

Non-Traditional Expatriate Managers: A Multi-level Analysis

Introduction

International assignments continue to be an important strategy of multinational enterprises (MNEs), especially for companies with majority revenues coming from international locations (Brookfield, 2013). Previous reports on employee global mobility show that the large majority of managers sent on international assignments are the traditional married male with children (Brookfield, 2013; Cartus, 2014). However, with the increase in workforce diversity additional focus should be given to non-traditional expatriate managers.

Compared with their traditional counterparts, non-traditional expatriates, such as those with different family compositions and status (e.g., single parent, step-parents, empty-nesters), sexual orientation (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) (McPhail, McNulty, & Hutching, 2014), and from different religious groups (e.g., Christians, Muslims, Jews), attract increasingly more attention within the ever changing global staffing environment (McNulty, 2013). In fact, non-traditional managers constitute ten percent or more of the global talent pool (McNulty, 2014). In recent years, more MNEs have launched comprehensive regulations and policies for non-traditional managers, yet there is still an underrepresentation of these minority groups in the highest levels of the corporate world. This phenomenon is known as the 'glass ceiling' (Auster, 1993), historically an impediment to the growth of women in management. This impediment is relabeled the 'glass border' when referring to international assignment opportunities (Gedro, 2010; Linehan & Scullion, 2001; Mandelker, 1994) to describe stereotypical assumptions about non-traditional managers such as their availability, suitability and preferences for international assignments.

Although a few theoretical and empirical studies have been conducted on non-traditional managers (Dupuis, Haines, & Saba, 2008; Gedro, 2010; McNulty, 2013; McPhail et al., 2014; Mujtaba & Cavivo, 2012; Pompper, 2013; Tharenou, 2008) this topic still remains relatively untouched.

Literature review

Since the late 1970s, many scholars contributed to the field of expatriation, covering an array of topics such as expatriate selection and cross-cultural training (Black & Mendenhall, 1989; Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987; Tung 1981, 1982), cross-cultural adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990), global career development (Feldman & Thomas, 1992), expatriate failures and successes (Newman, Bhatt, & Gutteridge, 1978; Tung, 1982, 1984, 1988), expatriate retention and turnover (Gregersen & Black, 1990; Neumann, 1992), and repatriation (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992). Adler (1987) also made significant early contributions in the area of female expatriates. Their pioneering work set the stage for all subsequent work on expatriation and other international assignments. Today, we see international assignments encompassing a wide range of activities and individuals (McNulty, 2013; McPhail et al., 2014).

Social identity inherently involves relational and comparative identity aspects (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Many scholars (Aries, 1996; Deaux, 2001) argue that being a minority, for example, being the only woman in a group of men, will make their distinctiveness (i.e., in this case, gender identity) more salient. Indeed, Kanter (1977) found that the existence of females in a traditional male-dominated work group enhanced the perceived differences between genders.

Although most social groups are categorical (e.g., male or female.), thus not convertible to quantitative values (e.g., low, medium, high), the extent to which people identify with each social category is a matter of degree (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In general, in-group favoritism is

even greater for those identifying strongly with their social identity (Brown, 2000), especially in collectivistic cultures (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002).

In-group favoritism often contributes to increased emotional attachment, loyalty, cooperation and cohesion within groups; however it also leads to overt and covert prejudice and discrimination against out-groups. Especially in a work setting, in-group favoritism results in the exclusion of minorities from important decision-making and less access to support, which subsequently jeopardizes career advancement (Chow & Crawford, 2004)

Diversified characteristics of expatriates (degree of diversity) (Dimension 1)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) managers

Since the early 1990s, significant improvements have been made regarding discrimination against LGBT employees in the workplace. According to a recent report, 96.8 percent of the 2012 Fortune 500 companies included sexual orientation in their workplace policies (Alfred, 2012).

Despite the decline in discrimination toward LGBTs in the workplace, there is a perceived tendency for organizations in general and MNEs in particular to not promote those in the sexual minority category (i.e., those who are not heterosexual) to positions of increased authority, power, prestige, and formal responsibility, a phenomenon known as the ‘lavender ceiling’ (Gedro, 2010). The ‘lavender ceiling’ is also believed to exist when selecting managers for international assignments (Gedro, 2010), and McPhail et al. (2014) also claim that there is a corporate ceiling for LGBT expatriates; they often experience discrimination, stereotyping, and limited organizational and host-country support. In addition to social discrimination, LGBT *couples* also face additional challenges related to the laws of the home and host countries.

