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The reasons for managers – expatriates’ failure and their problems at work¹

1. Introduction

The research on expatriates involves two approaches concerning the influence of cultural factors on such managers’ work. One of the approaches is called the **divergence** approach and is oriented towards the diversity of different management methods, attitudes and behaviours of employees coming from different countries. This approach is also called the **situational** approach [Sitko-Lutek 2004, 2.16] because it assumes that managing a company in a given country (in which the company’s branch is located) will take the existing situation into account, which means that cultural, economic, political and social aspects are considered.

Another approach is called the **convergence** approach. It assumes that there exists only one universal management model involving employees’ behaviour and attitudes. This model is successful in case of every country regardless the cultural and social diversities.² Such an approach causes a lot of problems connected with e.g. “the risk of transplant rejection”,³ which means difficulties

¹ **Expatriate** – also *expat*, is a manager who comes from the country of the origin of a company’s headquarters or from the third country and is ultimately transferred by the headquarters for long or short contracts to foreign branches of the company or he/she travels among different branches of a given corporation: S. Przytuła, Rola menedżerów-ekspatriantów w transferze praktyk ZZL w przedsiębiorstwach międzynarodowych [in:] *Kulturowe uwarunkowania zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim*, M. Juchnowicz, Wolters Kluwer, Kraków, 2009, p. 476.

² C. Brewster indicates two paradimes of international management: **universal** (which explains the point of convergence approach described in this article) and **contextual** (regarding divergence approach), *Międzynarodowe i porównawcze zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi*, “Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi” No. 6/2003 pp. 9–12.

³ See more: R. Rutka, M. Czarska, *Wpływ kultury kraju pochodzenia dominującego kapitału*

in the acceptance of the culture, methods of work and behavioural patterns proposed by the country where the headquarters is set. According to M. Bartosik-Purgat “cultural features of different societies arising from cultural convergence will be similar to the so-called Western values characteristic for Western European countries or the U.S.A. In some cases it might mean the creolization process, which means absorption and joining foreign values, traditions and beliefs with the local ones. Creolization is true mainly for poorly developed or developing civilizations. Japanese culture might be an exception because on the one hand it is the imitating culture, and on the other hand it is the imitated culture” [2008, p. 296].

However, from another point of view, the practice of international companies operating on the global market of the 80ies and the 90ies proves that the *only best way of management pattern* might influence company's successes⁴ regardless the cultural background.

According to A. Sitko-Lutek, “the attempt to decide which of the approaches (convergence or divergence) is more important, creates immense difficulties and comes down to managers' choice: is the transfer of behaviour and techniques among countries more important in connection with cooperating in the same environment, or is this the matter of greater knowledge, more extensive and diverse practice and techniques?” [2004, p.16]

In relation to A. Poczowski's opinion, “organizational cultures of some of the companies constitute a kind of mixture made of elements common for both models and they are shaped by the model whose features dominate” [2002, p. 28]. This tendency was confirmed by the research on managing panel in 35 international companies based in Poland. The results of the research indicate that “[...] it is difficult to describe the accuracy (background) of personal practices in global organisations. They have branches in different countries, where the values, models and norms of behaviour intersperse and on account of that it is difficult to find from which cultural background the human resources actions are derived. The tendency towards behaviour and personal practices universality is confirmed” [Listwan, Stor 2008, p. 285].

It means that practical international management is based rather on extracting methods, tools and models chosen from the practices of different countries (not just copying and transferring the whole models) and instilling

na kulturę organizacji działających w Polsce [in:] *Kulturowe i kadrowe problemy internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw*, P. Wachowiak, SGH, Warszawa, 2008, p. 69.

⁴ According to Ł. Sułkowski, however, a uniform management model and a model of Japanese organizational structure were applied in all Japanese branches all over the world in the 90ies, it was a base for criticism and disapprobation of the countries where the branch operated. Nevertheless, the use of Japanese managing methods (kaizen, TQM, quality circles) and instilling them in the American and European background made them to be successful. *Czy kultury organizacyjne zmierzają do unifikacji?*, “Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi” No. 3–4/2002, p. 16.

them in the country where the branch is functioning. It might be said that there are some organizations which are learning and sharing the knowledge. According to D. Simpson “in knowledge-based economy the important fact is the manager distinguishing himself by high qualifications and extensive experience acquired on different international markets. They should understand how employees with different cultural background are able to learn from each other” [2004, p. 313].

