The International Exchange Experience and the Social Construction of Meaning

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This article examines the notion of applying the social construction of meaning to the experience of an international faculty exchange. Specifically, the article analyzes challenges and changes in the three major sources that people draw on to provide meaning in life: (a) social relationships, (b) work and leisure activities, and (c) convictions to idea systems. It is argued that separation from one's home culture in an exchange produces discomfort and adjustment burdens resulting from the discrepancy between the new cultural setting and these three sources of meaning. Strategies are suggested for coping with sources of potential meaning uncertainty related to the exchange experience within the context of existing relationships, activities, and idea systems.

One of the factors that makes the human species unique is its ability for reflection. Humans not only experience the world but also feel compelled to imbue life experience with meaning. Meaning, however, is not inherent in people's experience; rather, people "socially construct" experience as they see it and as they interpret it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Searle, 1995). The social construction of meaning not only gives people a sense of direction and purpose but also provides an integrative framework that individuals use to make sense of life experiences. In this article, we first briefly outline a general theoretical perspective of how people attribute meaning to life experience, and then, we suggest how the theory might be applied specifically to the process of how faculty members participating in international exchanges make sense of that particular experience.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

In constructing meaning in situations, individuals do not necessarily perceive the world as it actually is. Like umpires, we call them like we see them. Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967), in a perspective that he calls "ethnomethodology," has studied ways in which ordinary people make sense of everyday life.

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Ethnomethodological research shows how people make sense of the world as they experience it, even when the experience is contradictory, inconsistent, or unclear. In what is referred to as *breaching* experiments, ethnomethodologists intentionally disrupt subjects' taken-for-granted assumptions of reality. When these assumptions of reality are violated or challenged, individuals immediately feel insecure and often threatened. For example, taken-for-granted assumptions about particular circumstances, such as how people stand in elevators (facing the sliding doors), are intentionally disrupted (e.g., an experimenter enters an elevator and faces away from the doors) to observe the processes by which individual actors (other passengers) attempt to give meaning in the situation (e.g., Why is this person facing the rear of the elevator?). We are suggesting that the same logic may extend to more global or integrative meaning construction. That is, what gives a person a sense of meaning in life in a general way may normally be taken for granted except when disrupted. Fundamental disruption to a person's source of life meaning may provoke a meaning or existential crisis. Traumatic life events such as the death of a spouse, getting fired from a job, or getting a divorce may cause a person to openly question underlying assumptions about meaning in life that at other times remain dormant or unchallenged (Becker, 1997). In an attempt to restore meaning to their disrupted life worlds, people in such extreme circumstances may be especially inclined to establish a new set of meanings or to reorder existing meaning priorities.

Elsewhere, McNamee (1995) has suggested that there are fundamentally three major sources of meaning that people draw on to construct a sense of what makes life worth living: (a) social relationships with others, (b) work and leisure activities, and (c) convictions to idea systems. Regarding the first, there is an abundant amount of evidence that indicates that social relationships, especially love relationships, are associated with feelings of happiness (Argyle, 1987), subjective well-being (Mirowsky & Ross, 1989), and meaning in life (Antonovsky, 1979; Baumeister, 1991; Burton, 1998). Conversely, loneliness, isolation, and estrangement are associated with feelings of unhappiness, discontent, and meaninglessness.

Regarding work and leisure activities, there is substantial evidence that attests to the importance of work in peoples' sense of self and well-being (Argyle, 1989; Blauner, 1964; Rubin, 1976). In general, the evidence supports the notion that challenging, autonomous, interesting, and varied work is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction (Kalleberg, 1977). Routine, mundane, repetitive jobs are associated with correspondingly lower levels of satisfaction. Whether individuals receive economic compensation for the activities in which they engage is not as important as whether the activities are imbued with meaning. Volunteer "work," for instance, for some people may provide similar intrin-

sic benefits as paid work (Knoke & Wood, 1981). Strictly leisure-type activities may define a person's avocation instead of a vocation and be similarly a source of intrinsic satisfaction. Indeed, for some, leisure activities may compensate for the lack of meaning in work settings, especially where work is perceived more as a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Parker, 1983).

Idea systems are related sets of values and beliefs that present an explanation for why things are the way they are, as well as direction about how adherents should orient their own behavior. An idea system (or ideology), in other words, simultaneously constitutes a worldview and a frame of action. Idea systems are cultural templates into which individuals may tap in constructing their own sense of life meaning. Tradition, kinship, community, religion, and political ideology are examples of idea systems individuals may adopt, whole or in part, that provide meaning, direction, and purpose for their lives.

