

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

## Training and Supporting an Expatriate Assignment

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Implications for the Manager</b>
<b>Training</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Support</b>	<b>Exercise</b>
<b>The Shock of Return</b>	<b>Notes</b>

### 18.1 Introduction

Ed, an American, was prepared by his company headquarters to take up a posting in Taiwan. Because he needed to network locally, Chinese language training was included. The human resource department arranged for him to be given intensive classes in the Cantonese dialect. On arrival in Taipei he realized that the official language was Mandarin Chinese and that the great majority of his new contacts spoke only Mandarin and knew no Cantonese.

This story shows a company investing in language training, but inadequately assessing needs. Resources were wasted, and Ed's sense of confidence in the human resource department supporting his expatriate assignment was lessened. So a well-intentioned mistake had negative effects and Ed's assignment was less productive than it might have been. Cross-cultural training must be appropriate if it is to be useful.

In a world where the selection processes operated perfectly, and the company could select from an unlimited number of candidates, training and support might not be needed. In practice, of course, neither of these conditions apply. The company uses imprecise instruments to select the best of the few candidates available. Added to this, the business environment is changing with increasing speed and unpredictability. This means that the initial job description may be very quickly outdated. The expatriate who seems to offer precisely the right qualities at the time of selection may be increasingly

less fitted over time, and need further training at post. However much is invested in selection, there are bound to be some surprise failures.

However, the opposite situation, in which the minimum investment is made in selection and the available resources are channeled into training and support, may be equally unsatisfactory. The company looks for the optimal balance in its selection, training, and support investments.

This chapter deals with training and support, to work and live in the new country, before leaving headquarters and at post, for the manager and his/her spouse and dependents. The type and degree of training and support is bound to be influenced by the identity of the expatriate selected, and hence by the selection process.

## **18.2 Training**

Training takes place before and during the expatriate assignment, and serves general functions of preparing the expatriate to both:

- work in the local culture;
- live in the local culture (see section 17.4.1).

Training is given both to the manager and to spouse and other dependents, although the contents of their training programs differ.

Preparation before includes both teaching the skills needed and developing the trainee's expectations of the job and living in the culture. Research by Caligiuri et al. (2001) shows that the more tailored and relevant the pre-departure cross-cultural training, the more expectations were met or positively exceeded. Expatriates who have no idea of what to expect are more likely to be frustrated.

### **18.2.1 Needs analysis**

When the selected expatriate needs a great deal of training in order to perform his/her assignment, and the assignment is considered vital, the company invests more in training. When the expatriate has few needs for training in order to perform the assignment or the assignment is not vital, the company invests less.

In either case, some needs analysis may be necessary. A formal needs analysis specifies the target behavior of the trainees (the manager and dependents). The first step is to specify skills, roles and areas of knowledge that must be mastered in order to operate successfully. Roles include both:

- **PRESCRIPTIVE** skills (that the trainee should perform) and
- **DESCRIPTIVE** skills (that the trainee actually performs).

Here is an example of these norms in apparent contradiction. The expatriate is posted as consultant to a joint venture, with a role to advise and train – a prescriptive norm.

In practice, the lack of local staff means that he has to manage certain points of the production process. This management role is not included in the job description and is covert; local concerns to maintain authority mean that foreign control cannot be admitted. Two descriptive norms apply; the consultant-as-manager, and the consultant-as-diplomat – handling the difficult issues arising from the role confusion. A training program that teaches only the prescriptive skills is inadequate. Descriptive skills also need to be developed. For example, the introductory case in section 16.1 showed that the realities of power and influence in a subsidiary do not always match official structures, and that the expatriate also needs skills to apply the informal relationships of power and control.

This raises a question; how are these descriptive needs recognized? Much can be learned from debriefing expatriates returning from work in the same situation; debriefings are discussed in section 18.4.1.

