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BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

**BMGT2004S: CROSS CULTURAL
MANAGEMENT**

**MAIN ASSIGNMENT
EXPATRIATE INTERVIEW**

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1. Interviewee Profile

The subject of the interview is Nathaneil Paul, or Neal, as he is usually known as. Interviewer - Fareez, have known Neal for the last four years through their similar interest in music. For this assignment, we have identified Neal as the best candidate for the interview due to his recent move to Sydney.

Neal is a 27-year-old Singaporean who has been living and working in Sydney, Australia for the last 1½ years. Neal had lived in Singapore most part of his life, spending a few years from date to date in Melbourne as an undergraduate. Currently, Neal lives in Sydney with his girlfriend, Lacey, together with their two dogs, Peach and Edwin.

Neal works as a Glass Façade Designer for Lisus Technology Pty Ltd (<http://www.lisus.com>), an Australian company that that specialises in custom cast glass fabrication and design.

2. The Interview

Since Neal is still living in Sydney, Australia, we arranged to have the interview conducted online via video. It was completed on April 2nd, 2007 via MSN Messenger video chat. Prior to the interview, we decided to focus the questions into the following areas:

- 2.1 Initial Reactions
- 2.2 Social Environment and Culture
- 2.3 Working Environment and Culture



2.4 Personal Perspectives

These topics are selected to provide a unique perspective of a Singaporean as an expatriate in a foreign country and its working environment. The full interview can be found in the Appendix A1.

2.1 Initial Reactions

Q: What were your feelings when you first heard about your overseas assignment?

A: I was glad because I've always wanted to experience working overseas.

Q: What were some of the reasons for accepting the overseas assignment?

A: I was feeling very jaded working in Singapore. People generally work and have no leisure time. I needed a change in environment and I was looking forward to having a more balanced work-life.

In this part of the interview, we found that Neal was very positive towards the move. He was eager to experience the prospect of working in an overseas assignment and he had the support of his family. However, there were others who were not as encouraging. He was very keen despite understanding its risks. He felt jaded about the congested working lifestyle in Singapore and possibly needed a new challenge in a different working environment. Typically as a designer, one might need a change of environment to broaden creatively. Therefore, in Neal's case, we feel that the move would allow him to explore and gain more insights by getting involved in overseas projects away from Singapore



2.2 Social Environment and Culture

Q: How did you get yourself acclimatized to the surrounding & culture?

A: Because there are almost 50 different cultures in Sydney, there wasn't a need to acclimatize to a particular convention. In Sydney, apart from the locals, there are many migrants from the Middle East, Europe, Asia and even Africa. You couldn't tell where someone is from until you ask. I didn't feel that I had to be 'inducted' to live a new way of life.

Q: What was your first big "aha" about the culture?

A: The racial riots in Cronulla beach showed me how sensitive racial issues can be. It was definitely an eye opener for me. The whole incident tells me how protective the Aussies can be towards their way of life and towards their own people.

Q: What surprised you about the way people thought / worked? Did you face any conflict / misunderstandings based on cultural differences?

A: After witnessing the Cronulla beach incidents, I became about people's perception. I realised people could live in peace as long as there was mutual respect. I try to accommodate and blend-in. So far, I have not encountered any cultural conflicts on my own.

It did not take Neal a long time to adapt to the local culture. However, we need to bear in mind that prior to his move; he did spend some years in Melbourne, Australia, as an undergraduate. Sydney is culturally diverse due to the large number of different ethnic communities living in it. There are many Europeans, Africans, Middle Eastern, Asians apart from the local Australians. Because of the varied mix of people and cultures, they do not seem to be any dominant way of living in Sydney.



The data from Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that in 2005 the number of overseas-born Australians passed 4.8 million, representing almost one-quarter (24%) of the total population (see Appendix A2). The 2001 Census showed that 3.5 million people born in Australia had at least one overseas-born parent, accounting for 26% of Australia's population (Appendix A3). Of these, 43% had both parents born overseas, 35% had their father (but not their mother) born overseas and 22% had their mother (but not their father) born overseas.

