

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Expatriate MasterCourse: Human Resources and International Mobility

Final paper

The spouse: a powerful factor on the success of international assignments.

Do Companies should adapt their policies and offer more comprehensive spouse support due to socioeconomic trends?

Master Thesis

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Introduction:

“The spouse plays a key role during expatriation in terms of willingness to go, assignment completion, expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance” (Mäkelä, Suutari, 2015)

Over the last few decades, the socioeconomic status of families changed. There was an increase of dual-career couples and the role of women has undergone a social and demographic shift. The ‘spouse’ could now be a domestic partner, a same-sex partner, a girlfriend, etc. Also, the percentage of two-income couples increased during the last decades. This topic is important for the Global Mobility function as the HR department has to manage the expatriate and the spouse. It is important to meet the expectation the employee and the spouse has on the assignment to avoid an early termination.

This development needs to be reflected within global mobility policies. The accompanying spouse is not mainly the wife anymore and the number of female expatriates is increasing. Couples often focus on developing their careers simultaneously. “78-Percent of the millennial population is part of a dual-career couple (...) (Graebel, 2017).

The thesis devotes attention to the topic of the accompanying spouse with focus on the current socioeconomic situation, the influence on the success of an assignment and the organisational support companies provide to the employee and the spouse.

Structure

This paper is structured as follows: First, it describes the definition of a trailing spouse and how different this term is used and understood. Chapter two gives an overview of how the definition of the term “dual career couples” and the socioeconomic shift over the last years is influencing this topic. The next chapter describes the different needs within several expat generations. The adjustment process of the Expat and the spouse is looked at in more detail in chapter 4. The influence of the spouse on the success of the assignment is an important topic within this paper. It will be examined in chapter 5.

The author will conduct an interview with a trailing spouse. She accompanied her husband, a Partner at a consultancy company, to Singapore where he is responsible for the new office location in Singapore and for leading the businesses expansion into Asia. The Assignment started on 1st of May 2016 and it is planned for 3 years. She will talk about her experience as a trailing spouse in Singapore and her experience with the Job search in Singapore. This should be seen as an Expert interview and it gives an insight in the life of a spouse. In the opinion of the author, the spouse is a good example as she had difficulties with the job search and an interesting experience abroad.

During the last chapters, the paper outlines options, how companies can improve the spouse support within their Policies. This change is necessary, due to changing circumstances in society and how couples and families organise themselves nowadays. Global Mobility is about people and needs to be adapted to socioeconomic trends to be able to guarantee an outstanding experience for the employee, a success for the company and not producing additional costs due to early termination or dissatisfactions of the employee.

Research methods:

The thesis is based on theoretical findings. Apart from the literature review, the author conducted an expert interview with an expatriate spouse. The theoretical parts are based on articles, books and online publications which are free accessible in the Internet.

Problem statement and limitations:

Many factors can lead to an early termination of an assignment and therefore to unexpected and excessive costs for a company. This Paper focuses on the impact of the trailing spouse and how this could cause an early termination. It also examines how socioeconomic trends influence the term of a trailing spouse and the Global Mobility work.

How can companies support the employee and the trailing spouse and do they have to adapt their Policies due to socioeconomic trends?

Sub questions which should lead to the answer:

- What is the definition of a trailing spouse?
- What is the socioeconomic trend in our society and how does it influence Global Mobility?
- Is the spouse influencing the success of an assignment?
- How do trailing spouses feel in the new location?
- Should companies give this topic significantly more weight and adapt their Policies?

The paper does not look at other factors that could cause employee dissatisfaction, like raising wrong expectations, Job description in the host location is different than expected, etc. It is not examining why employees decide to go on an assignment nor how they are selected within the company. The author is not investigating in detail if the spouse has an influence on the decision process upfront.

Definition and Characteristics of a trailing spouse

The term trailing spouse is under discussion in many articles and forums. The opinion of some authors and Global Mobility specialists is, that this term implicates that the spouse is just following the Partner abroad without own ambitions. Experts are demanding to redefine the term “trailing spouse” as the way, how couples and families are living together, has changed over the last years.

The term ‘trailing spouse’ was first described in 1981 by Mary Bralove in the Wall Street Journal in an article titled “Problems of Two-Career Families Start Forcing Businesses to Adapt”. She described the trailing spouse as a concept of sacrificing the own career plans for following the life partner on an international assignment. (Bralove, 1981)

“Here's one for the endangered species list: the dutiful wife who gleefully sells her house, packs up her bags, and prepares her fresh-faced children to accompany her husband abroad on an overseas assignment” (Worldwide ERC, 2012).

During the interview which the author conducted, the question was raised if the definition of Mary Bralove is still applicable. The trailing spouse answered the following: “Yes, I think it is still the case that the trailing spouse has to somehow give up their career. You must be highly educated to be able to find a Job in Singapore. I was self-employed in Germany and I had to give up my career as well. I lost my clients and at the beginning they told me that it will be possible to be self-employed in Singapore as well but then the legislation changed and it wasn't as easy as we thought. It is also hard to plan a career while you are abroad because you don't know for how long you will stay. I know that also from other Expats. Some are extending their stay and some of them are leaving earlier. The focus is on the partner and not on the trailing spouse. We don't want to fulfil the mentioned definition but very often the circumstances force us to do so”.

In the 1980s the first researches on international company transfers began. At that time, the approaches to spousal adaptation among Expatriates were based on middle-class, middle-aged women who grew up in the 1950s where the picture of a women was the stay-at-home housewife. They were supposed to undertake the supportive role for the husband and even in the research they assumed, that the wife would just follow her husband. The decision-making process was not examined. Many of those early trailing spouse women even if they were highly educated, not often had their own careers. It makes sense that studies did not engage in examining the decision-making process to relocate abroad. (Brescoll, Uhlmann, 2005). Substantial social, economic and political changes occurred since the first studies were realised and the opportunities for women in the field of paid employment expanded greatly during the 1960s and 1970s. As more women entered the workforce the dynamics within the households have modified as well. With the economic independence, women also started to have a greater influence in family decision making processes. One consequence of this change was that quite often, two careers need to be negotiated before a relocation is made. (Vinnicombe, 2013).

