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Coaching modern day nomads

International assignments in global corporations have immensely increased over the last few decades.

The growth of the global economy, multinational corporations and other organizations, as well as growth in intergovernmental and nongovernmental contacts have dramatically increased the number of expatriates.

Consequently expatriate development has become an important human resource development issue not only for multinational corporations but also for international organizations, [Osman-Gani & Tan 2005] governments and other businesses.

Expatriate performance effectiveness depends on a couple of factors, one of them being the ability to adjust themselves to the host culture.

Researchers claim [Shin, Morgeson, and Campion 2007] that in the expatriate literature there is strong support for the fundamental assumption that expatriates have to adjust to new cultural environments by modifying and adapting their behavior to fit the host country's cultural values, norms and paradigms. Meta-analyses that show that expatriate adjustment is an important predictor of performance [Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk 2005] provide similar support.

There is a number of reasons for sending a manager overseas. Such managers are responsible for penetrating new markets, overseeing operational start-ups, transferring technologies, managing joint ventures, transmitting organizational culture and developing international communication skills [Bennet et al. 2000].

Many people decide to work abroad because it can give them invaluable experience that will not only help them differentiate themselves from their competitors, but will also help develop skill sets strongly valued by current or

future employers. Working abroad teaches people how to handle ambiguity and new challenges. With workforces becoming more multicultural and diverse, learning a new language and developing cross-cultural communications skills abroad served managers once they have returned home.

Expatriates' cross-cultural competencies have grown in importance [Zakaria 2000; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985]. However, in the dynamic, diverse global environment, the expatriate often plays a variety of roles which can be described as an explorer, refugee, outsider and even tight rope walker [Richardson & McKenna, 2002].

One must admit that expatriate managers are key players in the global economy, acting as the 'human link in international trade' [Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, p. 168].

1. Failures in international assignments

Although foreign assignments are viewed as a key strategy for MNCs, many expatriate managers are unsuccessful in the foreign organization [Rahim 1983; Baumgarten 1995; Bhagat & Prien 1996; Bennet et al. 2000].

Expatriates' early return to the home country is often a key factor on which most of the measures of success and/or failure in expatriate assignments are based on. However, foreign assignments may be classified as unsuccessful for the following reasons:

- delayed productivity and start-up time,
- disruption of the relationship,
- damage to the organization image,
- lost opportunities [Bennet et al. 2000].

Foreign assignments fail because an expatriate:

- may not possess the required personality skills for the cross-cultural interaction,
- may lack technical abilities,
- may not be motivated to work overseas [Bhagat & Prien 1996; Tung 1981],
- may not communicate well with local employees,
- may not be able to transfer managerial practices to the host country,
- may not be able to adjust to the overall characteristics of the host culture [Bhagat & Prien 1996; Caligiuri et al. 2001; Rahim 1983].

Not only expatriate managers themselves may be unable to adapt to the physical and cultural differences of the new environment. The same problems concern their families.

2. Acculturation

The acculturation process is complex and multidimensional [Thomas 1998]. Assisting expatriate managers in achieving a smooth acculturation is no easy matter.

This process has no identifiable end point where one could be considered as 'acculturated'.

Researchers [Mendenhall et al. 2002] confirm that there exists a considerable body of research on expatriate selection, training and development. However, the challenge of finding effective methods for improving an expatriate's performance and satisfaction still remains [Earley and Peterson 2004].

Table 1. Suggestions for Expatriate Development

Author	Suggestions
Tung [1982]	Cross-cultural training for expatriates should include <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information about geography, climate, accommodation and schools 2. Introduction of local culture, values and customs 3. Cultural assimilation training 4. Language training 5. Sensibility training to develop attitudinal flexibility 6. Field experience
Oddou [1991]	Expatriate training and support should include <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language training 2. More time off to prepare for the move 3. A clarification of performance criteria 4. Consistent expectations between the domestic and the international site management teams 5. Initiating regular communications with the expatriates 6. Having assigned mentors 7. Providing a social network for expatriate families
Brewster and Pickard [1994]	After investigating cross-cultural training in the European cooperation, suggested that training should develop expatriates' <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness of culture and its influence 2. Knowledge to survive and succeed in different culture 3. Skills to understand and handle emotional challenges
Zakaria [2000]	The author suggested a new cross-cultural training model, which included two types of training programs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experiential training to trigger affective and behavioral responses, which are the basis of intercultural effectiveness skills, and thus enhance psychological adjustment 2. Cognitive training to trigger cognitive responses, especially cultural

awareness and interpersonal skills, and to enhance socio-cultural adjustment.

Petraneek [2004] The author suggested a “four C approach” for global human resource development:

1. Cooperation
2. Collaboration
3. Communication
4. Culture

Source: Wei-Wen Chang , Expatriate Training in International Nongovernmental Organizations: A Model for Research, Human Resource Development Review/ December 2005, 4; 440, pp. 450.

