cultural difference but I don’t see it as a difficulty since I was born and grew up in Africa, and Congo like Mali are both countries located in Sub-Saharan Africa.So,there are many similarities in the cultures of both countries even if they differ from each other”.

To sustain the same idea, he further adds that: ”There are some problems but as I’m originally from Africa,I don’t consider them like big challenges”**.**

The analysis of the data I collected reveals that cultural challenges have an impact on expatriates ’professional performances may they be either positive or negative. Cultural challenges have a positive impact on expatriates’ professional performances when they constitute a stimulus that helps them to find solutions to these difficulties and fulfill successfully their international assignments. In contrast, they have a negative impact when they constitute an obstacle that prevents expatriates to fulfill their international assignments successfully. Data analysis also reveals that expatriates use different strategies to overcome the cultural challenges they faceand this is based on their individual experiences. However, most of the expatriates assert that they did their best to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment and this strategy is found to be the most successful for overcoming cultural challenges they are confronted to. So, this depends on the individual capacity of each expatriate to adapt to the new culture. Yet, it happens that some expatriates find it difficult to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment and find an alternative way of overcoming cultural challenges. The illustration comes from Dramane (Appendix A, int.4) when he declares that:

“Like I’ve just said,I do my best for adapting myself to the new situation when I can do it but when I can’t,I miss my home country,I become nostalgic.So,I return to my country every 3 months but at work,I forget everything”.

Difficulty in understanding behavioral characteristics and in properly interpreting various verbal and non-verbal signals pose great challenges to the expatriates since they are exposed to a new and foreign environment(Paik&Sohn,2004:61-71).Under such circumstances, Paik &Sohn(2004) think that expatriates would not only face intensified adaptation problems, but would also be prone to cause communication problems.So,many of them never quite overcome the cross-cultural difficulties and sometimes are even forced to return home prematurely(Ibid)

 **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

This section aims at answering the main research questions of this thesis which are concerned with cultural challenges that expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their international assignments. The answers to these questions help us to know which cultural challenges expatriates are confronted to, what impact these cultural challenges have on their professional performances, how the expatriates overcome them and what should be done to avoid these cultural challenges in the future. In the end, some recommendations are made on the basis of interviewees ‘answers.

**5.1. Recommendations**

Cultural challenges expatriates encounter while doing their international assignments in the Republic of Congo are varied and depend on each individual’s daily experience. Due to the phenomenon of globalization which is growing faster, it is common to see more multinational companies’employes being sent abroad for fulfilling international assignments. It is obvious that meeting of different cultures makes challenges inevitable for them but it is necessary that their employers take appropriate measures to help them cope successfully with these challenges they face or avoid them so that they could reach the purpose of their expatriation. To do so, recommendations are made on the basis of one of the research questions which is: what should be done to avoid these challenges?

Expatriates ‘answers to this question give room to the following recommendations which could help expatriates avoid such challenges in the future so that they could fulfill their international assignments successfully. These recommendations are particularly addressed to Multinational Companies ‘Human Resource managers and the first of them is concerned with sending future expatriates for short missions to the host countries. Despite that expatriates are provided with useful information about their future host countries, this is found to be not sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to allow future expatriates to have a first physical contact with people and culture of the host country through short stays before sending him for expatriation orgetting him involved in frequent cross-border job swaps or assignments in multi-culturalproject teams. This idea is sustained by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) when he posits that:

“…..I think despite the selection criteria, multinational companies ‘managers should allow future expatriates to do missions or short stays beforehand in their future host countries so that they could establish the first physical contact with new cultural environments. This could help them integrate easily these cultural environments when they will be sent there for expatriation.I think it’s the best way to help expats avoid surprises, I mean to avoid facing cultural challenges which could hinder their professional performances. This clearly shows that learning other cultures through books is not sufficient……..”

It is obvious that reading books and partaking workshops or training sessions about their future host countries ‘cultures can provide expatriates with useful information that could help them to be well prepared for their assignments abroad but this does not prevent them from surprises when they are in front of the true reality. In fact, we all know that books are generally written on the basis of individuals ‘experiences and it is not true that everyone experiences the same things in the same way since each individual has his own capacity to adapt to a new cultural environment. This idea is shared by Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) when he declares that:

“To avoid cultural challenges, it’s necessary before expatriation to have the minimum knowledge about host countries’ customs and cultural values because it’s fundamental. So, multinational companies should first send future expatriates to their future host countries for short stay missions instead of making them discover these countries, their people and cultures through books and other”.

 According to Paik and Sohn(2004),expatriates with a high level of knowledge about the host country’s culture will have great confidence in their ability,i.e,selfefficacy,to control the behaviors of local personnel to produce desired outcomes(Paik&Sohn,2004:61-71).They further posit that one of the most important benefits that expatriates may realize through the above ability would be their competence to communicate effectively with local personnel and the in-depth knowledge of host country culture would enable them to process correctly various non-verbal signals so that they could avoid many problems resulting from cultural and behavioral differences(Ibid).

The second set of recommendations is concerned with asking Multinational Companies’ Human Resource managers to be aware of challenges their employeesare confronted to while doing their assignments abroad.So,it is necessary that they provide them with all the required and useful information about their host countries ‘cultures and people to help them overcome these challenges. They should extend their predeparture training programs by including expatriates ’families, I mean their spouses and childrento help them make a balance between their performances and family adjustment. Thisrecommendation is suggested by Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) when he declares that:

“They must also facilitate expatriates ‘integration through meetings with local populations by organizing for instance cultural meetings or events, etc., to help for the integration of expatriates’ spouses”.

The third set of recommendations is to ask Multinational Companies to plan effective policies which could help expatriates by providing them with practical advices or information about their host countries. They should provide expatriates with some compulsory predeparture and cross-cultural training in relation to their assignments. Predeparture training should allow Multinational Companies to set policies or programs to the needs of each expatriate before and during his expatriation period. This argument is sustained by Gilles (Appendix A, int.3) when he declares that:

“…….As a recommendation, I think multinational companies should plan policies which would help those they send abroad from the selection and recruitment process till their arrival to the host countries. They can also suggest practical advices about everything that concerns these countries. This can help expatriates to be more confident as soon as they arrive there”.

The fourth and last set of recommendations is related to the fact of recruiting host countries nationals instead of sending expatriates. Ismail (Appendix A, int.5) suggests that:”….Multinational Companies should recruitnationals of the host country for fulfilling missions that are assigned to expatriates nowadays”.

Recruiting nationals of host countries would be very important not only because it would represent a low-cost to Multinational Companies but also because it would help them to avoid problems due to cultural differences and which may eventually lead to managerial inefficacy.

**5.2. Conclusion**

Conclusion is drawn here on the basis of answers that are given to my research questions concerning cultural challenges that expatriates working for Multinational Companies located in the Republic of Congo encounter while doing their international assignments. The results of the current study indicate that although expatriation may lead to serious challenges which could hinder expatriates ’performances, it is seen as a very important factor for building the globalized world today since it favors the meeting of different people and cultures. These results show that most of expatriates think that expatriation is very important for their career development and this is illustrated by Dramane (Appendix A, int.4)when he asserts that:“……expatriation is very important since we talk about globalization today, it is an advantage that can help for the integration of different people around the world. Expatriation allows meeting of people and their cultures”.

The importance of expatriation is also sustained by Ronan (Appendix A, int.2) who claims that:”…..expatriation is a very good thing because it’s a system that allows employees of a company to discover what goes on beyond the borders of their home countries, to meet other people, other cultures, other ways of life, etc. It’s really a very interesting experience”. Expatriation is also seen as something that enriches employees ‘careers since it offers them many opportunities. According to Gilles(Appendix A,int.3),”expatriation is a good opportunity for enriching ones professional experience through culture, work methods and particularly through people we meet in the host country.I think if it’s well prepared, expatriation is very enriching and it brings opportunities”.

These research findings reveal that expatriates working for Multinational Companies located in the Republic of Congo are confronted to cultural challenges such as language, interpersonal relationships, and the notion of time. These challenges are mainly due to cultural differences since expatriates work in a new cultural environment. Paik &Sohn(2004) declare that working under an unfamiliar behavioral and cultural context would lead expatriates to encounter serious challenges in understanding local behaviors and interpreting various signals that local personnel implicitly or explicitly convey(Paik&Sohn,2004:61-71).They further adds that without a proper understanding of local behavioral patterns or the meanings they represent, these expatriates may behave in ways that may unintentionally offend and disturb local personnel(Ibid).The research findings also reveal that cultural challenges expatriates encounter influence their individual performances both positively and negatively. This depends on the capacity of expatriates to overcome these challengesby the use ofstrategies which are based on each individual’s experience. Success or failure in doing international assignments depends on expatriates ‘capacity to overcome cultural challenges they encounter and to adapt to the new cultural environment. Failing to fulfill international assignments effectively does not necessarily mean that the main reason is the lack of competence. This may be explained by the fact that an expatriate may be technically competent but he may not be fully trained to work in an entirely different cultural environment. Expatriates without proper cultural knowledge of the host country would not only fail to do their assignments effectively in the foreign context but would also cause misunderstandings and other problems because of their lack of ability to correctly comprehend their local circumstances (Paik&Sohn, Ibid).Some recommendations are addressed to Multinational Companies ‘Human Resource managers in order to help expatriates in their future international assignments. One of these recommendations indicates that expatriates should have significant knowledge of the host country which they are assigned to through not only predeparture training but also through cross-border job swaps or assignments in multi-culturalproject teams before leaving for expatriation. This thesis focuses only on the challenges expatriates are confronted to while doing their international assignments and it does not expands on other aspects related to expatriation.I think that the results presented in this thesis would be different if other theories, methods of data collection and approaches were used. Despitethese limitations,I hope the findings of this research will contribute to the management of expatriates by Multinational Companies, particularly in their preparation or predeparture training. In relation to the findings of this thesis and the importance of the research area, further investigations would be very interesting since they would help shed light on serious issues related to the concept of expatriation.