Most people draw on a combination of sources in formulating a sense of what gives them meaning in life. Some, however, may rely more heavily on a few or perhaps just one. The workaholic, for instance, may become absorbed in work to such an extent that love relationships with significant others are neglected. A dedicated parent may sacrifice a promising career to care for a child. A contemplative monk may forsake everything to devote himself to a life of prayer. More typically, however, people construct a sense of what gives them meaning in life by drawing simultaneously on a combination of sources.

INTERNATIONAL FACULTY EXCHANGES AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION

In this article, we are suggesting that the experience of participating in an international faculty exchange may entail a breach of taken-for-granted assumptions along each of the three dimensions outlined above. These breaches may result in stress and disorientation, which in turn, may call forth redefinitions and reconstructions of meaning, often having lasting effects.

We were both fortunate to have had international experience. One of us was a faculty exchange participant with a counterpart at a medium-sized university in London. Each exchange partner was expected to lecture in classes, give presentations to faculty and community groups, and generally be a part of departmental and university life. This same author has also participated in international conferences and has been an active player in supporting the international efforts on his home campus. The other served for 7 years as director of international programs at a medium-sized U.S. university. This position involved arranging and administering faculty exchanges, managing and overseeing the student study-abroad program, and emphasizing the need to develop more of an international component in the university curricula. These responsibilities required the direc-

tor to often visit partner universities abroad, with the concomitant need to develop workable relationships with faculty and administrative counterparts in a variety of cultural settings. These experiences enabled both of us to witness firsthand the cultural differences and the stresses involved in adjusting to new societal and work environments.

Few would disagree that there are distinct benefits, both professional and personal, for faculty who have international experiences. Being exposed to new ideas, access to cross-cultural research opportunities, and the positive impact these experiences can have on one's teaching are professional benefits that have been detailed in the literature (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991). Expanding one's horizons and arriving at a better self-understanding are personal benefits that have previously been noted (Stadler, 1995).

Nevertheless, faculty exchanges, especially in the beginning stages, can be unsettling because they are not dissimilar to the disorienting culture shock that ethnographers first encounter when initially immersed in a different cultural setting (Bernard, 1988; Oberg, 1960). All groups make a distinction between who is in and who is out. The culture of the group—norms, roles, values, beliefs, rituals, traditions—represents the boundary between members and nonmembers. Culture provides what one needs to know to function as a member in good standing within the various groups to which the person belongs. Culture gives one both a way to make sense of the world and an orientation to it. It represents a set of assumptions about how the world works and how people within the group are expected to relate to one another. Culture includes guidelines for acceptable behavior, including appropriate gestures, words, tones, and demeanor expected in rituals of greeting, eating, meeting, and so on. Culture shock occurs when a person is removed from a familiar cultural setting and is placed in a new and unfamiliar one. It represents a loss of cues and symbols of interaction that otherwise help to provide coherence, consistency, and predictability in the conduct of social life (Weaver, 1993). The resulting disorientation creates tension, stress, and confusion that is almost always unsettling and often traumatic.

All of the contingencies identified by Paige (1993) regarding culture shock in general apply as well to faculty on exchanges. Paige notes that the degree of disruption of meaning is contingent on a variety of factors: the degree of cultural difference between the native and host cultures, the extent to which the sojourner is ethnocentric, the extent to which the host culture is ethnocentric, the extent of language difficulty, the rapidity of the cultural immersion, the extent to which the sojourner is isolated from access to his or her native culture, the extent to which the sojourner lacks prior experience with other cultures, the extent of unrealistic expectations that the sojourner has of the experience, the extent of physical difference between the sojourner and members of the host culture, and

the extent to which the sojourner perceives a lack of respect in how he or she is being treated by members of the host culture.

