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Adjustment of Expatriates and Their Spouses as a Challenge for International Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

As globalization continues, firms are required to manage an increasingly diverse workforce, with expatriation being just a subset of this challenge. In consequence, international assignments have been popularly used as means by which information sharing, knowledge transfers and organisational routines transmission can be undertaken. According to Black and Gregersen, 80 percent of midsize and large companies send their employees abroad, and nearly half of them plan to increase the number of international assignees [1999, pp. 52–62].

Nevertheless, starting since the 90's of the previous century, expatriation attractiveness has been (from the workers' point of view) becoming ever weaker, which, in turn, is the reason why the critical issue for many international organisations is the accessibility of competent candidates interested in undertaking an international assignment [Dowling, Welch, Schuler 1999, p.94, Torbiörn 1982, p. 51]. At the same time, the scale of international assignment failure still remains significant: it reaches 25– 40% of the total expatriation level in developed countries and about 70% in developing countries¹ [Andreason 2003, p. 548]. Moreover, almost 1/3 of delegated managers perform below their superiors' expectations [Black, Gregersen 1999, pp. 52–62]. Among the most common reasons for expatriation failure is expatriates' or their companions' inability to adjust in a host country [*Międzynarodowe zarządzanie...* 2002, p. 147]. It is worth noticing, however, that this family context is becoming ever more complex and multidimensional in the face of such phenomena as: the increased

¹ Data on expatriation failure refer exclusively to premature returns from international assignments.

use of alternatives for traditional expatriation (e.g. short-time assignments), changes in career patterns (“nomadicity”), growing professional activity of women and the related career duality. In view of the above-mentioned trends and the constantly increasing expatriation scale, there is a need to systematise and update the knowledge on the adjustment of spouses or partners accompanying expatriates and to identify HR policies and practices supporting the process. This need simultaneously constitutes the main purpose of this paper and reaching its aim requires determining the following:

- What does expatriates' and their accompanying partners' adjustment consist in? How are those two processes linked?
- What are the main factors facilitating/impeding the partners' adjustment? What is the role of dual careers here? What is the importance of the partners' adjustment in the context of changes in expatriation practices?
- What are the indispensable HRM actions increasing expatriation's chances for success by means of supporting partner's/spouse's adjustment process?

2. The role of a partner/spouse in an expatriate's adjustment

Similarly to adaptation or acculturation, adjustment is a term frequently used with reference to the process of changes experienced by an individual and to its outcomes emerging as a result of moving to a foreign country. However, as suggested by Halsberger and Brewster, the above-mentioned practice has not been fully justified, as acculturation implies comprehensive adjustment to another culture which, in case of delegated workers, does not, in fact, take place or is highly improbable. On the other hand, however, adjustment leads to relatively smaller changes related to the necessity of facing new situations, while adaptation points to big changes occurring as a result of a serious crisis [Halsberger, Brewster 2007, p. 3]. All the same, the ranges of meaning of the examined terms are rather variable and partially shared and the suggested differences refer mainly to the “range” of change. Taking into consideration the vagueness of the above-mentioned differentiation as well as the meaning given to acculturation notion, only two terms shall be used in this paper synonymously: adjustment and adaptation.

Generally speaking, the examined process, in case of both an expatriate and his accompaniers, comprises two interconnected dimensions: psychological and socio-cultural² [see: Searle, Ward 1990, pp. 449–464]. The first dimension refers to the subjective well-being or mental states felt by an individual in a new environment, while the other one is understood as the ability to adjust to

² It should be noticed, however, that in her later work devoted to acculturation, Ward suggested a different classification of this issue [2001, pp. 411–447]. Namely, she distinguished three perspectives: affective - emphasizing psychological stress and coping strategies activated by an individual; behavioural - which she also referred to as socio-cultural (concentrating on acquiring social competences); and cognitive - showing a person's identity dynamics.