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**Appendices**

Appendices are numbered from page 33 up to page 88.They include interviews’ scripts presentation and the interview guide from page to page.

**Appendix A: Interviews’ scripts presentation**

**Interview n°1**

I: Bonsoir! **Good evening!**

* 

21:14

P :Bonsoir ! cmt allez-vous ? Good evening! **How are you?**

* ****

21:16

I :ça va bien,merci.Et vous,cmt allez-vous ? **Fine, thank you.And you?**

* 

21:19

P : Plus ou moins bien.Que puis-je faire pour vous?**I’m a bit well. What can I do for you ?**

* 

21:21

I :OK.Comme je vous l’ai dit dernièrement,je suis étudiant en Master de Culture,Communication et Globalisation à l’université d’Aalborg au Danemark et je suis actuellement au Congo pour collecter des informations nécessaires à la rédaction de ma thèse de fin d’études qui concerne principalement les expatriés travaillant dans des multinationales basées en république du Congo. **Ok.As I told you last time, I’m a student in the Master programme of Culture, Communication and Globalization at Aalborg University in Denmark and I’m currently in Congo for collecting data for my thesis on expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo.**

* 

21:27

P: Ok,je vois.Alors cmt puis je t’aider? **Ok, I see. Then, how can I help you?**

* 

21:29

I :Votre contribution sérait de m’accorder une interview en repondant à une série de questions que j’ai preparées.Mon souhait serait d’avoir une interview face à face mais comme vous m’avez suggéré de la faire sur Facebook,je suis obligé de respecter votre souhait.Etes-vous prêts à repondre aux questions ? **Your contribution would be to grant me an interview by responding to a set of questions would like to have a face to face interview with you but since you suggested to do it through Facebook, I’m obliged to accept your wish.So,are you ready to respond to my questions?**

* 

21:33

P :Ok,on peut y aller. **Of course ! Let’s go.**

* 

21:35

I :D’accord,merci.ma première question sérait de vous demander s’il est possible que vous vous presentiez,c-a-d qui êtes-vous et quelle est votre fonction au sein de la société ? **Ok, thanks. My first question would be to ask you to introduce yourself, telling us who are you and what do you do in your company?**

* 

21:40

P :Mon nom c’est Brice,de nationalité française,je suis le responsable de l’agence du groupe PANALPINA à Brazzaville en république du Congo.je ne sais pas si vous êtes satisfait de ma reponse.**My name is Brice Hardice,I’m from France and I’m the coordinator of the agency of Panalpina in Brazzaville,Congo.I don’t whether you’re satisfied by my answer.**

I : Bien sûr que oui ! Dépuis combien de temps travaillez-vous au Congo ? **Of course! How long have you been working in Congo?**



21:43

P : A dire vrai,je suis au Congo dépuis à peine 4 mois.Je suis encore un tout nouveau ! **Frankly speaking have been working here for 4 months. I’m still a new comer!**



21:45

I: Ah bon? C’est vraiment intéressant ça! Mais avez-vous déjà travaillé dans un autre pays comme expatrié avant de venir au Congo ? **Really? That’s very interesting! But, have you already worked in another country as an expat before coming to Congo?**



21:47

P :Malheureusement non,c’est ma première experience d’expatriation.**Unfortunately,I have not.This is my first expatriation experience.**



21:50

I:Alors que pensez-vous d l’expatriation ? **So, what do you think of expatriation?**



21:52

P : A mon avisc’est une très bonne expérience car elle permet de découvrir d’autres cultures,les modes d vie dans d’autres pays,en fait c’est très enrichissant du point d vue professionnel mais aussi inter humain.**I think expatriation is a very good experience because it allows to discover new cultures,new ways of life in other countries.In fact,it’s very important in the professional domain but also for the interpersonal relations.**



21:54

I:Je vois que c’est vraiment interessant.cela me pousse à vous demander si vous êtes déjà confronté à un certain nombre de problèmes qui sont liés à votre situation d’expatrié,tels que des problèmes d’ordre culturel,etc. **I see it’s really interesting. This leads me to ask you whether you have already been confronted to cultural challenges.**



21:57

P:Bien sûr,ce genre de difficultés ne manquent pas et surtout lorsqu’on arrive dans un pays différent du vôtre,et surtout un continent que je découvre à peine,un peuple aimable mais qui a une autre façon de vivre,pas forcement les mêmes croyances que les miennes,la même façon de voir les choses,etc. **Of course, this kind of problems usually occurs when you come to a foreign country, when you come to a continent you just discover, lovely people but with a different way of life from mine, different beliefs, values, etc.**



21:59

I :Pouvez-vous être un peu plus spécifique ? **What do you mean specifically?**

* ****

22:03

P:Je veux dire que malgré le fait que la langue de travail soit le français,qui est d’ailleurs la langue officielle du Congo,il arrive que les employés nationaux communiquent dans les 3 langues nationales congolaises.cela en fait constitue en quelque sorte un obstacle car nous ne comprenons pas ce qu’ils se disent entre eux.En plus les relations interhumaines sont totalement différentes d ce que nous avons en France car ici il faut utiliser le titre de mr X ou madame Y. **I want to say that despite French is used as the work language since it’s also the official language in the Republic of Congo,it happens times that national employees use Congolese languages when communicating between themselves.I see this fact as a big challenge because we don’t share the same communication code and we don’t understand what they tell each other.In addition,the type of interpersonal relations is totally different from what we have in France since in the Congo people are obliged to use titles such as Mr X or Mrs Y.**

* 

22:06

I:Cela n’est pas le cas en France?**It’s not the case in France?**

* 

22:08

P:Non,malheureusement.En plus,je constate qu’ici les employés sont très proches les uns des autres et au délà des rélations professionnelles,il est habituel de voir qu’ils sont plus qu’amis et on a même l’impression qu’ils se sont connus avant d’être employés par la société. **Unfortunately, not. In addition, I notice that national employees are very close to each other and beyond the professional environment, it seems like they have been close friends before working in the same company.**

* 

22:12

I :Ok,mais pouvez-vous me dire comment ça se passe en France ? **Ok, but would you like to tell us how it goes in France?**

* 

22:15

P:En France,les rélations entre employés sont beaucoup plus professionnelles et ne peuvent forcement pas être amicales comme cela se passe ici.Il y a aussi le problème lié à ma famille,mon épouse et mes enfants qui doivent aussi faire face à ces différences culturelles dans leur vie quotidienne.Il faut s’adapter à un nouveau mode de vie,un nouveau climat,un nouvel environnement,etc.J’aimerai ajouter aussi le problème lié au temps,je veux dire au respect du temps car cela constitue un obstacle au rendement au sein de l’entreprise.**In France,interpersonal relations between employees are mainly professional and are not necessarily friendly like they are here.The other problem is concerned with my family since my spouse and children also face cultural challenges in their daly life.We must adapt ourselves to the new way of life,a new climate,a new environment,etc.I’d like to add the problem that concerns time,I mean the conception of time,the way it’s used because it may be an obstacle to the company’s outcome.**



22:19

I:J’ai constaté que la plupart ds employés nationaux n’ont pas la même façon de voir la notion de temps que nous qui venons d’un continent où le temps est vraiment précieux,le temps c’est de l’argent comme on le dit.C’est cela le choc culturel. **I have noticed that most of national employees don’t have the same way of viewing time with us from the western world where that time is very precious as people say : »Time is money ».That’s really a cultural shock.**

* 

22:25

I:Ces problèmes que vous avez evoqués ont-ils une influence sur votre performance professionnelle ? Si oui,alors comment cela se fait-il ? **Do the problems you’ve mentioned here influence your professional performance ?**

* 

22:29

P :oui,ces problèmes ont bel et bien de l’influence sur ma performance professionnelle étant donné que la différenc culturelle ne permet pas l’existence d’une harmonie et de cohésion dans l’accomplissement de notre travail.On a l’impression de passer assez d temps à chercher à comprendre et à s’adapter à la culture des autres et c’est une véritable perte de temps.on peut par exemple planifier un horaire de travail mais malgré tout,il arrive toujours que certains nationaux arrivent en retard.Du coup,il y a un problème,surtout lorsqu’il s’agit de travailler en équipe car dans ces conditions,le travail n’avance pas comme il le faut. **Yes, these problems influence my professional performance since the cultural difference leads to misunderstanding and lack of harmony at work. It seems like we spend much time for trying to understand each other, to understand the new culture, and it’s a waste of time. We can for example plan something to do together but it happens that national employees usually come late. This is a big problem mainly when it comes to work in teams because we can’t move forward as it should be.**

* 

22:33

I :c’est donc un véritable problème,mais comment faites-vous alors pour surmonter tous ces obstales ? **It’s a real problem but how do you manage to overcome all these problems?**



22:35

P :C’est pas facile mais on essaie toujours de trouver une solution.Par exemple,on cherche souvent à intégrer des cercles culturels reservés aux expatriés où on se fait des amis.c’est vraiment important pour nous car on se sent vraiment bien de rencontrer beaucoup de gens qui font face aux mêmes problèmes liés à l’expatriation comme nous.On échange beaucoup sur les expériencs vécues et cela nous aide vraiment à surmonter ces défis culturels.Ma femme s’est faite des amies avec qui elle peut discuter et les enfants aussi.Pour cs derniers,nous les avons inscrits à l’école consulaire française où ils sont à peu près dans le même environnement qu’en France. **It’s not easy but we always try to find a solution to. For instance, we often seek to integrate cultural circles or centres exclusively reserved to expats and where we can make friends. It’s very important for us since we feel comfortable to meet many people who face the same challenges like us. We usually exchange our experiences. My wife and children have made friends there. My children go to the French consular school where they can learn in an environment that is similar to the one in France.**

* 

22:40

I:Etes-vous satisfait de votre mission en tant qu’expatrié ? **Are you satisfied with your situation as an expat?**

