CHAPTER

5

Recruiting and selecting staff for international assignments

Chapter Objectives

The focus of this chapter is on recruitment and selection activities in an international context. We will address the following issues:

- The myth of the global manager.
- The debate surrounding expatriate failure.
- Factors moderating intent to stay or leave the international assignment.
- Selection criteria for international assignments.
- Dual career couples.
- Are female expatriates different?

Introduction

Hiring and then deploying people to positions where they can perform effectively is a goal of most organizations, whether domestic or international. *Recruitment* is defined as searching for and obtaining potential job candidates in sufficient numbers and quality so that the organization can select the most appropriate people to fill its job needs. *Selection* is the process of gathering information for the purposes of evaluating and deciding who should be employed in particular jobs. It is important to note that recruitment and selection are discrete processes and both processes need to operate effectively if the firm is effectively to manage its staffing process. For example, a firm may have an excellent selection system for evaluating candidates but if there are insufficient candidates to evaluate then this selection system is less than effective. Both processes must operate effectively for optimal staffing decisions to be made. We shall return to this point later in the chapter.

Some of the major differences between domestic and international staffing are first that many firms have predispositions with regard to who should hold key positions in headquarters and subsidiaries (i.e. ethnocentric, polycentric, regiocentric and geocentric staffing orientations) and second, the constraints imposed by host governments (e.g. immigration rules with regard to work visas and the common requirement in most countries to require evidence as to why local nationals should not be employed rather than hiring foreigners) which can severely limit the firm's ability to hire the right candidate. In addition, as Scullion and Collings[1] note, most expatriates are recruited *internally* rather than externally, so the task of persuading managers (particularly if they are primarily working in a domestic environment) to recommend and/or agree to release their best employees for international assignments remains a key issue for international HR managers.

In this chapter, we will explore the key issues surrounding international recruitment and selection, with a focus on selection criteria. Implicit in much of the discussion and research about selecting staff for international assignments is that there are common attributes shared by persons who have succeeded in operating in other cultural work environments – that is, the so-called global manager. Our discussion on this topic centers around four myths: that there is a universal approach to management; that all people can acquire appropriate behaviors; there are common characteristics shared by global managers; and there are no impediments to global staff mobility. We then consider various factors – such as expatriate failure, selection criteria, dual career couples and gender – that impact on the multinational's ability to recruit and select high calibre staff for deployment internationally. For convenience, we will use the term 'multinational' throughout this chapter, but it is important to remember that the issues pertain variously to all internationalizing companies – regardless of size, industry, stage in internationalization, nationality of origin and geographical diversity. We continue to use the term expatriate to include all three categories: PCNs (parent-country nationals), TCNs (third country nationals) and HCNs (host-country nationals) transferred into headquarters' operations, although much of the literature on expatriate selection is focused only on PCNs.

Issues in staff selection

The myth of the global manager

Multinationals depend on being able to develop a pool of international operators from which they can draw as required. Such individuals have been variously labeled 'international managers' or 'global managers'. The concept of a global manager appears to be based on the following myths or assumptions.

Myth 1: there is a universal approach to management. The view that there is a universal approach to management persists, despite evidence from research to the contrary, and many multinationals continue to transfer home-based work practices into their foreign operations without adequate consideration as to whether this is an appropriate action. The persistence of a belief in universal management may be evidence of a lingering ethnocentric attitude or perhaps an indicator of inexperience in international operations. However, as we discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to the convergence–divergence debate, work practices have, to a certain extent, converged through the transfer of technology and 'best practice' and this process is supported by the global spread of management education programs that reflect the dominant Western approach to management. Linked to this process is the belief in the power of organizational culture as a moderator of cultural differences in the work setting.

Myth 2: people can acquire multicultural adaptability and behaviors. Some people can adopt culturally appropriate behaviors but that does not apply all the time in all cultural settings.[2] It depends, as we will examine later, on the individual's reaction to a particular cultural environment, as it is not always easy to put into practice what you know is the right way to behave and some individuals have much better effectiveness and coping skills than others.[3] Effectiveness skills are defined as the ability to successfully translate the managerial or technical skills into the foreign environment, whereas coping skills enable the person to become reasonably comfortable, or at least survive, in a foreign environment. Those who are able to function adequately in other cultural settings may be regarded as having good effectiveness and coping skills. As we examine later in this chapter, cultural adjustment has been linked to expatriate performance and influences how international assignments are perceived.

Myth 3: there are common characteristics shared by successful international managers. The body of literature on expatriate selection tends to reflect this approach, as we will explore in the next section of this chapter. It is possible to identify predictors of success, in that a person who has certain characteristics, traits and experience is more likely to perform effectively in foreign environments than a person who does not share this profile. However, this has to be countered by other factors involved – not just in the selection process, but also in the way the person responds to the foreign location. It is also unclear how the identified predictors of success should be measured.

Myth 4: there are no impediments to mobility. We have mentioned that particularly large multinationals are endeavoring to develop and exploit an internal labor market from which expatriates – international managers – can be drawn. As Forster[4] points out, firms may have become more global in their operations but their people have not. The barriers to furthering a geocentric staffing policy – staff availability, time and cost constraints and host-government requirements – reveal how the multinational's ability to deploy what may be the best person into a particular position can be curtailed. That some multinationals are experimenting with alternatives such as the virtual assignment is indicative of this constraint.

Compounding the above myths is the way in which the term 'global manager' is sometimes used to describe a person who has a global 'mindset', though often international experience is a prerequisite for building the global perspective required. Baruch[5] argues that there is no consistent way to characterize a global manager. He suggests that the basic qualities commonly listed – intelligence, motivation, adaptability and entrepreneurship – are the same requirements for any successful manager today.

Profile of an expatriate

Table 5-1 shows the current profile of an expatriate, drawn from results of a 2005 GMAC worldwide survey of 125 multinationals representing both small and large organizations. For 46 per cent of respondents, the company headquarters was located outside of the USA (a record high response from non-US firms). As the results show, while the largest group of expatriates are PCNs, this group is not the majority and the HCN and TCN groups are significant. Most expatriates are male (77 per cent), aged 30–49 (66 per cent), married (61 per cent) and accompanied by

Table 5-1 Current expatriate profile

			HCN	*(29%)*
Expatriate category	*PCN*	*(44%)*	*TCN*	*(27%)*
Gender	Male	(77%)	Female	(23%)
Age	30–49	(66%)	20–29	(16%)
Marital status	Married	(61%)	Single	(28%)
			Partner	(11%)
Accompanied by	Spouse	(81%)	Children	(52%)
Duration	1–3 years	(53%)	Short term	(27%)
			Permanent	(20%)
Primary reason	Fill a position			
Prior international experience	12%			

Source: Adapted from 'Global Relocation Trends: 2005 Survey Report', GMAC Global Relocation Services, National Foreign Trade Council and SHRM Global Forum (2006), GMAC-GRS.

a spouse (81 per cent) and children (52 per cent). While the majority of assignments are 1–3 years (53 per cent), a total of 27 per cent of assignments are classified as short term (i.e. less than one year). The primary reason for the assignment is to fill a position and, interestingly, only 12 per cent of assignees had prior international experience.

