

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Training and Supporting an Expatriate Assignment

A: Main Teaching Points (by textbook section)

The expatriate and dependents contribute more to the company when they are properly trained to work and live in the foreign environment. But training can be expensive. What level of training is cost-effective?

The chapter sees why managers and dependents need to be trained for expatriate assignments and examines reasons why many companies still give training a low priority.

18.1 Introduction

This case describes a company that invested in language training but did not properly assess needs. When the manager's qualifications do not match the job specifications, training is needed – and in a rapidly changing business world, the need for some training at some stage of a long assignment is increasingly likely.

18.2 Training

This section deals with decisions that have to be made in planning and implementing training the expatriate manager.

Expatriate training often fails because goals and needs are only vaguely identified. This section provides parameters for identifying goals and needs with greater exactitude. An initial distinction is made between working and living needs, and this throws an immediate spotlight on the issue of how far the needs of manager and dependents coincide and differ. Some training topics are of greater value to the manager, others of greater value to dependents.

Needs analysis provides the data needed to specify areas of skills needed, and the topics to be included. The section focuses on four areas: technical, management, cross-cultural, and language training.

The previous chapter showed how important it is that the spouse and other dependents adjust to the new cultural setting, and it may be to the advantage of the company that it invest in their training. This is likely to focus on cultural and language training.

Business students with experience of second language learning may be able to appreciate the problems discussed in the subsections on language training (18.2.6–18.2.9).

The language program provides a training model that can be applied to other areas of management training. The importance of making a rigorous needs analysis is emphasized. In practice, this can mean contracting the services of a professional (an applied linguist or communications expert). Companies otherwise scrupulous in contracting only qualified professionals for training purposes may have a poor record in arranging even basic language training.

Reasons for *not* training are considered. In practice, the direct and indirect costs associated with training may provide the most convincing arguments for not training. If the returns on training investments are modest, it may be because headquarters' policy makers fail to take full advantage of them. A well-planned program of evaluation serves a range of functions. It tells the company whether it is spending its training budget wisely, it helps assess needs and methodologies, and helps plan further training. Feedback on the relevance of training from ex-trainees and their managers can be applied to the development of knowledge about the foreign environment.

In sum, emphasize that training goals and all aspects of the training program must implement strategic goals. Training that cannot be directly related to strategic goals is irrelevant, wastes resources, and creates frustration and demoralization. The analysis of needs must reflect these goals. This emphasis on the strategic nature of expatriate training indicates that top management needs to be involved. Unless top management is prepared to support expatriate training, it is unlikely to meet company goals. The manager planning such training therefore has a political role to play in organizing this support.

18.3 Support

Make clear that expatriate support must be flexible. Different individuals have different needs, influenced by a range of factors. The support needed by expatriates and their spouse/dependents vary in some respects, and the size and composition of the expatriate community is also a factor.

18.4 The shock of return

Many expatriate managers experience their greatest problems in the first few months after returning from an assignment abroad. These problems are often most disturbing because they are not expected. Students studying abroad often face similar problems; meeting family and friends in the first few weeks is exciting, but fitting back into the constraints of familiar routine can be a downer.

B: Implications for the Business Student

(This section modifies the material on pp. 411–12 of the textbook.)

Does your business school offer courses teaching cross-cultural skills to managers about to be expatriated? If so, evaluate these courses.

Consider these groups: (a) CEOs, (b) functional heads, (c) trouble-shooters and short-term consultants, and (d) dependents of each of a–c.

1. In detail, what training is offered to each of these categories?
2. For each, what are the goals of the training?
3. What resources are used in the training program?
4. For each of the groups listed above, how successful is the training? (Take into account goals and use made of resources.)
5. For each of the groups, how could the training be improved?

C: Class Discussion Questions

1. In what respects might the dependent spouse require more cross-cultural training than the manager? Is it ever worth training the dependent spouse in some aspects of the manager's professional responsibilities at post? If you answer *yes*, what aspects, and why these?
2. Propose systems for evaluating a cross-cultural training program. What questions might be asked of whom, and using what media?
3. Describe your experiences in learning and using a second language. Do all learners have similar experiences? What implications are there for management language training?
4. Suppose an expatriate manager and dependents (spouse, two children) were coming to work at your organization on a 2-year assignment. What items of domestic information do you think would be most useful? What information would be more useful for the manager, for the spouse, for the children?
5. What functions are served by the evaluation of training? How can the MNC apply the findings to increase the sum of organizational knowledge?
6. (For foreign students) What re-adjustment problems do you expect when you return home from your studies? How can you best overcome these?

D: Answers to the Exercise

This exercise assumes that the students have experience of the labor market, that they are working on a full- or part-time basis (and hence are studying on a part-time basis)

or have at some time in their lives worked. In the event that they have no direct experience, have them research the jobs of working expatriates that they know, and apply their findings.

Assess the answers on the basis of:

- Insights into the job, and the organizational culture
- Insights into training
- Needs for support, and types of support available.

Students gain useful experience when they prepare and deliver their solutions to the class. The exercise can be further exploited by asking them to:

- Identify resources needed to mount the program
- Cost the program
- Design guidelines for evaluating the program. How far does it justify the expected cost?

E: Additional Exercise Material

This exercise is designed for students who have (or have recently had) a job. It asks you to analyze the communicative roles that you perform in the job, and to apply your experiences in identifying training priorities.