* 

22:42

P:Oui,je suis très très satisfait.c’est vraiment une expérience qui vaut la peine d’être vécue.Découvrir d’autres horizons,d’autres cultures,etc,c’est enrichissant. **Yes, I’m very very satisfied of it.It’s really worth experiencing. Discovering new countries, other cultures, etc., it’s enriching.**

* 

22:45

I:OK.pouvez-vous me dire en quoi consiste votre programme d’expatriation et quelle est sa durée?**OK.Can you tell me what is your expatriation programme concerned with ?**

* 

22:47

P:Comme je vous l’ai dit tantôt,je suis le coordonateur de l’agence PANALPINA au Congo et ma mission consiste à coordonner et contrôler toutes les opérations de la firme au niveau de Brazzaville et du nord du Congo.La durée de ma période d’expatriation sera de 3 ans. **As I have already told you, I’m the coordinator of the agency of Panalpina in Brazzaville. My mission is coordinating and controlling all the operations of the company in Brazzaville and northern Congo.**

* 

22:51

I:3 ans,est-ce la durée d’expatriation pour tout le monde?**3 years, is it the duration for everyone?**



22:53

P**:** Non, je ne pense pas car la durée d’expatriation varie d’un employé à un autre.**No, I don’t think so because the duration of expatriation varies from one employee to another.**

* 

22:55

I: Peut-on savoir combien de temps cela peut-il prendre pour qu’un expat s’adapte dans le pays hôte ? **How long does it take to an expat to adapt himself in the host country?**

* 

22:58

P : Je pense que cela depend aussi de la capacité d’adaptation de tout un chacun.Certains peuvent passer plus de temps pour s’adapter,tandis que d’autres n’ont besoin que de peu de temps.En ce qui me concerne par exemple,je pense que je m’adapte un peu plus vite par rapport aux autres. **I think it also depends on each expat’s capacity to adapt himself to the new culture. Some of them may spend much time for the adaptation while others need just a little time. As far as I’m concerned think it has been easier for me than for others.**

* 

23 :06

I: c’est vraiment intéréssant! Alors,comment faites-vous pour avoir cette facilité d’adaptation ? **It’s really interesting! So, how do you manage to easily adapt yourself in a new cultural environment?**

* 

23:11

P:Je pense que c’est grâce à mon esprit d’ouverture car je suis très interessé par les autres cultures.voilà mon secret et je pense que tout le monde devrait en faire autant.**I think it’s because I’m open-minded and I’m interested in other cultures.That is my secret and I think everybody has to do the same.**



I : Passons à une autre question.J’aimerai savoir quelles suggestions ou recommendations vous pouvez faire afin d’aider les expatriés à éviter le genre de problèmes auxquels ils sont souvent confrontés ? **What can you suggest to help expats to avoid cultural challenges they usually face?**

* 

23 :18

P :Je pense que les managers devraient penser à d’abord donner des informations utiles aux potentiels candidats à l’expatriation afin de leur permettre de s’iùmprégner au préalable de la culture de leur future pays hôte.En fait,cela empêcherait de faire face aux surprises désagréables que nous connaissons aujourd’hui.Il serait nécéssaire d’organiser des sessions de formation pour preparer les employés à mieux faire face aux défis à relever en tant qu’expatrié dans un environnement culturel tout à fait différent des leurs.Voilà un peu ce que je peux faire comme suggestion. **I think that multinational companies’ managers should first of all give useful information about host countries and their cultures to future expats to help them get prepared to eventual challenges. This would prevent them from challenges to which they are confronted today. It would be necessary to organize training workshops during which future expats will be well prepared to challenges they may face while doing their assignments abroad, in a cultural environment that differs from theirs. That’s what I can suggest.**



23 :20

I : Alors que pouvez-vous ajouter à propos de notre sujet de discussion ? **Do you have something to add to this topic ?**

* 

23 :24

P : Pas grand-chose à dire mais tout simplement signaler que l’expatriation est une experience importante dans la carrière d’un employé dans la mésure où elle permet de découvrir les cultures des autres pays,principalement les pays hôtes.Cependant,l’expatriation entraîne inévitablement des défis qu’il faut relever du point de vue culturel étant donné que l’expatrié est confronté à un nouveau mod d vie,un nouvel environnement,etc.Pour c faire,les managers des multinationales doivent créer un cadre qui pourrait permettre aux candidats à l’expatriation,comme je l’ai dit tantôt,à acquérir les informations utiles concernant les pays hôtes,afin de faciliter leur adaptation.C’est cela mon mot de la fin. **Not too much to say but I want just to mention that expatriation is an important experience in employees’ career since it allows them to discover cultures of other countries, their host countries.Yet,expatriation goes along challenges, among which cultural challenges, that expats have to face since they have to live in a new cultural environment, a new way of life,etc.So,multinational companies’ managers must help future expats to get more useful information about host countries so that it could be easier for them to adapt themselves to new cultural environment. That’s my last word.**



 23 :30

I : Je vous remercie du plus profond de mon cœur pour toutes ces informations importantes que vous venez de me donner.Merci une fois de plus.**Thank you so much for all the information you have given me.**

* 

23 :42

P : C’est à moi aussi de vous remercier pour m’avoir selectionné comme participant dans le cadre de vos récherches.Bonne chance pour votre travail.**Thank you for having selected me as one of participants.Good luck for your work.**

**Interview n°2**

I: Bonjour monsieur! **Good afternoon sir!**



14:43

P: Bonjour! Ça va? Good afternoon! **How’re you doing ?**



14:45

I:ça va un peu ,juste un problème avec ma gorge,mais ça va.**I’m so so, just a problem with my throat but it will be ok.**



14:47

P:ok.c’est pour l’interview?**Ok.Is it for the interview?**



14:47

I: Exact, c’est cela.**Exactly, it is.**



14:49

P:ok,je suis à votre disposition monsieur.**Ok, I’m at your disposal sir.**



14:53

I: J’aimerai tout d’abord me presenter.Je m’appelle Claude et je suis étudiant en master de Culture,Communication et Globalisation à l’université d’Aalborg au Danemark.Dans le cadre de mes études,je suis entrain de faire des récherches sur les défis que rencontrent les expatriés travaillant pour les multinationales basées au Congo.Pour ce faire,j’ai une serie de questions auxquelles vous dvriez repondre pour me permettre d’obtenir les informations importantes pour la rédaction de ma thèse.**I would like first of all to introduce myself. I’m Claude and I’m a student in the Master programme of Culture, Communication and Globalization at Aalborg University in Denmark and I’m currently in Congo for collecting data for my thesis on expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo.So, I’d like you to respond to a set of questions that are important for the writing of my thesis.**



14:58

P:C’est vraiment intéressant comme sujet et je suis prêt à repondre à vos questions.**That’s really interesting as a topic and I’m ready to respond to your questions.**

****

15:00

I:Merci beaucoup.Ma première question est celle de savoir qui vous êtes. **Thank you very much. My first question is to know who you are.**



15:03

P:Je m’appelle Ronan,de nationalité suisse,j’ai 48 ans et je suis responsable centrilift à Baker Hugues à Pointe-Noire,Congo.Voilà ce que je peux dire en peu d mots. **My name is Ronan, from Switzerland, I’m 48 and I’m the head of centrilift department at Baker Hughes in Pointe-Noire, Congo. That’s what I can say in few words.**



15:07

I:c’est déjà beaucoup comme information,merci.Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous au Congo et quelle est la durée de votre période d’expatriation ? **That’s enough as information, thanks.How long have you been working in Congo and what is the duration of your expatriation?**



15:11

P:Je suis icidepuis 2 ans et mon contrat d’expatrié est d 5 ans.**I have been here for 2 years and my expatriation contract is for 5 years.**



15:13

I : Que pensez-vous de l’xpatriation ? **What is your opinion about expatriation?**



15:16

P: A mon avis l’expatriation est une très bonne chose car c’est un système qui permet aux employés d’une entreprise à découvrir ce qui se passe au-délà des frontières de leurs pays d’origine,se frotter à d’autres peuples,d’autres cultures,d’autres mods de vie,etc.c’st vraiment intéressant comme expérience. **I think expatriation is a very good thing because it’s a system that allows employees of a company to discover what goes on beyond the borders of their origin countries, to meet other people, other cultures, other ways of life, etc. It’s really a very interesting experience.**



15:23

I :ok.parlant notamment de culture des autres,rencontrez-vous souvent des problèmes dûs au fait que vous avez une culture qui est différente de celle de votre pays hôte ? **Ok, let’s then talk about others’cultures.Does the difference of cultures constitute a problem for you?**



15:26

P: Tout à fait! Vous savez,c’est vraiment inévitable pour nous qui venons de l’occident,je veux dire l’europe et l’Amerique.Il y a vraiment un choc culturel**. Of course! You know, we can’t avoid it when we come from the western world, I mean Europe and America. It’s a cultural shock.**



15:31

I:Pouvez-vous alors nous dire quels sont les problèmes culturels auxquels vous êtes confrontés ? **So, could you please tell me what are the cultural challenges do you encounter?**