Given the important roles commonly assigned to expatriates, it is logical to assume that MNEs take great care in their selection process. What is evident from the now considerable literature on the topic is that the selection of expatriates is complex. Indeed, predicting future performance potential when hiring or promoting staff is challenging at the best of times, but operating in foreign environments certainly adds another level of uncertainty. For this reason, before we take a critical look at criteria for expatriate selection, we should consider the current debate surrounding expatriate non-performance.

Expatriate failure

There are three questions related to failure: its definition, the magnitude of the phenomenon and the costs associated with failure. We shall treat these separately before examining the reasons attributed to expatriate failure and the link to selection criteria.

What do we mean by expatriate failure?

The term expatriate failure has been defined as the premature return of an expatriate (that is, a return home before the period of assignment is completed). In such a case, an expatriate failure represents a selection error, often compounded by ineffective expatriate management policies. There has been some discussion in the literature about the usefulness of defining expatriate failure so narrowly. An expatriate may be ineffective and poorly adjusted yet, if not recalled, the person will not be considered a failure. Because of an inability either to effectively handle the new responsibilities or to adjust to the country of assignment, performance levels may be diminished. These results will not be immediately apparent but can have long-term negative consequences in terms of subsidiary performance. However, if the expatriate remains for the duration of the assignment, to all intents and purposes, the assignment will have been considered a success.

Thus, the premature return rate is not a perfect measure of success or failure, and may underestimate the problem. For example, in his study of 36 British-based firms, Forster[6] used the broadest definition of failure (that is, including under-performance and retention upon completion of the assignment). Forster found that a high proportion of staff do struggle to cope with their overseas assignments, concluding:

> If we accept that a broader definition of EFRs [expatriate failure rates] is warranted, then it can be argued that the actual figure of those who are 'failing' on IAs [international assignments] could be somewhere between 8 per cent and 28 per cent of UK expatriates and their partners.

Support for broadening the definition of expatriate failure comes from a 1997/98 Price Waterhouse[7] study of international assignment policy and practice among European multinationals (including US subsidiaries). Unlike previous surveys of this kind, the study added 'under-performance' to its definition of assignment failure, and found:

> The rates for employees currently under-performing on assignment as a result of difficulties in adapting to their cultural surroundings are even higher. 29% of companies report a rate in excess of one in twenty, with 7% reporting a rate over one in ten.

What is the magnitude of the phenomenon we call expatriate failure? Tung's[8] highly cited 1981 article could be said to have started the discussion about expatriate failure and, more particularly, the inability of US nationals to handle an international assignment. Her results suggested that expatriate failure was of more concern to US firms: 24 per cent of the US firms in her sample (n = 80) had recall rates below 10 per cent; compared to 59 per cent of the West European (n = 29) and 76 per cent of the Japanese firms (n = 35) reporting recall rates of less than 5 per cent. Later studies appear to confirm Tung's European results[9] in terms of expatriate failure. However, many studies that explore expatriate failure and expatriate adjustment persist in quoting high US rates of failure, variously reporting it as falling between 30 to 50 per cent and even higher.

Harzing[10] has questioned the reported failure rates in the US literature, claiming there is 'almost no empirical foundation for the existence of high failure rates when measured as premature re-entry'. More recently, Christensen and Harzing have questioned the value of the whole concept of expatriate failure, arguing that 'it might well be time to abandon the concept of expatriate failure altogether and instead draw on the general HR literature to analyze problems related to turnover and performance management in an expatriate context'.[11]

When we delve further into this issue to establish how large the problem actually is, one finds a suggestion of a declining rate. Evidence can be gained from two global surveys, conducted in 2002 and 2005. The first was a survey of 300 multinationals (46 per cent North American, 28 per cent European, and 9 per cent UK) from a wide range of industries by US-based consulting firm, ORC Worldwide.[12] They report that almost 56 per cent of respondents did not know the return rate of their expatriates. Those who keep records indicated, on average, that less than

10 per cent of their international assignments ended in early recall. The second survey by GMAC Global Relocation Services (GMAC-GRS) mentioned earlier asked responding firms to indicate their attrition rate – that is, expatriate turnover, including early recall from an international assignment, and upon completion of the assignment. Again, we find that some firms (36 per cent) could not answer, as they did not have the figures. Those that did have the information indicated that 21 per cent left the firm during an assignment and 23 per cent within one year of returning from an assignment. It would have been useful to find out why so many of the responding firms in these two surveys did not keep records on assignment failures. Perhaps this is because it is not seen as an important issue?

Respondents in the ORC Worldwide survey were also asked to define a failed assignment. Seventy-two per cent defined it as 'early return of the expatriate'. The other definitions were: 'unmet business objectives' (71 per cent); 'problems at assignment location' (49 per cent); and 'unmet career development objectives' (32 per cent). It would appear multinationals are recognizing that there are many aspects to a failed assignment, though it is not clear from the report if responding firms were separating out under-performance from early recall. Unmet business objectives, problems at assignment location and unmet career development may be reasons for early recall rather than a definition.

From the above discussion, though, we can draw a number of conclusions:

1. Broadening the definition of expatriate failure beyond that of premature return is warranted. Following up broad surveys with interviews with responding firms may assist in this.
2. Regardless of the definition or precise amount of 'failure', its very exposure as a problem has broadened the issue to demonstrate the complexity of international assignments. In fact, one could argue that the so-called persistent myth of high US expatriate failure rates has been a positive element in terms of the attention that has subsequently been directed towards expatriation practices. It has certainly provoked considerable research attention into the causes of expatriate failure.
3. The evidence about expatriate failure rates is somewhat inconclusive. Recent studies suggest that high failure rates reported in the 1980s have not persisted for US nationals. Though recent reports do not break results down into nationality groups, US firms form the largest group in these surveys. The European studies reported above were conducted at various intervals since Tung's original study, and do not include the same countries. Further, non-US researchers have been reporting from regional or single country perspectives (see for example, Björkman and Gertsen[13] who found expatriate failure rates of less than 5 per cent for Nordic firms; Dowling and Welch[14] reported similar results for Australian firms).
4. The above studies tend not to differentiate between types of expatriate assignments, the level of 'international' maturity,[15] or firm size – factors that may influence failure in its broadest sense.
5. It may be that companies operating internationally have since become more aware of the problems associated with expatriate failure and have learned how to avoid them. That is, multinationals have become more sophisticated in their approach to IHRM activities. Benchmarking against other firms may have assisted in the development of an awareness of international assignment issues.

What are the costs of failure?

These can be both *direct* and *indirect*. Direct costs include airfares and associated relocation expenses, and salary and training. The precise amount varies according to the level of the position concerned, country of destination, exchange rates and whether the 'failed' manager is replaced by another expatriate.