interactions in a host country. Such an ability may be assessed on the basis of the difficulty level which a given person experiences when dealing with everyday situations. This approach puts stress on social behaviour and practical social skills [cf. Black, Mendenhall 1991, pp. 225–247]. Some authors suggest that gaining the above-mentioned skills and the changes in social behaviour (socio-cultural adjustment) are “imposed” by the circumstances surrounding a person, while the process of changing attitudes (psychological adjustment) is not necessary to function successfully in a new environment; it, as it were, occurs as a result of the involved person’s willingness [cf. Jun, Lee, Gentry 1997, pp. 519–535, Furnham, Bochner 1986 after: Selmer 2000, p. 7]. On the other hand, however, one may expect that the new environment evokes strong mental discomfort constituting an indication of our psychological maladjustment [cf. Black et al. 1991, pp. 291–317] which might influence other spheres of adaptation process and, in effect, contribute to expatriation failure. As psychological and socio-cultural adjustment dimensions complement each other and their meanings for the success of expatriation must not be questioned, the paper shortly describes both of them.

The socio-cultural issues are, next to the professional sphere, taken into account in the three-dimensional concept of cross-cultural adjustment suggested by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou [1991, pp. 291–317]. It introduces the following domains³:

- work adjustment connected with new work requirements,
- interaction adjustment related to interactions with the representatives of the host country,
- general adjustment connected with the host country’s culture and living conditions.

Two sets of factors determining this multidimensional adjustment process have been distinguished in the examined model: anticipatory and post-departure. The first group encompasses, among others, the range and relevance of preparatory trainings, previous international experience and its similarity to the undertaken international assignment, the adequacy of the management’s expectations and the presence of effective candidate selection mechanisms. The second category, in the version expanded by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley, comprises: job factors, organisational factor, indicators of job status (positional factors), non-work factors and individual factors [1999, pp. 557–581].

³ The above-mentioned distinction is, according to some researchers, an effect of drawing conclusions on the basis of empirical studies rather than a model based on a theoretical though [Hippler 2000, pp. 491–504; Stahl, Caligiuri 2005, pp. 603–615; Thomas, Lazarova 2006, pp. 247–264].

Table 1. Factors influencing 3 dimensions of expatriate adjustment

Factors	General Adjustment	Interaction Adjustment	Work Adjustment
Individual factors:			
- personality-related			
• Cultural flexibility	+	+	+
• Social orientation	+	+	+
• Willingness to communicate	+	+	+
• Conflict resolution orientation		+	+
• Extraversion		+	
• Motivation to go overseas	+		+
• Ability to work with multinational workforce			+
- <i>experience-related</i>			
• Communication and language skills		+	+
• Previous assignments	+ / -	+	+
• Previous knowledge of the host country	+	+	
• Time spent with host nationals	+	+	
• Time spent with other expatriates	-		-
• Interaction with host nationals	+		+
• Culture novelty	+ / -	- / 0	-
Work-related factors:			
- prior to leaving			
• Pre-departure training	-		
• Cultural training		-	
- after arrival			
• Job role novelty	-		-
• Job role clarity	+		+
• Job role discretion	+		+
• Job role ambiguity	-		-
• Job role conflict	-		-
• Job satisfaction	+	+	+
• Commitment to the local company	+	+	+
• Commitment to the parent company			+
• Strong corporate culture		+	+
• Perceived organizational support			+
Environmental factors:			
• Spouse adjustment	+	+	+
• Spouse overall satisfaction			+
• Family adjustment			+

Source: based on [Puck et al. 2003, pp. 10–16]

Table 1 contains a detailed list of factors accompanied by the information on the correlation type completed by Puck, Holtbrügge and Dölling⁴ [2003]. It should be pointed out that in the original model by Black, Mendenhall and Oddou [1991, pp. 291–317] the partner's/spouse's/other accompaniers' adjustment constituted one of the nonwork category's components. It was only the later studies and empirical research that exhibited its role, treating it as a separate and crucial factor positively influencing all expatriate's adaptation dimensions (Table 1). For instance, the positive relation between the spouse's adjustment and the international assignee's adjustment in each of the three domains was confirmed by the empirical research by Shaffer and Harrison [1998, pp. 87–118], Parker and McEvoy [1993, pp. 355–379], Black [1990, pp. 109–125]. Furthermore, the relation with general adjustment and interaction adjustment was suggested by the results obtained by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley [1999, pp. 557–581] as well as Black and Gregersen⁵ [1991, pp. 497–515]. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the relations between the spouse's and the expatriate's adjustment are more complex: many researchers point to the bi-direction of this relation – the so called crossover effect [Caligiuri et al. 1998, pp. 598–614, Black, Stephens 1989, pp. 529–544, Shaffer, Harrison 1998, pp. 87–118]. Moreover, some authors suggest that the particular adjustment domains interact - which is the so called spillover effect [Takeuchi et al., 2002 (b), pp. 655–666, Black et al. 1991, pp. 291–317].