2. The reasons for expatriation failure in the literature of the subject and management practice

It is difficult to determine clear boundaries regarding management area defined by the country where the headquarters or the branch is situated. The only items which might be indicated are the factors resulting from the complexity of the international activities. These factors cause a lot of problems in managers-expatriates work. Because of international business activity development, the growing interest in managers-expatriates' problems is observed. The variety of foreign literature as well as empirical research in this area provide a lot of examples confirming a growth of employment within such a group.

The research carried out by S. Colakoglu and P. Caliuri [for: Harvey, Moeller 2009, p. 17] shows that there are about 850,000 branches of international corporations, which might indicate potential employment possibilities for managers-expatriates. The reason for choosing expats for managing positions in most of foreign branches might be a rather quite poor local market of well-qualified managers with international experience. The fact was confirmed by *Corporate Relocation Survey* which indicates that one of the most significant challenges for many of the corporations is the lack and availability of qualified personnel on local markets⁵.

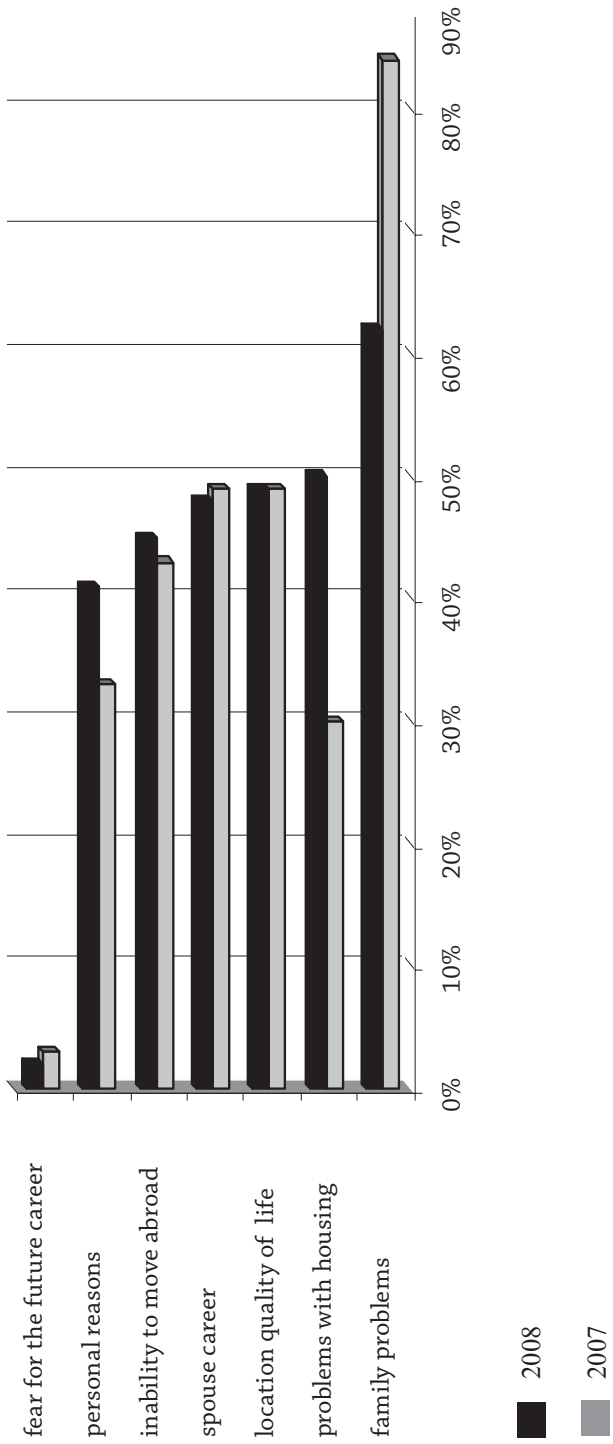
Furthermore, cyclical GMAC Global Relocation Trends research⁶ proves that 65% of studied corporations expect systematic expats' employment growth in the next decade. H. Scullion and C. Brewster also present a growing trend towards the use of expats services [1999, p. 45].