The 'invisible' or indirect costs are harder to quantify in money terms but can prove to be more expensive for the company. Many expatriate positions involve contact with host-government officials and key clients. Failure at this level may result in loss of market share, difficulties with host-government officials and demands that expatriates be replaced with HCNs (thus affecting the multinational's general staffing approach). The possible effect on local staff is also an indirect cost factor, since morale and productivity could suffer.[16]

Failure also, of course, has an effect on the expatriate concerned, who may lose self-esteem, self-confidence and prestige among peers.[17] Future performance may be marked by decreased motivation, lack of promotional opportunities, or even increased productivity to compensate for the failure. Finally, the expatriate's family relationships may be threatened. These are additional costs to organizations that are often overlooked.

Factors moderating performance

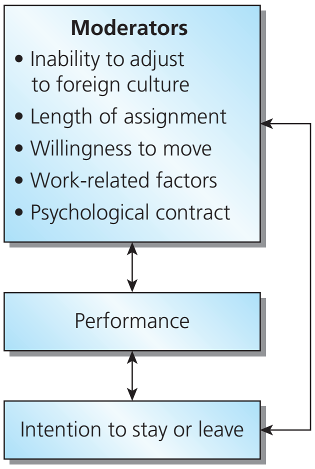
Naturally, the debate about the degree to which expatriate failure occurs has been accompanied by investigation and speculation about why failure occurs. Expatriates tend to have a higher profile, so reducing the rate of incidence is of some strategic importance as multinationals continue to rely on expatriates and therefore wish to encourage mobility. Consequently, there has been considerable research that has attempted to identify factors that may moderate performance and affect the decision to stay or leave the international assignment. The primary intention has been to link reasons for early recall to predictors of success and thereby generate selection criteria that may assist multinationals in their staffing decisions. While the focus has predominately been on cross-cultural adjustment, other factors have been identified, as shown in Figure 5-1. We will base our examination of the issue around this figure.

Inability to adjust to the foreign culture

This factor has been a consistent reason given for expatriate failure – and has been the subject of considerable interest to researchers. Again, we must acknowledge the pioneering contribution of Tung's[18] study in providing the impetus for this interest. She found national differences in the responses between the US and Japanese firms. Asked to rank reasons for failure in descending order of importance, US firms ranked 'inability of the spouse to adjust' as the most important, whereas this was ranked fifth for the Japanese firms. For the European firms, 'inability of the spouse to adjust' was the only consistent response provided.

Tung[19] noted that the relatively lower ranking of 'inability of spouse to adjust' by Japanese respondents is not surprising, given the role and status to which Japanese society relegates the spouse. However, other social factors may contribute to this finding. Because of the extremely competitive nature of the

Figure 5-1 International assignments: factors moderating performance



Japanese education system, the spouse commonly opts to remain in Japan with the children, particularly where male offspring are concerned. The Japanese word for these unaccompanied male expatriates is *tanshin funin* or bachelors-in-exile.[20] Thus, in many cases, the spouse is not a factor in expatriate failure. Unlike the debate around the magnitude of the problem, research over the past 20 years has shown a consistent ranking of 'inability of the spouse/partner/family' as a primary cause of early recall. The GMAC-GRS 2005 global survey mentioned above reported the following reasons for early return (in rank order):

1. family concerns
2. accepted new position in the company
3. completed assignment early
4. cultural adjustment challenges
5. security concerns
6. career concerns.

The persistence of family concerns as a reason for early return over several decades since Tung's findings were published, despite company programs to try to alleviate the problem, indicate how difficult an international assignment can be for some. It certainly explains why so much attention has been given to expatriate adjustment and confirms the importance of the selection process.

While there is limited evidence (at least readily accessible and in English) regarding expatriate experiences from other Asian countries, accounts indicate that expatriates from these countries may face similar adjustment problems. For example, Selmer *et al.*[21] report that spouses and children of Chinese expatriates in Hong Kong were normally not permitted to accompany the expatriates. While adjustment was not the focus of this study, the authors found that most of the respondents would have liked to have had their family with them, and conclude that the precarious situation of the families was not conducive to the pursuit of an international career.

The process of adjustment

The dilemma is that adjustment to a foreign culture is multifaceted, and individuals vary in terms of their reaction and coping behaviors. The concept of an adjustment cycle or curve, depicted in Figure 5-2, is helpful in demonstrating the typical phases that may be encountered during cultural adjustment. The curve (sometimes referred to as the U-Curve,) is based on psychological reactions to the assignment and comprises certain phases.[22]

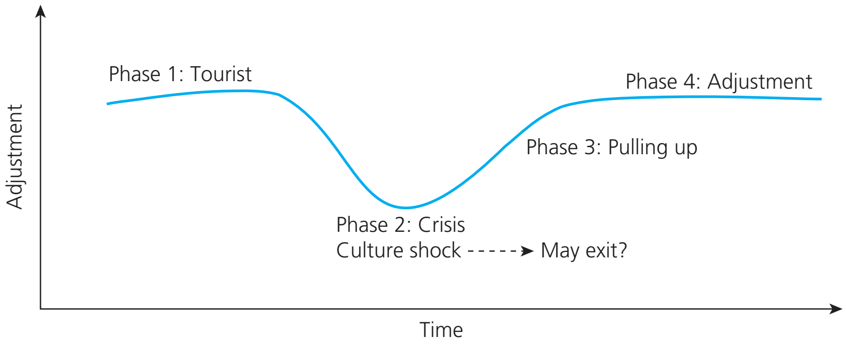
Phase 1 commences with reactions prior to the assignment – the expatriate may experience a range of positive and negative emotions such as excitement, anxiety, fear of the unknown, or a sense of adventure. There can be an upswing of mood upon arrival in the assignment country that produces what has been referred to as the 'honeymoon' or 'tourist' phase. Then, as the novelty wears off, realities of everyday life in the foreign location begin to intrude, homesickness sets in, and a downswing may commence – a feeling that 'the party is over'[23] – which can create negative appraisals of the situation and the location leading to a period of crisis – *Phase 2*. This can be a critical time, and how the individual copes with the psychological adjustment at this phase has an important outcome in terms of success or failure. There is a suggestion that 'failure as an early recall' may be triggered at this point (indicated by the dotted arrow in Figure 5-2). Once past this crisis point, as the expatriate comes to terms with the demands of the new environment, there is a pulling up – *Phase 3* – as the person begins to adjust to the new environment. This levels off over time to what has been described as healthy recovery – *Phase 4*.

However, when considering the above U-Curve, one should remember the following points:

- The U-Curve is not normative. Some people do not experience this U-Curve. Individuals will differ in their reactions to the foreign location.
- The time period involved varies, and there is no conclusive statistical support for the various phases. Black and Mendenhall[24] point out that the U-Curve describes these phases but does not explain how and why people move through the various phases.
- There may be other critical points during the assignment – beyond Phase 4 – that may produce downturns, negative reactions and upswings (that is, a cyclical wave rather than a U-Curve).

The phases of cultural adjustment

Figure 5-2



Source: Adapted from H. De Cieri, P.J. Dowling and K.F. Taylor, 'The Psychological Impact of Expatriate Relocation on Partners', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1991) p. 380.