The psychological perspective of the adjustment process emphasises the emotions felt at the time, such as: anxiety, frustration, homesickness, satisfaction, as well as the problem of stress frequently accompanying international assignments [see: Torbion 1982, Brown 2008, pp.1018–1034]. The empirical research results suggest that the sources of expatriates' and their spouses' stress are: the feeling that they spend too little time with each other, missing close friends, isolation and uncertainty about the future after returning to the home country as well as the difficulty in dealing with too many contrary expectations/demands [Brown 2008, p. 1024]. It should be noticed that the presence of children at international assignments makes both expatriates and their partners feel less isolated than it is in case of singles. What is more,

⁴ The symbols +, -, +/-, 0 in Table 1 relate to the type of relation between the factors and level of adjustment on the basis of empirical research described in the subject matter literature. It's worth noticing that the assessment of the influence of some factors may sometimes be inconclusive, for instance: culture novelty [cf. Shaffer et al., 1999, pp. 557–581; Shaffer, Harrison 1998, pp. 87–118, Parker, McEvoy 1993, pp. 355–379, Takeuchi et al. 2002 (a), pp. 1224–1244]. Another surprising outcome may be the negative relation between pre-departure/cultural training and general as well as interaction adjustment. Perhaps it is a consequence of defectiveness of those undertakings, e.g. inadequate training techniques or the wrong choice of contents or trainers.

⁵ The latter research confirmed merely the relation with the general adjustment, amounting to a high 0.80 factor.

married assignees experience relatively lower stress related to the “reduced-self” domain than single assignees⁶.

The dynamic approach to psychological adjustment has been in particular developed by De Cieri et al. [1991, pp. 377–413]. The authors describe the phenomenon as a process starting already before leaving and lasting throughout at least a few weeks after returning from the assignment during which, within separate stages, an individual goes through specific (typical) emotions [De Cieri et al. 1991, p.379]. The psychological adjustment process displays here the following characteristic features: the period of anticipation and fear preceding expatriation, unrealistic positive assessment and emotions typical for the initial phase of the stay – “honey moon”, exceedingly negative emotions, especially longing for home, irritation and frustration occurring in the next period – “party is over” lasting until the turning point which signals that an individual is gradually adjusting to the new environment and verifying his/her opinions or that the adaptation failed and the person is going through a crisis. The fourth phase is “healthy recovery” during which the acceptance of the new lifestyle and adjustment to the altered conditions take place [Harris, Moran 1979 after: De Cieri et al. 1991, pp. 379–380]. Analogically to expatriation, the repatriation process is connected with hopes and fears of returning home, followed by an euphoric “welcome home” phase, accompanied by unrealistic expectations for changes for better, the feeling of loneliness, disappointment and other negative emotions characteristic of the subsequent “what’s next” stage and finally reaching psychic balance or crisis persistence.

The above-mentioned description of psychological adjustment is merely a theoretical approach to the issue which, nevertheless, can serve as a starting point to further considerations and empirical research devoted to the adaptation of an expatriate’s partner [De Cieri et al. 1991, p. 377]. It should be emphasised at this point, however, that the results of some empirical research are by no means consistent with the postulated phases and their accompanying emotions [see: Ward et al. 1998, pp. 277–291, Ward, Rana-Deuba 1999, pp. 291–306; Boski 2009, pp. 523–524, De Cieri et al. 1991, pp. 377–413]. Moreover, the partner’s adaptation is connected with specific problems which are not faced by the expatriate to such an extent. The situation which a partner/spouse is put in influences the person’s socio-cultural adjustment [Shaffer, Harrison 2001, p. 238] as well as their psychological adjustment [De Cieri et al. 1991, p. 400] in a specific way.

⁶ The domain described in Brown’s research as “reduced –self” expressed the feeling of underestimation of efforts and lower self-esteem [2008, pp.1027–1028].

