

Global Adjustment Challenges Facing Female Business Expatriates

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Abstract

According to Church study (as cite by Caligiuri and Tung, 1999, p.769) cross-cultural adjusted expatriates 'represent a more integrative approach to new culture, [they] are open to the host culture, but integrate new behavior, norms and roles into the foundation provided by [their] home cultures. Therefore, female candidates are required to perform in low and high context society. As a result, women are must facing psycho-sociological challenges that will positively or negatively affect their cross-cultural adjustment process. This is why; it's crucial for female expatriate to accept the acculturation process in rigid hierarchies and protocols society such as Asia and Latin America. According to Regier Won, and Regier study, "Acculturation refers to the process by which group members from one cultural background adapt to the culture of a different group." (Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, D., 1985). In other words, women managers must have managerial and leadership skills that will dispel myths and stereotypes about their poor maladjustment process. As a result, the paper will address cross-cultural adjustment challenges facing women managers in global economy.

Introduction

Today global management opportunities attracts both men and women in this global economic. Therefore, global manager must have good understanding of different cross-cultural challenges within their international regions.

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Also, they must be able to adjustment to those changes within their environment. According to Florakowski and Fogel women still represent a relatively untapped source of human talent for expatriate assignments.

The number of female business expatriates lags far behind that of men. From a very small reported percentage in the early 1980s of about 3 percent more recently reported figures seem to be around 12 – 15 percent (as cited by Selmer and Leung, 2003, p.1117).

Therefore, female managers' adjustment process depends on their abilities to adapt into a cross-cultural environment. For example, work and non-work challenges may create a stressful environment for the female expatriate. As a matter of fact, if female expatriates do not support and interact with the host-national environment, their actions might negatively stereotyped women who are seeking international assignment. Their appropriate norms and behaviors will reduce the myth that female managers cannot handle unexpected situations and actions when they are assigned aboard.

As a result, cross-cultural adjustment plays an important role in the successful completion of the female expatriate overseas assignment. Therefore, female expatriates should be aware of the multidimensional concept within the cross-cultural adjustment process. According to study by Caligiuri and Tung women were less cross-culturally adjusted than men in countries with low female workforce participation and lower percentage of women managers (as cited by Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002,p.761). This paper will address female expatriates' work adjustment conflicts in an international setting and how psychological and socio-cultural support affects their expatriation adjustment process.

Review of the Literature

Cultural Value

According to Caligiuri and Tung study, " host nationals' cultural values affect the acceptance of expatriate women within a given culture." (p.766). Thus, country's cultural values could affect how female managers are accepted in the workplace.

For example, if women are not presented in a professional role in their host country, it might be difficult for females' expatriates to be accepted in this society.

Since cultural values are shared beliefs among people from the same society; those values could make it difficult for any outsider to adjust or be accepted into the workforce.

According to Mendenhall and Oddou (as cited by Caligiuri and Tung, 1999) this difference between host and home country cultures has been identified as culture distance or country difficulty.

Therefore, culture distance would make it difficult for a person to adjust or perform well in the workplace. As a result, "countries low in power distance (i.e. egalitarian societies such as the US and Scandinavian countries) tend to accept people (women included) as equals, while in high power countries, such as Japan, the rigid hierarchies and protocols, many of which are based on the century-old traditions, may stifle the advancement of women to positions of authority." (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999, p.767). This is why; most women may have a difficult time adjusting in non-egalitarian societies where fewer women are representative in the workforce. Thus, the power distance approach affects whether women were likely to accept host country's work values. According to Florkowski and Fogel's study, low cultural distance situations make it less likely that expatriates simply confused differences in work values with a noticeable reluctance on the part of Host Country Nationals (HCNs) to deal with foreigners.

As a result, "higher power distance countries may have a greater tendency to uphold rigid (often patriarchal) hierarchies. The underlying tendency to prefer men in positions of power may permeate organizations in high power distance countries (e.g. Japan)." (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999). However, the United States and other European countries have egalitarian values imbedded into their society, which could give female expatriates a great chance to succeed in this business environment. Therefore, the host country's values, attitudes and norms are some of the predictors, which could be used to explain female adjustment outcomes within an international assignment. However, Caligiuri and Tung's study reveals that cultural work values did not affect whether women were likely to succeed, as defined by either their desire to terminate the assignment or their supervisor-rated performance, while on global assignments.