Religious expatriates

Religious discrimination has been studied by many scholars (Bhatti, Sundram, & Hoe,

2012; Ghumman, Ryan, Barclay, & Markel, 2013; King & Ahmad, 2010). However, with rapidly increasing diversity in the workforce we believe there is a need to refocus our attention on religious discrimination.

Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi (2010) note that people from some religions may feel threatened by members of other religious groups who differ in their beliefs and lifestyles. An important aspect of religious discrimination is the ‘intersectionality of identity’ (Ali, 2013), which occurs when individuals have more than one dimension of identity (e.g., in terms of their gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation). In other words, two or more dimensions of identity of any given person intersect with each other. Gender adds an extra layer of complexity to the intersectionality of identity when discussing religious diversity. For example, since Muslim men are expected to support their families, there is little incentive for women from Islamic families to work (Ali, 2013; Tlaiss, 2013). Other dimensions of identity that present intersectionality with religion are ethnicity and national origin. Bhatti et al. (2012) point out that ‘Malaysian culture is based on different ethnicity which includes Malay (Muslims), Chinese (Christen and Buddhist) and Indians (Hindu). Each ethnicity practices its own culture, religion and rituals’ (2012: 31).

The understanding of religious discrimination, both in the United States and elsewhere, is necessary for the training and development of future expatriates to facilitate their adjustment to a new work environment. Many scholars have covered this critical component of expatriate training and development (Bhatti et al., 2012; Yaghi & Yaghi, 2013). However, precious little has been written about the need to address the issues related to selection and recruiting of expatriates from different religious groups to international assignments, particularly those who would be posted to countries with different religious beliefs.

Non-traditional families

According to family demographic reports, the structure of traditional families in the United States has been changing over the last few decades, with a decrease in birthrates and the percentage of married couples, and an increase in divorce rates and longevity (Vaiman, Scullion, & Collings, 2012). Consequently, the demographics of the workplace have also been changing, and the percentage of managers who belong to non-traditional families is increasing. Although some small changes have been seen in the demographics of international managers (McNulty, 2013), they have remained mostly male, married and between the ages of 30 to 40 years old (Brookfield, 2013).

Historically, spousal adjustment has played an important role in explaining why some expatriates succeed and other do not (Black & Stephen, 1989). Thus, it is not surprising that family members play an important role in the success of expatriates (McNulty, 2013; Tharenou, 2008). Recently 61 percent of the failures in international assignments are due to the inability of the expatriate's family to adjust to the host country (Cartus, 2014), which can be even more challenging for non-traditional families. Dugan and Elibero (1994) briefly address non-traditional demands of alternative family situations, such as single parents and unmarried couples, when managing job relocation, noting that not much has been written about the subject. For example, non-traditional families sometimes require the woman to care for both sets of aging parents (Pompper, 2013), face legal issues related to relocating unmarried couples, or encounter barriers to bring their pets. Although some scholars have addressed these non-traditional situations, particularly related to United States domestic employment, little has been done in regards to selecting non-traditional candidates for international assignments and the development of family relocation packages that would fulfill their unique needs (Dugan & Elibero, 1994; Pompper, 2013).

Non-traditional families can be categorized in many different ways, such as marital status, family composition, special needs, and working status (McNulty, 2014). Some of these non-traditional families are discussed next.

LGBT couples.

Despite recent changes in the United States and other countries in favor of LGBT couples, the laws aimed at lesbians, gay men and bisexual and same-sex activities and relationships vary significantly from country to country. For example, according to the International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association Annual Report (2013), there are seven countries where the death penalty is enforced and an additional 71 countries where persecution varies from life-long imprisonment to restriction of freedom of expression for members of the LGBT group. In these countries, LGBT couples almost certainly face safety, social acceptance, and work benefits challenges.

Nowadays, LGBT managers make up a growing percentage of the workforce as well as of expatriates, thus MNEs should acknowledge and support them.

Single parents. A vast number of studies on traditional expatriates (e.g., married male with children) have consistently shown that family plays an important role in the success of the expatriate (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001), yet little has been addressed regarding single parent expatriates (McNulty, 2014). With the increasing changes in the composition of families, single parent expatriates should be explored (Richardson, 2006). Literature has shown that the lack of a supporting spouse can cause additional strains to domestic single parent managers as well as to those in international assignments (Takeuchi, Wang, & Marinova, 2005).

Female breadwinners. There are an increasing number of women occupying senior roles in MNEs, yet only 10 percent of international assignees are female breadwinners (McNulty, 2013)

despite findings from studies showing that female expatriates are as equally successful as male expatriates in international assignments (Sinangil & Ones, 2003).