However, on the other hand, the examples of failures and problems connected with employment, development, remuneration, maintenance costs and repatriation of such managers are observed [Harvey, Nivicevic 2001, p. 69 and Harvey, Moeller 2009, p. 17]. The above fact strengthens the limitation of employing expats by corporations in their branches in favour of local managers. The *Corporate Relocation Survey* indicates the following reasons for expatriation failure:

⁵ <http://www.atlasworldgroup.com/survey/results>

⁶ Extended research carried out by GMAC Global Relocation Trends since 1993 with the results published in the form of the report every year. The research concentrates on relocation issues, mobility and adjustment to new working conditions specific for the group of managers. They are carried out in more than 110 countries all over the world and provide an in-depth analysis concerning expatriation costs, personality profile of expats and also present trends and challenges for the future.

Figure 1. The reasons for expatriates' failures



Source: <http://www.atlasworldgroup.com/survey/results>

The above figure suggests that the most common reasons for terminating a contract by expats include: family matters, accommodation problems and the costs of living in a new place, finding a job by a spouse, low territorial mobility of the candidate and other personal reasons.

Other research carried out by J. Shen and V. Edwards among American and Japanese expatriates confirms that the most common reasons of expatriation failure are expats' personal and family problems as well as psychological features and problems with adjusting to other culture [from: Rakowska 2006, p. 409].

The reasons for failures have their beginning in the evaluation of candidates during the recruitment and selection processes. This is the stage when "adjusting" the candidate to requirements connected with working abroad takes place. In *Organization Resources Counsellors'* research, the group of the most important qualifications required for managerial position in regard to foreign contracts during the selection process was defined:

Table 1. Qualifications requirements for managerial positions in international companies (in %).

managerial knowledge and skills	66
achievements in the previous place of work	28
position taken in the organizational structure	4
previous experience in working abroad	2
good command of foreign languages	1
costs of living abroad	1
knowledge of the country of the future assignment	0
marital status	0

Source: J. Bonache, Z. Fernandez, Strategic staffing in multinational companies: a resource-based approach [in:] M. Mendenhall, G. Oddou (eds.), *Readings and Cases in IHRM*, Routledge, 1999.

A strict connection between the selection process and expatriation failure is observed. In most cases, when searching for the appropriate candidate for a vacancy in a foreign company, candidates' knowledge, skills and professional achievements were considered to be the most important. International experience, speaking foreign languages, the knowledge about the country of future work were the least important at the stage of selection.

As it appears neglecting predisposition in the selection stage constitutes the most frequent reason for failure and expatriation problems. The researches made by J. Chew within Australian companies transferring managers to their branches all over the world indicate similar tendency. 87% of respondents indicated

technical competences and knowledge as the most common reasons for expats' success. Psychological features, adaptation abilities and internal motivation are of less importance for 47% of respondents [2004, p. 30].

Numerous examples of failure induce the author to consider the reasons for breaking off the foreign contract by the expatriate. The result of some of the assessment problems, which expats experience, will constitute a reason for preventive actions performed by the researchers in a given area.

The following factors influencing expatriates' actions and dysfunctional behaviour include:

- **individual factors** (mainly personality features, being non-alterable features of an individual),
- **cultural factors** (more susceptible to change, derived from an expatriate's sociocultural environment),
- **organizational factors** (regarding international company, manager's work environment).

1. **Individual** factors connected with an expat's personality and deciding on expatriation failure include:

a) psychological features arising from Big Five⁷ classification: introversion meaning being reserved towards social contacts, lack of optimism and preferences for spending time alone, neurotism which indicates the tendency to worry, states of hostility and anger, the feeling of confusion when meeting people, low openness to new experiences manifested by conventional behaviour and conservative views, low agreeableness, which is shown by egocentrism in contacts with other people.

According to the above listing these are the features which decide about a manager's failure in case of working abroad. They disagree with the required profile of a qualified international manager⁸.

b) Other psychological features include also low motivation for achievements, which means low tendency to undertake difficult tasks, the lack of willingness and readiness for continuous learning and increasing abilities.