15:33

P:Il y a beaucoup de problèmes qu’un expatrié peut rencontrer car il arrive dans un nouvel environnement qui est différent de celui de son pays d’origine.La différence du mode de vie est l’un des premiers défis à relever pour un expatrié dans son pays hôte.Ici par exemple,il est de coutume de saluer tout le monde,même ceux que vous ne côtoyez pas souvent mais que vous pouvez rencontrer au boulot ou ailleurs.Cela est différent de ce qui se passe en occident. Il y a aussi la différence dans la façon dont le temps est geré ici car on a l’impression que les Congolais ont une autre vision de cela.Vous verrez par exemple,des gens rester dans le couloir pour causer pendant plusieurs minutes alors que l’heure du début de travail a déjà sonné ou bien des employés qui arrivent constamment en retard,sans se soucier du temps.Un autre problème est celui qui concerne l’organisation du travail car ici,ils sont habitués à attendre les ordres de la hiérarchie pour amorcer un travail.C’est un système qui fait qu’il y ait un chef qui donne les ordres et les autres executent,alors que chez nous,les employés prennent des initiatives sans attendre quelque ordre que ce soit car chacun sait déjà en quoi consiste son travail.Il y a aussi le problème des bureaux.**There are many problems expatriates may be confronted to when they are sent abroad.The different way of life is one of the first challenges an expat faces in the host country.It is common here to greet everyone even those who’re not your acquaintances.This is quite different from what we see in the western world.There is also the problem related to the concept of time because Congolese people have a different view about it.You can see for instance employees stay for several minutes in corridors during the work time just for chatting and start working later on without respecting time.Another problem is related to the way work is organized because people,here,are used to wait for orders from managers or hierarchy before doing something.This contrast to what happens in the western world because employees know what is their daily work is like instead of waiting for orders from hierarchy.There is also the problem of offices.**



15:47

I :Que se passe t-il avec les bureaux?**What is it wrong with offices?**



15:49

P:ben ici les bureaux sont occupés par une ou deux personnes seulement alors qu’en occident,le système organisationnel fait qu’on travaille tous dans une grande salle ouverte et chacun a sa machine et son mobilier faisant office de bureau.On peut voir tout le monde et savoir qui fait quoi.Ici,quelqu’un peut rester cloîtré dans son bureau en fermant la porte et on ne peut même pas savoir ce qui se passe derrière les murs.J’ai plusieurs fois demandé aux autres de laisser ouvertes les portes de leurs bureaux mais en vain.La même chose se repète tous les jours et il m’a été même dit que cela est enraciné dans leurs habitudes.Ils n’y peuvent rien pour l’instant.L’autre problème que j’aimerai parler ici c’est l’utilisation des langues nationales congolaises par les autres. **Ben it’s common here to see offices that are occupied only by one person whereas in the western world, the organizational system requires people to work in open spaces, I mean in large rooms where many people can work together, each of them having his desk, his chair, etc., as an office. Everyone can see each other and know who does what but here, someone may be hidden in his office and what can’t know what he or she is doing inside. Most of the time they are asked to let offices doors opened but in vain. They go on doing it everyday and I was even told that this is rooted in their culture. They can’t get rid of it now, it’s in their daily behavior. The other problem I want to mention here is the use of Congolese national languages by the others.**



15:56

I :Cela constitue un obstacle pour vous?**Is it an obstacle ?**



15:59

P :Evidemment!**Obviously !**



16:04

I :Comment alors? Pouvez-vous être un peu plus explicite ? **How? Could you explain it please ?**



16:09

P :Vous savez,le Congo est un pays constitué de plusieurs groupes ethniques qui ont chacun leurs cultures,leurs langues,etc en plus des deux langues nationales qui sont parlées par l’ensemble de la population.Je parle d’obstacle parceque les autres,je veux dire les Congolais peuvent se parler dans une de ces langues sans que nous les expatriés ne comprenions quoi que ce soit.Nous ne pouvons pas leur interdire d’utiliser leurs langues nationales bien qu’ au sein de l’entreprise nous avons deux langues de travail que sont le français et l’anglais.Cette situation pousse les expatriés à se mettre aussi ensemble car ils peuvent communiquer facilement et mieux se comprendre.**You know,the Republic of Congo is a country made of a mixture of ethnic groups and each of them has its own culture,its own language,in addition to the two national languages that are spoken by all the Congolese people.I’m talking about obstacles because the others,I mean Congolese people,can talk to each other in their national languages which we can’t understand anything.We can’t forbid them to use their languages although the languages of work in the company are French and English.This situation pushes expatriates to form their own group instead of being together with nationals so that they could easily communicate between them and well understand each other.**



16:17

I : ok,mais en quoi ces problèmes affectent-ils votre performance professionnelle?**Ok, but how do these problems influence your professional performance?**



16:22

P :Vous savez bien que la difference culturelle peut entraîner une incompréhension ,causant ainsi l’échec d’un projet.Je vous avoue que beaucoup d’expatriés ont échoué à leurs missions non pas par incompétence professionnelle mais parcequ’ils ne se sont pas adaptés aux contextes culturels nouveaux.S’adapter à une nouvelle culture nécessite de la patience,la volonté,la motivation,bien que cela ne soit pas facile.En tant qu’expatriés,nous avons à accomplir la mission pour laquelle nous avons été envoyée par la société-mère.Ainsi,l’incapacité de s’adapter à la culture du pays hôte peut entraîner le refus d’acceptation par les employés nationaux et qui peut créer un conflit entre eux et nous.La conséquence immédiate c’est l’impossibilité ou la difficulté de mieux accomplir la mission qui nous a été assignée.Ce que je sais c’est que les congolais sont plus ouverts et acceptent facilement ceux qui s’adaptent à leur culture.**You know that cultural difference may lead to misunderstanding and cause failure to a project.I tell you the truth that many expats fail to their mission or international assignment not because they are not professionally competent but because they don’t succeed to adapt themselves to new cultural environments.To adapt oneself to the new culture requires patience,will,motivation,although it’s not as easy as we think.As expats,we have to fulfill the mission for which we are sent abroad by the company.Therefore,failing to adapt oneself to the host country’s culture may lead to the rejection of the expats by national employees and cause conflict between them and us.The immediate consequence of this is failure to do one’s assignment abroad.What I know is that Congolese people welcome those who adapt themselves to their culture.**



16:29

I :Que faites-vous alors pour surmonter ces obstacles,ces défis culturels ? **What do you do to overcome these cultural challenges ?**



16:32

P:Je pense que l’expatriation conduit nécessairement à travailler dans un environnement culturel different et nouveau.Cela conduit aussi à travailler avec des gens qui sont différents de soi-même et je pense que c’est excitant de découvrir les autres ainsi que leurs cultures.Pour rfepondre à votre question,je pense que la meilleure façon de surmonter ces obstacles c’est de s’intégrer,socialiser afin de faciliter les choses.C’est vrai que je ne peux pas abandonner ma culture car j’y suis né et j’y ai grandi mais pour le besoin de la cause,je me vois bien m’adapter à la situation nouvelle afin de mieux accomplir ma mission.Je m’efforce donc à apprendre beaucoup de choses liées à la culture congolaise,leur façon de vivre,leur comportement,etc.Je me fais aider par mon chauffeur pour apprendre beaucoup de choses sur la culture congolaise et ma femme a aussi sympathisé avec certaines femmes congolaises qui lui apprennent beaucoup de choses.Je pense que cela nous permet de nous sentir plus proches des congolais et de faciliter notre intégration dans leur société afin de rendre notre mission ici facile à accomplir.**I think expatriation leads necessarily to work in a different and new cultural environment.It also leads to work with people who are different from me and I think it’s exciting to discover the others and their cultures.To answer your question,I think the best way for overcoming these challenges is to integrate oneself into the new cultural environment,to socialize,in order to make things easy. It’s true that I can’t get rid of my culture because I was born and I grew up in but I can adapt myself to the new situation in order to better fulfill my mission.Therefore,I’m doing my best to learn many things about Congolese culture, the way of life, people’s behavior,etc.My chauffeur helps me learn many things about Congolese culture and it’s the same to my wife who has made acquaintance with Congolese women from whom she is also learning many things.I think this is an important way for being closer to Congolese people and facilitate our integration into their society in order to fulfill our mission as easy as possible.**



16:49

I :Passons à une autre question.J’aimerai savoir quelles suggestions ou recommendations vous pouvez faire afin d’aider les expatriés à éviter le genre de problèmes auxquels ils sont souvent confrontés ? **What can you suggest to prevent expats from cultural challenges they usually face?**

P:Voilà une bonne question qu’il fallait nécessairement poser.je pense qu’en dépit des critères de selection,les managers des multinationales doivent permettre aux employés destinés à l’expatriation d’effectuer quelques missions au préalable dans leurs futurs pays hôtes afin d’établir un premier contact physique avec les nouveaux environnements culturels.Ayant connaissance de ces cultures,l’intégration des expatriés serait facilitée une fois qu’ils seraient envoyés pour accomplir leur mission à l’étranger.je vous assure que c’est le meilleur moyen qui permettra aux expatriés d’éviter des surprises,je veux dire d’éviter de faire face aux défis culturels qui pourraient entraver leurs performances professionnelles.c’est donc dire qu’apprendre les autres cultures par les livres ne suffit pas.voilà ce que je peux faire comme recommendation. **This is a good question which should necessarily be asked.I think despite the selection criteria, multinational companies ‘managers should allow future expatriates to do missions or short stays beforehand in their future host countries so that they could establish the first physical contact with new cultural environments. This could help them integrate easily these cultural environments when they will be sent there for expatriation.I think it’s the best way to help expats avoid surprises,I mean to avoid facing cultural challenges which could hinder their professional performances. This clearly shows that learning other cultures through books is not sufficient. That’s what I can make as recommendations.**



17:11

I:Vous voulez dire qu’avant de vous envoyer au Congo,votre société vous a quand fourni les informations nécessaires concernant ce pays,ses habitants et sa culture ?**Do you mean that before leaving for Congo,your company provided you with necessary information about the country,its people and its culture ?**



17:15

P :Evidemment mais ce n’était pas suffisant pour avoir une idée nette sur la culture d’un pays en se basant sur les livres,il fallait avoir un véritable contact physique avec cette culture en effectuant des missions ici avant de venir pour une période d’expatriation.**Of course but it was not sufficient to have a clear idea concerning the culture of a country through books,it should be important to establish a real physical contact with that culture by going to short stays missions in future host countries before leaving for expatriation.**

