

Transcription Lesson 6: Expatriate Training

The most common staffing strategy to fill international positions is an expatriate assignment. This occurs when the employee expatriates to a foreign country to live and work for at least one year in order to fulfil a specific role and then repatriates back to the home country. Spouses and children typically relocate with expatriates, which adds additional challenges to the work assignment, but also provides the expatriate employee with a social support system.

A long assignment can mean a significant investment for the MNE. Two key reasons for expatriates failing are the inability of the spouse, or of the employee, to adjust to the new environment – physically or culturally. Common complaints include a lack of appropriate cross-cultural training to prepare expatriates and their families, lack of long-term career planning, and difficulties in adjusting to the demands of an expatriate assignment. Therefore, assessing an expatriate's likelihood of success in his or her international assignment will allow the MNE to identify training needs and prevent the assignment from failing. It is recommended that training in host-country experiences and activities be given to every person selected for expatriation. The prescribed book, on page 452, makes the following recommendations on training, based on the length of the expatriate assignment:

First, basic level training which focuses on providing information on practicalities in so-called area briefings, cultural briefings, and the use of interpreters. It often includes language training, which may focus on survival phrases (such as 'good morning', 'thank you' and 'please take me to this address').

Second, intermediate training. This type of training would include cultural assimilation training such as role plays and discussion of cases and critical incidences. Experienced expatriates will lead these groups.

Third, advanced training – also known as full immersion training. Advanced training has the aim of intensively exposing the trainee to the foreign culture and language. Expats may spend a few days at the new location, guided by a sponsor, in a situation resembling the future role. Sponsors from the home and host organisations should be identified to mentor expatriates and to help them manage the challenges they will experience during their assignment. These sponsors help the employee maintain and enhance the connection between headquarters and the subsidiary. Ideally, those chosen as sponsors should have experience in international assignments (having been abroad themselves) and should be empathetic and understanding about the experience as it can be extremely stressful (Molinsky & Hahn, 2016). Involving the spouse and children in expatriate training is advisable, as they will be sharing the expat experience and can be an important source of personal support. If the MNE has the resources, it can also offer specialist relocation services firms to find a suitable place

References: Kraimer, M, Bolino, M & Mead, B. 2016. Themes in expatriate and repatriate research over four decades: What do we know and what do we still need to learn? *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 3(1):83–109; Molinsky, A & Hahn, M. 2016. 5 *Tips for managing successful overseas assignments*. [Online], Available at: <https://hbr.org/2016/03/5-tips-for-managing-successful-overseas-assignments> [23 October 2020]; Peng, MW & Meyer, KE. 2019. *International business*. 3rd edition. Andover, United Kingdom: Cengage Learning.

for the expat to live, the removal of furniture, identification of suitable schools for the children, and organisation of visa and work permits.

In addition to training, Molinsky and Hahn (2016) make recommendations for preparing successful overseas assignments. They advise selecting the right person for the right reasons. Sending someone on an international assignment is resource intensive, so there should be an urgent organisational need and valid reason why the need cannot be met through hiring a local candidate. Furthermore, the person who is selected for the assignment should be open-minded and committed to adapt to the local culture, should develop specific skills because of the assignment, and should ultimately contribute to the organisation as a result of these skills. Kraimer, Bolino and Mead (2016) recommend that expatriates be guaranteed positions within the MNE on their completion of the international assignment to reassure them of their future employment within the organisation. These positions should effectively use expatriates' skills and knowledge acquired while overseas. Furthermore, MNEs should show that they value the international experience of their expatriates through pay and promotional opportunities.

References: Kraimer, M, Bolino, M & Mead, B. 2016. Themes in expatriate and repatriate research over four decades: What do we know and what do we still need to learn? *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 3(1):83–109; Molinsky, A & Hahn, M. 2016. 5 *Tips for managing successful overseas assignments*. [Online], Available at: <https://hbr.org/2016/03/5-tips-for-managing-successful-overseas-assignments> [23 October 2020]; Peng, MW & Meyer, KE. 2019. *International business*. 3rd edition. Andover, United Kingdom: Cengage Learning.