

The International Assignment Challenge International assignments provide a means for managing strategic business risks and exploiting business opportunities. A successful assignment results in valuable benefits for an organization and an assignee.

Gothandapani Volume 7 Otago Management Graduate Review Managing Expatriates on International Assignments Gitte Brynningesen Introduction The world is becoming more and more global and to be successful, many companies have to compete on the global playing field. This is due to the fact that costs associated with the development and marketing of new products are too great to be amortized only over one market and production costs can be cheaper elsewhere around the world. This globalization of companies is making it more important than ever to understand how multinational enterprises can operate more effectively. According to Harvey and Moeller there are currently , subsidiaries of multinational corporations operating globally. Expatriate managers continue to be a viable means for exercising control over foreign operations and they can therefore have a direct impact on organizational performance. This, together with the underlined fact about the growth in the expatriate cadre worldwide, makes it of highly interest to examine the HRM process of international assignments. Furthermore, an international assignment is the single more powerful experience in shaping the perspective and capabilities of effective global leaders. People are the key to success; they are the ones behind the strategy. This paper will discuss some of the most relevant stages of the IHRM process, beginning with the selection and concluding with the repatriation stage. It begins with a few definitions and then describes the IHRM process, where each stage is described and discussed in terms of contradictions in the literature. The paper concludes with implications for the company. Note that the version presented here is a condensed extract from a substantially more complete original paper. It is thus the aggregate of the various HRM systems used to manage people in the multinational corporation, both at home and overseas. Strategic human resource management SHRM is used to explicitly link HRM with the strategic management processes of the organization and to emphasize coordination or congruence among the various human resource management practices. This definition shows that managing people is one of the aspects of SIHRM, both domestic and international. This means low internal consistency with the rest of the company and high external consistency with the local environment. This approach is consistent with a polycentric approach to MNC management Taylor et al. In the polycentric approach the MNC treats each subsidiary as a distinct national entity with some decision making autonomy. This means high internal consistency and low external consistency. The parent company is replicating the HRM policies and practices used in the home country to its overseas affiliates, leaving the overseas affiliates with almost no autonomy. An integrative SIHRM orientation attempts to take the best approaches and use them throughout the organization in the creation of a worldwide system. This approach is consistent with the geocentric approach that recognises that each part affiliates and headquarters makes a unique contribution with its unique competence. Staffing subsidiary locations focuses on using the most qualified personnel regardless of nationality, which includes both local and home country nationals, but also third country nationals, which are managers from neither the parent nor the host country. All aspects of people management and thereby the process of managing expatriates on international assignments apply to all companies engaged in transferring people across national borders. This paper will therefore not distinguish between companies in different internationalisation stages. The Process of Managing Expatriates It is very important to develop a basic framework for the discussion of how to manage expatriates on global or international assignments. They identify a Global Assignment Success Cycle to conceptualize the term people management through. They view people management as a set of activities instead of a function of a specific department. This means that each activity builds upon the others as the process becomes an integrated package. They identify five generic functions of managing people: No matter how many specific phases the process is divided into the process of managing and supporting expatriates on international assignments can be divided into three broader phases; before the assignment, during the assignment and after the assignment. The phase before the assignment would usually contain identification, selection, training and