Since almost 24% of the population are born overseas, culturally, Australia as a whole, have a very unique values stemming from the mix of cultures. People mingle with other cultures in Sydney and it is not uncommon to see people from various backgrounds together in a social setting. Based on the interview, people seem to be relatively tolerant of the different ethnic backgrounds and accept other people's way of life and culture as long as mutual respect is shown. You have freedom of religion and culture in Australia, not needing to assimilate yourself into their way of life.

2.3 Working Environment and Culture

Q: Describe your company's management structure. Do you have any staff to supervise? How do they perceive your working style? (Describe your relationship with your co-workers?)

A: No, I do not have any staff to supervise. There is little distinction between who is bigger in rank and who is under whom. We simply have a small team of staff who are well versed at what they do individually. There is respect and trust amongst one another.



Q: How different is the business culture in Sydney compared to Singapore?

A: It's totally different. I guess, a society that is culturally, environmentally, geographically different would possess different ethics, believes, people thoughts, food and entertainment would present a different business method.

The people here tend to be more vocal in their ideas and opinions. Communication within the work environment is usually very direct. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. I think they dare to do things differently and break the norm as long as it makes good prospective sense to them.

Structurally, there was no major hierarchy in Neal working environment and supervision is quite limited within its company culture. It is evident of a strong opinionated and individualistic working culture; however, there is strong appreciation of every member's role in the company. Communication is much open, direct and very matter of fact, which makes them objective and receptive to new ideas.

Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimension for Australia (ITIM International, 2007) in Figure 1 below supports what Neal mentioned in the interview. There is a high level of Individualism (IDV).



QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure 1 – Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions – Australia

*(Key: PDI = Power Distance Index, IDV = Individualism, MAS = Masculinity,
UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index, LTO = Long-Term Orientation)*

Neal mentioned the Australians are more vocal as they share their opinions and ideas. Possibly because of the individualist, open communications - ideas and opinions and decisions are exchanged often. There was also respect and trust among the staff that are well versed at what they do individually. This represents a culture with minimal hierarchy influence and operates merit-based. This meritocratic postulation further indicates high individualistic nature.

These high uncertainties can attest to how Australians would dare to do things differently, against the norm, demonstrating objectivity and receptiveness to new ideas or risks. If you compare Figure 1 against Figure 2, the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) is much higher for Australia than Singapore. Making Australians more likely to accept risks compared to Singaporeans



Power Distance index (PDI) is relatively low in Australia compared to the Singapore. PDI is indicative of a greater equality between societal levels, including government, organizations, and even within families (Stephen Taylor, 2007). In Singapore, the higher Power Distance Index (PDI) indicates strong hierarchy culture and high dependency on their managers for decision-making.

On the contrary, Neal added in the interview on how there was no exact or clear indication of hierarchy or authority. Socially, PDI can be seen as Neal puts it - there are almost 50 different cultures in Sydney, as long as there was mutual respect, there was tolerance for each other. Equality at a social level is suggestive of low power distance culture of its people.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure 2 – Geert Hofstede Cultural Dimensions – Singapore

(Key: PDI = Power Distance Index, IDV = Individualism, MAS = Masculinity,

UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index, LTO = Long-Term Orientation)



2.4 Personal Perspectives

Even though he is enjoying his stay in Sydney, Neal does not feel he has changed and he lives the way he does just like in Singapore. Apart from missing his family and friends, he looks forward to catching up with them whenever he is back for the holidays. However, as long as he is able to work and stay in Sydney, he would not consider leaving Australia for now. He is enjoying a more balanced work-life at he moment.

As an expatriate, he encourages people to take up the opportunity for an overseas assignment, although he admits that there might be risks involved. He reminded us that it is important to keep an open-mind and ensure that the simple needs are met and enjoy the experience.