As the role of women has undergone a social and demographic shift, women start their own career and the responsibility for the family, child care, etc. is quite often split between man and women. But it is still the fact, that most of the trailing spouses are female. According to the Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016 of Brookfield, 75 % of the Expatriate population is Male and 68 % married. 25 % are female Expats. The Survey represents over 11 Million employees from 163 Global Companies. Over the last years a slight increase of female Expatriates can be observed. According to the Global Mobility Trend Survey 2011, 18 % of international assignees were female. This means that also the support of male trailing spouses is getting more important. “it is safe to assume, that it will be more challenging for male trailing spouse to plug

into a social network and find contentment during an international assignment” (Welsh, Kersten, 2013)

“The organisation is very strong about its diversity and inclusiveness and encourages women to take international assignments by having a range of family friendly policies that provide solutions to some childcare concerns and make this decision easier for female assignees.” Said by the Head of Global Mobility of an EMEA Headquartered Energy Company. (Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016, Brookfield).

Is the definition of a trailing spouse a gender topic? Is it about questioning if the female trailing spouse is a victim of gendered social expectations since she follows her husband and she hence accepts the traditional role or is a man just following abroad if the Partner earns more than he does and for him it is always an economic decision? It is more than that. It is about the personal circumstances of the employee. A trailing spouse could also be a same sex Partner for example. Companies should focus on the individual situation and how they can support the employee, to enable a satisfying situation for the employee and the spouse in the host country. The newest term for trailing spouse is STARS (Spouses Traveling and Relocating Successfully) which is under discussion in social media articles and Blogs. (McGill, Global Living Magazine, 2015). This definition should be the goal. All spouses should be able to call themselves STARS.

Dual career couples and how they influence Global Mobility

One reason why the definition of a trailing spouse is under discussion, is the socioeconomic shift over the last few decades. One of these changes is the increase of dual-career couples.

The term “dual career” was first coined in 1969 by the European academic couple Rhona and Robert Rapoport. In dual-career couples, both partners pursue an occupational career seeking job which are characterized by high professional standards and a high degree of commitment. (Rapoport, 1971) A newer statement is that dual career couples are defined as a couple in which both partners are career-orientated. Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins identified four different family types in modern families where both partners are in a work relationship: (Duxbury, Lyons and Higgins, 2007, p.473)

- the dual-career couple, in which both partners are engaged in managerial or professional work;
- the dual-earner couple, in which both partners have (low-paying) “jobs” rather than careers;
- the status-reversal couple, in which the female partner is engaged in managerial or professional work, whereas the male partner has a “job”; and
- the new-traditional couple, in which the male partner is engaged in managerial or professional work, whereas the female partner has a ‘job’.

These differences have a major influence on the ability of these individuals to negotiate how their families are constructed. This also influences the expectation regarding the assignment and the situation in the host country. Companies should invest the time to find out the current family model of the employee and how they would like to organise themselves abroad. Managing these expectations upfront, prevents an early termination of the expatriate.

Another interesting aspect is the gender view. Studies show that married women are less willing to relocate just for their own careers if their husband is not able to find a satisfying job before moving. Differently, most of the husbands are willing to move even if their wife’s have no jobs in the new location. (Heckman et al., 1977) Studies on psychologist couples and pn Ph.D. graduates in general (Ferber, M. & Huber, J., 1979) conclude, that highly educated women are more willing to put their careers in secondary positions for family needs and for

their husband's careers than their partners do. This fact could also change with the new generation who is used to the dual career model.

Different Expat generations:

"78-Percent of the millennial population is part of a dual-career couple (...)" (Graebel, 2017). The Millennials are becoming a substantial part of the global work environment and studies have proven that their thinking and the requirements concerning work and career conditions differ from other generations. According to the Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016 of Brookfield, 11% of the assignee population is 20 – 29 years old. 31% of the total population is 30 – 39 years old. But this is also different from company to company. "Companies with greater alignment of mobility and the talent agenda are sending more Millennials on international assignments than the rest of the survey respondents". (Brookfield, Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016, p. 17). PwC executed the study: "PwC's NextGen: A global generational study" and they found out that the millennial generation is expecting to work abroad and they are also expecting a high support and transparency from the company. "The NextGen study found that more Millennials (37%) view the opportunity to work overseas as part of their desired career path than their non-Millennial counterparts (28%)". (PwC, NextGen study, 2013, p.12). This is one aspect, companies should keep in mind and consider the different expectations within their policies. Millennials also have stronger ties to their friends and family than other generations. Companies maybe assume that the young generation is moving without family or children and are therefore less complex to relocate but there are other challenges. "However, the wider meaning of 'family' to include parents and other close relatives renders this motivation very important for Millennials" (McNulty, Selmer, 2017, p. 269) For Millennials, they could view a family member or close friend with the same level of importance in their life as a traditional spouse would be viewed by their partner. This is something that companies should keep in mind as the requirements on an assignment might change. For example, it could be the case that Millennials are expecting more home flights to stay in touch with their family and friends rather than a spouse support.

The Millennial generation is more used to traveling than the older generations. When they start their careers, many of them already worked, or studied abroad. They are used to the international context and workforce. Whereas the generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), are more settled and in most of the cases, will work for the same company for many years. "Partner and dual career considerations, as well as family and educational concerns, are more pressing for generation X expatriates than for other age groups" (People Management magazine, 2017). Generation X employees are close to reaching the peak of their careers and represent the most common-form of working expatriates today. The expat Generation Y or Millennials (born between 1981 and 1994), are the young, ambitious and adventurous employees. Being the first generation to experience travelling as a world trend and starting with their first experiences abroad during their time at university already. According to the Brookfield Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016, the respondents said that most of their assignees are between 40 -49 years old, with the second highest percentage between 30 – 39 years old. (Brookfield, Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016, p. 17)