I :Passons à une autre question.J’aimerai savoir quelles suggestions ou recommendations vous pouvez faire aux managers des multinationales afin d’aider les expatriés à éviter le genre de problèmes auxquels ils sont souvent confrontés ? **Let’s consider another question. I’d like to know what suggestions you can make to multinational companies’ managers to help expatriates avoid this kind of challenges they are often confronted to?**



17:21

P :Je pense que ma suggestion serait de demander aux multinationales de permettre aux futurs expatriés d’effectuer au préalable des missions de travail dans leurs futurs pays hôtes car cela leur empêcherait d’avoir des surprises désagréables tels que des problèmes liés à la différence de cultures comme ceux que nous évoquons dans notre interview. **I think my suggestion would be to ask multinational companies to allow future expats to go for short stays beforehand to their future host countries. This would help them avoid unpleasant surprises such as cultural challenges we’re talking about in this interview.**

****

17:24

I :ok,merci pour votre reponse mais avez-vous quelque chose à ajoutezr sur notre sujet de discussion ? **Ok, thank you for your answer but do you have something to add to our topic?**



17:27

P:Bon je pense que les multinationales doivent être conscientes des difficultés que rencontrent leurs employés qui passent des périodes d’expatriation à l’etranger à cause du manque ou de l’insuffisance d’informations sur les cultures des pays hôtes.les défis culturels auxquels ceux-ci sont confrontés exercent une influence importante sur leurs performances professionnelles.c’est donc dire que la réussite ou l’échec de la mission d’un expatrié depend de sa capacité ou de son incapacité d’adaptation à la nouvelle culture.voilà ce que je peux ajouter à notre sujet.**I think multinational companies must be aware of difficulties their employees face while doing their assignment abroad due to the lack of or the insufficiency of information about the cultures of host countries.The cultural challenges expats are confronted to influence their professional performances.This means that success or failure of the expats’mission depends on their capacity of to adapt themselves to the new culture.That’s what I can add to the topic.**



17:33

I :Je ne sais quoi vous dire monsieur pour exprimer ma gratitude quant à votre grande contribution à mon travail de récherche mais je vous dis tout simplement merci.Si vous le voulez,je vous enverrai une copie de ma thèse. **I don’t know how to express you my gratefulness for having helped me in my research but I can simply say « thank you ».If you want it,I’ll send you a copy of my thesis.**



17:37

P:Je vous en prie monsieur et c’est à moi aussi de vous remercier pour m’avoir choisi comme l’un de vos informateurs.j’espère que je vous ai donné les informations nécessaires à votre récherche malgré le fait que l’interview s’est faite sur facebook.Je vous souhaite donc bonne chance pour vos études. **You’re welcome sir.I also thank you for having selected me as one of your informants hope I’ve given you all the necessary information for your thesis although the interview has been carried out on Facebook wish you all the best for your studies.**



17:43

I :Merci à vous une fois de plus et aurevoir monsieur. **Thank you once more, bye bye sir.**

**Interview n°3**

I: Bonjour monsieur! **Good afternoon sir!**



19:43

P: Bonjour! **Good afternoon!**



19:45

I:Alors Cmt allez-vous ? **So,what’s up ?**



19:47

P:ça va bien,merci.Et vous ? **Alright, thanks. What about you?**



19:48

I: Tt va bien aussi.J’espère que vous êtes prêt pour l’interview comme convenu sur Facebook.**I’m alright too.I hope you’re ready for the interview as we agreed on Facebook.**



19:52

P: oui, je suis prêt à repondre à vos questions.désolé que je n’ai pas accepté d vous permettre d’enregistrer ma voix mais j’espère que vous me comprenez.je suis vraiment desolé.**Yes, I’m ready to answer your questions. Sorry because I haven’t allowed you to record my voice but I hope you understand me.I’m really sorry.**



19:56

I: Il n’y a pas de problème,monsieur car je vous comprend.Pour commencer notre interview,j’aimerai tout d’abord me presenter.Je m’appelle Claude et je suis étudiant en master de Culture,Communication et Globalisation à l’université d’Aalborg au Danemark.Dans le cadre de mes études,je suis entrain de faire des récherches sur les défis que rencontrent les expatriés travaillant pour les multinationales basées au Congo comme je vous l’ai expliqué lors de notre rencontre.Pour ce faire,j’ai une serie de questions auxquelles vous dvriez repondre pour me permettre d’obtenir les informations importantes pour la rédaction de ma thèse.**No problem sir,I do understand you.I want first to introduce myself. I’m Claude and I’m a student in the Master programme of Culture, Communication and Globalization at Aalborg University in Denmark and I’m currently in Congo for collecting data for my thesis on expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo. So, I’d like you to respond to a set of questions that are important for the writing of my thesis.**



20:04

P:Ok,je me rappelle de cela.On peut commencer.**Ok,I do remember.We can start.**



20:06

I:Merci beaucoup.pouvez-vous d’abord nous dire qui êtes-vous et que faites-vous ? **Thank you so much.Could you first introduce yourself ?**



20:09

P:Je suis Gilles,de nationalité belge,j’ai 42 ans et je suis ingénieur en sécurité et contrôle des plateformes petroliers à la société française Total E&P.Voilà ce que je peux dire en peu d mots.**I’m Gilles,42,I’m from Belgium and I’m engineer in oil platforms safety and control at the French oil company Total E&P.That’s what I can say in short.**



20:12

I:Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous ici et quelle est la durée de votre période d’expatriation ? **How long have you been working here and what is the duration of your expatriation?**



20:14

P:Je travaille icidepuis le 10 Janvier 2014,à peine 3 mois à Brazzaville,au Congo.Je suis en expatriation pour la durée du projet,en principe mon contrat court jusqu’au 15 Juillet 2015.**I’ve been working in Brazzaville,Congo,since 10 January 2014,that’s for 3 months.I’m going to work here till 15 July 2015.**



20:18

I : Que pensez-vous de l’xpatriation ? **What do you think about expatriation?**



20:23

P: L’expatriation,c’est pour moi une belle opportunité d’enrichir son expérience professionnelle à travers la culture,les méthodes de travail et surtout les rencontres que l’on fait dans le pays d’expatriation.Je pense,si elle est bien preparée,l’expatriation peut être très enrichissante et porteuse d’opportunités.**To me,expatriation is a good opportunity for enriching ones professional experience through culture,work methods and particularly through people we meet in the host country.I think if it’s well prepered,expatriation is very enriching and it brings opportunities.**



20:28

I :ok.parlant notamment de culture des autres,rencontrez-vous souvent des problèmes dûs au fait que vous avez une culture qui est différente de celle de votre pays hôte ? **Ok, let’s talk about others’ culture. Have you been confronted to problems which are related to cultural difference?**



20:34

P: Tout à fait! Vous savez,c’est vraiment inévitable pour nous qui venons directement de l’occident,je veux dire l’europe et l’Amerique.Il y a vraiment un choc culturel.**Yes !You know,you can’t avoid them when you come directly from Europe and America.There is a real cultural shock.**



20:37

I:Pouvez-vous alors nous dire quels sont les problèmes culturels auxquels vous êtes confrontés ? **Can you tell me which cultural challenges are you confronted to?**



20:39

P:Vous savez bien que travailler dans un autre environnement culturel que le nôtre peut souvent entraîner des difficultés qui auraient un impact positif ou negatif sur le rendement des expatriés.En ce qui me concerne,je n’ai pas encore rencontré de problèmes particuliers pour l’instant.En fait,ici,plus particulièrement au Congo,où le français est courant,les normes de construction sont toutes calquées sur celles qui existent en France et cela facilite énormément les choses.Pour moi,je parlerai plutôt d’avantage que de parler de difficultés.Je sais bien que la différence du mode de vie est l’un des premiers défis à relever pour un expatrié dans son pays hôte ainsi que la différence de cultures mais comme je viens de le dire,c’est un avantage pour moi d’aller travailler dans un autre environnement culturel que le mien.**You know that working in a new cultural environment may cause problems that could impact positively or negatively on expatriates’outcomes.As far as I’m concerned,I’ve not faced specific problems yet till now.In fact,here,in Congo particularly,where French is commonly spoken,most of the things are copied from what exists in France and this makes things easy for me.Therefore,I will talk about advantages rather than talking about difficulties or challenges.I know well that the difference of ways of life and culture is one of the first challenges an expat has to face in his host country.But,as I’ve said before,it’s an advantage to work in another cultural environment that differs from mine.**



20:47

I :Vous voulez donc dire qu’en dépit de différence de culture,vous ne rencontrez aucune difficulté liée à cette dernière?**Do you mean that although the cultural difference, you’re not confronted to challenges that are related to?**



20:49

P:Pour repondre à votre question,j’aimerai dire que même si je ne rencontre pas de réelles difficultés culturelles,je pense qu’il y en a quelques unes que je peux mentionner ici.**To answer your question,I’d like to say even though I don’t face big cultural problems,I think there are some of them I can mention here.**



20:52

I :Comme quoi alors?**Such as?**



20:53

P :comme la conception du temps et les rélations interpersonnelles.C’est totalement different ici au Congo.**Such as the notion of time and interpersonal relations.Things are totally different here in Congo.**