A possible reason for the perceived 'glass border' is that female breadwinners face additional challenges compared to males. For example, families of female expatriates are less likely to accompany female expatriates on their international assignments (Cartus, 2014) thus necessitating additional familial support (e.g., nannies) (Tzeng, 2006). In addition, female breadwinners' supervisors may assume that women with small children are not interested in foreign assignment opportunities (Hearn, Jyrkinen, Piekkari, & Oinonen, 2008) or that they would prefer a more family-focused/work-life balanced career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006).

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that the major cause of failure for an expatriate is the lack of adjustment of the spouse. This situation may be aggravated in the case of male trailing spouses because of low self-esteem and decreased self-worth for not being the breadwinners for their families (Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010) or for losing their jobs (Cole, 2012; Harvey, 1997), a situation that may jeopardize the success of the female expatriate (McNulty, 2013).

Multi-generational families. During the last two decades, the number of Americans living in multi-generational families increased by 62 percent, from 35 million (1990) to 57 million (2012) (Fry & Passel, 2014). This growth represents a change from 14.3 to 18.1 percent of Americans living in multi-generational families, caused by an increase of young adults ages 25 to 34 still living with parents and/or elderly parents living with their children (Fry & Passel, 2014). Americans who have young adult children as well as elderly parents living with them are known as the 'sandwich generation' (Belout, Dolan, & Saba, 2001). Elderly parents represent the fastest growing segment of the United States population (Konopaske, Robie, & Ivancevich,

2009). In addition to the demands of traditional families, managers who belong to multi-generational families also face the challenging task of caring for their elderly parents. In certain countries such as China, due to the increase in life expectancy, managers might also have to care for their grandparents (Selmer, Luring, & Feng, 2009). This situation may be even more relevant for female managers as in many cultures daughters have the primary responsibility of caring for elders. These challenges may create some real and perceived barriers for the selection of managers who belong to multi-generational families to participate in international assignments. For example, managers, or their spouses, might be unwilling or unable to move without their elderly parents (Konopaske et al., 2009). Even if they are interested in and able to accept international assignments their supervisors may assume that they are not, and may not consider them for international opportunities. Clearly, more research should be done regarding managers who belong to multi-generational families.

Other non-traditional families. In addition to the non-traditional families discussed in this section, other non-traditional families should be studied particularly regarding their willingness and ability to participate in international assignments. Some of these non-traditional families include split families (i.e., manager moves to the host country while the immediate family stays at the home country), step-parents, dual career couples (i.e., both spouses have a career that they are not willing to give up), families with special needs (e.g., children with disability), pet owners and single managers. Many of the challenges of these families are similar to the ones described in this section although they also face other challenges not previously discussed.

We refer to the degree of diversity of non-traditional managers as the additive accumulation of minority attributes, many of them discussed in this section.

Length of international assignment (Dimension 2)

For nearly half a century scholars have discussed an array of issues related to the successes and failures of long-term international assignments (Caligiuri, 2000; Hays, 1971; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Newman et al., 1978; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). Most of these discussions have focused on expatriate assignments, which generally span 3 to 5 years (Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther, & Clarke, 2009) but also permanent transfers. More recently, alternative global assignments have been examined including short-term international assignments (i.e., lasting between 3 to 12 months, with or without family) (Brookfield, 2013; Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004), flexpatriate or ‘intermittent’ assignments (i.e., projects in different locations lasting less than 3 months and with no relocation) such as extended business travel, commuter assignments, and rotational assignments (Brookfield, 2013; Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Mayerhofer, Schmidt, Hartmann, & Bendl, 2011), frequent-flyers or international business travelers (i.e., frequent international trips and no relocation) (Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Meyskens et al., 2009) and virtual assignments (Collings et al., 2007).

The major difference between traditional expatriate assignments and alternative assignments is that relocation of the expatriate and his/her family most likely will not be necessary. Alternative assignments are a good way to gain valuable international experience while still maintaining a home base. In addition, alternative international assignments may help MNEs solve or reduce challenges associated with the traditional long-term international assignment, such as growing costs and risks, expatriation retention, expatriate failure, and repatriation (Collings et al., 2007). Conversely, alternative assignments may increase manager burnout from travel fatigue, spouse burnout due to an increase in home responsibilities, and work-life balance (Meyskens et al., 2009). In research done with 94 male and female international travelers, scholars found that the

challenges associated with alternative international assignments can be intensified for female managers due to their traditional or perceived role as a woman and the lack of support from their spouse (Festing, Budhwar, Cascio, Dowling, & Scullion, 2013).