1. Suppose that you have been promised promotion, and that a foreigner is being hired to do your present job (or the job you last held). This foreigner has only elementary skills in your language, and needs to take additional language training.
2. You have been asked to make a communicative needs analysis of the job. This needs analysis will be used to design a syllabus of language training materials.
3. Complete this questionnaire:
 - a. How much of your working time do you devote to each of the following skills (in percentages)?
 - (i) speaking (ii) listening (iii) reading (iv) writing
 - b. How important are these skills? Rank them, from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important).
 - (i) speaking (ii) listening (iii) reading (iv) writing
 - c. How much of your working time do you devote to communicating with each of the following (in percentages)? By what channel (speaking, writing, in percentages)?
 - (i) superiors (speaking, writing) (ii) other managers (speaking, writing) (iii) workforce (speaking, writing) (iv) persons external to the organization (speaking, writing)

- d. How important are these communicative functions? Rank the four most important, from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important).
 (i) leading (ii) liaising (iii) monitoring (iv) disseminating information (v) planning (vi) acting as spokesperson (vii) controlling (viii) resolving conflict (ix) resource allocation (x) negotiating (xi) proposing new ideas (xii) any other
- e. How important is it that you communicate effectively in each of these situations? Rank the four most important, from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important).
 (i) one-on-one meetings (ii) small-group meetings (iii) presentations (iv) telephone (v) conferences (vi) memos (vii) letters (viii) fax (ix) reports (x) any other

Check your answers to 3 with other persons who perform the same or a similar role in your organization.

Your answers to the questionnaire provide a basic description of the communicative skills needed to perform your job. The foreigner coming into your job needs to perform these skills. An applied linguist can apply this description of needs to designing a syllabus and materials for training your successor.

Apply your experience of completing a communicative needs questionnaire to designing a questionnaire that can be used in designing one of the following:

- A syllabus and materials for training your successor in the TECHNICAL skills needed to perform the job.
- A syllabus and materials for training your successor in the MANAGERIAL skills needed to perform the job.

Use whatever categories you think relevant.

Check your answer with other persons who perform the same or a similar role in your organization.

F: Test Bank

1. Ideally, training prepares:
 - a. The expatriate manager to live in the other culture
 - b. The expatriate manager to work in the other culture
 - c. The expatriate manager's dependents to live in the other culture
 - d. All the above.

(Answer, d: p. 397)

2. The first stage in a needs analysis is to specify:
 - a. The skills that the trainees can already perform
 - b. The resources available for training
 - c. The target technical skills needed
 - d. The target skills needed for working and living.

(Answer, d: p. 398)

3. The second stage in a needs analysis is to specify:
 - a. The importance of cultural skills
 - b. The skills that the manager can already perform
 - c. The needs for on-post support
 - d. The effects of culture shock.

(Answer, b: p. 398)

4. Technical training includes material about:
 - a. Ethical policies
 - b. Non-evaluative attitudes towards the local culture
 - c. Constraints on the implementation of new technology
 - d. Local risk factors.

(Answer, c: p. 399)

5. Management training given to the expatriate manager:
 - a. Is also given to dependents
 - b. Includes information about the organizational culture of the unit that he/she is going to join
 - c. Includes information about technology transfer
 - d. Focuses on descriptive skills.

(Answer, b: p. 400)

6. Organizational structure determines the relationship between headquarters and the unit abroad, and this:
 - a. Influences skills needs
 - b. Has no influence on skill needs
 - c. Determines how much time is given for training
 - d. Determines whether training sessions are undisturbed.

(Answer, a: p. 400)

7. Research reported by Mendenhall et al. (*Global Management*, 1995) estimated that pre-departure training was offered to their expatriates by:
 - a. 85 percent of US MNCs
 - b. 35 percent of US MNCs
 - c. 35 percent of European MNCs
 - d. Fewer than 20 percent of European MNCs.

(Answer, b: p. 402)

8. Systems for evaluating the training program:
 - a. Can be applied only when training is completed
 - b. Can be applied only during training
 - c. Can be applied at all stages
 - d. Cannot be applied before training.

(Answer, c: pp. 404–405)

9. Successful schemes for supporting the expatriate manager and dependents:
 - a. Do not accommodate personality differences

- b. Take account of the stage that the manager has reached in his/her career
- c. Do not address issues of career planning
- d. Compare training programs.

(Answer, b: p. 405)

10. The main function of the headquarters mentor is to:
- a. Arrange pre-departure training
 - b. Arrange training to overcome culture shock
 - c. Advise the expatriate and protect his/her interests in headquarters
 - d. Plan the headquarters schedule for expatriate postings.

(Answer, c: p. 406)

11. Culture shock is a condition of adjusting to a new cultural context, and:
- a. Can affect anyone
 - b. Affects only weak people
 - c. Occurs only when the home and new cultures are very different
 - d. Affects only dependents.

(Answer, a: pp. 407–408)

12. Debriefing the expatriate after an assignment has a prime function of:
- a. Giving him/her the opportunity of discussing his/her experience in the other culture
 - b. Evaluating his/her success rate
 - c. Explaining headquarters changes during his/her absence
 - d. Checking his/her financial returns.

(Answer, a: pp. 410–11)