3. The specific character of the expatriate's spouse/partner adjustment

The experiences of a spouse may differ from those of an expatriate to a large extent in terms of their nature and degree [Black, Gregersen 1991, pp. 497–515, Black, Stephens 1989, pp. 529–544]. For instance, a spouse interacts with the local society more frequently, must often give up his/her career and does not have such opportunities to sustain relationships or receive support in the professional sphere as the expatriate who cooperates with the parent firm - usually in more familiar environment, resembling home organization in terms of corporate values and job characteristics. The spouse is more vulnerable to culture shock, as it is the expatriate who often works in the international teams where people widely speak English, whereas the spouse has more frequently to do with people who don't belong to this cosmopolitan elite [Andreason 2008].

The additional difficulties accompany the spouses' repatriation - coming back home is, for many of them, connected with the loss of expatriate society's support, which is especially painful when the "old friends" don't have enough time and are not interested in deepening/ renewing the bonds after a long separation [see: Torbion 1982, Tremayne 1984, p. 132]. Moreover, due to their career break, competence depreciation and outdated knowledge, it is harder for them to return to the professional activity, which may prolong/deepen the period of the domination of negative assessment, disappointment and frustration. In the face of the above-mentioned differences, as well as on the basis of the empirical research exposing the role of different factors influencing the spouse's/partner's adjustment (Table 2), some researchers suggest the necessity of modifying the concept in question. An attention-deserving suggestion comes from Shaffer and Harrison. They propose that, along with general and interaction adjustment, a personal category should be introduced, linked to the sense of "being at home" and depending on the extent to which a spouse can re-establish his/her social identity [after: Bauer, Taylor 2001, p. 136] .

Table 2. Factors influencing the adjustment of the expatriate's spouse/partner

Factor	Influence on spouse adjustment
<i>personal</i>	
change in employment status (from being employed to being unemployed)	negative but not significant correlation
language fluency	positive influence
satisfaction with life	positive influence
satisfaction with family relationships	positive influence
self-esteem	positive influence
social support in host country	positive influence
extended family support	negative influence
having preschool-age children	positive influence
social efficacy	negative influence
<i>organizational</i>	
company assistance	positive influence, strong in early stages
certainty of assignment duration	no significant correlation
<i>cultural/ environmental</i>	
culture shock	negative influence in early stages
perceive culture distance	negative influence in early stages
culture novelty	negative influence
favourability of living conditions	positive influence

Source: based on [Shaffer, Harrison 2001, pp. 238–254, De Cieri et al. 1991, pp. 377–413]

The adjustment process of the partners accompanying expatriates is shaped by various factors (described below) which, by convention, can be divided into three categories: linked to the person, to organisation and to the host country, whereas their meaning will be different than in the expatriates' case (Table 2).

Research suggests that the aspects facilitating spouse's adjustment are the ability to communicate in a foreign country and the sense of satisfaction - both general and linked to family relations. A relatively stable feature of self-esteem turned out to be related to the successful adjustment process as well [De Cieri et al., 1991, pp. 377–413].

An essential success factor seems to be the social support gained due to making friends and acquaintances in a host country. The positive influence of having children at pre-school age can be explained in two ways: it either involves the continuation of the specific social role which allows to retain at least part of the identity linked to the host country and/or it involves the opportunity to

build relations with the host country's inhabitants in a similar family situation, where the interactions in public places, such as parks, playgrounds, etc. are more probable than in case of pupils/students (spending time together not necessarily in the parents' presence). At this point, a reverse relation, linked to the extended family social support, is worth noticing. Shaffer and Harrison suggest that it may be a result of a spouse's big effort put in sustaining bonds with the relatives with a simultaneous "negligence" of the relations in the host country [2001, pp. 238–254].

The social self-efficacy of the partner, reflecting self-awareness/being convinced about one's own ability to develop social relations, despite the authors' different assumptions, was negatively correlated to the adjustment. Perhaps the outcome points to a cultural conditioning of the feature which brings positive results in the home country but becomes a source of frustration in a different social environment (where an individual fails to establish new relations).

The negative relation between the change of an employment status (from working to unemployed) and the spouse's adjustment undoubtedly requires confirmation in further empirical research. Such a need can be justified by Shaffer and Harrison's choice of respondents (wives accompanying traditional - long-term expatriates); besides, such matters (not taken into consideration in their study) as the previous work character, the attitude to one's own career, the objective reasons for lack of employment (e.g. restrictions in a host country) can be of large importance [2001, pp. 238–254].