Cultural distance (Dimension 3)

In international business, cultural distance refers to the extent of which the culture of a home country differs from that of a host country (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984), particularly differences in language, education, business practices, and economic and cultural development (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Maude, 2011). The concept of cultural distance has been used by MNEs in the selection of international business locations as well as in the selection of international business managers (Luo & Shenkar, 2011). Due to different levels of cultural distance, some countries seem to be easier to adapt to while others seem to be more difficult (Church, 1982).

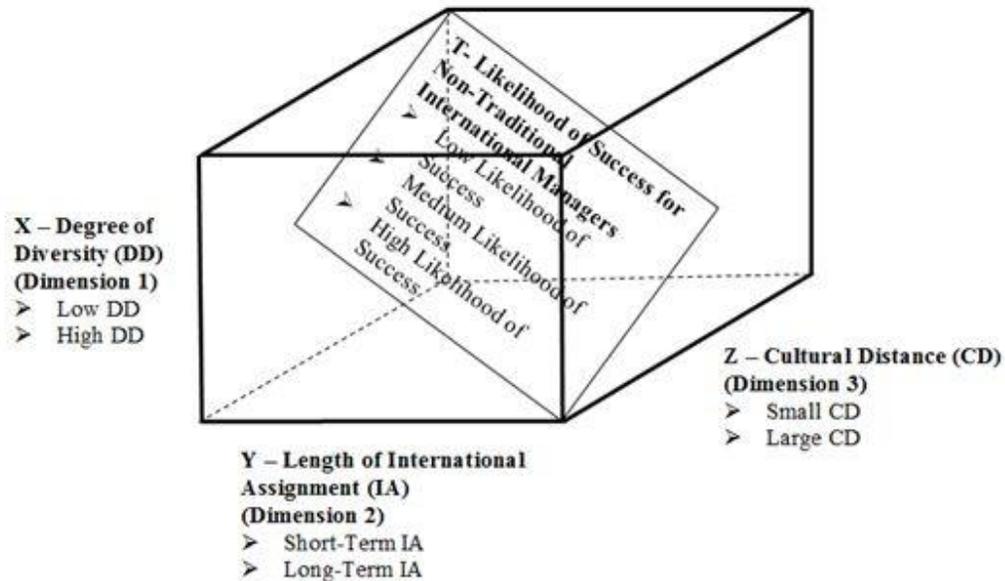
Working in culturally distant countries often results in poor expatriate adjustment (Harvey & Moeller, 2009), becoming more difficult and expensive for the expatriate to succeed in the international assignment (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). Moreover, expatriates generally prefer less culturally distant destinations in order to avoid probable failures (Dupuis et al., 2008).

Multi-level model and propositions

In this article, we attempt to evaluate the current state of non-traditional managers as related to their ability and willingness to participate in international assignments, as well as the many challenges they face in the workplace and on international assignments. In this section, we present a multi-level model (see Figure 1) to depict the complexities and challenges associated with the interactions of the three dimensions discussed in the literature review (i.e., the degree of diversity of the non-traditional manager, the length of the international assignment, and the

cultural distance gap between the host and home countries) and their impact on the likelihood of success of non-traditional managers on international assignments.

Figure 1. Multi-level model of likelihood of success for non-traditional international managers:



We now define four different scenarios that non-traditional managers may encounter when they undertake international assignments. In each scenario, we present two propositions conveying the likelihood of success of non-traditional managers on international assignments as related to their degree of diversity, the length of the international assignment and the cultural distance gap between the host and home countries.

Scenario 1: Non-traditional managers appointed to long-term assignments in countries with great cultural distance

Managers appointed to international assignments who have a non-traditional profile will face more challenges when compared with their traditional counterparts (McNulty, 2013). These challenges seem to be aggravated for long-term international assignments as non-traditional managers need to consider additional factors such as the host country social norms and the

implications of relocating their families (Mumma, 2001), factors that may not be as significant for short-term assignments. Furthermore, if there is great cultural distance between the host and home countries, non-traditional managers may face discrimination (e.g., against LGBT, Muslims, female), be treated as an out-group member (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011; Peltokorpi, 2007; Toh & Denisi, 2007), or be unable to adapt due to low level of infrastructure or lack of appropriate health care (e.g., for managers with special needs or with special need relatives and pets) (Andreason, 2008). Dupuis et al. (2008) contend that the greater the cultural distance, the greater the uncertainty involved in an international assignment and the environment of the country destination, which most likely will result in some type of resistance from non-traditional managers to participate in international assignments.

Proposition 1a: Non-traditional managers with a high degree of diversity are less likely to succeed in long-term international assignments in host countries with great cultural distance.

Proposition 1b: Non-traditional managers with a low degree of diversity are less likely to succeed in long-term international assignments in host countries with great cultural distance.