3. Coaching compared with training and mentoring

Organizations understand the importance of smooth acculturation and attempt to increase the likelihood of a successful sojourn by trying to select the right people and providing them with appropriate training opportunities.

One of them is mentoring, assisting expatriate managers to cope with the challenges of a sojourn. Mentors pass on their personal and professional skills, life experience and knowledge to their protégées [Clutterbuck and Megginson 1999]. Obviously, there are clear strengths in being guided by someone who has their own personal experience to share. That is why senior company executives have an important role to play as mentors in the process of acculturation [Harvey, Buckley, Novicevic and Weise 1999].

However, there are several limitations. For instance, what worked well for the mentor might not always be the right solution for the protégée because:

- cultural context in which a mentor gained the experiences and the contexts of the protégée are worlds apart,
- personal qualities and leadership style of the mentor and the protégée can vary significantly.

Additionally this kind of support is usually indirect.

Professional coaching represents a cross-disciplinary approach. It aims at the enhancement of well-being, performance and professional development as well as the facilitation of individual and organizational change [Grant and Cavanagh 2004]. The field of coaching is well-established in many countries. It is developing an international profile. Today, the International Coach Federation (ICF), an international association for professional coaching, formed in 1995, is the leading global organization, with over 14,000 members. The organization is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high professional standards, providing independent certification and building a network of credentialed coaches (www.coachfederation.org.)

However, there are several other organizations operating worldwide:

- International Coaching Community,
- European Coaching Institute,
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council,
- International Association of Coaches,
- Association for Professional Executive Coaching and Supervision,
- International Consortium of Coaching in Organizations,
- Professional Coaches' and Mentors' Association,
- Worldwide Association of Business Coaches,
- American Coaching Association,
- Association for Coaching and some others.

The core constructs of coaching are:

- helping,
- collaborative and egalitarian relationship between a coach and a client,
- focus on the development of the client through an individualized, client-centered process [Grant 2003].

Coaching is used in cross-cultural contexts. Rosinski [2003] developed a coaching process that places the emphasis on leveraging cultural differences at the national, corporate, and individual level.

Over the last couple of years organizational use of professional coaches has grown considerably [Wales 2003].

Executive coaching encompasses a wide range of services and specialties:

- presentation skills,
- anger and stress management,
- strategic planning,
- team building,
- leadership etc.

There are many executive coaching definitions one of them being 'helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals' [Kilburg 2000, 142].

In other words the coaching process is a systematic goal-directed process, that aims to facilitate the sustained change, by fostering the ongoing self-directed learning and personal growth of the executive [Grant 2003].

The main role of coaching is challenging and encouraging clients to reflect on alternative perspectives and trying new approaches. Reflective thinking,

planning and action are essential features of coaching models. The role of a coach is to encourage clients to step outside their stressful work environments to examine their thinking styles and the effectiveness of those styles within their specific contexts. Cognitive perspective plays a central role in coaching. It is worth emphasizing that in the expatriate environment the client is surrounded by people whose cognitive patterns are likely to be very different. In coaching, collaborative goal-setting and action are crucial. Coaches encourage and support the client to extend their existing skills and competencies. The effectiveness of any coaching depends on the personal qualities and professional skills of the coach [Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson 2001]. Therefore, the choice of a coach is vital, especially in a cross-cultural setting. Coaches clearly need a high level of skill in order to be effective. According to Chapman, Best and Casteren [2003, pp. 272] the necessary attributes of a 'capable coach' are:

- communication skills,
- interpersonal skills,
- self-management,
- coaching craft (e.g. goal-setting, planning etc.),
- breadth of experience,
- technical skills.

However the coach who is working with expatriates should have a couple of additional traits:

- an appreciation of the cultures of the client and the host country,
- self-awareness in terms of the coach's own cultural background,
- personal experience in cultural adaptation and acculturation,
- familiarity with the theory, research and practice in cross-cultural psychology, communication and management.

Coaches can use "cultural maps" and dimensions during their sessions and discussions. The best-known writers on this subject are Hofstede [2001], Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner [1998, Inglehart and Baker 2000; Schwartz 1999; Smith, Peterson, and Schwartz 2002].

Although researchers debate about the validity of the maps [for example, see Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1997; McSweeney 2002; Hofstede 1996, 2002], they have a considerable impact on the management practice, including orientation and training of expatriates [Bing 2004].

It is worth stressing that overgeneralization about the results of such measurement across cultural dimensions can lead to failure. Osland, Bird, Delano, and Jacob [2000] believe that cultural dimensions are a good starting point or base from which managers can explore cultural paradoxes and develop complex explanations of the behaviors they observe in the new cultures.

Other important aspects of acculturation effectiveness and the work of a coach are:

- culture from which expatriate managers come from [Stening and Hammer 1992],
- cultural baggage of the coach,
- age and gender.