Next psychological factor making expats' work abroad even more difficult, might be his/her low resistance to stress which means small ability to cope with depression arising from breaking away from an expat's country or close family.

⁷ Big Five classification is a set of five groups of personality features according to Costa and McCrae: extroversion / introversion, conscientiousness, being open for new experiences, tendency to compromise, emotional stability, for: S. Przytuła, *Psychologia zarządzania. Wybrane zagadnienia*, University of Economics publishing house, Wrocław, 2009, p. 89.

⁸ See: S. Przytuła, *Dobór pracowników na stanowiska kierownicze, Zarządzanie kadrą menedżerską w organizacjach międzynarodowych w Polsce*, T. Listwan, M. Stor, University of Economics publishing house, Wrocław 2008, p. 108.

The above features are also connected with locus of control feature [Przytuła 2008, p. 58]. In international setting, inside control localization is required. This feature characterizes people who are aware they have control over their life and who make autonomic decisions. This is due to their own experience and knowledge.

Another required expats' feature is proactiveness which means that the person is able to control his/her future situation and social environment at present. Such a person is characterized by new goals and possibilities orientation, maximum concentration on the person's achievements, stubbornness and sticking to his/her plans.

It should be emphasized that psychological features are permanent, inborn and very difficult to modify. They are not the characteristics which people can learn, however, according to J. M. Crant as far as proactiveness is concerned "this covers both personality features and contextual features. The most important is not to disregard inborn proactiveness and with different intercultural training use it for creating positive required features" [for: Bańka 2006, p. 102]. It means that inborn psychophysical predispositions, which are immensely important regarding the nature of work or profession, might be reinforced and shaped by appropriate trainings and courses. This is a valuable clue for people who work on adaptation programmes for foreign contracts candidates.

c) A set of above listed psychological features is connected also with expats' career development and shaping. K. Inkson and others indicate two models of international career. The first model describes "foreign contract" for an expat which is the result of international corporation initiative to create a vacancy for a new employee. It is called an *expatriate assignment (EA)*. Another model of professional career is called "private odyssey" or an *overseas experience – OE*⁹. It comes from internal motivation to develop oneself in international setting. The second model is characteristic for expats, also called "free agents"¹⁰. The comparison of both career models is presented in Table 2:

⁹ The importance of this feature in building an expat's career (self-initiated assignment) is underlined also by J. Bonache, C. Brewster [in:] *Preface: Knowledge, International Mobility and Careers*, "International Studies of Management and Organizations", Vol. 37, No. 3, Fall 2007, p. 6.

¹⁰ If an expat is not engaged in the interests of headquarter or a branch, if he/she is not engaged in the process of management practices transfer, he is called a "free agent". Such a person is characterised by flexibility of actions, courage and willingness to take risk, cares mainly of his/her career, likes challenges, freedom of acting and thinks highly of financial benefits and immaterial benefits regarding the expatriation. For: S.Przytuła, *Rola menedżerów-ekspatriantów w transferze praktyk ZZL w przedsiębiorstwach międzynarodowych* [in:] *Kulturowe uwarunkowania zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim*, M. Juchnowicz, Wolters Kluwer, Kraków, 2009, p. 482.

Table 2. Contrasting qualities of expatriate assignment

	<i>(expatriate assignment-EA)</i>	<i>(overseas experience-OE)</i>
Initiation	company	individual
Goals	company project (specific)	individual development (diffuse)
Funding	company salary&expenses	personal savings&casual earnings
Career type	organizational career	boundary-free career

Source: Inkson K., and others, *Expatriate assignment versus overseas experience* [in:] *Readings and cases in IHRM*, (ed.) D. Thomas, Sage Publication, 2003, p. 332.

2. Cultural factors connected with expats' cultural background and influencing their work in an international company include: sex, age, race, religion, nationality, ethnic identity, language.