The second step is to distinguish those skills that the manager and dependents can already perform from those that must be acquired. This avoids re-teaching what is already known. A needs analysis provides the data on which the training syllabus is based. A simple model might ask the following questions:

#### NEEDS ANALYSIS

- (a) What skills, roles, and areas of knowledge will the manager need when:
  - working in the new culture?
  - living in the new culture?
- (b) What skills, etc. will the spouse/dependents need when living in the new culture?
- (c) What skills, etc. are already known?
- (d) What *new* skills, etc. are needed?
- (e) At what standards are new skills, etc. needed?
- (f) What outcomes are expected from the trainees learning and using the new skills, etc.?

Training may be needed in the four content areas below.

- 1 technical training (section 18.2.3);
- 2 management training (section 18.2.4);
- 3 cross-cultural training (section 18.2.5);
- 4 language training (section 18.2.6).

The agenda above can be applied to each of the four content categories. For example, in the case of (a):

- (a1) What TECHNICAL skills, etc. will the manager need when working in the new culture?
- (a2) What MANAGEMENT skills, etc. will the manager need when working in the new culture?

- (a3) What CULTURAL skills, etc. will the manager need when both working and living in the new culture?
- (a4) What LANGUAGE skills, etc. will the manager need when both working and living in the new culture?

### **18.2.2 Training alternatives**

Training may be given at headquarters, before the expatriate and dependents leave, *and/or* at post. Training is given by company trainers, *and/or* external trainers. So far as possible the syllabus and training materials are tailored to the specific needs of the trainees, and may be produced by company trainers or selected from published and other sources.

The expatriate may need further training at the end of the assignment to prepare him/her for return to headquarters.

### **18.2.3 Technical training**

The manager is given training on:

- technologies used by the subsidiary or venture with which he/she is unfamiliar, including alternative technologies;
- opportunities for technology transfer and innovation;
- constraints on the local implementation of new technology.

### **18.2.4 Management training**

Management training is specific to the post and the local joint venture or subsidiary. The manager is trained in:

- the administrative RESPONSIBILITIES of the post;
- company STRATEGY and subsidiary (or venture) STRATEGY;
- its ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE and systems: strategies and opportunities for change; systems for control and communication; systems for planning, motivating, and resolving conflicts; organizational culture; informal systems;
- investment and TREASURY factors, including accounting and auditing procedures, financial sources, investment commitments, protection of assets;
- relations with HEADQUARTERS: systems for control, communications;
- relations with OTHER SUBSIDIARIES;
- the local BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT;
- local RISK factors;
- HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES: labor markets and recruitment; labor relations and policies; relations with unions; salary and reward structures; training resources and policies;
- ETHICAL policies.

The headquarters functional manager assigned to a general management role abroad needs a greater understanding of a range of headquarters units than he/she normally acquires within a functional specialism.

### ***18.2.5 Cross-cultural training***

Cross-cultural training aims to teach the following.

- (a) ABOUT the other culture. The training teaches:
  - what values are important within the other culture;
  - how the culture is reflected in significant historical, political, and economic data;
  - how cultural values are expressed in behavior.
- (b) HOW TO LIVE AND WORK effectively in the other culture. It teaches how to recognize the influence of culture on:
  - social relationships;
  - management styles, structures, and systems;
  - strategic planning and management;
  - technology innovation, implementation, transfer;
  - the business environment.
- (c) HOW TO APPLY these lessons in appropriate behavior.

### ***18.2.6 Language training***

A language training syllabus varies depending on whether it aims to teach:

- at beginner's level, at intermediate level, at advanced level;
- reading and/or writing and/or listening and/or speaking;
- social varieties, business/work varieties, any other varieties;
- up to near-native speaker fluency, polite openers (good morning, how are you? my name is X, etc.), all levels between.

The mix of these categories determines the syllabus in terms of:

- content: grammar, vocabulary, communicative discourse;
- teaching techniques;
- materials needed.

### ***18.2.7 Training needs determined by organizational structure***

The organizational structure determines the relationship between headquarters and the joint venture or subsidiary, and this influences what new skills are needed.