In addition to the general culture shock associated with being in a foreign country that any traveler might experience, we are suggesting that faculty on international exchanges experience particular forms of disorientation and disruption of meaning that are related specifically to the dimensions of social relationships, work and leisure activities, and convictions to idea systems.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Depending on the length of a faculty exchange, separation from familiar meaning anchors—family, friends, colleagues, community, and so on—evokes varying degrees of meaning uncertainty. If exchanges are short, separation may not result in much meaning disruption. If the faculty member travels with family members, significant others, or professional colleagues from the home institution, then some disruption of meaning based on social relationships may be reduced, although not entirely eliminated. Lack of familiar social support would be most acute in the early stages of an exchange, when culture shock is greatest and when no new basis of social support has crystallized. As the exchange proceeds in time, and as the faculty member develops a network of associates and familiar routines, we would anticipate that meaning disruption would be reduced.

Constant social interaction with strangers in unfamiliar settings can be very stressful, especially where language barriers exist. In faculty exchanges, there is typically a succession of meetings with strangers: faculty hosts, administrators, staff, and students. Nuances of expression, eye contact, posture, body language, and so on may convey different meanings in different cultural settings (Hall, 1973). Even simple rituals of interaction, such as forms of address, may vary from one setting to another and from one audience to another. Always lurking in the background is the potential to misread or misinterpret these cultural signals.

Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of the dramatalurgical model of everyday life is relevant here. Goffman uses the metaphor of the stage to describe social life. In everyday life, people perform (i.e., act out) scripts (e.g., role of professor), complete with sets (e.g., classroom), costumes (e.g., professorial attire), and props (e.g., briefcases). Goffman further identifies a "front stage" and a "back stage." Formal presentation of self occurs in the front stage. It is in the front stage that actors are most guarded and deliberate in their presentation of self to others. Like actors on a stage, people try to portray particular images of self to create impressions to others. The actor monitors his or her "performance," constantly gauging the reactions of the "audience," and remaining alert to the possible need to further manage impressions. If the performance is going well,

the actor receives the intended feedback in the form of attentiveness, nods of approval, smiles, and other "cues" that the performance is being received in the manner the actor intends. If the performance is flawed or spoiled, the result is embarrassment.

In the back stage, the actor interacts with friends and close associates with whom the actor has a history of prior interaction. The presentation of self to others in the back stage is more relaxed and informal. In the back stage, the success of the performance does not rely exclusively on single or first impressions. Because interacting parties have a shared history, ongoing relationships with others are understood in this broader context. Embarrassment resulting from a flawed presentation of self to others is likely to be less severe and less traumatic in the back stage. Risks of failure are less because the actor has established prior stocks of credibility.

The back stage is the arena of interaction in which the "actor" prepares for front stage performances. Preparation includes grooming, make-up, and costumes, and also may include "rehearsals" in which the actor practices the anticipated "performance" that will subsequently be presented on the front stage. Finally, the back stage is the arena of interaction to which the actor retreats to recover from failed or spoiled performances and to regroup, to rest, and to fortify the self for the return to the front.

It is not uncommon for the faculty member on an international exchange to have met the hosts in some capacity prior to the visit. However, the faculty member often is known to the hosts only by reputation or by a paper presentation of self in the form of a vita. Although the faculty member may be secure in an identity as a teacher, scholar, and colleague at the home institution, he or she is virtually unknown in these capacities at the host institution. Will the faculty member on exchange live up to the promises of his or her paper credentials? This creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for both the faculty member and host. The paper potential is "tested" in scheduled performances such as addresses and lectures. It is our experience that faculty members on exchange are especially sensitive to even the most subtle forms of feedback, anxious that the "performance" has been well received. Immediately following such performances, even the most secure and established individual will actively solicit feedback from their hosts ("How did it go?" "Do you think they understood what I was saying?" "How did I come across?" etc.).

Adding to this anxiety may be cultural variations in defining audience feedback, or lack of it. For example, telling a joke or trying to be humorous is very risky because appreciation of these is so culturally bound. Cultural cues typically are different in different cultural settings and often are a source of nervous tension. The "performer," for instance, may entirely misread audience reaction

as either a "false positive" or a "false negative." In the case of a false positive, the actor may be oblivious to aspects of the performance that others find rude, inappropriate, or offensive. In the case of a false negative reading, the actor may attempt corrective action that is either unnecessary or may indeed create problems where none existed.