It seems that the expats' country of origin and nationality should be priorities which are taken into account in case of expats' preparation process for working abroad. However, the most important features of the preparation stage include getting to know the cultural and organization standards of the country where the headquarters is based and the knowledge of sociocultural, legal and political aspect of the country to which the expat will be transferred. The cultural background as well as an expat's origin are not treated seriously – these are the conditions which often influence the success or failure of the expatriation. The conditions in which mobility of international employees grows, the practices of employing in which e.g. an American corporation employs a Japanese employee, who will be transferred to Germany will be more and more frequent. According to A. Bańka “expatriates take part in intercultural transfers twice: among organizational cultures and among national cultures. Both kinds of transfers are a source of the cultural shock” [2006, p. 93].

Moreover, N.J. Adler's research confirms that an employee's behaviour is influenced more by his/her national culture than the culture of a given corporation [from: Sułkowski 2002, p. 12]. Factors such as religion, age, profession or sex differentiate people less than cultural affiliation. For example, an American Christian is first an American and then a Christian. It means that he/she has more in common with an American of different religion, than with a Polish Christian [Hofstede 2003, p. 29]. That is why an expat's preparation process should firstly consider cultural elements of the country of his/her origin, and then cultural elements of a given corporation as well as the culture of a new country.

The correlation of the three cultural dimensions: the expat's country of origin, the country of headquarters and the country where the branch is placed influence the character of psychological contract¹¹. One of the types of psychological contract is a **transactional contract** – perceived by the parties as a short-term exchange of experiences and economical benefits. The area involved in the contract includes work in exchange for remuneration. A **relational** psychological contract concerns long-term cooperation of economic, social and emotional character [Miroński 2004, p. 115].

The culture of the expat's country of origin is of great importance when taking creating psychological contract into account. For example, the Japanese are more relationally oriented and prefer contracts based on long-lasting confidence and *guanxi* rule in the place of work. However, a transactional contract is characteristic for Americans who adopt the attitude of a “*player*” working for the company until the situation is advantageous for them. Ch. Hampden-Turner and A. Trompenaars' research is the proof. They asked the managers the following question: When I apply for the job in the company:

1. I am, nearly for sure, going to work there for the whole life.
2. I am almost sure that I am going to work there for specific period of time.
99% of American respondents have chosen the second option [Grzeszczuk 2003, s. 91].

3. Another group of factors which might be described as **organizational** and which influence the success or failure in an expat's work are: organizational structure of the corporation, which determines the number of branches and subsidiaries in the country of origin and abroad, as well as dependence on headquarters. The notion of a branch and a subsidiary should be distinguished. A **branch** constitutes the investment property of the corporation. It can be an independent company controlled by the headquarters (where the headquarters share is at least 95%) or it can be ruled by minority. The branch has a legal entity of a country in which it operates and is treated as a foreign company from the outside. Its functions include production, distribution, services and financial areas of the business. A branch has its own board of directors and is responsible for a part of a decision making process. The branches are allowed to set their own branches in different countries and to control shares [Moraczewska 2003, p. 90]. A branch might be set up in two ways: by buying a local company or making an investment from the beginning till the end (*greenfield*). A **subsidiary** does not have its own legal entity and is not as much independent as a branch. It is under the jurisdiction of the country of the origin and not of the country in which it

¹¹ In the specialist literature the following types of contracts are listed: an **economic contract** (i.e. employee's expectations regarding remuneration) and a **psychological contract** (i.e. employee's expectations regarding immaterial aspects of work), for: Makin P., Cooper G., *Organizacje a kontrakt psychologiczny. Zarządzanie ludźmi w pracy*, PWN, Warszawa, 2000, p. 10.

is placed [Rymarczyk 2005, p. 193]. A subsidiary is an integral (delegated) part of the headquarters company which is responsible for the obligations of the subsidiary company.

The above distinction is significant when taking expatriation into account because it implicates the scope of responsibilities and duties for which expatriates are responsible. In case the expatriates are delegated to the branch they have greater freedom of acting and managing the company, if to the subsidiary - their role is based on control and coordination of actions which must be consistent to the headquarters requirements. Their freedom of acting, the scope of responsibility and required qualification are completely different¹².

Another factor of organizational character is the multiplicity of headquarters in one corporation. For example the situation of a Spanish expatriate employed in American corporation branch based in Poland, which is supervised by the company's headquarters in Europe, based in Germany. A mixture of different management styles, employees' attitudes to work and elements coming from the three organizational cultures (values, symbols, artefacts, rituals and myths) provoke numerous intercultural problems.