20:56

I: C’est à dire? **That’s to say?**



20:57

P :je veux dire qu’ici je trouve les gens beaucoup plus chaleureux,ouverts,toujours prêts à vous venir en aide,ils sont toujours disponibles pour les autres contrairemeznt à ce que je vois en France où tout le monde est toujours occupé,pressé,et rarement disponible pour les autres.En fait,chacun s’occupe de soi-même d’abord.je pense que cela est dû au fait que la société française comme les autres sociétés occidentales est basée sur l’individualisme alors qu’ici,c’est la collectivité.Au Congo comme dans les autres pays d’Afrique,la vie en société est basée sur l’entraide mutuelle et la solidarité,et cela a aussi une influence sur les rélations interpersonnelles au niveau de l’entreprise.Les gens sont vraiment très proches les uns des autres et j’admire cela.En France ou en Belgique par exemple,les rélations professionnelles entre employés ne conduisent forcément pas à des rélations fraternelles ou amicales tel que ça se passe ici car comme le dit le mot,elles s’arrêtent tout simplement dans le cadre professionnel.Parlant de la conception du temps,il est facile de constater qu’en majorité ici les gens n’ont pas la même façon de concevoir le temps comme en europe car il suffit de contrôler l’heure d’arrivée au lieu de travail et même lorsqu’il s’agit des rendez-vous ou des réunions de travail.Les gens ont tendance à arriver 1h après en moyenne.En fait,il est difficile pour eux de respecter l’heure précise même dans leur vie quotidienne.Je pense que cela est ancrée dans leurs habitudes,dans leur culture et pour moi qui vient d’une culture différente,cela constitue un choc culturel,un défi à relever.**I want to say that people here are warm-hearted,open-minded,they are always ready and available to help others,contrary to what we see in France or in Belgium where everyone is for himself first.I think this is due to the fact that French society like other western societies is based on individualism whereas in Congo,like in other African countries,society is based on collectivism.Social life is based on mutual help and solidarity,and this also influences interpersonal relations within the company.People are very close to each other and I like it.In France, for instance,interpersonal relations between employees don’t necessarily lead to friendship or brotherhood as we see it here,they remain just professional relations as defined by the word.Concerning time,it’s common to notice that most of people don’t view the concept of time as it is in Europe.You have just to see at what time they come to work,to appointments or to work metings.Most of them are used to come 1h later.In fact,it’s difficult for many of them to be on time even in their daly lives.I think it’s related to their culture,it’s their behaviour,and it constitutes a cultural shock for people who come from a different cultural environment.**



21:07

I : Pouvez-vous me dire dans quelle mésure ces problèmes que vous venez de mentionner affectent-ils votre performance professionnelle?**Can you tell me how do the problems you’ve just mentioned affect your professional performance?**



21:10

P :J’aimerai tout d’abord dire que les difficultés d’adaptation à un environnement nouveau peut entraîner l’échec dans l’accomplissement de la mission d’un expatrié mais réussir à s’y adapter entraîne par contre la réussite de sa mission.cela montre clairement que les problèmes culturels que les expatriés peuvent rencontrer à l’étranger ont inévitablement un impact sur leurs performances professionnelles.En ce qui me concerne,ces difficultés ont été un stimulant qui m’a poussé à toujours faire plus,à trouver des solutions,d’accroître mon autonomie.Je pense que sans ces difficultés culturelles,je m’ennuierais sans nul doute car elles m’ont poussé à beaucoup réflechir pour y trouver des solutions.Je vous assure qu’en voulant imposer mes valeurs occidentales sans tenir compte des réalités culturelles congolaises,j’ai failli causer un échec à ma mission car un climat d’incompréhension s’est installé entre moi et les employés locaux.Et même lorsqu’il s’agissait de faire des remarques aux collaborateurs congolais en ce qui concerne les heures d’arrivée au lieu de travail mais grâce à ma capacité d’adaptation au contexte culturel nouveau,j’ai fini par comprendre la cause de tout cela et d’en trouver la solution.**First of all, I’d like to say that difficulties expats face for adapting themselves to the new cultural environment may lead them to fail their assignments abroad. In contrast, succeeding to adapt themselves in the new culture may lead them to success. This shows clearly that cultural challenges expats encounter while doing their assignments abroad influence their professional performances. As for me, these challenges have been a stimulus that pushed me to do more than I could, to find solutions, to increase my independence.I think without these challenges, things would be boring here because they pushed me to think more about how to find solutions.I do tell you that when I tried to impose my western values without taking into consideration Congolese cultural realities,I was about to cause misunderstanding between Congolese employees and me.This was the same when it came to blame them for coming late to work since they have another conception of time. Thanks to my capacity to adapt myself to the new cultural environment,I did my best to find solution to that problem.**



21:19

I : Vous voulez dire que vous avez réussi à surmonter ces obstables.Alors comment avez-vous procédé**? Do you mean you’ve succeeded to overcome these challenges? So, how did you manage it?**



21:21

P:La meilleure façon de surmonter ces écarts culturels,à mon avis,c’est de se confondre dans la masse tout en gardant ses convictions,ses propres valeurs culturelles.Apprendre des autres et essayer d’en donner aussi de son expérience avec humilité.J’ai par exemple expliqué l’importance du temps dans le travail et dans toute autre forme d’activités,le genre de rélations interpersonnelles entre employés en Belgique et en France,etc,et de leur côté,ils m’ont aussi expliqué comment ça se passe ici.Finalement,nous avons commencé à nous comprendre et tout se pase bien maintenant.**To me,the best way for overcoming these challenges is to adapt oneself to the new cultural environment and keeping his own cultural values.Learning from others and trying to share his own experience with them by being humble.I for instance talked about the importance of time for work and other activities in Belgium and France,the kind of interpersonal relations between employees,etc,and they also explained me how things go on here.Finally,we started to understand each other and everything is ok now.**



21:29

I :Quelles sont les suggestions que vous pouvez faire afin d’aider leurs employés à éviter ces difficultés culturelles dans les pays où ils sont envoyés pour leur période d’expatriation ? **What would you recommend for helping expatriates avoid cultural challenges they encounter in countries where they are sent to for their international assignments?**



21 :32

P:Vous conviendrez avec moi qu’il y a plusieurs facteurs qui rentrent en compte pour repondre à cette question.En effet,il y a plusieurs paramètres qui interagissent pour l’intégration,notamment la personnalité de l’expatrié,les conditions de son expatriation,l’environnement socio-culturel,la langue,etc.Comme recommendations,je pense qu’il est souhaitable que les entreprises qui envoient des gens sous ce statut mettent en œuvre des politiques d’accompagnement depuis le débauchage jusqu’à l’arrivée future sur le lieu d’expatriation.On peut également proposer des services de conseils pratiques(fiscalité,vaccination,communiquer d’avantage sur les atouts du pays de destination).Voilà des choses comme ça qui permettent de mettre l’expatrié dès le départ en position de confiance mutuelle. **You understand that there are several factors to consider for answering this question. In fact, there are several parameters that are taken into consideration for integration, particularly the expat’s personality, conditions of his expatriation, the socio-cultural environment, language, etc. As arecommendation, I think multinational companies should plan policies which would help those they send abroad from the selection and recruitment process till their arrival to the host countries. They can also suggest practical advices about everything that concerns these countries. This can help expatriates to be more confident as soon as they arrive there.**



21:42

I :Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter sur notre sujet de discussion ? **Do you have something to add to the topic ?**



21:44

P:Rien de particulier sinon dire que les difficultés culturelles que j’ai rencontrées pendant mon expatriation ont été une bonne chose pour moi,un véritable avantage car elles m’ont permis de découvrir ce qui existe dans la culture des autres et de trouver les moyens de m’adapter au nouvel environnement culturel.c’est tout ce que je peux ajouter.**Nothing special to mention here but I can just say that the cultural challenges I have encountered during expatriation have been very important for me,an advantage since they helped me discover what characterizes other people’s cultures and find ways for adapting myself to the new cultural environment.That’s all I can add here.**



21:50

I:Je vous remercie monsieur de votre franche collaboration. **Thank you for your collaboration sir.**



21 :53

P:Merci à vous aussi et bonne chance.**Thank you and good luck.**



21:57

I: Merci beaucoup. **Thank you so much.**

**Interview n°4**

I: Bonsoir monsieur Coulibaly! **Good evening Mr. Coulibaly!**



14:43

P:Bonsoir monsieur Mpika,comment vas-tu ? **Good evening Mr. Mpika, how’re you doing?**



14:44

I:Je vais bien,et vous ? **Fine,and you ?**



14:46

P: ça va bien, merci.**I’m fine too, thank you.**



14:47

I:Que Dieu soit loué.J’espère que vous êtes prêt pour l’interview. **May God be blessed.I hope you’re ready for the interview.**



14:50

P:oui,je suis prêt à repondre à toutes vos questions et je suis entièrement à votre disposition.**Yes,I’m ready to answer all your questions and I’m entirely at your disposal.**



14:52

I:Je ne sais cmt vous remercier pour avoir accepté de collaborer avec moi etpour commencer notre interview,j’aimerai tout d’abord me presenter.Je m’appelle Claude Mpika,comme je vous l’ai dejà dit lors de notre premier contact,et je suis étudiant en master de Culture,Communication et Globalisation à l’université d’Aalborg au Danemark.Dans le cadre de mes études,je suis entrain de faire des récherches sur les défis culturels que rencontrent les expatriés travaillant pour les multinationales basées au Congo.Pour ce faire,j’ai une serie de questions auxquelles vous devriez repondre pour me permettre d’obtenir les informations importantes pour la rédaction de ma thèse.**I don’t know how to thank you for accepting to collaborate with me.So,to start with I’d like first to introduce myself.I’m Claude Mpika,as I told you when we first met,and I’m studying the master programme of Culture,Communication and Globalization at Aalborg University in Denmark.I’m currently collecting data for the writing of my thesis about cultural challenges encountered by expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo.Therefore,I have a set of questions and your answers will help me get relevant information for my thesis.**



14:56

I:Merci beaucoup.pouvez-vous d’abord vous presenter? **Thanks. Could you please introduce yourself?**



14:58

P:Je m’appelle Dramane,je suis italien mais mes parents viennent du Mali,pays où je suis né.Je suis agé de 47 ans et je travaille pour la société italienne ENI depuis 2009 comme ingénieur chargé du contrôle des champs petroliers.**My name is Dramane, I’m Italian but my parents are from Mali (Western Africa), a country where I was born. I’m 47 and I work for the Italian company ENI since 2009 as engineer in charge of oil platforms control.**



15:02

I:Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous au Congo et quelle est la durée de votre période d’expatriation ? **How long have you been working in Congo and what is the duration of your expatriation period?**