Because of limited direct contacts between an organisation and a spouse, one might expect that the influence of organisational factors for his/her adjustment will be much weaker than in case of a worker. However, the research clearly suggests the essential and positive relation between the adaptation and the company's support, which is clearly visible before leaving homeland and in the initial weeks of staying abroad [De Cieri et al. 1991, pp. 377–413].

The significant role of cultural differences in the partner's/spouse's adjustment is fully reflected by the results of the research including the following factors: culture shock, perceived cultural distance and host culture novelty. The research confirmed the suppositions that their high level exerts negative influence on the adaptation success [cf. De Cieri et al., 1991, pp. 377–413, Shaffer, Harrison 2001, pp. 238–254].

Living conditions in the host country were the last factor indicated in Table 2. Their positive assessment (in comparison with the experiences from the home country) clearly fostered spouses'/partners' adjustment.

Conclusions regarding individual antecedents of the spouses' adjustment (Table 2) are supported by the empirical research devoted to stressors influencing them during expatriation and repatriation period [cf. Brown 2008, pp. 1018–1024]. Partners accompanying expatriates feel much more stressed than the expatriates themselves due to the lower self-esteem, the feeling of being underestimated and their own incompetence. On the other hand, the need to

receive social support (Table 2) in a place of stay, balancing its partial loss in a home country, was confirmed in the highly stress-inducing role of isolation which is clearly more intensely felt by the spouses separated from their friends and extended family [Brown 2008, p. 1029]. They are afraid of breaking or worsening those close bonds on the one hand [Forster 1997, pp. 414–433]; on the other – building local contact network from the very beginning is for them a source of many tensions. Moreover, everyday difficulties of living in a strange culture were a more intense source of stress (in comparison with expatriates) for the spouses/partners; therefore, the support in dealing with cultural differences on the organisation's part not only positively influences their adjustment (Table 2) but may also contribute to reducing the level of stress which they experience.

Knowledge about the above-described factors influencing the expatriate's partners adjustment process may help managers and HR professionals in providing their employers with successful solutions. The special meaning of this process arises from a strong correlation between both spouses' adjustment and the fact that the reactions of the children accompanying them usually reflect the condition of their parents [Black, Stevens 1989, p. 541]. It should be pointed out, however, that most theoretical considerations and empirical research in this area concentrates on "traditional", long-term expatriates and their non-working wives. Therefore, the next part of this paper focuses on the ever more crucial issue in expatriation, that is on career duality and its relation to the adjustment of both partners.

4. The present challenges connected with partner's/spouse's adjustment and their implications for IHRM

Research conducted at international enterprises by CBI, Employee Relocation Council and ORC in the years 1990–2010 clearly suggests that significant changes take place in expatriates' society, among others, a growing share of women-managers and the increasing number of the dual-career couples [Cummins 2010, p. 3]. These phenomena create new challenges both for the researchers dealing with expatriation, especially with the problem of adjustment, and for organisations seeking to create appropriate solutions for the changing needs and circumstances of the international operations.

As it has been noticed by Harvey, there is very little empirical research devoted to the adjustment of dual career couples who have been relocated internationally, although circa 70% of delegated managers remain in a relation (marriage or partnership) with an employed person pursuing his/her career [Harvey 1997, p. 627]. Moreover, there is no theoretical model wholly covering the whole issue under examination⁷. However, for the purpose of this paper, a few observations

⁷ Nevertheless, the research in the subject matter literature on expatriates' spouse adjustment (both working and non-working) very often refers to the spillover theory which assumes inability of separating actions, devoted time and stress connected with performed roles in both life domains: professional and family one. This mutual intermingling of the two spheres

resulting from the research carried out by the above-mentioned author among the dual career couples⁸ are worth discussing in more detail.