Despite these limitations, however, expatriates often relate experiencing these phases, and awareness of the psychological adjustment process can assist the expatriate adopt positive coping behaviors. We should also note that family members experience the phases differently, and not necessarily move through the various phases at the same time as each other. How accompanying family members handle cultural adjustment is important, as there can be a spill-over effect – an unhappy spouse may affect the expatriate's ability to adjust, and thus impact on performance. For example, in their study of US managers in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Black and Stephens[25] found a high correlation between spouse and expatriate adjustment. Companies can assist in the cultural adjustment of the expatriate and employee by using volunteer employees who have worked abroad as expatriates to 'adopt' a visiting family and assist in their adjustment.

Length of assignment

There is some evidence that length of assignment does contribute to adjustment and performance. For example, the average assignment for Japanese firms tends to be four to five years, compared with the figure shown in Table 5.1 of 1–3 years for 53 per cent of the sample of the GMAC 2005 survey. A longer assignment allows the expatriate more time to adjust to the foreign situation and become productive.[26] Japanese firms often do not expect the expatriate to perform up to full capacity until the third year; the first year of the foreign assignment is seen mainly as a period of adjustment to the foreign environment.

Willingness to move

In a situation where an employee is a reluctant expatriate or accompanied by reluctant family members, it is more likely that they may interpret negatively events and situations encountered in the new environment. In their survey of 405 US managers and their spouse/partners, Brett and Stroh[27] found a significant causal relationship between the manager and the spouse's willingness to move. They conclude that managers who are most ready for international relocations are those whose spouses are also supportive of that move – a not surprising finding. Other studies support the importance of a positive outlook. For example, Hamill[28] reported that the reasons for lower British expatriate failure rates were that British managers were more internationally mobile than US managers, and that perhaps British companies had developed more effective expatriate policies. Dowling and Welch[29] note that the respondents in their research perceived an expatriate posting as a desirable appointment – an opportunity to travel and live overseas – leading to a positive outlook on the foreign assignment. Willingness to relocate as a predictor of success should include the views of family members and is also associated with the perceived desirability of the location of the international assignment.

Work environment-related factors

Gregersen and Black[30] studied 220 American expatriates in four Pacific Rim countries. They found a positive correlation between what they term 'intent to stay in the overseas assignment' and the PCN's commitment to the local company, adjustment to interaction with HCNs, and adjustment to general living conditions. Adjustment to the work role itself however, was negatively associated with 'intent to stay'. Support for these factors as moderators has come from a study by Shaffer *et al.*[31] of expatriates working in ten US multinationals. However, Bolino and Feldman[32] extended this to include skills utilization and commitment to the organization. Their study of 268 expatriates from six Fortune 500 companies found that effective skill utilization was significantly related to job satisfaction, organization commitment and intent to finish the international assignment.

Job autonomy is also a powerful factor influencing expatriate turnover.[33] Another moderator is the perceived level of organizational support – from home as well as from the host unit.[34] Further, once the expatriate has mastered, or nearly completed, the assigned work, other factors may surface and assume relative importance. For instance, if the work becomes less demanding and no longer so time-consuming, the expatriate may have time to pay more attention to negative cross-cultural experiences that the family is encountering. These negative experiences can become distorted when combined with lack of challenge at work and thus sow seeds for early recall, or under-performance.

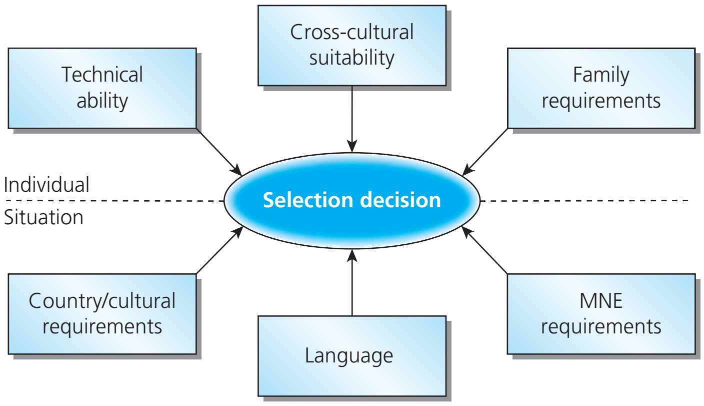
Selection criteria

We now have a fuller understanding of the phenomenon called expatriate failure, and the multifaceted nature of international assignments, and why developing appropriate selection criteria has become a critical IHRM issue. It should be noted that selection is a two-way process between the individual and the organization. A prospective candidate may reject the expatriate assignment, either for individual reasons, such as family considerations, or for situational factors, such as the perceived toughness of a particular culture.

It is a challenge for those responsible for selecting staff for international assignments to determine appropriate selection criteria. Figure 5-3 illustrates the factors involved in expatriate selection, both in terms of the individual and the specifics of the situation concerned. It should be noted that these factors are inter-related. We base the following discussion around this Figure.

Factors in expatriate selection

Figure 5-3



Technical ability

Naturally, the person's ability to perform the required tasks is an important consideration. Technical and managerial skills are therefore an essential criterion. Indeed, research findings consistently indicate that multinationals place heavy reliance on relevant technical skills during the expatriate selection process.[35] For example, the ORC Worldwide 2002 survey mentioned earlier found that 72 per cent of responding firms selected assignees on the basis of skills or competencies for the job. This is not surprising given that 'position filling' is the most common reason for an international assignment. Reinforcing the emphasis on technical skills is the relative ease with which the multinational may assess the candidate's potential, as technical and managerial competence can be determined on the basis of past performance. Since expatriates are predominantly internal recruits, personnel evaluation records can be examined and checked with the candidate's past and present superiors. The dilemma though is that past performance may have little or no bearing on one's ability to achieve a task in a foreign cultural environment.

Cross-cultural suitability

As we have already discussed, the cultural environment in which expatriates operate is an important factor in determining successful performance. Apart from the obvious technical ability and managerial skills, expatriates require cross-cultural abilities that enable the person to operate in a new environment. There appears to be a consensus that desirable attributes should include cultural empathy, adaptability, diplomacy, language ability, positive attitude, emotional stability and maturity.[36]

In practice, while inter-cultural competence is recognized as important, it is difficult to precisely define what this comprises, let alone assess a candidate's suitability in this regard. One has to take into consideration aspects such as the individual's personality, attitude to foreigners, ability to relate to people from another cultural group and so on. Multinationals may indicate that, for example, relational abilities are an important expatriate selection criterion, but few will assess a candidate's relational ability through a formal procedure such as judgement by senior managers or psychological tests. As we will discuss shortly, testing procedures are not necessarily the answer.

Family requirements

The contribution that the family, particularly the spouse, makes to the success of the overseas assignment is now well documented, as we mentioned above in relation to the impact of the accompanying spouse/partner on early return. Despite the importance of the accompanying spouse/partner, as Shaffer and Harrison[37] point out, the focus has been on the expatriate. From the multinational's perspective, expatriate performance in the host location is the important factor. However, the interaction between expatriate, spouse/partner and family members' various adjustment experiences is now well documented.