Psycho-Sociological Factors

“Social support and social interaction can create a sense of belonging, enhance psychological security and self-esteem and reduce anxiety for female expatriates. Given the profound impact social networks can have on a female expatriate’s success, organizations should encourage opportunities to support such interactions.” (Caligiuri and Lazarova, p. 769). As a result, the social interaction and social support are critical factors that determines the female expatriates’ adjustment process. For example, high power distance culture could levitate female expatriate’s anxiety by providing information on the country’s norms, behavior and relationship building techniques, which could ease their affirmation process. Also, this socialization process will reduce uncertainties that are related to work and non-work issues. For instance, host country’s network system such as emotional, and instrumental support programs are used to ease negative assumption about female expatriates’ socialization and interaction among the host-nationals.

For example, “if a neighborhood grocer agrees to deliver groceries to a female expatriate’s home because she cannot get to the store before it closes, then the grocer is providing instrumental support (i.e. her need for groceries after the store close).

Emotionally, the fact that the grocer would be willing to do this for her makes her feel more connected to the broader host-national community. In addition, instrumental support may enable deeper forms of social support. For example, when a female expatriate finds a trusted baby-sitter, then she is able to spend some time socially with host-national colleagues (i.e. developing emotionally supportive friendships). Thus, for functional and emotional reasons, instrumental support serves an important role in female expatriate cross-cultural adjustment.” (Caligiuri and Lazarova, p.769)

Therefore, female expatriate adjustment process depends on the psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, which will determine a person’s behavioral and attitudinal changes that are needed (i.e. ‘fit in’) when adopting a host culture. “The concept of psychological adjustment is based on a problem-oriented view focusing on attitudinal factors in the adjustment process. The socio-cultural notion of adjustment is based on cultural learning theory and highlights social behavior and practical social skills underlying attitudinal factors.” (Selmer, 1998, p. 998).

As a result, corporate policies should adapt managerial practices that are aimed to put the expatriate in the right frame of mind, which could significantly reduce expatriate failure rate. This process will bring about a concept of subjective well being in a person's work and non-work situations.

According to Selmer and Leung study, "females may have experienced a lower degree of psychological adjustment, as measured by their subjective well being, than the males."(p.1125). Therefore, organization should encourage socialization and interaction among women managers, because it will heighten their culture awareness and positively increase their subjective well being among host-country nationals.

However, as mentioned before, the host-national network system could provide training programs, which would facilitate necessary services; information and resources need to create opportunity for females in a non-egalitarian society. This training program could help women overcome managerial barriers that are preventing them from being potential candidates when they are being considered for overseas assignment. Therefore, this program is detrimental to the female expatriate adjustment process, because it provides career development programs, which is equal to their male counterparts. As a result, the system can boost a person's psychosociological esteem, which would help to speed up female expatriate work adjustment.

For instance, "to the extent that psychological barriers to adjustment originate in preconceived ideas and prejudice on the part of the expatriates, a special effort would have to be made to get them in the right frame of mind. It could be useful to administer cross-cultural training to try to modify both expatriates' perceived inability and unwillingness to adjust. Whereas traditional training methods which focus on factual information about the host country (Gudykunst et al., 1996) would have some potential in moderating perceived inability to adjust, additional training elements would probably be required to make individuals more willing to adjust." (Selmer, 2001, p. 161). As a result, cross-cultural training (CCT) could lessen the inability or unwillingness for expatriates to adopt and accept the host unit's acculturation process.

Cross-Cultural Training

According to Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique and Burgi study, "cross-cultural adjustment can be facilitated if the expatriate has an awareness of the norms and behaviors that is appropriate in the host country. Thus, many MNC offers cross-cultural training (CCT) to teach expatriates the host countries appropriate norms and behaviors.

For more than twenty years, CCT has been advocated as a means of facilitating effective cross-cultural interaction and cross-cultural adjustment." (p.358). The cross-cultural training is design to enhance the expatriate knowledge and skills for specific assignment, so they could perform their jobs more effectively and efficiently. This program has three objectives that are predictor for female expatriates' success.

For instance, "first, CCT should enable expatriates to determine (in advance) the appropriate cultural behaviors and suitable ways of performing necessary job tasks in the host country (Brewster and Pickard, 1994; Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Kealey and Protheroe, 1996). The second objective of CTT is to help expatriates cope with unforeseen events in the new culture and to reduce conflict due to unexpected situations and actions (Earley, 1987). The third objective of CTT is to create realistic expectations for expatriates with respect to living and working in the host country." (as cited by Caligiuri et al., 2001).

The cross-cultural training will reduce uncertainty and false expectations for expatriates during global assignment. This program could enhance the female expatriates pedagogical skills by providing them with realistic and accurate training, which could be use in high-context cultures such as Asia and Latin America. Furthermore, CCT could give women managerial tools needed to handle stressful situations, which would increase their technical competence on the job. Therefore, female expatriates' willingness to adjust could be improved, if companies adapts realistic training program that support host-nationals professional relocation process. According to Fielder, Black and

Mendenhall study (as cited by Caligiuri, Joshi and Lazarova, 1999, p.174) cross-cultural training and relocation assistance were the most commonly cited policies aimed at supporting the female expatriates.