Analysing the issue of the adjustment of expatriates and their professionally active spouses, he came up with the following groups of factors influencing this process: individual (lack of performance during expatriation, marital satisfaction, work/family role pressures, impact on income level, disruption to trailing spouse's career), position-related (requirements of international assignment, performance appraisal process, host country organizational culture, adequacy of training to fulfil the above-mentioned requirements) and environmental (distance between home and host country in cultural and economic terms, professional contact with external environment) [Harvey 1997, ss. 627–658]. The research results obtained by Harvey allow to formulate the following conclusions [1997, pp.637–650]:

The most crucial factors influencing the adjustment of the professionally active spouses are: organisation support which still does not fulfil the expatriates' expectations and the distance between the home and the host country. It should be noticed that in the previously described research referring to the antecedents of the spouse's adjustment (cf. Table 2), support from organization and cultural differences were also of great importance, although predominantly in the initial stages of international assignment. Still, Harvey's research shows that the important role of the organisational support can be noticed both in expatriation and repatriation.

Among the main conflict/stress domains, family and marital satisfaction were of special meaning; additionally men pointed to the performance below expectations and the lack of adequate preparation for a foreign assignment, whereas women – to the role strain between work and family. There is no doubt that these are the areas which are directly (formulating realistic expectations concerning performance level, providing adequate pre-departure program) and indirectly (supporting/facilitating work-life balance) determined by the organisation. However, the assessment of actions taken by the enterprises was not, in the light of the discussed research, satisfactory. The issue particularly questioned was the usefulness of trainings offered to expatriates and their spouses before leaving; there was also criticism of the employment opportunities for the accompaniers and company's help in compliance with the requirements regarding legal employment of a spouse in a host country. Additionally, female expatriate managers pointed out the need of providing professional consulting for an accompanying spouse. Moreover, according to the respondents, the remuneration and benefit packages which were to compensate the loss of income

involves tension and conflicts, whose consequences (positive and negative) affect both a husband and a wife.

⁸ 332 persons responded to the survey (51% response rate), where: 41% were male-expatriate-repatriate managers, 37% - spouses of male managers, 12% - female expatriate-repatriate managers and 11% - their spouses.

by the trailing spouse were inadequate [Harvey 1997, pp. 627–658]. It should be noticed at this point that worsening of money conditions related to the mission and no opportunity to pursue professional career by one of the spouses may negatively influence the adjustment process (when accompanied by the worsening of the standard of living), general satisfaction, relations between a husband and wife and other spheres of life (in accordance with the spillover and crossover effect theories).

Taking into consideration the hitherto existing observations related to the factors influencing expatriates' partners/spouses adjustment, as well as the above-mentioned suggestions on the organisation's involvement in this process, let us have a closer look at the most essential trends in the support offered to those persons.

The ORC research results over the previous 20 years demonstrate substantial diversity of the support methods for the spouses, connected with the expatriation stage [Cummins 2010, p. 4–6]. Currently, the dominating forms of support in the period preceding the assignment are language courses and host country's culture orientation programmes - both forms advancing in importance. Additionally, some other typical preparatory actions are: assistance in preparing application documents and formalities necessary to obtain a work permit; vocational guidance and job search support. Sponsoring language courses is a dominating form of support during the assignment; less common is covering costs of further education (children), job search support and helping in formalities required before undertaking employment, partial refunds for the spouse's lost income. The percentage of companies offering expatriates' spouses cultural trainings during the assignment is about 40% - substantially smaller (by as many as 23%) than in the period preceding the assignment. The repatriation period is usually connected with considerably smaller range of support for the spouse - Cummins points to the gradual decrease of the support level during the last decade [2010, p. 5]. The assistance in preparing application documents and looking for job offers is offered at that time; vocational guidance is offered less frequently.

There is no doubt that there is still a gap between the desired quality and the scope of organisational solutions (policies, programmes, tools etc.), especially within IHRM area and the current practices directly or indirectly influencing the adjustment process of the partners accompanying the expatriates. The range and intensity of organisation's activity before the assignment has to some extent improved in the previous years, however, cultural trainings are still being criticised [cf. Puck et al. 2008, pp. 2182–2197]. A positive symptom may be the popularity of covering costs of language courses before and during an international assignment as the ability to speak a language positively and substantially influences the adjustment process and facilitates finding employment in case of the accompanying person. Still, during the stay, and especially when coming back to the home country, the company's support seems to be insufficient.