15:04

P:Je travaille au Congo en tant qu’expatriédepuis le 11 Août 2013,c'est-à-dire dépuis près de 8 mois.La durée de ma période d’expatriation est de 3 ans car mon contrat prendra fin en 2016.**I have been working as an expat in Congo since 11 August 2013, I mean for 8 months. My expatriation duration is for 3 years since my contract ends in 2016.**



15:11

I : Que pensez-vous de l’expatriation ? **What is your opinion about expatriation?**



15:13

P: Pour moi l’expatriation est une nouvelle expérience qui vaut la peine d’être vécue car elle permet de donner et de recevoir.**To me, expatriation is something that is worth experiencing since it allows those who’re concerned by it to give and receive something.**



15:17

I: C’est à dire? **What do you mean?**



15:19

P: C'est-à-dire que l’expatriation permet de travailler dans un nouvel environnement culturel et qui est souvent tout à fait différent de celui dans lequel l’expatrié a toujours vécu.Cela revient à dire que l’expatriation permet de faire la découverte de nouvelles cultures,des gens de différentes cultures avec qui on peut échanger.Je veux donc dire que grâce à l’xpatriation j’ai pu apprendre beaucoup de choses sur le mode de vie au Congo,les langues nationales ou ethniques,etc,la culture congolaise en général mais j’ai pu aussi faire découvrir ma culture aux collègues congolais et d’autres nationalités.**I mean expatriation allows people to work in a new cultural environment that differs from the one within which they have always lived.This is to say that expatriation allows people to discover new cultures,different with whom we can exchange.I want to say that thanks to expatriation I’ve learned many things about the Congolese way of life,Congolese national or ethnic languages,etc,about Congolese culture in general but I’ve also taught my culture to Congolese colleagues and those from other countries.**



15:28

I :Vous venez là de mentionner le concept de culture.Pour ce faire,rencontrez-vous souvent des problèmes dûs au fait que vous avez une culture qui est différente de celle de votre pays hôte ? **You’ve just mentioned the concept of culture. So, do you often face problems due to the fact that you’re from another culture?**



15:34

P: Ce genre d problèmes est souvent inévitable dans le contexte de l’expatriation dans la plupart des cas,mr Mpika.Personnellement,je sens une différence de culture mais je ne considère pas cela comme difficulté d’autant plus que je suis tout d’abord un africain d’origine et le Congo,tout comme le Mali,est un pays situé en afrique sub-saharienne.Donc,il n’y a pas trop de différences culturelles bien qu’elles existent. **This kind of problems are often unavoidable in the most of the cases of expatriation, Mr. Mpika.Personally,I notice there is cultural difference but I don’t see it as a difficulty since I was born and grew up in Africa, and Congo like Mali are both countries located in Sub-Saharan Africa.So,there are many similarities in the cultures of both countries even if they differ from each other.**



15:41

I:Pouvez-vous alors nous dire quels sont les problèmes culturels auxquels vous êtes confrontés ? **Could you please tell us which cultural challenges are you confronted to?**



15:43

P:Il y a quelques problèmes mais en tant qu’africain,ils ne sont pas insurmontables.Il y a par exemple le problème de langue car en dehors du français,les congolais comme d’autres africains utilisent aussi des langues nationales et une multitude de langues liées aux groupes éthniques.Quelques fois on peut se sentir exclu du groupe quand les employés congolais utilisent leurs langues nationales.L’autre difficulté concerne la religion car le Congo est un pays chrétien bien qu’on y rencontre quelques musulmans qui sont particulièrement des commerçants venant des pays de l’afrique de l’ouest,du maghreb et des pays arabes.Pour un musulman,il y a des heures de la journée que l’on doit respecter pour faire sa prière quelque soit l’endroit où l’on peut se trouver mais cela est souvent mal vu par les non musulmans.Pour ce faire,je suis souvent obligé soit de me cacher soit de ne pas remplir mes obligations de musulman comme il le faut et attendre le soir une fois rentré à la maison.Voilà les quelques problèmes auxquels je suis confronté.**There are some problems but as I’m originally from Africa,I don’t consider them like big challenges.There is for example the problem related to language because Congolese people like other Africans,in addition to French language,use their national and other ethnic languages.Sometimes one may feel excludedfrom the group when Congolese employees use their national languages.The second problem is concerned with religion since Congo is a christian country though some muslims,particularly merchants or traders from Western Africa and Arab countries,live in the country.As a muslim,there are hours that should be respected for worships and prayers wherever he can be but this seems to be not well accepted by non-muslims.So,I’m often obliged to hide myself for fulfilling my religious obligations or to wait for until I’m back home from work in the evening.These are the main challenges I’m confronted to.**



15:48

I :ok.J’aimerai alors savoir si ces problèmes que vous venez d’evoquer influencent-ils votre performance professionnelle ? **Ok.I’d like to know whether these problems you’ve mentioned have an impact on your professional performance.**



15:50

P:Je peux dire plus ou moins mais pas comme cela se passe avec les autres expatriés que je vois ici qui ont même du mal à transmettre leurs connaissances aux employés congolais à cause de ces problèmes de culture.Pour ma part,je me sens un peu mal compris et en quelque sorte considéré comme un être différent d’eux car ayant certaines valeurs culturelles différentes des leurs mais je m’éfforce à m’adapter à la situation nouvelle quand je le peux et d’accomplir en mieux ma mission d’expatriation.**I can say it’s more or less but not as it is with other expatriates I see here and who can’t transfer their knowledge to Congolese employees because of cultural challenges.As far as I’m concerned,I feel as if I’m misunderstood and considered as someone who is different from them since I have some different cultural values.But,I usually do my best to adapt myself to the new situation and fulfill my expatriation mission as it should be.**



15:56

I : Peut-on savoir comment faites-vous pour surmonter toutes ces difficultés?**What do you do for overcoming these challenges ?**



15:58

P :Comme je viens de le dire,je m’éfforce à m’adapter à la situation nouvelle quand je le peux mais quand je n’arrive pas à m’y adapter,j’ai le mal de mon pays.Voilà pourquoi j’y retourne tous les 3 mois mais au travail j’oublie ces problèmes.**Like I’ve just said,I do my best for adapting myself to the new situation when I can do it but when I can’t,I miss my home country,I become nostalgic.So,I return to my home country every term(3 months) but at work,I forget everything.**



16:04

I :Quelles sont les suggestions que vous pouvez faire aux multinationales afin d’aider leurs employés à éviter ces difficultés culturelles dans les pays où ils sont envoyés pour leur période d’expatriation ? **What suggestions do you maketo help expatriates avoid cultural challenges they encounter in countries where they are sent to for their international assignments?**



16:07

P:On peut faire plusieurs suggestions mais je pense que la plus importante serait de permettre aux employés destinés à l’expatriation d’effectuer des missions dans leurs futurs pays d’accueil.Je pense que cela rendrait la période d’expatriation facile à gerer d’autant plus que les futurs expatriés seraient en contact physique avec leurs futurs pays d’accueil et toucher du doigt la réalité à laquelle ils vont s’attendre.Cela leur permettra de se faire dejà une idée sur les peuples de ces pays et leurs cultures afin de mieux se preparer à l’expatriation.**We can suggest many things but I think the most important would be to send first future expats to their future host countries for short stay assignments.This would help them to establish the first physical contact with cultures of these countries so that they could be aware of what they could expect and be well prepared for it.This will also help them to make their expatriation a very pleasant time to spend abroad.**



16:13

I :Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter sur notre sujet de discussion ? **Do you have something to add to the discussion ?**



16:16

P:J’aimerai juste souligner que l’expatriation est très importante car au moment où nous parlons tous de la globalisation,elle constitue un atout important qui peut permettre l’intégration des peuples du monde.L’expatriation permet la rencontre des différents peuples et de leurs cultures.**I’d like to say that expatriation is very important since we talk about globalization today,it is an advantage that can help for the integration of different people around the world.Expatriation allows meeting of people and their cultures.**



16:22

I:Je vous remercie mr Dramane pour avoir bien voulu m’accorder cette interview.**Thank you mr Dramane for granting me this interview.**



16:26

P:Merci à vous aussi mr Claude,et que Dieu vous bénisse.**Thank you too mr Claude.May God bless you.**



16:31

I: Merci.**Thank you.**

**Interview n°5**

[15/03/2014 19:21:12] Claude Joseph Mpika: Bonsoir Mr. Yasso! **Good evening Mr. Yasso!**

[15/03/2014 19:23:05] Ismail Yasso: Bonsoir, on dit quoi? **Good evening, what’s up?**

[15/03/2014 19:26:01] claude Joseph Mpika:Tout va bien,et vous ? **I’m feeling good,and you ?**

[15/03/2014 19:28:47] Ismail yasso: Rien de grave à signaler.On peut déjà commencer avec les questions car j’ai rendez-vous dans à peu près 1heure.ok ? **Nothing special to mention. We can start with the interview now because I have an appointment within an hour.ok?**

[15/03/2014 19:31:26] claude Joseph Mpika:Ok,monsieur.[15/03/2014 19:28:33] claude Joseph Mpika: Pour commencer notre interview,j’aimerai tout d’abord me presenter.Je m’appelle Claude et je suis étudiant en master de Culture,Communication et Globalisation àl’université d’Aalborg au Danemark.Dans le cadre de mes études,je suis entrain de faire des récherches sur les défis que rencontrent les expatriés travaillant pour les multinationales basées au Congo comme je vous l’ai expliqué lors de notre rencontre.Pour ce faire,j’ai une serie de questions auxquelles vous dvriez repondre pour me permettre d’obtenir les informations importantes pour la rédaction de ma thèse.Alors,pouvez-vous nous dire qui êtes-vous ? **To start with our interview,I’d like first to introduce myself.I’m Claude Mpika,as I told you when we first met,and I’m studying the master programme of Culture,Communication and Globalization at Aalborg University in Denmark.I’m currently collecting data for the writing of my thesis about cultural challenges encountered by expatriates working for multinational companies located in the Republic of Congo.Therefore,I have a set of questions and your answers will help me get necessary information for my thesis.Could you please introduce yourself ?**

