

Factors affecting international human resource management narrative



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Not all interactions are likely to take place in English, mainly within the host country.

As, dealing with customers, suppliers, and employees is often best done in the local language. But transnational exchanges are more and more probable to take place in English. When the top worldwide staff of Swiss-Swedish ABB Asea Brown Boveri meets, the one common language for their joint sessions is English. And when the Italian middle manager for the Milan, Italy, branch of Commerz Bank of Germany phones to headquarters in Frankfurt – which she must do many times a day – the conversation takes place in English. Of course, all the worldwide managers above a particular level for firms like Unilever (a Dutch-British firm), ABB Asea Brown Boveri, or IBM, or Toyota Motor Car Company, all of which work in seventy or more countries, must speak English.

And, even though it was controversial, when Euro-Disney opened in April, 1992, all of the 12, 000 employees were required to be able to speak English, French, and, of course, the language of their home countries, if it wasn't French or English. It is in fact now anticipated that English is spoken worldwide by more people than any other language, by at least one billion persons (Naisbitt, and Aburdene, 1990). One result of this can be that employing local nationals that are fluent in English may be as significant as requiring managers to be fluent in the local languages. Even so, it is clear that an capability to speak the local language is still quite important – for managers to deal with local nationals and local customers and suppliers, as well as to acclimatize to the host culture (and be accepted into that culture), both of which are major keys to successful manager experiences.

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One last issue involves the issue of separate languages being spoken by a parent firm and its subsidiaries and international joint ventures (Lester, 1994). In any situation where there is recurrent interaction between headquarters and its foreign operations, the opportunity for mistakes, misunderstandings, and disagreements can be huge. This can occur in situations where contracts are being negotiated, the setting up of a new office, transferring technology to host-country workers and engineers or even just in day-to-day communications between home office and host operations. Partially there is a requirement for a language translator. And partially, since language is so related to culture, there is a need for a “cultural translator,” someone who can not simply translate the words in such interactions, but who can also assist both sides understand the cultural implications and nuances in meaning of the written and spoken words (Beeth, 1997). Such cultural translators can prevent conflicts from arising and smooth over conflicts that do arise and remain them from becoming major, costly, crises.

In many countries where context is so significant to understanding meaning, such as Japan, China, India, and Saudi Arabia, having such a person available can make the difference between success and failure of the foreign endeavor. Typically this is a manager who speaks (or learns) the foreign language and stays in the assignment long enough to learn the culture, as well. Again, the requirement to focus on overseas assignment candidates' skills and interests are so important. Becoming a cultural translator requires someone with the capability to learn the language and the compliance and interest to learn the culture. In conclusion I must say that IHRM responsibility

not only staffing, but primarily on the issue of selecting best manager for overseas assignment.

This paper further examined the difficulties experienced in the selection and management of managers and suggested some of the approaches successful multinational companies use to ensure positive experiences with those managers and repatriates. The biggest issue for most multinational companies in the management of their overseas assignment system is the alignment of the competing interests of the firm, IHRM, and the overseas assignment and family. The business is concerned regarding its globalization and needs quick action, to generate new revenues, and to manage the costs and risk involved with doing that. IHR needs sufficient lead time to find and select effective overseas assignments; they need a low enough case load of overseas assignments to be able to provide good service; they desire to be able to apply an effective process for selecting and developing quality overseas assignment candidates; and they desire to be able to apply a consistent policy of treatment of overseas assignments. And overseas assignments themselves, and their families, desire sufficient compensation for the personal and career sacrifice they make in relocating; they want their family concerns to be given vital priority; and they expect to be able to come back to a career promotion that will take benefit of their overseas experience.

Multinational companies experience suggests a number of steps that can be taken to make sure the success of international assignments. And when the steps are followed, experience suggests that multinational companies will

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