Both of us, for instance, have made presentations in different settings to Asian audiences. Compared to American audiences, the typical Asian audience reaction is muted. Unless prepared for what appears to be a lack of affect and response by American standards, a faculty member may think his or her performance is failing, perhaps disastrously. One may attempt to recover audience attention by speaking more loudly, or more slowly, or more emphatically. What the faculty member may misperceive as nonreaction (false negative) may well be a culturally specific demonstration of deferential respect. It is indeed easy to misread in a variety of situations. For example, the Japanese tendency of reluctance to finality in negotiations may be seen as a sign of foot-dragging or cleverness. Although in reality, this is more a tendency for patience and respect for the process and a desire to adapt the agreement to the contingencies that quite naturally evolve as the process takes its course (Fisher, 1980).

In our own experience and among the faculty we know who have been on exchanges, one of the recurring themes is that faculty perceive themselves to be constantly "on stage." In addition to scheduled professional performances, typical exchange obligations also involve a series of work-related leisure activities such as dinners, receptions, socials, and so on. Faculty members soon realize that they are being evaluated even in these settings. In some cases, faculty may be staying with hosts in their homes, further eroding opportunities to retreat to the back stage. In short, there is limited private space to collect oneself and recover from the rigors of impression management. Indeed, the faculty exchange appears to take on the character, atmosphere, and heightened self-consciousness of an extended job interview.

WORK AND LEISURE

Faculty exchanges are fundamentally work activities. As indicated previously, even social activities of faculty on exchanges are essentially work related. Work is a central source of life meaning. Indeed, for Americans in particular, identity is often inextricably related to the work they do. Sociologists refer to the dominant status that a person occupies as a "master status." The master status is usually so pervasive that it spills over into other spheres of the person's life. A medical doctor, for instance, is not only a doctor on the job at the hospital or in the doctor's office but, in nonwork settings (such as on the golf course, at the church picnic, at the charity ball, etc.), is also recognized and defined in terms of

that status. In general, the higher the status of one's job, the more likely it will be representative of a master status.

For faculty on exchanges, the master status of *professor* is projected into the new setting. The associated expectations of *intellectual*, *scientist*, *expert*, and *teacher* are highlighted even beyond those to which the visitor is accustomed. Consequently, the claimant of this status feels an obligation to project a convincing image to others consistent with these definitions. The "performance" must be convincing enough to gain acceptance and recognition by others. There is vested interest in a successful exchange because the exchange literally becomes part of the faculty member's professional biography and therefore a part of her or his professional identity. In short, what is at stake is not only the faculty member's professional credibility and reputation but also the core sense of self.

Although secure in one's credibility as a professional in the home setting, the faculty member on exchange will no doubt feel anxious about her or his status in the new. There may be some question about the transferability of skills and professional capital in an international setting, even within the same and otherwise familiar disciplinary boundaries. Teaching styles that are normative or effective in one cultural setting may not be in another. Hot topics within disciplinary boundaries may differ across cultural settings. Patterns of relating to colleagues, staff, administration, and students may be different.

All of these differences may create anxiety about one's professional presentation of self, which in turn, may call forth a reformulation or reevaluation of professional self-image. An example is provided by our own experiences in exchanges with British universities. The academic rank structure, for instance, is different in American and European universities. In European universities, the rank of professor is held typically by only one or perhaps two individuals in a department. The title is, therefore, particularly honorific. Incumbents hold the title until they retire or move to another institution. In the British system, senior lecturers who have the credentials to warrant elevation to the rank of professor are eligible for consideration only when an opening occurs somewhere in the system, either in their home institution or elsewhere. In the American university system, there is typically no quota (at least not officially) on those holding the rank of professor. Associate professors are eligible for promotion to the professor rank whenever they meet the criteria for promotion established by the home institution, which in turn, varies from one institution to the next. At the time of one author's exchange with a British university, he held the rank of professor at the home institution. The hosts in the British university knew the rank in advance, as was clearly indicated in the vita and correspondence. When actually on the exchange, a number of individuals who had not seen the paper credentials in advance were met at the host institution. As is the custom in academic circles

(and especially in British universities), business cards are exchanged with various administrators and faculty, with rank clearly specified. In many cases, the issue of faculty rank is a delicate one that creates some uncertainty and discomfort regarding professional identity. One is made acutely aware (and self-conscious) of the differences in meaning of the rank of professor between the two settings and, indeed, we were reminded of it on more than a few occasions. Defensively, one finds oneself acknowledging the differences in a deferential manner so as not to appear presumptuous. In short, one often feels the need to construct a revised professional identity consistent with the meaning of the *professor* rank at the host institution.