4. The limitations of coaching

Although coaching is gaining more and more popularity and is a fast growing business, there are several limitations that need be considered:

- some managers don't want to have a coach Laske [1999],
- some managers don't respond to coaching,
- client may become dependent on the coach (inhibiting acculturation),
- when the expatriate is under most stress (early in the sojourn), they may not be receptive to using the reflective space provided by coaching,
- many expatriate assignments take place in developing countries and there is no guarantee that appropriately qualified coaches will be readily available in the host country
- high-quality executive coaching can be very expensive.

Table 2. Relative strengths of coaching, training and mentoring for facilitating expatriate manager success

Method: Characteristic:	Coaching	Training	Mentoring
Works in the affective (A) domain	Yes. Deals with the emotional 'here and now' of the client. Works from the values and aspirations of the client.	Not usually – mainly limited to role plays, simulations. Limited evidence of effective cross over into reality.	Yes. If relationship is strong, expatriate can discuss feelings and get strategies for coping.
Works in the behavioural (B) domain	Yes. Clients can set specific goals or behaviour change and experiment in workplace. Coach can deliver behaviourally based training in areas of expertise. Coach can directly observe behaviour.	Sometimes. Some training programs are specifically designed for skill acquisition and behaviour change.	Sometimes. Depends on how the relationship works. Mentoree likely to make behaviour changes in direct response to advice from experienced mentor.

Works in the cognitive (C) domain	Yes. Reflective thinking and cognitive reframing are strengths of coaching to promote situational awareness and client learning.	Yes. Often a focus of training courses in giving attendees a cognitive appreciation of facing the challenges of expatriate assignment.	Sometimes – depends on mentor. Mentors may give advice for action based on experience rather than encourage mentoree reflection and learning in context.
Works interactively across A, B and C	Yes. Works directly with feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of the client in context.	Rarely. Very hard to achieve within the boundaries of training courses. Role plays, simulations can go some way towards this.	Depends on mentor.
Helps build relationships	Yes – though not directly. Coach – client with others. Coaching goals often include relationship building.	Not usually.	Sometimes – depends on mentor.
Sensitive to context of expatriate	Yes – coach works in context.	Not necessarily – often delivered pre-departure.	Sometimes – depends on location of mentor.
Works over time through the assignment	Yes – regular sessions through sojourn if company is prepared to invest.	Not usually – though can be spaced before, during, and after assignment.	Yes – though sometimes by distance.
Assists with initial adjustment difficulties	Not usually – can assist expatriate in anticipating issues, but time for reflective thinking in the early phase is likely to be limited.	Not usually – pre-departure training can assist in anticipating issues. Early-assignment training programs for individual not usually possible.	Yes – can be very helpful in giving expatriate a trusting, experienced ear.
Tailored to the individual	Yes.	Not usually – group needs considered.	Sometimes – depends on mentor.

Culturally appropriate to expatriate situation	Yes – though depends on coach. Ideally coach will be experienced in relevant cultures, and integrate a cultural perspective to promote client cross-cultural competence.	Sometimes. Courses on cross-cultural management have some impact in cognitive level.	Sometimes – depends on mentor. Can be counterproductive if mentor is home-based and lacks relevant cultural experience.
Facilitates an integrationist approach	Most likely as coaching promotes an ‘and’ rather than ‘either/or’ approach.	Possibly, but not if training is anchored in home culture.	Possible if mentor has achieved success through integration.
Directed to needs of company	Usually – requires agreement between the coach, company, manager. Usually more directed to sustainable change rather than short-term business goals.	Yes – usually. Often courses are geared to specific needs of company at the time.	Yes – assuming mentor is or was in company.
Considers needs of family	Yes – if coaching approach is broad.	Not usually – though can include spouse and family. Spouses not usually a part of training.	Sometimes – depending on nature of the relationship. If mentor becomes a family friend, can be very effective.
Can apply knowledge from research and other sources	Evidence-based coaching is very strong here. Coaches can integrate	Yes, but limited in range and selection.	Possibly – but hit and miss depending on the individual mentor.

Source: Abbott, N.G., Stening, B.W., Atkins P.W.B., Grant A.M., 2006. Coaching expatriate managers for success: Adding value beyond training and mentoring. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* Vol. 44, pp. 296–303.

4. Conclusions

Acculturation is an active, dynamic and holistic process. It impacts on an individual’s affective, behavioral and cognitive domains interactively and is quite often transformative.

Smooth acculturation is one of the most important factors that leads to success in foreign assignments. Coaching encourages synthesis between alternative cultural orientations.

Professional coaching is highly action-focused. That approach helps clients to reach meaningful goals. Professional coaches who have broad knowledge and experience in cross-cultural psychology, management and communication should be able to make a strong contribution towards enhancing the performance and personal satisfaction of modern day nomads.

Abstract

International assignments in global corporations have immensely increased over the last few decades.

The growth of the global economy, multinational corporations and other organizations, as well as growth in intergovernmental and nongovernmental contacts have dramatically increased the number of expatriates. Consequently, expatriate development has become an important human resource development issue not only for multinational corporations but also for international organizations, governments and other businesses. This article deals with the aspects of coaching in acculturation process of expatriate managers.

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