Does that mean an age-sensitive global mobility approach is beneficial for organisations? In the opinion of the author, yes. The age has a direct influence on the expectations of an assignment. The family structure is different within the generations as employees are at various stages of their life. If the company takes the time to evaluate the required support and the family structure of the employee, a tailored package can be offered. It doesn't mean that all employees of one generation need the same level of support, but at least companies should be aware of the differences and the possible challenges within each generation. They should also evaluate their own expat population to know more about the employees. For example, is there a developmental assignment in place and if so, is the younger generation participating

in that? Maybe the policy can be adapted and offer less benefits like cultural training within that type of assignment and therefore one home flight every three months. The younger generations maybe less likely to need the cultural training due to globalisation and multiculturalism. This generation is used being around diverse cultures during their studies or at work. They are well connected and used to staying in touch with people all around the globe. Maybe they are not interested in spouse support as they are fine with moving abroad alone and therefore visiting the family / partner more often instead of a big move with the whole family. In opposition to the long-term assignment where a spouse support is more needed. Companies should invest the time to know more about their expatriate population. Although they are being part of the general workforce, expatriates can be still viewed as a separate cohort and the HR department is more involved in their private life than with other employees.

Adjustment process of the expatriate and spouse

To ensure that the assignment is a success, the employee and the family has to adjust to the new host location. They must feel at home and comfortable in the new country, at least for the time of the assignment. Experts call it cross-cultural adjustment. It describes the process of living in a different culture than the own culture in the home country. This is what expats have to do. The employees are facing new challenges at work and in their private life.

Cross-cultural adjustment is defined as “the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity that the individual has for the new environment” (Black, 1990, p.11). To describe the various stages an employee and his family is going through in the host location, the u-curve model is used very often.

The u-Curve framework has been designed from Lysgaard in 1955 to describe the cross-cultural adjustment process of expatriate employees and the spouse within a foreign culture (Ward, C., Bochner, S., Furnham, A, 2005). The U-curve model includes four stages of adjustment (Figure 1). The honeymoon stage occurs during the first week after arrival at the host country. Individuals are fascinated by the new and different culture. They show lots of interest in getting to know the new culture, they are very motivated and cooperative. When the expatriate and the family start to deal with the conditions in the host country on a daily basis, the second stage begins - the culture shock stage. This stage is characterised by frustration and hostility towards the host nation. The family may get homesick as they are missing their friends and family and feeling isolated in the new host location. The third stage is the adjustment stage in which the individual slowly adapts to the new norms and ideals of the host country and can act more appropriately than they were before. This stage is characterized by learning appropriate behaviours, learning some language skills if necessary, and learning how to navigate and move around in the new culture. At the end of this stage, the individual has “developed some proficiency in performing the new set of behaviors” (Black 1988, p. 279). Finally, in the mastery stage, the individual can effectively function in the new culture.

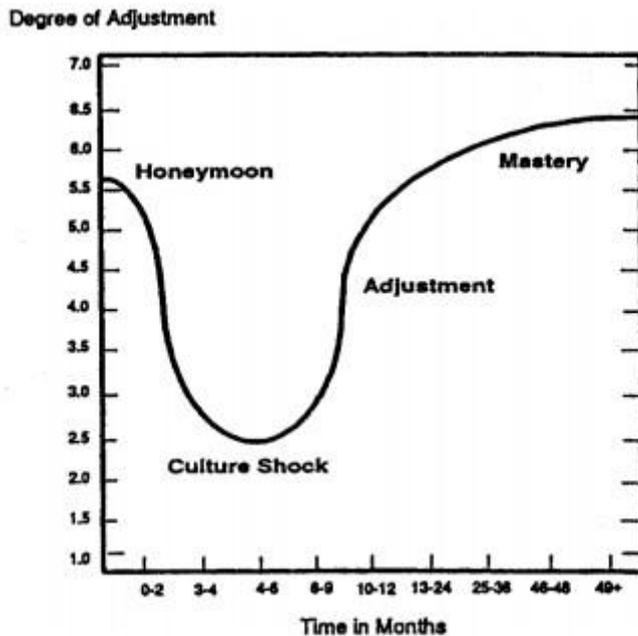


Figure 1; the u-curve of cross-cultural adjustment

This model also has its limitations as the expatriate and the spouse may go through these stages in a different order, at different times, or perhaps not at all. It all comes back to the individual situation of the assignee and the spouse. The employee may have already spent time in the host country as part of a short-term assignment or a project. Therefore, a honeymoon phase would only occur for the accompanying spouse. If the spouse is not working and she spends more time with the local people and the daily tasks like doing the shopping for the family, the cultural shock stage will occur earlier than for the employee who spends most of the time in the office in a more familiar environment.

The interviewed spouse had the following comment on the graph: "I had to smile a bit when I saw the figure as this is what my family and friends at home told me about. Everyone warned me about this 'culture shock' but I didn't experience it. I think it also depends if you know the country or the area a bit. And as mentioned, Singapore is quite western. We travelled a lot through Asia and we experienced the 'real' Asia so maybe that is one reason why we had no cultural shock in Singapore. We really had a Honeymoon time in Singapore as we married two weeks before we left Germany (also due to visa regulations). The first year was exciting and everything was new. Now, after 15 months here in Singapore I would say that we are between the adjustment and mastery stage."

This also undergirds the argument that the spouse support is an individual topic.

To better support the spouse and to facilitate the adjustment process, the company has to understand the current situation, the family model and the expectation on the new life abroad. Reginald Punnett, a British geneticist identified three separate groups of spouses and he mentioned, that each needs a different treatment. (Lundby, Jolton, 2010)

- Female spouses who do not expect to work abroad ('traditional expatriate spouse'); major concern for this group is that the cultural adjustment will fail
- Female spouses who do expect to work abroad: Major concern is job / educational opportunities;
- Male spouses who predominantly expect to work abroad: major concern is job opportunities and emotional support.

Due to the mentioned socioeconomic shift in our society and in the opinion of the author, more categories should be implemented. This could be:

- Male spouses who do not expect to work as he will take over the child care; major concern no network available, isolation and social exclusion
- Same-sex Partner who do expect to work abroad; no job opportunities, discrimination, political and social persecution
- Same-sex Partner who do not expect to work abroad; major concern is isolation, political and social persecution, no network nor social contacts available

One of the critical issues is finding a job opportunity for the spouse in the host location. There may be many external obstacles that keep a spouse from pursuing a career abroad. The lack of a work permit, the language barrier, unaccredited qualifications, and a competitive local job market are just some of them.

The Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016 of Brookfield indicates, that 49 % of the spouse population was employed prior to the assignment only. There is no information available about how many spouses expected to find work in the host country but as they were employed prior to the assignment it might appear that a high percentage would prefer to work abroad as well. Only 16 % of the population were employed before the assignment and during the assignment. During the survey, they also found out that 27% of the married assignment population decide to choose the status “single” during a long-term assignment. The most common reason for that were concerns regarding the spouse and family situation in the host country.

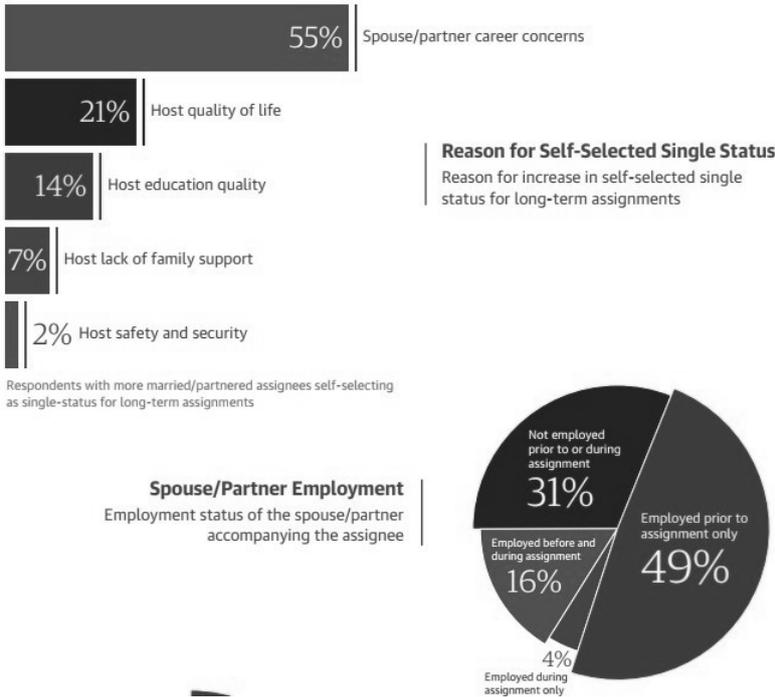


Figure 2; Family related assignee issues, lbal Mobility Trend Survey 2016, Brookfield

The Influence of the spouse on the success of an assignment

Harvey (1998) identified three different theoretical models that are usually used to analyse family migration regarding organisational relocations:

- neoclassical market model (maximizes family well-being; each spouse potential gain or loss is weighted equally),
- relative resources and couples' decision making (concept of power through which decisions are made; the partner with greater earning capacity is likely to determine the outcome of a relocation decision) and,
- gender-role and provider-role ideology (the potential trailing spouse has the right to exercise power in a given area as well as his/her relative resources).

This means that regardless of the family type prior to an international assignment, couples have different strategies on how to decide about an international relocation. This also influences the expectations on the assignment in the host location. Companies should understand how the expatriate and his spouse came to the decision and what they expect. It might appear, that they will use the same approach to decide if they would like to repatriate earlier than planned.

An interesting outcome of the Global Mobility Trend Survey from Brookfield is that, the most common reason for assignment refusal are family concerns (38%) and second, Spouse/partner and career/income concerns (18%).

Reasons for Assignment Refusal:

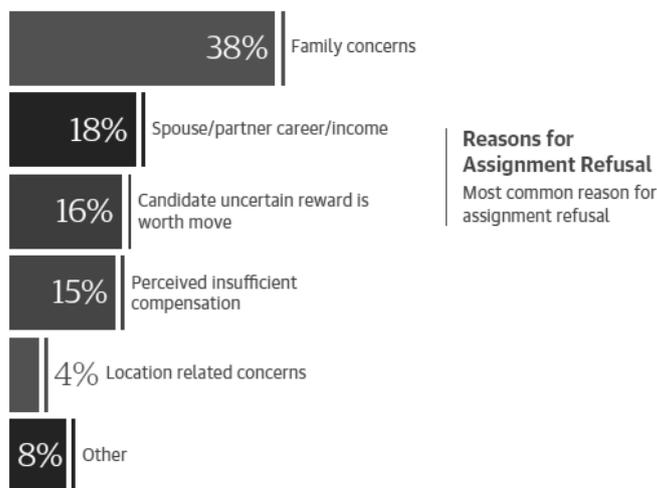


Figure 3; Reason for assignment refusal, Global Mobility Trend Survey 2016, Brookfield

Assignment refusals and early returns were also highlighted when the Permits Foundation surveyed 3300 expatriate partners in 2008. The results showed that 22% of international assignees had previously turned down an assignment and 7% had returned home early because of concerns about the partner's career. Between the two studies, 373 companies and international organisations were represented, which implies that many companies are affected by this issue, even if there is some uncertainty as to the magnitude. (permits foundation, International Mobility and Dual Career Survey of International Employers, p.8)

This demonstrates the link between the spouse support and the success of the assignment. The company should review the personal situation of the employee and how they can support the integration of the employee and the spouse. The assignees integration process takes place

in a fairly familiar organisational context in which the employees role and the organisational support system are present (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), the spouse adjustment process takes place in a complete new context. To determine the needed support, the personal circumstances must be reviewed closely. What is the current situation of the employee's family? The life conditions, e.g. if they were married, had children, were employed etc. This would affect how much the spouses will lose the connection they had to their own society in the home country. It may be true that the spouse experience difficulties in adjusting to a new living environment including a new unfamiliar context and is not able to rely on a social network for support. As a consequence, several negative issues may arise like isolation, insecurity and stress (Takeuchi et al., 2002). The employee has to find a balance between integrating into the new work environment and supporting the spouse with settling in and feeling comfortable in the new host country. It leads to a double burden for the employee.