In addition, in exchanges, faculty not only represent themselves as professionals but also represent their home institutions and, to some extent, their home countries. This informal role of ambassador adds to the burden of role performance in the conduct of the faculty exchange. The faculty member on exchange is generally aware of this added responsibility, especially if he or she is the first individual from the home institution to participate in an exchange at that host institution. Although perhaps administrators may be more accustomed to acting in the role of ambassador, rank and file faculty on exchanges often need to redefine themselves in this capacity.

IDEA SYSTEMS

The most typical types of idea systems that people draw on to formulate a sense of life meaning are religious and political. However, in an academic discipline, a particular theoretical perspective or methodological technique and even substantive specialties can evoke similar passions. Indeed, some academics identify who they are by virtue of their allegiance to such orientations and often avow and defend them with religious-like zeal. These idea systems become quasi-sacred and often are associated with rigid boundary distinctions between adherents and nonadherents. It is not surprising then that challenges to idea systems can be unsettling. A faculty exchange participant may encounter new and different perspectives that perhaps challenge or call into question taken-for-granted assumptions. Such exposure may prompt the participant to rethink his or her own underlying academic worldview. It is, of course, possible for such exposure to awaken the faculty participant from his or her dogmatic slumber.

For instance, in our experiences, particularly in the United Kingdom, we discovered that the sociology faculty there were immersed in a globalization perspective. In short, globalization refers to a process by which economic, political, and cultural institutions and activities are increasingly spilling beyond national borders, spanning the globe, and changing the conduct of social life for particular nations, communities, and individuals. One of the leading pioneers in this

perspective was on the faculty at the university where we both had professional experiences. A great deal of the intellectual banter there was focused on this perspective. Globalization was only vaguely familiar to us at the time, as it had not taken root in American sociology. Globalization represents a fundamentally different way of looking at and making sense of the conduct of social life. It is precisely this kind of paradigmatic shift in idea systems that immersion in a different intellectual environment can produce.

Although breaking away from familiar routines creates meaning disruption, it is possible for this disruption to be a welcome one with professional benefits. For example, even in disciplines wherein the United States is considered to be the leader, areas of exceptional expertise can be found abroad. The impact on teaching improvement has also been documented (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991). In some ways, the experience of an international foreign exchange is similar to a retreat or sabbatical. Each of these gives the faculty participant the time and opportunity to reexamine underlying assumptions that may otherwise remain dormant. In other words, the exchange provides the faculty participant an opportunity to take stock professionally. It was our experience that we found ourselves often taking stock of the overall direction of our careers. Others have referred to this process as "reloading" or "gaming," as in reshuffling the deck and starting over (Goodwin & Nacht, 1991). This kind of reflection can result in major career shifts. In our experiences, it was not uncommon to speak with others about the possibilities of relocation, academic versus administrative career trajectories, the general direction of our research agendas, and other long-term issues. Faculty exchanges, in this sense, also may parallel the experience of attending professional conferences. Professional conferences can create similar meaning disruptions and also may be associated with taking stock both of the direction of one's discipline as a whole and one's place within it.

Finally, international faculty exchange involves metalevel meaning disruption. At base level, the faculty participant encounters the associated culture shock of being in a foreign country. At another level, the participant is also uprooted intellectually through immersion in an unfamiliar and alien professional subculture. The combined effect of these disruptions is that the faculty participant may very well reexamine the basic underlying assumptions of life meaning that may result in the construction of new meanings or reordering of existing meaning priorities.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have identified three sources that people typically draw on to make sense of their life experiences: social relationships, work and leisure activities, and convictions to idea systems. We have applied this general model

to the specific experience of international faculty exchanges. We have suggested that faculty exchanges create potential for meaning disruption along each of these dimensions, and we have examined ways in which participants may reconstruct or reprioritize meanings in the process of making sense of this experience.

Faculty exchanges are not just about having an enriching cultural experience; exchanges are increasingly becoming an important and common part of a faculty member's professional career. Professional training, identity, and credibility are on the line. As the world is becoming more interdependent, universities are responding by placing more emphasis on international education. There is recognition that high-quality teaching now requires international and comparative understanding. And a prepared faculty equals a prepared student. For students to have the preparation needed to participate more effectively with those who are different, faculty and institutions are realizing not only the necessity of but particularly the benefit from cross-cultural exposure. The American Council on Education (ACE) (1995), for example, has called for changes in how colleges and universities educate their students about the world. The ACE is calling for universities to expand the understanding of languages, cultures, and global issues. Universities are more aggressively taking the position that both students and faculty should be sensitized to and have knowledge of multiple worldviews and perspectives. To this end, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (1997) has developed a strategic plan for the "global university" of the 21st century, emphasizing the need to institutionalize the internationalization of activities at the university and the necessary role faculty will play. With proper administrative groundwork and incentives, faculty will deliver and provide the kind of expertise required for developing an international agenda. This requires curricular, travel, and study-abroad arrangements, in addition to appropriate personal preparation for exposure to living and working in different cultures.

