


# Chapter 10


## Expats Escaping Culture Shock: Designing a Game for Intercultural Communication

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The world is rapidly changing, with significant impacts on businesses and personal lives. Companies operating globally are increasingly moving parts of their operations abroad. To remain competitive, firms must recruit highly qualified, internationally mobile staff, often referred to as “expatriates” or “expats.” However, relocating can lead to culture shock, causing expats to feel disoriented, stressed, and out of place, which can result in poor work performance and costly early returns. Effective human resource management is essential in addressing these challenges. Research shows that preparation and support programs focusing on both logistical (“hard facts”) and cultural (“soft facts”) aspects are crucial. One innovative solution is to use educational escape rooms (EERs) for training. This chapter outlines how EERs can be designed to address culture shock, offering a blueprint for their creation and assessment. This approach lays the groundwork for similar training tools in other areas, enhancing their effectiveness and applicability.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing and uncertain world, marked by volatility, anxiety, non-linearity, and incomprehensibility—captured by the “BANI” concept (Cascio, 2020)—organizations are increasingly compelled to adapt their strategies for talent mobility. To remain competitive, businesses must go beyond traditional relocation strategies and embrace new, flexible models for attracting and managing highly qualified, internationally mobile professionals and employees (Bonache et al., 2024). Work itself is no longer confined to specific places, roles, or hierarchical structures. The shift towards a more “borderless” world of work brings human performance into sharper focus, detaching labor from rigid organizational constructs and embedding it within flexible, globally dispersed frameworks.

Hence, global mobility today involves beside sending employees abroad on traditional expatriate assignments a wide spectrum of mobility types including international remote workers, self-initiated movers, digital nomads, project-based international work, and other fluid forms of global engagement (Bozzi, 2024; Krogmann & Zinner, 2023). The trend toward the flexibilization of assignment models has increased due to digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic (Bozzi, 2024).

Nevertheless, several firms perceive significant challenges in fully transforming to digital work models due to organizational, individual, and technical factors. These include a lack of integration into corporate culture, legal uncertainties, reduced personal interaction, blurred boundaries between work and private life, inadequate or limited access to technological infrastructure, and concerns regarding data security or digital safety (Frick & Marx, 2021). Although there is still much to explore on both the side of digital nomads and that of organizations and management, mobile professionals—whether expats or digital nomads—face numerous challenges (Bozzi, 2024; Frick & Marx, 2021).

The adjustment process to an alien analog workplace or a global virtual workspace can be emotionally and cognitively demanding. Without prior international experience respectively an experience of nomad lifestyle and strong support systems, many global employees report feelings like disoriented, isolated, and anxious (Bozzi, 2024, p. 6; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021, p. 207-208). Although these feelings might arise from different sources (such as the loss of familiar norms, losing social contacts) they can be characterized by confusion, a sense of alienation or frustration (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2022; Hensellek & Puchala, 2021). These feelings not only reduce performance but also increase the risk of premature returns for expats or a discontinuation of the nomadism. Early returns or giving up being a nomad can be costly—for the sending firm, in terms of investment and reputation, and for the individuals, who miss out on professional development opportunities and may suffer personal setbacks (Genkova, 2021; Waxin & Brewster, 2024).

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