This means that problems of the spouse cross over to the expatriate. As a consequence, the stressful experiences in the family domain may spill over to the work domain (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Many factors influence the cross-cultural adjustment of the employee and the spouse and it includes the experience at work and outside of work. Spillover effects refer to the influence that expatriate's attitudes in a particular domain have an effect on attitudes in other domains, whereas crossover effects refer to the influence of expatriate's attitudes on the spouses attitudes (and vice versa). Work-to-family spillover means, when factors at the workplace affect family functioning and vice-versa. There are different studies about the spillover and crossover effects of the spouse and expatriate. One of these was realised by Takeuchi in 2002. 298 Japanese expatriates from 55 companies were interviewed. In addition, 186 spouses of these expatriates were interviewed, as well as superiors of the employees who were familiar with the expatriate and could give an assessment of the expatriate's adjustment at work. The employees received questions about their cross-cultural adjustment, general Job satisfaction and about the intent to return early. Sample questions were: "Please rate your own degree of adjustment to living conditions in general", "I am satisfied with the convenience in my surroundings", "I discussed the possibility of returning home early with my spouse", etc. Also, the spouse was asked to assess the expatriate's intent to return early and the results correlated significantly with the expatriates own ratings. A reciprocal relationship between the expatriate and the spouse was found. "The implications are that there is a possibility for both negative and positive synergy between spouses and expatriates in terms of the cross-cultural adjustment process" (Takeuchi et. Al, p.29) It also means that the satisfaction of the spouse can be a positive driver for the success of the Assignment. "(...) companies need to pay closer attention to these issues when selecting and preparing to send expatriates with spouses overseas (...) companies should be advised to pay closer attention to the general surroundings and provide support to help expatriates and their families settle into overseas locations." (Takeuchi et. Al, 2002) Of course, studies like that have their limitations. To better understand the influence and to prove the causal direction of the spouse and expatriate, long term studies should be executed.

Studies also show that there is difference in the behaviour of men and women regarding work-to-family spillover. The result was that while experiencing a similar work-family conflict, female employees show higher levels of positive spillover than men. (Powell, Greenhaus 2010, p.526). Independent of gender, if employees separate work and family strictly, they show lower potential for conflicts but also lower positive spillovers. (Powell, Greenhaus 2010, p.525). That means that it has a positive and negative effect if the areas are separate.

Even though the studies often focus on the negative impact of the spouse, the partner can also be a positive influence on the assignment. Companies should be taking advantage of this fact.

How companies should support this development

In the interview with the trailing spouse in Singapore, the author raised the question: What kind of additional support would you expect from the company of your Partner?

“In my opinion, a language training would be very helpful for many trailing spouses. I know some women who didn’t speak a word English when they got here. Then it is even harder to integrate and feel at home. Singapore is quite western but in other locations a cultural training would be helpful as well. But the most important thing for me is a language training. I would also say that the needed level of support is different for everyone. I know women who came here with their husband and kids and they didn’t know anything about the country or the school system for example. It is also the responsibility from everyone else but sometimes you just rely on your partner as he and his company are initiating the whole relocation. Also, information about the career possibilities would be great. I think the companies don’t take the time to closely look at the personal situation of the spouse as they want to generate business with the expatriate”.

The author believes that, companies should give the spouse more weight and include it in Global Mobility Policies as a separate topic. It could be called ‘spouse relocation counselling’ for example or companies could create a separate partner support policy. Effective spouse relocation counselling, like any type of counselling, begins with understanding and support. In the course of an expatriation, the spouse is facing a substantial change in life. This affects his or her career, his or her social network and the familiar environment. The author suggests, that companies should split their offered spouse relocation counselling in diverse groups. This could be “Organisational support”, “career support”, “social support”.

The organisational support is already implemented in many companies. This includes: settling in service, language training, information about the tax and social security regime, etc. Still, it should also be tailored to the spouse on an individual basis. These topics are usually already covered by expatriate policies and companies very often just authorises these services and external providers take care of it. But unfortunately, in many cases, the spouse is not part of the preparation meetings. For example, the tax briefing meeting with an external tax provider.

The career support should start with a short interview with the spouse. It is important to find out, what the accompanying partner did in the home country and what the expectations are on the job opportunities in the host location. Next step would be to assist with the needed work permits, job counselling tailored to the host country possibilities, CV counselling, etc. Companies must invest time and money to be able to support the spouse on the career topic as it is a crucial factor for the success of an assignment. The Permits Foundation reports that employed trailing spouses perceive that working while they are abroad has a positive impact on their adjustment, family relationships, health and well-being, as well as willingness to complete and to extend their current assignment. (Permits foundation, International Survey, p.43) Also the studies about the dual-career couples validate, that this is an important topic and companies must extend their career support for trailing spouses.

The social support should help the spouse to integrate into the new location. Some companies are providing support at the beginning of an assignment in the form of cultural training but not during the assignment. One way to support the spouse could be to offer memberships to social clubs or more information about expatriate networks in the host location. For families, some information about the school system, leisure time facilities for kids and families should be provided from a local person. This could be an external provider, social worker or other expatriates. Large companies could also create their own Expat network. At the start of an

assignment, they could offer their employees to somehow register as an Expat or include them into a TeamRoom where they can talk to other Expats of the company sent to the same location. A separate account for the Spouse needs to be generated so both can collaborate with other expats and their spouses and talk about experiences. This could help the spouse be less lonely, learn from others who have been there longer and further along the adjustment curve and feel as an equal part of the relocation.

How companies should support this development - Status quo:

The permits foundation has looked into the subject and come up with some interesting findings. The goal of this foundation is to enable dual careers in the global workforce. “Permits Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit corporate initiative to support international mobility by promoting work authorisation for expatriate spouses and partners worldwide”. (www.permitsfoundation.com) They conducted the survey: “International Mobility and Dual Career Survey of International Employers” in 2011. It was conducted to learn more about the challenges that organisations face regarding international dual careers and partner support, and the potential impact on the businesses.