The applied general strategy of the corporation implicates the shaping process of expatriates. The majority of specialist literature regarding international strategies is based on **EPRG approach** (ethnocentrism, polycentrism, regiocentrism and geocentrism) created in 1969 by H.V Perlmuttera. Applying any of the approaches by the company is reflected in personal strategies realised by given subjects. They particularly influence **managerial personnel recruitment** for international companies.

Another organizational factors regard individual subfunctions of expatriates' human resources management especially: selection process, adaptation programmes preparing an expat and his/her family to leaving the county, motivating and remuneration of managers¹³, programmes prepared for expats' development. A very important, as shown in the research, though neglected stage of the expatriation is the process of remigration. As M. Juchnowicz writes "the effects of carrying out the remigration process badly is an employee's resignation. It causes that the organization does not get back the investment made in the area of human resource"¹⁴. The employee who leaves takes with him/her valuable knowledge and experience acquired abroad, which will be gladly used by the competition.

¹² See: S. Przytuła, *Rola menedżerów-ekspatriantów w transferze praktyk ZZL w przedsiębiorstwach międzynarodowych* [in:] *Kulturowe uwarunkowania zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim*, M. Juchnowicz, Wolters Kluwer, Kraków, 2009, p. 482.

¹³ Remuneration blocks for international managers are different in different countries and depend on legal, cultural and social conditions. *Global compensation*, L. Gomez-Mejija, S. Werner, Routledge, 2009, p. 18.

¹⁴ ROI Model return on investment in expatriation process, presented by H. Scullion [in:] *Global staffing*, Routledge, 2006, p. 51.

3. Conclusion

The significance of the cultural factor in the area of intercultural business influenced the creation of management strategies of cultural differences [Waszczak 2009, p. 81]. In this approach the diversity is perceived mainly as a source of the company's competitive advantage which consists of employees' knowledge, qualifications and experience derived from different cultural backgrounds.

The success of expatriation is conditioned by numerous merging factors which include: manager's personality factors (psychological features) which make the person predestined to or preclude him/her from work in an international environment. Personality features are, according to the majority of psychologists, innate and difficult to be changed, however they might be strengthened with the use of different trainings or courses, if they constitute an advantageous expatriate's side.

An important, but often neglected set of factors determining an expatriate's work as well as deciding about the success of his/her mission or untimely contract termination, are cultural factors concerning an expatriate's cultural background. Adaptation programmes and intercultural trainings teach the culture of corporation and headquarters' country of origin as well as social and cultural values of the country of the new place of work. Taking the role of expatriate's into account (it is often the role of a coordinator or an inspector of management practices in a given branch, working on unanimity with headquarters' standards, eulogist of mission and corporate culture) it is a justified practice. However, too little attention is focused on the cultural origin of an expat (values and norms and attitudes towards work, religious beliefs, approach to time, etc.) which are the cultural legacy of his/her origin including his/her external environment meaning corporate and national culture he/she worked with.

The third group of organizational factors regards the organizational structure model of the corporation, the management style and methods of shaping management staff of a given corporation (especially the selection method, motivation, remuneration, training and career's model as well as repatriation meaning the use of knowledge and the experience of a returning expat).

In the face of numerous factors influencing the work of the expat it is worth considering the operationalization of the process of adjusting expatriates to work in an intercultural environment. It is about creating tools which would smooth away dysfunctions and failures regarding an expat's work and which would facilitate the process of expatriation. Even if the specialist literature presents a lot of adaptation models for expatriates, they are not enough for the management practice which provides numerous examples of expatriation failure.

Abstract

The growing dynamics of direct investment makes the international companies to take advantage of expatriate managers. It concerns greenfield investments, which mean establishing a new plant or subsidiary in the host country. Then, sending managers-expatriates makes sense due to the know-how that should be implemented in the new subsidiary and due to taking control of investment plans that should be realized in the host country.

The purpose of this article is to present various factors determining problems and failures in expatriate work. It is a study based on foreign literature and research findings.

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