[15/03/2014 19:39:44] Ismail yasso: Je me nomme Yasso Ismail,de nationalité française,je suis actuellement ingénieur chef de projets à Socotec Bassin du Congo.Je suis au Congo depuis le 25 Mars 2013 mais j’ai d’abord travaillé au sein de Socotec Maroc à Marrakech de Janvier 2008 à Mars 2013,date à laquelle j’ai été envoyé en expatriation ici à Brazzaville au Congo.**My name is Yasso Ismail,I’m from France and I’m currently Engineer and project manager at Socotec Bassin du Congo,a subsidiary of the French company Socotec International.I’ve been working in Congo since 25 Mars 2013 but I first worked for Socotec Morocco in Marrakech,from January 2008 to March 2013.**

[15/03/2014 19:45:18] claude Joseph Mpika: Je constate que vous avez déjà été en expatriation avant de venir au Congo,alors que pensez-vous de l’expatriation ? **I see that you’ve already worked as expat before coming to Congo. So, what do you think about expatriation?**

[15/03/2014 19:49:33] Ismail yasso:L’expatriation est une experience particulière car vous partez à la rencontre de nouvelles cultures,de nouveaux modes de vie,bref,vous avez une autre vision du monde et de gens.Personnellement,j’apprécie beaucoup les voyages(car étant fils de diplomate) et donc l’expatriation dans le cadre de mes attributions professionneles ne me pose pas assez de problèmes. **Expatriation is an exceptional experience since you discover new cultures, new ways of life, in short, you have another view of the world and people.Personally,I like travelling too much(my father is a diplomat).Therefore, expatriation for my professional purpose doesn’t cause big problems to me.**

[15/03/2014 19:54:45] claude Joseph Mpika: Vous voulez donc dire que la difference de cultures ne constitue pas un challenge pour vous pendant votre expatriation ? **Do you mean that cultural difference doesn’t constitute a challenge for you as an expat?**

[15/03/2014 19:57:04] Ismail yasso: En général,je ne ressens pas de difficultés majeures car en tant que fils de diplomate j’ai vécu au Japon,en Belgique et dans quelques pays d’afrique,en plus du Maroc où j’ai déjà été en expatriation comme je l’ai souligné plus tôt.Le principal souci étant d’abord la langue car en dehors du français,les congolais utilisent deux langues nationales et plusieurs langues ethniques.Cela est la principale difficulté culturelle que je rencontre au Congo même s’il y en d’autres qui concerne le mode de vie des gens,leurs us et coutumes ou bien la différence de la vision du monde entre les expatriés et les ingénieurs locaux.Je m’éfforce donc à faire face à cela et le reste vient tout seul si on est ouvert d’esprit. **Generally speaking, I’m not confronted to big difficulties since my father is a diplomat.So,I lived in Japon,Belgium and in some African countries, in addition to Morocco where I first worked as an expat like I’ve previously said. The main challenge I faced is language since Congolese people often use 2 national and several ethnic languages in addition to French which is the official language. This constitutes the main cultural challenge I’m confronted to in Congo even though there are other challenges that are concerned with people’s way of life, customs and values or difference in the way expats and local engineers view the world.I try to do my best for overcoming these challenges and everything becomes easy when someone is open-minded.**

[15/03/2014 20:09:17] claude Joseph Mpika: ok.Ces difficultés culturelles que vous venez d’évoquer influencent-elles votre performance professionnelle ? Si oui, alors comment? **Ok.Do these cultural challenges you’ve just talked about influence your professional performance? If yes,how do they ?**

[15/03/201420:14:32] : Ismail yasso :Je pense que tous les échanges culturels que nous faisons pendant l’expatriation influent très positivement sur le rendement professionnel et cela depend de la capacité d’adaptation de chaque individu au nouvel environnement culturel.Pour moi,ces difficultés culturelles m’ont permis de mieux m’adapter à la culture congolaise et cela a une influence positive sur ma performance professionnelle.**I think all the cultural exchanges we have during expatriation have a very positive impact on professional performance or outcome and this depends on each individual’s adaptation capacity to the new cultural environment.As for me,these cultural challenges have helped me to better adapt myself to Congolese culture and they have a positive impact on my professional performance.**

[15/03/2014 20:20:45] claude Joseph Mpika: Peut-on savoir comment avez-vous fait pour surmonter ces difficultés ? **What do you do to overcome these challenges ?**

[15/03/2014 20:23:18 ]Ismail yasso: Pour surmonter ces difficultés,il faut s’intégrer à la nouvelle culture,côtoyer les autochtones,s’imprégner de leur vision du monde tout en gardant son identité.Il faut donc s’adapter au nouvel environnement culturel dans lequel on se trouve pendant l’expatriation et cela depend de la capacité individuelle de chaque expatrié d’autant plus que certains s’y adaptent en quelques semaines(comme moi) tandis que d’autres le font au bout de quelques années ou bien n’y arrivent même pas.Ceux qui arrivent à s’adapter ont plus de chance de reussir leur mission d’expatriation mais ceux qui n’y arrivent pas sont souvent voués à l’échec.**To overcome these challenges,expatriates must adapt themselves to the new culture,collaborate with nationals,learn their culture by keeping their own cultural identities.They have to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment within which they are for expatriation and this depends on each expatriate’s capacity since some of them can do it in few weeks(that’s my case) whereas others do it after years or fail to do it.Those who succeed to adapt themselves to the new cultural environment usually succeed their assignments abroad.In contrast,those who can’t adapt themselves fail their mission.**

[15/03/2014 20:31:25] claude Joseph Mpika: Quelles sont les suggestions que vous pouvez faire aux multinationales afin d’aider leurs employés à éviter ces difficultés culturelles dans les pays où ils sont envoyés pour leur période d’expatriation ? **What could you recommend multinational companies to do for helping their employees avoid cultural challenges when they are sent abroad for expatriation?**

[15/03/2014 20:35:31] Ismail yasso:Pour éviter les problèmes liés à la culture,il faut avant de s’expatrier avoir un minimum de connaissances des us et coutumes du pays d’accueil car c’est vraiment fondamental.A cet effet,les multinationales devraient d’abord envoyer les employés destinés à l’expatriation à effectuer des missions dans leurs futurs pays d’accueil au lieu de leur faire découvrir ces pays,leurs habitants et leurs cultures à travers les livres et autres.Il faudra aussi faciliter l’intégration des expatriés à travers des rencontres avec les populations locales en organisant par exemple des rencontres ou événements culturels,etc ;faciliter l’insertion sociale du conjoint ou de la conjointe de l’expatrié(e).Enfin,pour éviter tous ces problèmes culturels,je suggerai aux multinationales de procéder dans le futur au recrutement du personnel local pour accomplir les missions qui sont assignées aux expatriés aujourd’hui.**To avoid cultural challenges,it’s necessary before expatriation to have the minimum knowledge of host countries’ customs and cultural values because it’s fundamental.So,multinational companies should first send future expatriates to their future host countries for short stay missions instead of making them discover these countries,their people and cultures through books and other.They must also facilitate expatriates’integration through meetings with local populations by organizing for instance cultural meetings or events,etc,to help for the integration of expatriates’ spouses.At last,to avoid such cultural challenges in the future I suggest multinational companies to recruit nationals of the host country for fulfilling missions that are assigned to expatriates nowadays.**

[15/03/2014 20:41:43] claude Joseph Mpika: Avez-vous quelque chose à ajouter sur notre sujet de discussion ? **Do you have something to add to the discussion ?**

[15/03/2014 20:44:48]Ismail yasso: S’il faut ajouter quelque chose concernant l’expatriation,je dirais qu’il faut être très vigilant vis-à-vis des rélations privées.On doit prendre en compte la situation de l’expatrié mais aussi de sa famille,en facilitant leur insertion dans les pays d’accueil car ils sont tous concernés par les difficultés culturelles.C’est tout ce que je peux ajouter et je pense que je dois me deconnecter maintenant.Je vous ai dit au début que j’avais rendez-vous quelque part et je dois y aller maintenant.J’espère au moins vous avoir donné des informations nécéssaires à la rédaction de votre thèse.Je suis désolé mais je dois partir maintenant.**If I can add something concerning expatriation,I’ll say it’s important to serious with private relations.The situation of expatriates and their families must be taken into consideration by helping them integrate easily host countries’ societies since they all face cultural challenges.That’s all I can add to the discussion and I’ve to disconnect right now.I told you at the beginning I have an appointment somewhere and I have to leave now.I hope I have provided you with necessary information for your thesis writing.I’m sorry but I have to leave now.**

[15/03/2014 20:52:07] claude Joseph Mpika:Je vous en prie mr Yasso,merci pour avoir accepté de m’accorder cette interview.C’est très gentil de votre part.Bonne soirée à vous et au revoir.**You’re welcome mr Yasso,thank you for granting me this interview.It’s very kind of you.Bye bye.**

[15/03/2014 20:54:43] Ismail yasso: Au revoir Mr. Mpika et bonne chance.**Bye bye Mr. Mpika and good luck to you.**



Øverst på formularen

Nederst på formularen

**Appendix B: Interview guide**

1. Basic information about the participant and his company.

-Who are you and what is your current position in the company?

-How long have you been working here?

2. What do you think about expatriation?

3. What is the duration of your expatriation stay?

4. Do you encounter challenges related to cultural differences? If yes, what cultural challenges do you encounter?

5. How do these cultural challenges influence your professional performance?

6. How do you cope with these challenges/what do you do to overcome these challenges?

7.Which initiatives do you think multinational companies should take in regards to personal issues related to expatriation or what do you suggest multinational companies to help expatriate employees to avoid cultural challenges in the future?

8. Is there something else you would like to add to the topic?

Thank you so much.

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