The survey attracted 177 organisations employing almost 7.5 million people in the private and public sectors. Overall, they employed about 7.5 million employees, including over 130,000 expatriate employees. One of the outcome of the survey was that 66% of employer’s report that partner careers and employment impact their organisation’s ability to attract employees to international assignments.

It is encouraging to note that 71% of employers provide some form of dual career assistance for expatriate partners either under a formal policy, informal guidelines or on a case-by-case basis decision. Many companies want to improve on that topic and start introducing a formal package for the spouse. Within their survey they asked, why companies start introducing a partner support policy. The result was that employers do it to promote family friendly policies and be an attractive employer. “Other reasons include: reducing the costs of assignment refusal or early return; meeting corporate social responsibility goals; and supporting diversity or gender initiatives”. (Permits Foundation, International Mobility and Dual Career Survey of International Employers, p.11)

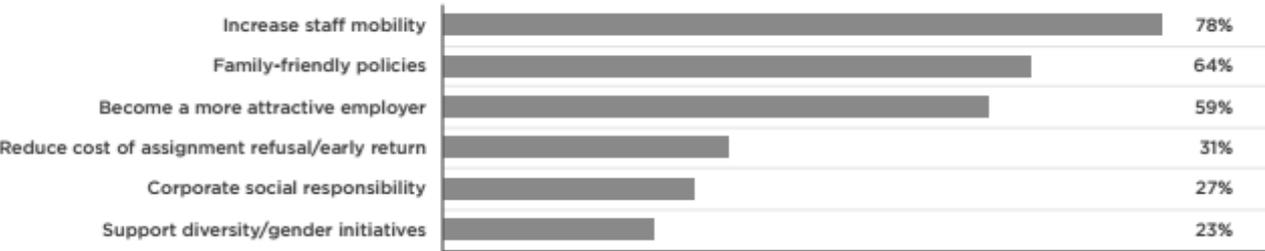


Figure 4; Reasons why employers introduce a partner support policy, permits foundation

The most common forms of spouse assistance are language trainings and work permit information and / or advice, provided by almost two-thirds of employers. 61% of the employers surveyed provide financial support for partners either by an allowance or reimbursement of costs.

| FINANCIAL SUPPORT | NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS | AVERAGE € |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Annual maximum reimbursement | 22 | 1,364 |
| Annual allowance | 30 | 3,831 |
| Per assignment maximum reimbursement | 32 | 3,930 |
| Per assignment allowance | 25 | 2,892 |

Figure 5; Average levels of financial support by allowance and reimbursement, permits foundation

To provide this support is a first step but the topic is very complex as the realisation differs from spouse to spouse and from country to country. If companies want to support the trailing spouse with career counselling, they need to know if this is even possible in the host country. The USA, India, China, Indonesia and Brazil topped the list of countries to which it was considered difficult to transfer employees because of spouse or partner work permit concerns. In the US, the spouses of intra-company transfers and some diplomatic visa holders can work, but not the spouses of skilled workers. They also do not recognize unmarried partners. In India, spouses of employment visa holders must apply for their own employment visa and unmarried partners are also not recognized. In UAE and other Islamic countries, it is also difficult as they do not accept non-married and same-sex couples. (Permits Foundation, International Mobility and Dual Career Survey of International Employers, p.9) It is important that companies check the latest information on the work permit restrictions for accompanying partners before briefing the employee and the spouse. The fact that local employers prefer to hire people who do not require a permit is also a major barrier to gain employment while on assignment. If the spouse is able to work from a visa and work permit perspective, another difficulty is to find out if the qualifications, for example whether the university degree is recognised and sufficient in the host country.

During the Interview with the trailing spouse in Singapore, she expressed her experience with the Job search: “As mentioned, at the beginning I thought about starting my own business in Singapore as I had it in Germany. My back-up plan was to start a correspondence course at a university in Germany. And then everything turned out completely different. I started to write for a German magazine here in Singapore. Now, I am the head of the editorial department and I really like my Job. I started something totally new and I think this is very important as an accompanying partner. You should be open for new things and don’t be too focused on your plans. I am also writing a Blog with useful tips about Singapore and about our Expat life. Another thing is that, it is really important, how you define success for yourself. I am not earning the big money so in this regard I am maybe not successful for other people but for me it is more about learning new things and I really like what I do. From my perspective, I am successful in Singapore. But of course, this is also depending on your personal situation. If you have kids and you must bring them to school and to their activities in the afternoon, etc., it is even harder to start a career and it is extremely hard to find a part-time Job as well as they want to hire local people for that. I heard from women that it is boring for them sometimes. Also, if the kids have problems to integrate in school it’s hard for the whole family and everyone is unhappy in the new location”.

The relocation company “Atlas” conducted a Corporate relocation survey in 2017. In total, 471 decision-makers from the Global Mobility area participated in that survey. One topic was the

spouse / partner assistance. The result is that a high percentage of the interviewed stated that the spouse or partner employment abroad is affecting the employee relocations within the company. "Nearly two-thirds of firms continue to report this issue, far more than at any time over the previous 12 years (62% & 63% vs. roughly half or less)." (Atlas, Corporate Relocation Survey, 2017) Since 2013 the influence of the employment status of the spouse abroad, increased about 20 percent. This acknowledges that the importance of the spousal support is increasing and companies have to deal with this change.

Policy strategies:

In the opinion of the author, there are different strategies to support the spouse more than before.

In general, the author suggests that companies should split the assignment types into more categories. This could be:

- unaccompanied long-term assignment
- accompanied long-term assignment
- unaccompanied short-term assignment
- accompanied short-term assignment
- Developmental assignment
- Business traveller
- Commuter, etc.

The company should involve the spouse from the beginning and categorise the assignment on factors like the duration and the accompanying partner. This guarantees that the company is able to tailor the policy to the needs of the spouse and create awareness within the company.