3. Personal Reflective Summary

Jensen - On a personal level, I think it would a great experience to have to opportunity to get to work on an overseas assignment, especially in an individualistic culture. Singaporeans are a very general consensus group where we are brought up in a way not question on authority. In most cases of working environment, only one or two are decision makers while the rest would be what I call “going through motion”. It would be interesting to see if I can fit in to the openness and directness of the new culture. If not, would I at least be able to learn to say no without any pleasantries.

I would probably face some reluctance from my parents on potentially being out



station overseas for long period. They are slightly conservative; however I am certain they will be turn to be supportive if it happens – collective nature. Neal did mention about on adapting in a foreign country, I figure it would be like “guiding light” if I locate a fellow country mate if I was facing any culture shock.

Neal added about the ethnic clashes of Cronulla riots. Singapore itself has previously faced many racial problems. Historically they were many clashes. Since then, the Government now takes subtle discreet efforts to integrate us into one national identity instead of the different races. Till now, it is still working well. Overall I think it the experience of working overseas would help develop and enrich me as a person to be adaptive to change and broaden the view of life and myself.



Appendix A1 – Interview Transcript

Residence Status

1. Which country were you born in & which country are you residing in currently?

I was born in Singapore. I'm now residing in Sydney, Australia

2. Are you currently living alone or with your family?

I am currently living with my girlfriend, Lacey. She's also a Singaporean. We have our two dogs with us, Peach and Edwin.

Initial Reactions

3. What were your feelings when you first heard about your overseas assignment?

I was glad because I've always wanted to experience working overseas.

4. How did your family react to your overseas assignment?

They were happy for me. In fact it was my father who encouraged me to take up the overseas assignment.

5. What were some of the reasons for accepting the overseas assignment?

I was feeling very jaded working in Singapore. People generally work and have no leisure time. I needed a change in environment and I was looking forward to having a more balanced work-life.

6. Did you do any research on your own or any form of pre-departure preparation?



Yes, I visited Sydney a few months before the move. I met my future bosses and got to know the city a little bit better.

7. Did you face any resistance / unfavourable comments about working overseas?

Yes I did. There were people who felt that I was taking a very big risk by starting afresh in a totally new place so far away.

Working Environment and Culture

8. What is your current profession & what does your job scope encompass?

I am working as a Glass Façade Designer; I design glass façade systems for many different types of commercial and residential buildings.

9. Describe your company's management structure. Do you have any staff to supervise? How do they perceive your working style? (Describe your relationship with your co-workers).

No, I do not have any staff to supervise. There is little distinction between who is bigger in rank and who is under whom. We simply have a small team of staff who are well versed at what they do individually. There is respect and trust amongst one another.

10. What was the most significant thing you learned in the first six months?

I realize that I cannot afford to take things for granted. I was living all alone in far away from my friends and family. I realize I need a plan in life to succeed.



11. Were there any issues in the adjustment process? Was there anyone assigned to help you adjust to the environment?

There wasn't much of an issue because, both my partner and myself studied in Melbourne some years back. So the 'Aussie way of life' was nothing new. However, my boss and some close colleagues were always there to help out.

12. How different is the business culture in Sydney compared to Singapore?

It's totally different. I guess, a society that is culturally, environmentally, geographically different would possess different ethics, believes, people thoughts, food and entertainment would present a different business method. The people here tend to be more vocal in their ideas and opinions. Communication within the work environment is usually very direct. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. I think they dare to do things differently and break the norm as long as it makes good prospective sense to them.

Social Environment & Culture

13. What were the first few days like? (What were your initial feelings and thoughts?)

I had to get used to the Aussie slang all over again. The weather was cooler compared to Singapore. I realized how nice the houses were and how cheap the car prices are! However, the cost of living is slightly higher and we had to get used to the prices. I miss the cheap coffee in Singapore.

14. How did you get yourself acclimatized to the surrounding & culture?



Because there are almost 50 different cultures in Sydney, there wasn't a need to acclimatize to a particular convention. In Sydney, apart from the locals, there are many migrants from the Middle East, Europe, Asia and even Africa. You couldn't tell where someone is from until you ask. I didn't feel that I had to be 'inducted' to live a new way of life.