Scenario 2: Non-traditional managers appointed to short-term assignments in countries with small cultural distance

In contrast, when non-traditional managers are on a short-term assignment in countries with small cultural distance, many of the challenges mentioned above, such as the need for social acceptance and the stress related to family and/or personal relocation are alleviated. In addition, when non-traditional managers are sent to countries with small cultural distance when compared to their home countries, they are likely to have more knowledge of the country's language and/or business practices, thereby easing their adaptation to the new environment. Moreover, non-traditional managers are usually more willing to participate in international assignments when

they are sent to countries with small cultural distance when compared to their home country (Dupuis et al., 2008).

Proposition 2a: Non-traditional managers with a high degree of diversity are more likely to succeed in short-term international assignments in host countries with small cultural distance.

Proposition 2b: Non-traditional managers with a low degree of diversity are more likely to succeed in short-term international assignments in host countries with small cultural distance.

Scenario 3: Non-traditional managers with low degree of diversity appointed to short-term assignments in countries with great cultural distance or to long-term assignments in countries with small cultural distance

Propositions 1 and 2 present the extremes of situations non-traditional managers may face on international assignments (i.e., the safest extreme of a short-term assignment in a host country with low cultural distance, and the least safe extreme of a long-term assignment in a host country with high cultural distance). The following four propositions refer to situations between these extremes. We argue that the opposite extremes between the cultural distance gap and the length of the international assignment can create balance, providing a moderate likelihood of success for non-traditional managers, which will also vary depending on their degree of diversity.

Proposition 3a: Non-traditional managers with a low degree of diversity have medium-high likelihood to succeed in long-term international assignments in host countries with small cultural distance.

Proposition 3b: Non-traditional managers with a low degree of diversity have medium-high likelihood to succeed in short-term international assignments in host countries with great cultural distance.

Scenario 4: Non-traditional managers with high degree of diversity appointed to short-term

assignments in countries with great cultural distance or to long-term assignments in countries with small cultural distance

Lastly, we argue that the equilibrium between the length of the international assignment and the cultural distance gap between the host and home countries discussed in Scenario 3 will be lessened for non-traditional managers with a high degree of diversity. Although Scenario 3 and Scenario 4 are similar, Scenario 3 is less problematic than Scenario 4 due to the low degree of diversity of non-traditional managers. Non-traditional managers with high degree of diversity may encounter additional challenges associated with their different diversity identities.

Proposition 4a: Non-traditional managers with a high degree of diversity have medium-low likelihood to succeed in long-term international assignments in host countries with small cultural distance.

Proposition 4b: Non-traditional managers with a high degree of diversity have medium-low likelihood to succeed in short-term international assignments in host countries with great cultural distance.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we introduced the topic of non-traditional managers in international assignments by presenting the recent demographics of families, which have been changing for the last two decades thereby impacting the demographics of the global workforce. We also conveyed the growing need of a larger pool of candidates for international assignments due to the increasing globalization of MNEs and that non-traditional managers may help meet these strategic needs. In addition, we enumerated the challenges non-traditional managers face in their careers, particularly the phenomenon of ‘glass ceiling’ and ‘glass border’ as well as the lack of support received by traditional expatriates, which may lead them to become maladjusted and

dissatisfied with their job (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Tung, 1981), possibly leading non-traditional managers to fail in their international assignments.

In the literature review, we examined three dimensions that we believe influence the success of non-traditional managers in international assignments, in addition to their social identity and adjustment. First, we discussed the unique characteristics of non-traditional managers and the different levels of diversity they represent. We have identified them according to their sexual orientation, religious affiliations, and family composition. We discussed the unique challenges they face in the workforce. Next, we listed the different types of international assignments and discussed their relative merits, which vary according to the length of the international assignment as well as the host country selection. We then looked at the additional impact that cultural distance may cause in the likelihood of success of non-traditional managers.

Furthermore, we developed eight propositions, each consisting of three areas of IHRM that we believe influence the decision of MNEs to recommend non-traditional expatriates to participate in international assignments.

Lastly, we invite MNEs IHR managers to re-evaluate their policies to facilitate the candidacy and selection of non-traditional managers for international assignments and to better prepare them for a successful experience as international managers. We conclude that, during the selection of non-traditional managers for international assignments, IHR managers should not eliminate qualified applicants based on their diverse backgrounds and identities. Nevertheless, we recommend they consider the combination of the three dimensions presented in this study and the propositions developed to deliver appropriate training and make necessary arrangements for the appointed non-traditional manager.

References: The detailed reference list of the works cited herein is available from the authors.