



## Roles of the Expatriate

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### ABSTRACT

*Expatriates tend to have a higher profile, so reducing the incidence, and thereby the cost, is of some strategic importance. It should be pointed out that the spouse (or accompany Partner) carries a heavy burden. Upon arrival in the country of assignment, the responsibility for settling the family into its new home falls on the spouses, who may have left behind a career, along with friends and social support networks.*

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Expatriates are the process of identifying and attracting potential international candidates for future employment. The reasons for using expatriates are not mutually exclusive. They do, however, underpin expectations about the roles staff play as a consequence of being transferred from one location to another country. We shall now take a look at these roles.

#### The Expatriate as an Agent of Direct Control

The use of staff transfer can be regarded as a bureaucratic control mechanism, (Welch et al., 1994) where the primary role is that of ensuring compliance through direct supervision. To a certain extent, using expatriates for control reflects an ethnocentric predisposition, but this can be important in ensuring subsidiary compliance, enabling strategic objectives for local operations to be achieved.

#### The Expatriate as an Agent of Socialization

This role is related to the use of corporate culture as an informal control mechanism. There is an implicit expectation that expatriates assist in the transfer of shared values and beliefs. Attempts to instill corporate values and norms ritualized in the form of certain expected behaviours often have negative results at the subsidiary level. The Commencement of the German Operations.

International assignments do assist knowledge sharing and competence transfer, and encourage adoption of common work practices, aspects of which may comprise elements of corporate culture. Staff in the various organizational units may be exposed to different viewpoints and perspectives that will shape their behaviour and may reinforce their feeling of belonging.

#### Expatriates as Network Builders

People tend to nurture and protect their networks, to be very selective about the way they use their connections and to evaluate the potential damage to key individuals in their networks if the connection was to be inappropriately utilized.

#### Expatriates as Boundary Spanners

Boundary spanning refers to activities, such as gathering information that bridges internal and external organizational contexts. Expatriates are considered boundary spanners because they can collect host-country information, act as representatives of their firms in the host country and can influence agents. For example, attending a social function at a foreign embassy can provide the expatriate with an opportunity to

network, gather market intelligence and promote the firm's profile at high level.

#### Expatriate as Language Nodes

Many multinational firms operate through language standardization - or a common corporate language, usually English.

#### Reasons for Expatriation

**A Strategic Perspective :-** The various issues of expatriation are reviewed in order to look more closely at the problems and perspectives that they arise. The analogy of the missionary has been used because quite often. Like the missionary, the expatriate goes abroad in order to fill the needs of the parent organization to introduce methods of working, new technology or marketing methods, and sometimes to propagate his corporate culture. Like the missionary, the expatriate is preaching a message. When this message is taken directly from the home country and implanted to the host country, management techniques and methods principles to the local in appropriate to the host culture. Adopting principles to the local conditions may be one way of doing things, but the cultural values on which principles are based may be quite different.

*(a) Fulfilling the strategic needs of the organization.* Within ethnocentric Expatriation organizations expatriates from the parent company manage subsidiaries. This may be regarded as the highest level of missionary work and often occurs at the early stages in the development of international organization. In the polycentric organizations locals manage subsidiaries. Hence there are few Notes expatriate assignments. A regiocentric organization provides good opportunities for expatriate careers within a specific region such as Europe and like the geocentric organization is staffed without regard to the expatriates' nationalities. Shell may well be a good example of a geocentric approach.

Career planning is important to both manager and key employee and to the organization for which they work, for the following reasons:-

- ♦ *Employee loyalty:* if an organization has a good career programme, then good and ambitious employees can be retained.
- ♦ *Avoiding future shock:* an organization should be prepared for the future.

- ◆ *Performance motivation*: knowing the context of your jobs is a good motivator.
- ◆ *Integrating objectives*: a good career programme should integrate the needs and objectives of the organization in its future development, with the needs and aspirations of individual

(b) *Meeting individuals' career aspirations*: Not only do managers as individuals have a responsibility for their own career development, they also have a key role to play in the organization in respect of other people's careers. Managers and key employees should therefore:

- ◆ Include career development within the performance appraisal and review process
- ◆ Facilitate job experience and training to fulfill an individual's career plan.

#### Is Expatriation Problematic?

The demand for expatriates is increasing as 830 a rapid growth of multinational companies and international joint ventures as expatriates meet the needs of the parent company to implement corporate strategy or supply a skill or knowledge, which is not available locally. However, expatriates are expensive to employ as the cost of additional allowances and redeployment increases the base salary by 25-100%. In addition, expatriate assignments present to them and their families with a number of difficulties and challenges.

#### Choosing Expatriates

In order to make sure that expatriate assignments are as successful as possible, companies need a means of selecting people who are likely to succeed. Phatak (1992) lists nine skills that companies look for when selecting their international managers.

- ◆ technical ability
- ◆ language aptitude
- ◆ managerial skills
- ◆ personal motives
- ◆ cultural empathy
- ◆ emotional stability and maturity
- ◆ adaptability and flexibility
- ◆ adaptability of family
- ◆ diplomatic skills.

#### Acculturation (Modification of Culture)

Once selected, the level of acculturation in the foreign assignment may well determine the level of success of expatriates. Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) point to four dimensions that relate to successful expatriate acculturation: self-oriented dimension, other-oriented dimension, perceptual dimension and cultural toughness dimension.

**1. Self-orientation dimension: This relates to those activities that serve to strengthen self-esteem, self-confidence and mental hygiene. The dimension contains three sub-factors:**

- (i) *Reinforcement substitution*: replacing activities which bring pleasure and happiness in the home culture with similar but different activities in the host culture (e.g. art, sport, cuisine, music), that is, learning to enjoy a parallel activity in the host culture;
- (ii) *Stress reduction*: managing stress through adaptation and creating 'stability zones' (e.g. through meditation, writing a diary, pastimes, religion) which can be retreated to, in order to develop a rhythm of engagement with the host culture and withdrawal from it;
- (iii) *Technical competence*: being able to accomplish the objectives of the assignment by employing technical abilities for the job.

**2. Others-oriented dimension: This relates to activities and attributes which enhance the expatriate's ability to interact effectively with host nationals. This dimension contains two sub-factors:**

- (i) *Relationship development*: the ability to develop long-lasting friendships (e.g. mentor relationships);
- (ii) *Willingness to communicate*: including the willingness to use the host language (rather than fluency in the language), and involving observation, listening, experimentation and risk taking, and active participation.

**3. Perceptual dimension: This relates to the ability to understand why foreigners behave the way they do. It involves being non-judgmental. While not reflected in classic competences, it may be possible to provide training to develop people's awareness.**

**4. Cultural toughness dimension: This is based on the assumption that some cultures are more difficult to adapt to as they are more different than other cultures from one's own.**