It should be pointed out the spouse (or accompanying partner) often carries a heavy burden. Upon arrival in the country of assignment, the responsibility for settling the family into its new home falls on the spouse, who may have left behind a career, along with friends and social support networks (particularly relatives). In developing countries the employment of house servants is quite common but this is an aspect of international living that many Westerners from developed countries have some difficulty adjusting to. It is often not possible for the spouse/partner to work in the country of assignment and the well-being and education of the children may be an ongoing concern for the spouse. Though the majority of spouses are female, accompanying male spouses/partners face similar problems of adjustment.[38] In fact, when one adds cultural adjustment problems to such a situation, it is perhaps not so surprising to find that some couples seek to return home prematurely.

Despite studies that emphasize the link between the favorable opinion of the spouse to the international assignment and expatriate adjustment, companies appear reluctant to include the spouse/partner in the selection process, treating it in a peripheral way.[39] As a survey by Price Waterhouse[40] found:

> Compared to our 1995 survey, the number of companies which routinely interview an employee's spouse or partner as part of the selection process has increased slightly, from 9% to 11%. However, overall, fewer companies involve the spouse or partner in the selection process under any circumstances, rising from half in 1995 to two-thirds currently. Of the companies which do interview the spouse or partner, 12% interview them on their own. Given that more than a third of the companies believe the assignments that either failed, or had been ended prematurely, due to a spouse or partner's difficulties with adapting to life in the host location, it is perhaps a little surprising that companies are not attributing more importance to assessing their suitability.

The 2002 ORC Worldwide survey did not address the involvement of the spouse/partner in the selection process, though reports that assistance was provided to help the accompanying person cope with the international assignment.

Apart from the accompanying partner's career, there are family considerations that can cause a potential expatriate to decline the international assignment. Disruption to children's education is an important consideration, and the selected candidate may reject the offered assignment on the grounds that a move at this particular stage in his or her child's life is inappropriate. The care of aging or invalid parents is another consideration. While these two reasons have been noted in various studies, what has been somewhat overlooked is the issue of single parents. Given increasing divorce rates, this may become a critical factor in assignment selection and acceptance where the custody of children is involved. The associated legal constraints, such as obtaining the consent of the other parent to take the child (or children) out of the home country, and visiting/access rights, may prove to be a major barrier to the international mobility of both single mothers and single fathers.

Country/cultural requirements

As discussed in Chapter 1, international firms are usually required to demonstrate that a HCN is not available before the host government will issue the necessary work permit and entry visa for the desired PCN or TCN. In some cases, the multinational may wish to use an expatriate and has selected a candidate for the international assignment, only to find the transfer blocked by the host government. Many developed countries are changing their legislation to facilitate employment-related immigration which will make international transfers somewhat easier – for example the European Union Social Charter allows for free movement of citizens of member countries within the EU. It is important that HR staff keep up-to-date with relevant legislative changes in the countries in which the MNE is involved.

Our IHRM in Action Case below shows how one US MNE's careful planning allowed it to obtain the required number of PCN visas to successfully launch its business in Australia.

An important, related point is that generally a work permit is granted to the expatriate only. The accompanying spouse or partner may not be permitted to work in the host country. Increasingly, multinationals are finding that the inability of the spouse to work in the host country may cause the selected candidate to reject the offer of an international assignment. If the international assignment is accepted, the lack of a work permit for the accompanying spouse or partner may cause difficulties in adjustment and even contribute to failure. For these reasons, as reported above, some multinationals provide assistance in this regard.

Further, the host country may be an important determinant. Some regions and countries are considered 'hardship postings': remote areas away from major cities or modern facilities; or war-torn regions with high physical risk. Accompanying family members may be an additional responsibility that the multinational does not want to bear. There may be a reluctance to select females for certain Middle East or South East Asian regions and in some countries a work permit for a female expatriate will not be issued. These aspects may result in the selection of HCNs rather than expatriates.

To overcome this problem, a group of more than 20 large multinationals (including Shell, British Airways, Unilever, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Siemens) has established an organization called 'Permits Foundation',[41] in an attempt to promote the improvement of work permit regulations for spouses of expatriates. It also aims to raise government awareness of the connection between work permits and employee mobility.

IHRM in Action Case 5-1

Citibank Plans for Changing Staffing Needs

Banks, along with oil and construction companies, remain heavy users of PCN employees, because these industries require very specific (sometimes firm-specific) skills frequently not found in foreign locations. In the mid-1980s Australia offered a once-only opportunity for foreign banks to enter the local market. Citibank already held a limited banking license that allowed it to operate in Australia as a merchant bank and finance company. A year before the licenses were to be awarded, Citibank sent one of its senior HR managers on a year-long assignment to Sydney to assess the staffing implications of an application to the Australian government for a banking license. First, an assessment was made as to how many PCN visas would be required. Then, a detailed summary was prepared for the Australian immigration department that demonstrated the history of Citibank's investment in training Australian nationals, with career examples of HCNs who were now employed by Citibank in Australia, in other foreign locations, and in the USA. This proved to be a successful strategy: Citibank received one of the 16 licenses on offer and all of the PCN work permits it requested.

MNE requirements

Situational factors often have an influence on selection decisions. For example, the MNE may consider the proportion of expatriates to local staff when making selection decisions, mainly as an outcome of its staffing philosophy. However, operations in particular countries may require the use of more PCNs and TCNs than would normally be the case, as multinationals operating in parts of Eastern Europe and China are discovering. This will affect the selection ratio – that is, PCN:TCN: HCN. Other situational factors include the following:

- *The mode of operation involved.* Selecting staff to work in an international joint venture may involve major input from the local partner, and could be heavily constrained by the negotiated agreement on selection processes.[42]
- *The duration and type of the assignment.*[43] Family members tend not to accompany an expatriate when the assignment is only for three to six months, so family requirements would not normally be a relevant factor in the selection decision in such cases.
- *The amount of knowledge transfer* inherent in the expatriate's job in the foreign operation. If the nature of the job is to train local staff, then the MNE may include training skills as a selection criterion.

Language

The ability to speak the local language is an aspect often linked with cross-cultural ability. However, we have chosen to stress language as situation-determined in terms of its importance as a factor in the selection decision. Language skills may be regarded as of critical importance for some expatriate positions, but lesser in others, though some would argue that knowledge of the host country's language is an important aspect of expatriate performance, regardless of the level of position.