Table 3. The suggested IHRM practices supporting expatriates and their partners

Stage	Activities
Pre-departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussion on international assignment (including: realistic view of everyday work, expectations concerning performance, anticipated date of return), its possible consequences for expatriate and family (in a host country and after returning home), requirements and help needed (recommended presence of a spouse) - selection process including family concerns, i.e. personality and attitudes, career orientation, healthy matters, previous experience and other family-related problems (applies to both partners) - ensuring enough time and providing help in managing matters such as: partner's possible career disruption, children's education, housing, taxation, financial and medical concerns, farewells to friends and extended family - providing adequate training on cultural issues*, developing social competences and language skills (applies to both partners) - providing basic information on employment opportunities for spouse/partner, assistance in fulfilling host country requirement (visa, work permit etc.) - mediating/ facilitating/ encouraging expatriate and spouse to contact other company expatriates/ repatriates and their communities abroad
After arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing enhanced information on employment opportunities, assisting in the search for a job, career counselling (for spouse/ partner) - financial help (compensating the lost income of expatriate's partner, cost of children's education) - helping in relocation and accommodation, logistic assistance in handling day-to-day living requirement, - providing language courses and further cultural training focused on local interactions, - mentoring programs, where host-country employees "adopt" trailing spouses and children, - supporting work-life balance, developing time management skills, offering psychological counselling, stress monitoring, - creating favourable circumstances for building local contacts at clubs/ organisations/societies, developing partner's personal and professional interests, - facilitation of sustaining relations with the home country (by providing information, ensuring the possibility to maintain relations by means of electronic devices and covering costs of travelling/stay in the home country), providing realistic information on the changes in the company/home country, the subsequent stages of the career and other consequences of returning home.

* The range, length and form of training should take into account, among others, the following aspects: the length of stay, the distance between the host country and the home country, the intensity and nature of interaction with the local representatives as well as individual features of the assignees [Dowling et al. 2008, pp. 142-143].

Stage	Activities
Repatriation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - providing enhanced information on employment opportunities, assisting in the search for a job, career counselling (all for spouse/ partner) - assistance in relocation and accommodation - offering psychological counselling, stress monitoring (for both partners/ spouses) - appreciating international experience and achievement of a repatriate (career development, changes in remuneration etc.)

Source: own study on the basis of the subject matter literature.

A complex programme of support for expatriates and their companions which would, at the same time, facilitate the process of adjustment to life and work in another country, should contain various solutions taking into consideration the priority needs and expectations of the assignees which change at the successive stages of an international assignment. A general outline of such an offer has been presented in Table 3. The list of recommended practices is, in this case, based on the literature devoted to IHRM as well as the adjustment of spouses accompanying 'traditional' expatriates and partners in the so called dual career couples. The suggested solutions require close cooperation of the corporate and local HRM services as well as external consultants, especially during the assignment. In general, it should be underlined that the offer is merely introductory and requires further discussion and empirical verification.

5. Summary

International assignments introduce substantial changes both in professional and family life, especially of those people who are engaged in long-term relationships. Before leaving, each of the partners is involved in a vast network of social relations which constitute a source of support; however, during their stay in a host country they only have a source of support in each other. Expatriation often unsettles the relation balance, sometimes enforces a new distribution of the social roles, especially when the previously employed partner stays at home and no longer pursues his/her career. Returning to the home country, on the other hand, is connected with the unknown and the fear that perhaps some expectations will not be met, it is also related to uncertainty of the changes which might have taken place during their absence there. Top management and HR professionals have to realise that an expatriation often entails a revolution in careers of an employee and his/her partner that affects the whole family. Therefore, in order to make an international assignment successful, it is essential to undertake, at each stage: before, during and after it is completed, appropriate measures addressed not merely to a worker but to the people accompanying him as well, especially a spouse/partner, whose adjustment is undoubtedly of a crucial meaning here.

Abstract

International expansion of any organisation is undoubtedly determined by the availability of motivated, competent and mobile employees, especially the expatriates whose performance is crucial when entering new markets. Research evidence, however, suggests that expatriate failure rates have remained moderately high. The important source of such a problem is delegated employees' and/or their families' inability to adjust in a host country. Increasing the importance of expatriates' spouses/partners adjustment in the context of continuing internationalization and dual-career issues creates new challenges for organizations. Those challenges need to be identified and faced up to by HR professionals. The paper discusses the above-mentioned problem; it aims to identify current developments and focuses on their consequences for international human resource management practice.

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