15. What was your first big "aha" about the culture?

The racial riots in Cronulla beach showed me how sensitive racial issues can be. It was definitely an eye opener for me. The whole incident tells me how protective the Aussies can be towards their way of life and towards their own people.

16. What surprised you about the way people thought / worked? Did you face any conflict / misunderstandings based on cultural differences?

After witnessing the Cronulla beach incidents, I became about people's perception. I realised people could live in peace as long as there was mutual respect. I try to accommodate and blend-in. So far, I have not encountered any cultural conflicts on my own.

17. Who do you mainly socialize with? (People from your own culture, third-country expatriates, or host-country nationals)?

I have friends who are local Australians, some friends from other parts of Southeast Asia, European friends. Basically, I mingle with many different people from different cultures and from different parts of the world.



Personal Perspective

18. Do you feel you have changed as a result of working abroad? If so, how?

No, I don't think I have changed. I am still the same person. I haven't changed the way I speak, dress or live. I still know where to place my 'lahs' when I speak to another Singaporean. Maybe I've just grown wiser as a person.

19. What do you miss most after moving overseas? (Egg. Food? Entertainment?)

I miss the food!!! Nasi lemak, Roti Prata, Teh Tarik!!! I miss having all these food with friends after work while we grumble about our bosses and work life in Singapore.

20. How does it feel when you return home during your holidays?

I've got mixed feelings about it. I look forward to meeting my family and close friends and my dog, Angel. I look forward to stuffing myself with all the food I miss. But I hate the weather and the thought of not having a car back in Singapore.

21. What are some of the things you enjoy most about Singapore?

Food, family and friends... The 3 'F's.

22. What, if any, are the things you dislike about living in Singapore.

No comments... I'm just going to say I wouldn't want to come back unless I have no other choice.



23. What advise would you give to someone who is planning to work overseas?

They have my full support. They should do it without a doubt. Find out more about the place and its people. Get your accommodation sorted out as soon as possible. Be open-minded. Lastly, take a chance and just do it.

24. Any final thoughts you would like to share?

You've really reminded me of the food I miss.



Appendix A2 – Australian Population by Country of Birth

MAIN COUNTRIES OF BIRTH OF THE POPULATION						
	1954(a)	1961(a)	1971(a)	1981(a)	1995(b)	2005(b)
	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000
United Kingdom(c)	664.2	755.4	1,081.30	1,075.80	1,220.90	1,137.40
New Zealand	43.4	47	74.1	160.7	304.2	455.1
Italy	119.9	228.3	288.3	275	261.6	224.3
China	10.3	14.5	17.1	25.2	107.2	191.2
Vietnam	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	40.7	157.8	177.7
India	12	14.2	28.7	41	80	138.7
Philippines	0.2	0.4	2.3	14.8	98.3	129.4
Greece	25.9	77.3	159	145.8	142.3	127.2
Germany	65.4	109.3	110	109.3	120.1	115.2
South Africa	6	7.9	12.2	26.5	58.8	113.8
Malaysia	2.3	5.8	14.4	30.5	82.8	100.3
Netherlands	52	102.1	98.6	95.1	96.1	87.7
Lebanon	3.9	7.3	23.9	49.4	77.1	85.3
Hong Kong (SAR of China)	1.6	3.5	5.4	15.3	76.6	76.2
Total overseas-born	1,285.80	1,778.30	2,545.90	2,950.90	4,164.10	4,829.50
Australia	7,700.10	8,729.40	10,173.10	11,388.80	13,907.70	15,499.10
Total population(d)	8,986.50	10,508.20	12,719.50	14,516.90	18,071.80	20,328.60

(a) Census counts.

(b) Estimated resident population at 30 June. For 2005, data are preliminary.

(c) Includes Ireland in 1954, 1961 and 1971.

(d) Includes country of birth 'Not stated' and 'At sea'.

[Source: Migration, Australia \(3412.0\); Estimated Resident Population.](#)



Appendix A3 – Birthplace of Parents of Australian-Born People - 2001

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



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