Strategy for the accompanied policy: the spouse scholarship

As outlined in this paper, the spouse has a direct influence on the success of an assignment and on the public perception of a company. Why not treat her like an employee? The spouse should be in direct contact with HR and the external provider just like the employee. This strategy combines the psychological aspect with the compensation aspect. This approach gives the feeling, that the spouse is part of the assignment from the beginning and that the company takes the accompanying partner seriously. Compensation is also a very important aspect of workforce motivation. That applies to local staff and Expatriates. As proven by the permits foundation, 61% of the company's already support the spouse with an allowance or reimbursement. Usually this amount of money is paid to the employee directly and determined in the assignment letter or contract of the employee. This approach encourages the feeling that the spouse is just following abroad and not travelling with the partner as he is even managing her allowance. The company could change this approach and pay the allowance directly to the spouse, as a scholarship. The spouse could use the money for individual needs. If the accompanying partner would like to work abroad, they maybe want to spend the money for further studies or a career coach. Whereas a young mum would like to take baby gym classes to network with other young mums or a stay-at-home dad might prefer to join a local soccer club. This approach allows the spouse to talk to HR and feel like part of the assignment preparation. HR should organise a short briefing with the spouse or combine it with the HR briefing with the employee. From a contractual point of view, a short confirmation of the participation and the exact amount of money must be issued to the spouse.

If the spouse had a good Job in the home country and suddenly, they lose their official working status, financial independence and freedom, it could help to receive an individual support from a company and to know, that you can decide on what you would like to spend the money on. In some cultures, it could also be difficult for the spouse to ask for money as this is not morally correct or he / she is too shy to ask for it.

This approach does not consider the possible differences regarding the needed support within the various generations. It assumes that every employee / spouse which is categorised in one of the accompanied assignments, is entitled to a spouse scholarship payment.

Strategy for the accompanied policy: Cafeteria Policy

The cafeteria approach is not completely new and there are already discussions about it in some forums and articles. In general, the idea is that the company lays down the framework of the possible Benefits they are offering and the company or the employee choose. It sounds like the perfect solution. The employee can decide if a spouse support is needed, the needs of the different generations are considered and the employee has the feeling that he or she can actively help shaping their assignment.

The structure is that some basic benefits will be granted to everyone. This could be benefits like en route travel, temporary living, Tax support, etc. In addition to that, the flexible benefits will be listed. According to the Worldwide ERC survey, 45 percent of companies using a cafeteria approach place a ceiling on the value of the selections made. (Worldwide ECR survey, Relocation Assistance: Transferred Employees, 2017, p.6)

In the opinion of the author the problem of this approach is that the company must decide who will choose the benefits from the menu? The Manager or supervisor of the employee? This does not mean that this is the person who knows the employee best. Some Managers would fight for more Benefits for their employees than others do. In fact, the Worldwide ERC survey reports that in 84 percent of organizations with cafeteria plans, the business unit or division selects the specific benefits. It could also be the HR department / Global Mobility department who decides on the benefits. In any case, if the company decides on the benefits they must implement guidelines and decision criteria to explain the outcome to the employee to prove that the decision is not decided on a random basis.

Another option is that the employee can choose the benefits independently. This would guarantee a high individuality of the assignment. The challenge for the company is the administrative workload connected to this option. The costs of the flexible benefits must be estimated with some care to ensure that the menu items are mutually interchangeable from a budget standpoint. The costs must be reviewed regularly and maybe also on a country basis as the prices for specific services can differ from country to country.

The cafeteria plan could be a solution for smaller companies with the time to talk to their employees on an individual basis. The approach can be as fair and flexible as possible as everyone has the same selection of different benefits and can choose individually and according to the current situation in life. Spouse support could be one item on the menu and the employee can select between different packages. This could a lump sum payment – a certain amount is offered to the employee for an individual spouse support. The other option is to offer various menu items regarding spouse support and the employee can choose. This could be cultural training, job mentoring, language training, etc.

These are only two options, how companies can change their policies or add several benefits to it. It also depends on the population and the culture of each company.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to examine, if the importance of the spouse support increased over the last few years and if companies should adapt their Policies.

According to the author it is the fact that, due to socioeconomic shifts and the way how couples are living together changed, companies must involve the spouse more than before and support the expat and the spouse to prevent an early termination or a dissatisfaction. Different studies proved that companies are experiencing this change and the influence of the spouse on the success on an assignment increased.

Different facts are leading to this change. In the opinion of the author, one of this is that the role of women has undergone a social and demographic shift and the role model of couples changed as well. The number of female expatriates increased and a new challenge is the male spouse. In many countries, social isolation could be one of the challenges they are facing as in some cultures it is not accepted that the man is the stay-at-home part.

Another fact is the increase of dual career couples. Both parties would like to have their own career. In this case, the company should support with different benefits like career counselling, etc. To be able to offer these kind of benefits, the responsible persons should be informed about the legislation of the host country and inform all involved parties about any spouse or partner work permit concerns to prevent any form of disappointment.

To understand, what the expat and the spouse are expecting of the assignment is the first and most crucial step in the preparation phase of any relocation. Only if the company knows how the couple or family is organising their life and what they would like to do abroad, they can support them in an appropriate way and the expat and the accompanying spouse / family has the chance to start the adjustment process successfully and the assignment has the chance to be a broad experience for the employee and the company.

Many companies are already offering some forms of spouse support and in most of the cases this is a financial support which the employee receives during the time abroad. In the opinion of the author, companies should implement more individual support which goes directly to the spouse. The spouse should feel like an equal part of the assignment from the beginning and participate in briefings and get the chance to talk about expectations and concerns. Still, there is no one size fits all solution as every company must evaluate their assignee population and the needs of the expatriate population and stay informed about changes in the work related and personal context of people as this is what Global Mobility is about.

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Appendix 1: Interview

Current situation: The expert accompanied her husband, a Partner at a consulting company, to Singapore where he is responsible for the new office location in Singapore and for leading the businesses expansion into Asia. The Assignment started on 1st of August 2016 and it is planned for 3 years.