Logistical institutional arrangements and problems of individual and family coordination are obvious issues that must be resolved in travel preparation. But perhaps the most often neglected yet, more often, most problematic challenges involve the emotional, social, and psychological adjustments to living and working in a foreign culture. Living abroad in an alien setting and interacting daily with both members of the host academic community and host country, on one hand, can be very enriching but, on the other, can also be very stressful (Leinwand, 1983).

Because having a professional international experience is an essential ingredient in global knowledge, it is important for faculty to be equipped to deal with the complexity of issues inherent in the process of becoming accustomed to a different culture. Based on our review of the process by which faculty make sense

of this experience, we can suggest some practical ways to help close the gap of meaning uncertainty related to international exchanges.

First, with respect to social relationships, maintaining home contacts can soften the potential disruption of this major source of life meaning. Home contacts provide continuity of experience and an ongoing basis of support. Separation from the continuity of enduring social relationships can be disheartening and perhaps even emotionally traumatic. One way to avoid this disruption is to travel with family members, colleagues, or friends. If not traveling with family, friends, or colleagues, staying in touch with them while abroad may also ease the transition to a new surrounding. Maintaining home contacts, however, should not come at the expense of developing new ones in the host setting. Expanding social contacts should be part of the international experience. The point is not to eliminate sources of meaning uncertainty altogether but to avoid debilitating uncertainty that otherwise could interfere with the quality of the exchange experience.

Second, with respect to work relationships, some general prior understanding of the culture, structure of higher education, and background information on the host institution itself will help to professionally orient the exchange participant. These preparations can assist in making sense of the new setting because no matter how well-known and professionally respected one may be at the home institution, this prior stock of credibility may mean very little when faced with new associates, attitudes, and values. Also, knowing what will be expected of the faculty participant in the course of the exchange (e.g., lectures, presentations, research collaborations) and the settings in which these "performances" will appear reduce the potential for unpleasant surprises. Having at least a tentative schedule of events will assist both in reducing anxiety of what might happen when and in making appropriate preparations.

Finally, potential meaning disruption in the realm of ideas can be reduced at both the cultural and intellectual levels. Culturally, the exchange participant should have some advanced understanding of the traditions, values, beliefs, customs, and ways of life of the host country. Such advanced knowledge will reduce the potentially disruptive effects of culture shock and will facilitate a more rapid adjustment to new surroundings. At the professional level, potential meaning disruption can be further alleviated if the exchange participant has some information on the substantive interests, research agendas, and theoretical perspectives of the host faculty. Preparing for a future social status or new role is a phenomenon sociologists refer to as *anticipatory socialization*. Although exposure to an alien environment can put people under heavy stress, if they are able to foresee the potential for culture shock, groundwork can be laid that may lessen the impact of exposure to a different culture (Hofstede, 1980). Learning in

advance about the host faculty's academic interests and orientations, thereby anticipating this experience, should ease the professional adjustment process as well.

In summary, although having an international experience provides an undeniable professional and personal benefit to faculty, we have argued that discrepancy between one's home and host cultures produces discomfort and adjustment burdens, the degree of which is dependent on the magnitude of the discrepancy. In making sense of this experience, whatever is familiar is generally comforting while whatever is new and different is at least potentially unsettling. Although the familiar tends to be comforting, we would caution that the use of elaborate devices designed to shield one from any infringement of the familiar negates the high value of the exchange. In an important sense, the more one attempts to replicate the home environment abroad, the less the benefit of the cross-cultural experience. In other words, too little meaning disruption is likely to result in little or no personal or professional growth. Too much meaning disruption, on the other hand, may be debilitating and interfere with the quality of the experience. The challenge is to strike an appropriate balance in the process of making sense of this valuable new experience within the context of existing relationships, activities, and idea systems.

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