development, and compensation. The argument for putting compensation in the phase before the assignment is that it is typically agreed upon before the expatriate go on the assignment. This paper will look at the stages recruitment and selection, training and development, adjustment, integration, repatriation. These stages are chosen since it seems like they have the highest impact on the success or failure of the process. Before the Assignment This phase contains selection and training of the expatriate. The time before the assignment can vary, sometimes the international assignment arises because of problems that have to be fixed quickly, other times it is a process that expands over several months. No matter how long the time horizon is the company should pay attention to the selection and training stages in the process of managing expatriates. Selection Some international assignments arise because of a problem in a subsidiary. When this is the case, many companies have a strong desire to fix the problem as fast as possible, resulting in an obsession with the technical and managerial qualifications of the candidates and their presumed ability to solve the short-term problem. This process, however, ignores the human resource department and their ability to help. They only consider a narrow range of potential candidates. This process also overlooks the ability of the candidates and their families to adjust to and function effectively in a new cultural environment. This technically oriented selection process can easily result in costly premature returns or ineffective performance throughout the assignment Black et al. This triggers the need for recruitment and selection. In recent years the trend has moved towards viewing expatriate assignments as unattractive. This makes the selection process more about finding people who are willing to go rather than selecting the best candidate from a large pool of applicants Selmer, If this is the case the selection process might become less important. However, even though there might only be a slight number of potential candidates there will presumably always be a need for some kind of selection, for which reason this stage is described and discussed here. According to Forster , one of the main reasons put forward for a purported high failure rate among expatriate employees is the inadequate selection criteria used by many multinational corporations. Others state that selection can influence the adjustment; if you choose the right people they are more likely to adjust to the foreign culture and environment and thereby succeed in the international assignment. This is essential for the company making selection of great importance Anderson, When companies send people on international assignments they want the highest possible return on investment. For this to be possible, according to Black et al. Furthermore, when a company increases its global reach and moves through various stages of globalization, it needs to pay more attention to the selection process, which becomes increasingly important. Researchers have identified several factors that should be considered in the selection of successful international managers. These factors include, among others: Many researchers Black et al. After the company has decided which selection criteria are most appropriate and relevant, it needs to determine how to evaluate candidates effectively on those criteria. There is a wide range of selection tools available; however, most companies tend to rely on a very limited range Black et al. Some of the most used selection methods are: These methods each have their strengths and weaknesses for which reason a combination of selection methods would be optimal to use in selecting the right candidate Black et al. Harris and Brewster are questioning the selection process and they show that the expatriate selection is often an ad-hoc process. They suggest that the selection process can be started through a casual conversation about an assignment between executives chatting around the coffee machine. Another thing to consider is who should evaluate the candidates. Most often, only one individual, the line manger with the overall responsibility for the international unit, makes the decision, although others may also be involved in the selection process. The human resources department is often underutilized; it often plays an after-the-fact role. Sending an expatriate to a foreign country often involves sending a whole family. This is achieved by evaluating the candidate from a systems perspective that includes family as an integral part Black et al. Training International assignments are often more complex than domestic assignments since they involve going to another country and a different culture. This is where training is helpful; it can prepare the expatriate going on the international assignment. Most studies involve the training stage in the process of managing expatriates on international assignments leading people to think that training is of great importance. However, there seem to be contradictions in the literature about the effect of cross-cultural training. The study suggests that the more tailored and relevant the pre-departure cross-cultural training, the more expectations were either

met or positively exceeded. The study shows that having accurate expectations, in turn, positively affects cross-cultural adjustment, and that accurate expectations can be formed by tailored and relevant pre-departure cross-cultural training. Bennett, Aston, and Colquhoun also found that if cross-cultural training is competently managed and well executed it can be a key intervention in promoting assignment success, averting failure, and increasing the return on investment for all parties involved: Other studies do, however, find contradictory results. A study conducted by Puck, Kittler, and Wright found that cross-cultural training has little if any effect on general, interactional or work-setting expatriate adjustment. They did however find a significant impact of foreign language competence. This study focused on pre-departure cross-cultural training which means that a possible implication for practice is that future expatriates may receive sequential training or post-arrival training as mentioned earlier. From this it is difficult to determine if cross-cultural training have an impact on adjustment and thereby the success of the expatriate. And it seems like that companies do not pay that much attention to cross-cultural training. Gertsen found that although most personnel managers claim that training is important, not very much is actually done in this respect. Only about 20 per cent of the companies surveyed offer any kind of formal pre- departure training. The reasons mentioned for not offering training can be grouped into three main types: Some of the reasons stated by the Danish companies in the research by Gertsen include that they send to few employees abroad to make it worthwhile, they only send people abroad if they already have international experience; therefore, they do not need training, they only send their employees to countries that are culturally so much like Denmark that training is unnecessary, they cannot afford it, and they do not have time for training Gertsen, In the past, US multinationals have been reluctant to provide even a basic level of pre- departure training, however, this is slowly changing. A study from found that only 25 per cent of US multinationals offered extensive pre- departure training programs and a study found that only 13 per cent indicated that they would offer expatriates a pre-departure program. A survey from showed that about 62 per cent of US companies offer some type of cross-cultural preparation, but it also found that on average, those who receive training get less than a day of it Black et al. These different findings show that cross-cultural training might not be given the attention it should and that companies might not be aware of its importance. Even though there is contradiction in the literature about the impact of cross-cultural training it seems to be of some importance and should not be ignored. During the Assignment When the expatriates and their families are send overseas adjustment and integration are very important aspects of the process of managing expatriates. A review of the empirical research and findings on the U-Curve theory showed that the majority of the articles indicate support for the U-Curve hypothesis; however, several problems prevented them from simply accepting U-Curve as a supported phenomenon. Most of the studies did not offer statistical tests of the data or report statistically non-significant findings. Even though the U-Curve Theory is a description of adjustment over time, only two out of eighteen studies were longitudinal in nature. Thus, the lack of consistent methodological rigor in many of the studies makes generalizing their results problematic. Furthermore, studies operationalized adjustment in very different ways, which can account for some of the differences in the findings and make comparing findings problematic. To be useful for companies dealing with managing expatriates on international assignments the theory should be a theoretical framework of how and why individuals move from one stage to the next, rather than a description of phases of adjustment. Vance and Paik state that during the culture shock stage the individual is struggling with four major adjustment dimensions in the host country:

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Want to Work and Live Abroad? Here are some things to be aware of. Global mobility is on the rise. Although the type of international assignments may be moving in a different direction from that of the past, the numbers are steadily increasing.

Assessing process as well as product Assessing individual as well as group learning Challenges for students Coordination costs represent time and energy that group work consumes that individual work does not, including the time it takes to coordinate schedules, arrange meetings, meet, correspond, make decisions collectively, integrate the contributions of group members, etc. The time spent on each of these tasks may not be great, but together they are significant. However, if coordination costs are excessive or are not factored into the structure of group assignments, groups tend to miss deadlines, their work is poorly integrated, motivation suffers, and creativity declines. Instructors should note that coordination costs increase with: The more people in the group, the more schedules to accommodate, parts to delegate, opinions to consider, pieces to integrate, etc. Smaller groups have lower coordination costs. Heterogeneity of group members tends to raise coordination costs, especially if there are language issues to contend with, cultural differences to bridge, and disparate skills to integrate. However, since diversity of perspectives is one of the principle advantages of groups, this should not necessarily be avoided. To help reduce or mitigate coordination costs: Designate some class time for group meetings. Use group resumes or skills inventories to help teams delegate subtasks. Warn students about time-consuming stages and tasks. Actively build communication and conflict resolution skills. Designate time in the project schedule for the group to integrate parts. Motivation costs refers to the adverse effect on student motivation of working in groups, which often involves one or more of these phenomena: Free riding occurs when one or more group members leave most or all of the work to a few, more diligent, members. Free riding “if not addressed proactively” tends to erode the long-term motivation of hard-working students. Social loafing lowers group productivity. Conflict within groups can erode morale and cause members to withdraw. Conflict “if not effectively addressed” can leave group members with a deeply jaundiced view of teams. To address both preexisting and potential motivation problems: Explain why working in groups is worth the frustration. Increase individual accountability by combining group assessments with individual assessments. Teach conflict-resolution skills and reinforce them by role-playing responses to hypothetical team conflict scenarios. Assess group processes via periodic process reports, self-evaluations, and peer evaluations. Intellectual costs refer to characteristics of group behavior that can reduce creativity and productivity. To reduce intellectual costs and increase the creativity and productivity of groups: This forestalls groupthink and helps the group generate and consider more different ideas. Encourage group members to reflect on and highlight their contributions in periodic self-evaluations. Create structured opportunities at the halfway point of projects to allow students to reevaluate and revise their strategies and approaches. Challenges for instructors While group assignments have benefits for instructors, they also have complexities that instructors should consider carefully, for example in these areas: While group assignments may save instructors time in some areas e. Functioning effectively in teams requires students to develop strong communication, coordination, and conflict resolution skills, which not all instructors feel qualified to teach. Many instructors are also reluctant to devote class time to reinforcing these skills and may be uncomfortable dealing with the interpersonal issues that can arise in groups. In other words, dealing proactively with team dynamics may push some instructors out of their comfort zone. Assessing process as well as product: Assessing teamwork skills and group dynamics i. Effective evaluation of process requires thoughtful consideration of learning objectives and a combination of assessment approaches. This creates layers of complexity that instructors may not anticipate. Assessing individual as well as group learning: Group grades can hide significant differences in learning, yet teasing out which team members did and did not contribute to the group or learn the lessons of the assignment can be difficult. Once again, this adds complexity to group projects that instructors often underestimate. Find effective strategies to help faculty address these issues in the design of effective group projects.

3: The International Assignment

The challenges of managing international assignments. Unit VIII Case Study To read the case study below, you must first log into the myCSU Student Portal and access the Business Source Complete database found in the CSU Online Library.