Questions:

1. You decided to go on an assignment with your partner – what was your first thought when the decision was made?
We talked about the option half a year earlier and my husband said maybe there is a chance to go to Singapore at some point. But nothing was decided yet and I know that plans can change quickly. Six months later he asked me 'do you want to go to Singapore for three years'? It took me half a second and I said 'yes, sure!' I had always desired going abroad for some time so it was an easy decision for me. I did some research in the internet but I found only a few information in German about Singapore.
2. According to the literature, the definition of a trailing spouse was first used in 1981 by Mary Bravole. She described the trailing spouse as a concept of sacrificing the own career plans for following the life partner on an international assignment. Would you agree to that definition?
Yes, I think it is still the case that the trailing spouse has to somehow give up their career. You must be highly educated to be able to find a Job in Singapore. I was self-employed in Germany and I had to give up my career as well. I lost my clients and at the beginning they told me that it will be possible to be self-employed in Singapore as well but then the legislation changed and it wasn't as easy as we thought. It is also hard to plan a career while you are abroad because you don't know for how long you will stay. I know that also from other Expats. Some are extending their stay and some of them are leaving earlier. The focus is on the partner and not on the trailing spouse. We don't want to fulfill the mentioned definition but very often the circumstances force us to do so.
3. What was your experience with finding a Job a Singapore?
As mentioned, at the beginning I thought about starting my own business in Singapore as I had it in Germany. My back-up plan was to start a correspondence course at a university in Germany. And then everything turned out completely different. I started to write for a German magazine here in Singapore. Now, I am the head of the editorial department and I really like my Job. I started something totally new and I think this is very important as an accompanying partner. You should be open for new things and don't be too focused on your plans. I am also writing a Blog with useful tips about Singapore and about our Expat life. Another thing is that, it is really important, how you define success. I am not earning the big money so in this regard I am maybe not successful for other people but for me it is more about learning new things and I really like what I do. From my perspective, I am successful in Singapore.
But of course, this is also depending on your personal situation. If you have kids and you must bring them to school and to their activities in the afternoon, etc. it is even harder to start a career and it is extremely hard to find a part-time Job as well as they give that to local people. I heard from women that it is boring for them sometimes. Also, if the kids have problems to integrate in school it's hard for the whole family and everyone is unhappy in the new location.
4. Are you feeling "at home" in Singapore?
I am feeling at home in regards of where do I have to go, I know the area and where I can find the supermarkets, doctors, etc. The only thing which is complicated is to make

new friends. In Germany, we had our family and friends for many years but here in Singapore, many people come and go and there are always new faces. It is easy to get in contact as there are many Expat networks and events but to keep in touch is a bit harder.

The positive thing is that everyone who is new receives a warm welcome and a lot of help from the experienced expats within these networks. We are happy that we are now able to give something back to these people and now we are supporting the new arrivals.

5. Was your goal to find a Job in Singapore as well and if so, what was your experience?
German association
See number 3.

6. Did the company of your Partner supported you appropriate?
I think that we received an appropriate support from the company of my husband. We didn't have to take care about the health insurance which was a significant help and they supported with my Visa application.

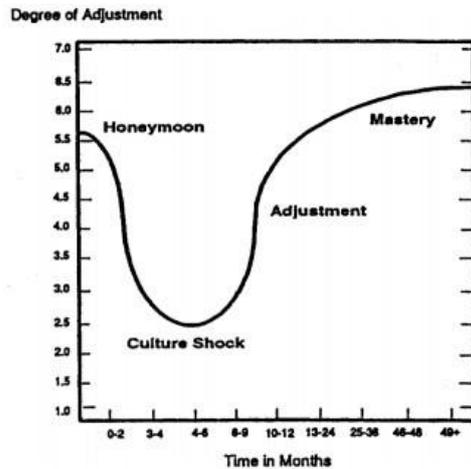
7. What kind of additional support would you expect from the company of your Partner?
In my opinion, a language training would be very helpful for many trailing spouses. I know some women who didn't speak a word English when they got here. Then it is even harder to integrate and feel at home. Singapore is quite western but in other locations a cultural training would be helpful as well. But the most important thing for me is a language training. I would also say that the needed level of support is different for everyone. I know women who came here with their husband and kids and they didn't know anything about the country or the school system for example. It is also the responsibility from everyone else but sometimes you just rely on your partner as he and his company is initiating the whole relocation.

8. Appendix A shows a figure of the u-curve model. Experts assume that these are the various stages of the adjustment process of the expatriate and the spouse. Would you agree? Did you experience these different stages?

I had to smile a bit when I saw the figure as this is what other Expats told me about. Everyone warned me about this 'culture shock' but I didn't experience it. I think it also depends if you know the country or the area a bit. And as mentioned, Singapore is quite western. We travelled a lot through Asia and we experienced the 'real' Asia so maybe that is one reason why we had no cultural shock in Singapore. We really had a Honeymoon time in Singapore as we married two weeks before we left Germany (also due to visa regulations).

The first year was exciting and everything was new. Now, after 15 months here in Singapore I would say that we are between the adjustment and mastery stage.

APENDIX A:



Adjustment process of the expatriate and spouse

Cross-cultural adjustment is defined as “the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity that the individual has for the new environment” (Black, 1990, p.11). To describe the various stages an employee and his family is going through in the host location, the u-curve model is used very often.

The u-Curve framework has been designed to describe the cross-cultural adjustment process of expatriate employees and the spouse within a foreign culture (Lysgaard, 1955; Black & Mendenhall 1990; Usunier 1998). The U-curve model includes four stages of adjustment (Figure 1).

The honeymoon stage occurs during the first week after arrival at the host country. Individuals are fascinated by the new and different culture. They show lots of interest in getting to know the new culture, they are very motivated and cooperative. When the expatriate and the family start to deal with the conditions in the host country on a daily basis, the second stage begins - the culture shock stage. This stage is characterised by frustration and hostility towards the host nation. The family may get homesick as they are missing their friends and family and feeling isolated in the new host location. The third stage is the adjustment stage in which the individual slowly adapts to the new norms and ideals of the host country and can act more appropriately than they were before. This stage is characterized by learning appropriate behaviours, learning some language skills if necessary, and learning how to navigate and move around in the new culture. At the end of this stage, the individual has “developed some proficiency in performing the new set of behaviors” (Black 1988, p. 279). Finally, in the mastery stage, the individual can effectively function in the new culture.