Differences in language are recognized as a major barrier to effective cross-cultural communication.[44] Yet, in terms of the other selection criteria we have examined above, from the multinational's perspective, language is placed lower down the list of desirable attributes. For example, the ORC Worldwide survey results rank language ability as the fifth most important selection criteria. In the past, US multinationals have tended to place a relatively low importance on foreign language skills. For example, in a 1990 study of US multinationals, Fixman[45] found that foreign language skills were rarely considered an important part of international business success. She comments: 'Language problems were largely viewed as mechanical and manageable problems that could be solved individually'. This view is also confirmed by the consistent and relatively poor performance of young Americans on polls of geographic literacy sponsored by the National Geographic Education Foundation. In the most recent 2006 poll[46] of young American adults between the ages of 18 and 24 the following results were reported:

- 50 per cent of the sample thought it was 'important but not absolutely necessary' to know where countries in the news are located.
- 75 per cent did not know that a majority of Indonesia's population of 245 million is Muslim (making it the largest Muslim country in the world).
- 74 per cent of the sample thought that English was the most commonly spoken language in the world, rather than Mandarin Chinese.

There are signs that in a post 9/11 world, the USA is beginning to refocus on some of these issues. Recently, the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the US Congress[47] has examined the issue of international and foreign language studies and the Chair of the Committee noted that:

> Congress created Title VI in the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to address a sense of crisis caused by U.S. citizens' lack of knowledge of other countries and cultures. This program remains the federal government's leading mechanism for supporting programs that produce Americans with expertise in foreign languages and international studies, including international business . . . Continued federal support for these programs reflects the significance and growing relevance of language and area studies, diplomacy, national security, and business competitiveness.

This level of commitment is encouraging, but as we noted in Chapter 1, the task of internationalizing business education in the USA is a large one and will require considerable resources and persistence for significant progress to be made.

Another component to language as a situation factor in the selection decision is the role of the *common corporate language*. As previously discussed, many multinationals adopt a common corporate language as a way of standardizing reporting systems and procedures. This is not, perhaps, an issue for PCN selection within multinationals from the Anglo-Saxon world (Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) where the chosen corporate language remains the same as that of the home country. However, it becomes an expatriate selection issue for multinationals from non-English-speaking countries that adopt English as the corporate language, unless the posting is to a country with a shared language. For instance, a Spanish multinational, using Spanish as the corporate language, selecting a PCN to head its new subsidiary in Mexico, does not face the same language issue as a Spanish multinational, with English as its corporate language, selecting a PCN to its US facility. For the latter, fluency in English would be required. Lack of fluency in the corporate language, therefore, can be a selection barrier. Prospective candidates may be eliminated from the potential pool due to a lack of at least competency in the common language.[48] Language ability therefore may limit the MNE's ability to select the most appropriate candidate.

The use of selection tests

Although there is a consensus among scholars and practitioners that personal characteristics (or traits) are important, there is considerable debate about how such personal characteristics can be reliably and accurately measured. Personality and psychological tests have been used in the selection process, but the effectiveness of such tests as predictors of cultural adjustment is questioned. For example, Torbiörn[49] comments that though desirable personality traits are specified and recommended, the tests or criteria to assess these traits are seldom convincingly validated. Likewise, Willis[50] states that if tests are used they should be selected with care and regard for reliability and validity because, while some tests may be useful in suggesting potential problems, there appears to be little correlation between test scores and performance. He further adds that most of the relevant tests have been devised in the USA and, therefore, may be culture-bound. Use of such tests without careful modification on non-American nationals adds another question mark to their reliability and validity as predictors of expatriate success. It is important that HRM staff in all locations are aware of the debate surrounding the use of selection tests, particularly the culture-bound nature of psychometric tests designed for PCNs.

Another constraint is that in some countries (the UK and Australia for instance) there is controversy about the use of psychological tests.[51] There is also a different pattern of usage across countries – the use of such tests is very low in Germany.[52] The 1997/98 Price Waterhouse survey reported only 12 per cent used formal assessment centers, and some companies 'indicated through their comments that they also use psychometric tests'. The majority of respondents (85 per cent) mainly assessed expatriate suitability through the traditional interview process. More recent surveys have not addressed this aspect of selection. The difficulty of predicting success, then, seems to be related to the lack of valid and reliable screening devices to identify, with certainty, managers who will succeed in a foreign assignment. The crucial variables affecting the adjustment of the individual and family are not only difficult to identify or measure, but the complex relationship between personality factors and ability to adjust to another culture is not well understood.[53]

Another drawback of expatriate selection based on traits or characteristics is the subjective nature of the scoring of abilities, especially those classified as personal and environmental characteristics. Nevertheless, models derived from this approach have value in that they provide some guidelines that can be applied during the selection process, rather than mere reliance on the potential manager's domestic record as a predictor.[54] One such model is that offered by Mendenhall and Oddou.[55] They propose a four-dimensional approach that attempts to link specific behavioral tendencies to probable overseas performance:

- The self-oriented dimension – the degree to which the expatriate expresses an adaptive concern for self-preservation, self-enjoyment and mental hygiene.
- The perceptual dimension – the expertise the expatriate possesses in accurately understanding why host nationals behave the way they do.
- The others-oriented dimension – the degree to which the expatriate is concerned about host-national co-workers and desire to affiliate with them.
- The cultural-toughness dimension – a mediating variable that recognizes that acculturation is affected by the degree to which the culture of the host country is incongruent with that of the home country.

The evaluation of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses on these four dimensions, Mendenhall and Oddou suggested, will focus appropriate attention on cross-cultural ability and behavior, thus complementing technical ability assessment.

Equal employment opportunity issues

In the recruitment and selection process, multinationals must address the issue of equal employment opportunity (EEO) for employees in all employment locations. This involves taking into consideration the increasingly conflicting national laws on employment. As Jain, Sloane and Horwitz[56] mention, mandatory retirement and hiring ages are illegal in some countries such as the USA and some other countries but remain a legal requirement in other countries.

Determining which law applies where, and which has precedence, is a problem without a specific solution. The USA has a comprehensive statute (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) to cover many EEO situations. In 1991 the US Supreme Court[57] held that this Act does not apply outside the territorial borders of the USA. The case involved an American citizen who claimed that he had been illegally discriminated against while working overseas for a US corporation. A naturalized citizen born in Lebanon, the plaintiff began working for Aramco Corporation in Texas in 1979 and was transferred by the company to work in Saudi Arabia in 1980, where he worked until 1984, when he was discharged. The Court rejected the person's claim that he had been harassed and ultimately discharged by Aramco Corporation on account of his race, religion and national origin. This decision had important implications for the status and protection of Americans working abroad for US firms and the Civil Rights Act was subsequently amended by the US Congress in 1991 to extend protection to all US citizens working overseas.

Equal employment opportunity laws are expressions of social values with regard to employment and reflect the values of a society or country.[58] In parts of the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America, women are perceived to have a lower social status and are not universally employed. On the other hand, with the increasing rate of female entry into the workforce, many Western countries have introduced legislation to cover sex discrimination. Multinationals must be aware of legislation and ensure subsidiary compliance where appropriate in selecting expatriates.

Expatriate selection in practice: the role of the coffee machine

As we indicated at the beginning of the section on selection criteria, most multinationals admit that technical and/or managerial skills are the dominant, sometimes only, criteria used. We have suggested that reliance on technical skills is mainly due to the fact that most international assignments are 'position filling'. Of the factors outlined in Figure 5-3 above, technical skills is perhaps the easiest to measure. It could be argued that Figure 5-3 represents a best practice or ideal selection model which many MNEs do not in fact use. Harris and Brewster[59] have argued that expatriate selection, in reality, often tends to be an ad hoc process which they describe as the 'coffee-machine' system.