Describe how to prepare for an international assignment. Discuss the acculturation process as an expatriate. Describe effective strategies for living and working abroad. Suppose you have the opportunity to work or study in a foreign country. You may find the prospect of an international assignment intriguing, challenging, or even frightening; indeed, most professionals employed abroad will tell you they pass through all three stages at some point during the assignment. They may also share their sense of adjustment, even embrace of their host culture, and the challenges of reintegration into their native country. An international assignment, whether as a student or a career professional, requires work and preparation, and should be given the time and consideration of any major life change. When you lose a loved one, it takes time to come to terms with the loss. When someone you love is diagnosed with a serious illness, the news may take some time to sink in. When a new baby enters your family, a period of adjustment is predictable and prolonged. All these major life changes can stress an individual beyond their capacity to adjust. International business assignments are a reflection of increased global trade, and as trade decreases, they may become an expensive luxury. As technology allows for instant face-to-face communication, and group collaboration on documents via cloud computing and storage, the need for physical travel may be reduced. But regardless of whether your assignment involves relocation abroad, supervision of managers in another country at a distance, or supervision by a foreign manager, you will need to learn more about the language, culture, and customs that are not your own. You will need to compare and contrast, and seek experiences that lend insight, in order to communicate more effectively. An efficient, effective manager in any country is desirable, but one with international experience even more so. You will represent your company and they will represent you, including a considerable financial investment, either by your employer in the case of a professional assignment or by whoever is financing your education in the case of studying abroad. That investment should not be taken lightly. As many as 40 percent of foreign-assigned employees terminate their assignments early, Tu, H. Of those that remain, almost 50 percent are less than effective. Your experience with other cultures may have come firsthand, but for most, a foreign location like Paris is an idea formed from exposure to images via the mass media. Paris may be known for its art, as a place for lovers, or as a great place to buy bread. But if you have only ever known about a place through the lens of a camera, you have only seen the portraits designed and portrayed by others. You will lack the multidimensional view of one who lives and works in Paris, and even if you are aware of its history, its economic development, or its recent changes, these are all academic observations until the moment of experience. That is not to say that research does not form a solid foundation in preparation for an international assignment, but it does reinforce the distinction between a media-fabricated ideal and real life. Awareness of this difference is an important step as you prepare yourself for life in a foreign culture. If the decision is yours to make, take your time. If others are involved, and family is a consideration, you should take even more care with this important decision. Residence abroad requires some knowledge of the language, an ability to adapt, and an interest in learning about different cultures. If family members are not a part of the decision, or lack the language skills or interest, the assignment may prove overwhelming and lead to failure. Sixty-four percent of expatriate respondents who terminated their assignment early indicated that family concerns were the primary reason. Should you accept the international assignment? How flexible are you? Do you need everything spelled out or can you go with the flow? Can you adapt to new ways of doing business? Are you interested in the host culture and willing to dedicate the time and put forth the effort to learn more about it? What has been your experience to date working with people from distinct cultures? What are your language skills at present, and are you interested in learning a new language? Is your family supportive of the assignment? Will this assignment benefit your family? How long are you willing to commit to the assignment? What resources are available to help you prepare, move, and

adjust? Can you stand being out of the loop, even if you are in daily written and oral communication with the home office? What is your relationship with your employer, and can it withstand the anticipated stress and tension that will result as not everything goes according to plan? Is the cultural framework of your assignment similar to or unlike your own, and how ready are you to adapt to differences in such areas as time horizon, masculinity versus femininity, or direct versus indirect styles of communication? This list of questions could continue, and feel free to add your own as you explore the idea of an international assignment. An international assignment is not like a domestic move or reassignment. Within the same country, even if there are significantly different local customs in place, similar rules, laws, and ways of doing business are present. In a foreign country, you will lose those familiar traditions and institutions and have to learn many new ways of accomplishing your given tasks. What once took a five-minute phone call may now take a dozen meetings and a month to achieve, and that may cause you some frustration. It may also cause your employer frustration as you try to communicate how things are done locally, and why results are not immediate, as they lack even your limited understanding of your current context. Your relationship with your employer will experience stress, and your ability to communicate your situation will require tact and finesse. Successful expatriates are adaptable, open to learning new languages, cultures, and skilled at finding common ground for communication. Rather than responding with frustration, they learn the new customs and find the advantage to get the job done. They form relationships and are not afraid to ask for help when it is warranted or required. They feel secure in their place as explorer, and understand that mistakes are a given, even as they are unpredictable. Being a stranger is no easy task, but they welcome the challenge with energy and enthusiasm. Acculturation Process Acculturation The transition to living abroad. Canadian Bureau for International Education.

4: The International Assignment Challenge |

The Chicago Food and Beverage Company (CFB Co) is an American multinational with subsidiaries in North America, Europe and Asia. The case is about the alignment of CFB Co internationalization strategy and the orientation of the head office in regard to its international human resource management.

THE CHALLENGE OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS pdf

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