These results support past research that indicates a positive relationship between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural adjustment.

Cultural Work Values

“Contrary to expectations, there was also an indication that female expatriates had higher work adjustment than their male colleagues. The finding that female expatriates may be better adjusted to their work situation than their male colleagues represents an important insight, since the primary reason for assigning business expatriates aboard is to perform certain work tasks.” (Selmer and Leung, 2003, p.1125). As a result, companies should hire females expatriates, because they bring diverse managerial and leadership style that are adaptable in any high masculine society. Therefore, local work values factors influence foreign women professionals’ ability and willingness to succeed in non-egalitarian environment.

For example, Westwood and Leung (1994) found that most female expatriates in Hong Kong thought that their gender did not stand in the way of successfully performance their jobs, as long as they were competent and professional (as cited by Selmer and Leung, 2003). Therefore, women managers had proven that they are capable of working in low and high context environment, this refuted the old stereotype of female maladjustment theory. This is information dispel the myths that high masculine society such as Hong Kong considered women to be close mind person, because of their culture-bound natures of social skills create problems for host-national men.

Other Factors That Affects Cross- Cultural Adjustment

“International firms may use some basic personal characteristics as necessary minimum requirement representing a more realistic way to assure themselves that an individuals’ willing to relocate abroad also is suitable.” (Selmer, 2001). Because a personal attributes such as self-confidence, self-efficacy and openness are predictor on how well a person can adjust in a foreign environment. Therefore, an expatriates’ adjustment process depends on their multicultural personality mind set and how their frame of mind could adapt to the host-nationals’ ideology and the same time staying focused on the company’s multinational goals.

For instance, one's personality could be very important factor when selecting a person for an overseas assignment. For example, a person's maturity, age, behavior and attitude may determine how professionally and socially committed they're to the host-national country acculturation process. Therefore, person's characteristic traits could be measure by management to reduce failure rate among expatriates during an overseas assignment. For example, some companies are using an evaluation program that test participants' intercultural, perceptual and interpersonal aptitude.

For example, according to Schaeffer study, (as cited by Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven), a Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed as a personality instrument aimed at measuring the dimension that underlies multicultural effectiveness of expatriates. The instrument has scales for cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. In contrast with general personality questionnaires, the MPQ-scales are tailored to cover more narrowly those aspects of traits that is relevant to multicultural success.

In larger, the MPQ-questions refer to behavior in multicultural situations, making the relation between test behavior and the aspired international position transparent to its respondents, thereby enhancing the acceptability of the instrument. The instrument may be used for the selection and training of international employees, that is employees who have a job with an international scope, whether in an expatriate assignment, or in a job dealing with international issues more generally.

This MPQ testing system could be very fruitful for any company, because its collecting psychological and behavioral data that management could use in their selection process. As a result, the personality dimension evaluation system could identify the right person needed for a global assignment and reduce maladjustment among female expatriates while on assignment. For example, the Van der Zee and Van Oudenhaoven study provides support that the personality dimensions of the MPQ are indeed related to expatriate adjustment. The possession of emotional stability, in particular, seems to have helped the expatriates-who was in majority from Western countries – in their adjustment to life in a non-Western society.

Summary

This study revealed what adjustment process female managers need to know so they can perform well in an international assignment.

Also, the paper provided information on how a realistic cross-cultural training concept could be use to identify psycho-sociological issues within a multinational environment. For example, " the paper provided important information that social support and social interaction should be use to buffer against the psychological effects of stress that would accompany maladjustment." (Caliguri and Lazarova, 2002). Also, the MPQ evaluation system had positive effect on expatriate adjustment process by providing useful information about a person's behavior under a multicultural society. As a result, the paper provided valuable information for global manager to use to attract and retain female expatriates. Therefore, Western managers could use this information to facilitate female expatriates' adjustment process; and to dismiss false assumptions about female managers inability and unwillingness to adapt while assigned in a high context (masculine) setting.

Future Research Recommendation

Future research should be conducted on how United States major corporations are selecting and training senior female executives for overseas assignments. For example, examining how cultural diversity training could benefit female expatriates' spouse and family members prior to the cross-cultural assignment. Also, the study should examine, if multinational enterprise are using different preparation processes for female expatriates' family members from their male counterparts. Because, it has being reported that expatriates' spouse and family could have positive or negative effect on expatriates to the socialization process. Since expatriates' poor adjustment process is affect by psycho-sociological support and interaction of family members when assigned in a high context society.

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