Harris and Brewster suggest that executives chatting around the coffee-machine (or water cooler) can start the selection process through a casual conversation about an assignment need confronting one of them. Another executive can volunteer the name of a potential expatriate thus starting an informal short list of candidates. What happens next, according to Harris and Brewster, is that the multinational's processes are then activated to legitimize the decision that has, in effect, already been taken around the coffee machine. Harris and Brewster relate that this process was the most common form of selection process they encountered in their study of UK firms. They then derived a typology of selection systems to explain variations found in the way expatriate selection is conducted, detailed in Table 5-2.

Harris and Brewster regard the coffee-machine scenario as an example of the informal/closed cell in their typology. It is of course possible to find examples of formal, open selection processes in firms as well as informal or closed systems. Harris and Brewster note that the process can be influenced by the maturity of the multinational, its stage in the internationalization process and its size or industry. The type of position involved, the role of the HR function in the process and whether the multinational is reactive rather than proactive where international assignment selection is involved remain key factors in how selection processes work in multinationals.

Harris and Brewster's selection typology **Table 5-2**

	Formal	*Informal*
OPEN	• Clearly defined criteria • Clearly defined measures • Training for selectors • Open advertising of vacancy (internal/external) • Panel discussions	• Less defined criteria • Less defined measures • Limited training for selectors • No panel discussions • Open advertising of vacancy • Recommendations
CLOSED	• Clearly defined criteria • Clearly defined measures • Training for selectors • Panel discussions • Nominations only (networking/reputation)	• Selectors' individual preferences determine selection criteria and measures • No panel discussions • Nominations only (networking/reputation)

Source: H. Harris and C. Brewster, 'The Coffee-Machine System: How International Selection Really Works', *International Journal of Human Resource Management,* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1999), p. 493. Reproduced with permission.

Dual career couples

So far, we have focused on selecting suitable candidates for international assignments. We will now consider an emerging constraint – the dual career couple – on the available pool of candidates, thus hindering the recruitment and selection process. The rise in dual career couples, along with the aging population and other family-related situations, combine to make more people immobile. Employees are prepared to state the grounds for refusal as 'family concerns'. That this has become more acceptable as a reason reflects a significant shift in thinking about the role of non-work aspects impinging on work-related matters.

The increase in the number of dual-career couples is a worldwide trend, one that is posing a dilemma for both companies and employees alike. This is not surprising given that accepting a traditional international assignment will impact upon the career of the potential candidate's spouse or partner. The ORC Worldwide 2002 survey focused on the issue of dual careers and international assignments. A major finding was that spousal or dual career issues were the most common reasons for rejecting international assignments reported by North American and European firms, but were rarely cited by Asian firms. Rather, concern for children and ageing parents were barriers to assignment acceptance for this group. Likewise, the GMAC-GRS 2005 survey cites spouse career concerns as the third most frequent reason for assignment refusal.

Multinationals are being forced to select from a diminishing pool of candidates who may be less qualified. This has strategic implications for staffing policies, and may be a reason why more TCNs are being utilized. As we noted when discussing the expatriate profile in Table 5-1, 27 per cent of expatriates were TCNs in the 2005 GMAC survey. While cost containment remains a major driver of localization (that is, replacing expatriates with HCNs), staff availability is also a factor.[60] Reflecting this global trend, the impact of the accompanying spouse/partner's career orientation upon the international assignment is an emerging area of research. It seems that career orientation not only affects the couple's willingness to move, but also may negatively affect performance and retention in the foreign location.[61] Some multinationals are endeavoring to come up with solutions to the dual-career challenge. These can be divided into two categories: finding alternative arrangements and making the assignments more 'family-friendly'.

Alternative assignment arrangements

There are a number of alternative assignment arrangements that can be identified in international staffing:

Short-term assignments. In the ORC Worldwide 2002 survey, 72 per cent of responding firms used short-term assignments (compared with 26 per cent in a 1996 ORC survey) as an alternative means of satisfying the international assignment need.

Commuter assignments (sometimes referred to as 'commuter marriages'). The spouse may decide to remain in the home country, and the couple works out ways to maintain the relationship with the help of the firm. Alternatively, couples may move to jobs in adjoining countries, or within the same geographical region to make commuting (relationship-maintenance) easier. Multinationals often adjust compensation benefits to fit with agreed arrangements. The ORC survey found that 46 per cent of responding firms had such arrangements (compared with 19 per cent in 1996).

Other arrangements. Other arrangements included in the ORC 2002 report findings were:

● Unaccompanied assignments	50 %
● Replacing assignments with business travel	57 %
● Virtual assignments	16 %.

Only 23 per cent of respondents in a similar study by ORC Worldwide in 1995 reported the use of unaccompanied assignments.

There has been little attention given to the advantages and disadvantages of these non-standard assignments in terms of the individual employees, their spouses and the strategic objectives that prompt the use of international rather than local staff. While these arrangements may have short-term benefits in overcoming reluctance to move, how effective they will be in encouraging dual career couples to accept international assignments over time is yet to be determined.

Family-friendly policies

Inter-company networking. Here the multinational attempts to place the accompanying spouse or partner in a suitable job with another multinational – sometimes in a reciprocal arrangement. To illustrate: a US multinational may enter into an agreement with a German multinational also operating in, say, China, that they find a position within their respective Chinese facilities for each other's accompanying partner (that is, 'you find my expatriate's spouse a job and work visa, and I will do likewise for you'). Alternatively, a local supplier, distributor, or joint venture partner may agree to employ the accompanying spouse/partner.

Job-hunting assistance. Here the multinational provides spouse/partner assistance with the employment search in the host country. This may be through employment agency fees, career counselling, or simply work permit assistance. Some may provide a fact-finding trip to the host location before the actual assignment. The 2005 GMAC-GRS survey reports that 31 per cent of responding firms assisted in finding the accompanying spouse/partner employment by funding job-finding and executive search fees.

Intra-company employment. This is perhaps a logical but often a somewhat difficult solution. It means sending the couple to the same foreign facility, perhaps the same department. Not all multinationals (or all couples) are comfortable with the idea of having a husband and wife team in the same work location and there can often be difficulties obtaining work visas for such arrangements.

On-assignment career support. Motorola[62] is an example of how a multinational may assist spouses to maintain and even improve career skills through what Motorola calls its Dual-Career Policy. This consists of a lump-sum payment for education expenses, professional association fees, seminar attendance, language training to upgrade work-related skills and employment agency fees. There are conditions attached, such as the spouse must have been employed before the assignment. Thus, if the spouse is unable to find suitable employment, the time can be spent on career development activities.

Other examples of on-assignment assistance are providing help in establishing contacts and paying for lost spouse income. The idea is to maintain skills so that the spouse may find work upon re-entry into the home country. These attempts demonstrate that creative thinking can assist multinationals to overcome this potential barrier. It is not possible to comment with authority on how effective the above assistance schemes are in terms of overcoming the dual career barrier. However, it is clear that multinationals are attempting to address the issue and create solutions for this barrier to mobility.

Are female expatriates different?

Our final issue in terms of selection for international assignments is related to gender. The typical expatriate tends to be male: 23 per cent in the GMAC-GRS 2005 survey were females, 14 per cent in the ORC 2002 survey. The authors of both these surveys make the point that the proportion of females is increasing. For example, the ORC report compares the 2002 situation to that of their 1992 survey where only 5 per cent of expatriates were female. One can go further back to a 1984 article, in which Adler[63] reported a survey of international HR practices in over 600 US and Canadian companies that found only 3 per cent of the 13 338 expatriates identified were female. She found that female expatriates tended to be employed by companies with over 1000 employees in the banking, electronics, petroleum and publishing industries. It has been argued that as the proportion of women in the domestic workforce continues to increase, and as international experience becomes an essential criterion for career progression within multinationals, we will see more international managers who are female.

Over the past decade or so, researchers have attempted to discover why so few expatriates are female. Is it because they were unwilling to relocate? Is it attitudinal? Does it reflect a somewhat externalized belief that men in some cultures, such as certain Asian countries, do not like reporting to female managers, particularly foreign women, and therefore women should not be posted overseas, creating what has been referred to as 'the glass border that supports the glass ceiling'.

A number of studies challenge some of the attitudes regarding the suitability of females for international assignments. For example, Stroh, Varma and Valy-Durbin[64] found that US and Canadian women are interested in and likely to accept international assignments, though there are variations between those with children and those without. However the women in this study tended to believe that their firms were hesitant to ask them to accept an international assignment, though supervisors (whether male or female) did not necessarily share that belief. Further, performance of female expatriates was found initially to be affected by host-country prejudice regarding the role of women in certain countries – considered as culturally tough assignment locations. However, the longer the women were on such assignments, the less they perceived that prejudice was a barrier to effectiveness. Caligiuri and Tung,[65] in their study of female and male expatriates in a US-based multinational found that females can perform equally as well as their male counterparts regardless of a country's attitude toward women in managerial positions.

Taking a different approach in her study of Austrian female expatriates, Fischlmayr[66] used the concepts of external and self-established barriers to explore why women are under-represented in international assignments. These are listed in Table 5-3.

Through 21 interviews with HR managers and female expatriates in Austrian multinationals from various industries and positions, Fischlmayr found that attitudes of HR directors were a major barrier to the selection of female expatriates, though self-established barriers were also very strong. Females in Austrian companies often had to specifically request an international assignment whereas their male colleagues were required to take international assignments. Further, some women regarded that their age was decisive in terms of others' perceptions and expectations about their behavior. The older the woman, the easier it is. Fischlmayr concludes that women are partly to blame for their under-representation.

Mayrhofer and Scullion[67] report on the experiences of male and female expatriates in the German clothing industry. They found that women were sent into a diverse number of countries, including those with an Islamic influence. Overall, there were few differences in the experiences of both gender groups, though female expatriates placed more value on integration of spouse/family issues prior to and during the assignment than did the males in the sample.

Table 5-3 Barriers to females taking international assignments

External barriers	*Self-established barriers*
• HR managers reluctant to select female candidates • Culturally tough locations or regions preclude female expatriates • Those selecting expatriates have stereotypes in their minds that influence decisions	• Some women have limited willingness to relocate • The dual career couple • Women are often a barrier to their own careers by behaving according to gender-based role models

Source: Based on the literature reviewed in I.C. Fischlmayr, 'Female Self-Perception as Barrier to International Careers?', *International Journal of Human Resource Management,* Vol. 13, No. 5 (2002), pp. 773–83.

Assignment lengths in this industry tended to be shorter and involved various forms of non-standard assignments, and there were generally more female managers than perhaps found in other industries. More women than men were assigned for longer assignment terms, and these authors conclude that the higher proportion of women in the industry appeared to make gender less of an issue. However, this did not apply at the top senior management positions where women were less represented. Mayrhofer and Scullion conclude that there are still barriers to female expatriates in terms of senior expatriate positions.

A further contribution comes from a study by Napier and Taylor[68] of female expatriates from various countries working in Japan, China and Turkey. The women fell into three categories: traditional expatriates, 'trailers' who were spouses/partners of male expatriates, and 'independents' – professional women who could be called self-selected expatriates. Napier and Taylor found that gaining credibility with local clients was a major issue. Accommodating cultural differences, maintaining a social life and a need for appropriate interpersonal skills were important factors in coping with work demands. Networks became important for both business and social contexts. Being a minority (foreign females) meant higher visibility than they were used to and could be a positive in terms of getting access to key clients and customers.

What emerges as common across the various studies on female expatriates is that assignment location, level of organization support, spouse/partner satisfaction and inter-cultural experiences are important in terms of performance. The list of moderators is similar to those we discussed in general terms earlier in this chapter. What does appear to differentiate female and male expatriates is the degree to which these moderators affect individual performance and the value placed on cultural awareness training prior to the international assignment. The dual career issue may prove to be a greater barrier for female mobility as males are more reluctant to accompany their spouse/partner.

Summary

This chapter has addressed key issues affecting recruitment and selection for international assignments. We have covered:

- Four myths related to the concept of a global manager: that there is a universal approach to management; that people can acquire multicultural adaptability and behaviors; that there are common characteristics successful international managers share; and that there are no impediments to mobility.
- The debate surrounding the definition and magnitude of expatriate failure.
- Cultural adjustment and other moderating factors affecting expatriate intent to stay and performance. These included duration of the assignment, willingness to move and work-related factors.
- Individual and situational factors to be considered in the selection decision. Evaluation of the common criteria used revealed the difficulty of selecting the right candidate for an international assignment and the importance of including family considerations in the selection process.
- Dual career couples as a barrier to staff mobility, and the techniques multinationals are utilizing to overcome this constraint.
- Female expatriates and whether they face different issues to their male counterparts.

It is also clear that, while our appreciation of the issues surrounding expatriate recruitment and selection has deepened in the past 30 years, much remains to be explored. The field is dominated by US research into predominantly US samples of expatriates, though there has been an upsurge in interest from European academics and practitioners. Will the factors affecting the selection decision be similar for multinationals emerging from countries such as China and India? If more multinationals are to encourage subsidiary staff to consider international assignments as part of an intra-organizational network approach to management, we will need further understanding of how valid the issues discussed in this chapter are for all categories of staff from different country locations. It is apparent, though, that staff selection remains critical. Finding the right people to fill positions, particularly key managers – whether PCN, TCN or HCN – can determine international expansion. However, effective recruitment and selection is only the first step.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a global manager and a global mindset?
2. Should multinationals be concerned about expatriate failure? If so, why?
3. What are the most important factors involved in the selection decision?
4. Are female expatriates different?
5. Discuss the proposition that most expatriate selection decisions are made informally, as suggested by the ‘coffee-machine’ solution.

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