

TITLE:

HRM roles in cross culture training provision: Insights from Israeli companies

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INTRODUCTION:

In light of a steady use of traditional expatriate assignments and the increased popularity of alternative assignments (e.g. Brookfieldgrs, 2016; KPMG, 2017) it is not surprising that the factors that contribute to their success have attracted a lot of attention (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Littrell *et al.*, 2006). In this context the role of cross culture training (CCT) has been widely discussed, as part of wider global HR approaches (Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Menipaz and Menipaz, 2011). Often described as a ‘practice with potential’ (Morley and Parkinson, 2015), CCT is generally portrayed as comprising practices that focus on specific or general cultural content (e.g. Caligiuri, 2006; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011) and aim to shorten the adjustment period by enhancing expatriates’ awareness and creating realistic expectations (e.g. Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001), facilitating the development of positive relationships abroad (e.g. Okpara and Kabongo, 2011) and helping with assignment related stressors (Littrell *et al.*, 2006). In this vein, specific CCT constructs have been linked to the achievement of different cultural adjustment dimensions, such as work (e.g. Chien, 2012; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013), cognitive (e.g. Haslberger *et al.*, 2013) and interpersonal adjustment (e.g. Susanto and Rositani, 2012).

Despite the substantial body of prescriptive and exploratory work on CCT design and methodologies (e.g. Budworth and DeGama, 2012; Joshua-Gojer, 2012; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014; Littrell *et al.*, 2006; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011; Tungli and Peiperl, 2009), there is compelling evidence to suggest that the provision of CCT is frequently restricted and non-comprehensive (e.g. Brookfield, 2015; KPMG, 2017) and often does not meet the needs of

expatriates (e.g. Chien, 2012; Hutchings, 2005). While many explanations for this conundrum have been suggested, such as resource shortages (Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014; Tungli and Peiperl, 2009), lack of awareness and required expertise among key decision-makers, including HR professionals (e.g. Edwards and Rees, 2011; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011), and pragmatic focus on easily measurable outcomes (Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014), the role that HR managers play in CCT provision has not been systematically investigated despite the fact that managing and assisting global talent management and staff mobility falls within the remit of their work (Brookfieldgrs, 2016; Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

The role of the HR function has attracted considerable attention and many, often prescriptive, models have been proposed to describe the ‘multifaceted and complex’ set of HR roles (Caldwell, 2003: 987) and expectations about them (e.g. Conner and Ulrich, 1996; Storey, 1992; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockback, 2005). There is, however, a dearth of empirical studies into how HR professionals‘ enact their roles (O‘Brien and Linehan, 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Stiles and Trevor, 2006), in particular in international settings (Welch and Welch, 2012) and in relation to specific issues, such as CCT. In light of empirical evidence that ‘personnel managers will have different roles in relation to different issues with which they are concerned’ (Procter and Currie, 1999: 1078), a more fine grained exploration of specific HR roles in international settings is called for. In line with the argument that ‘a fuller understanding of roles requires a consideration of *how* they are enacted and *why* they are performed in a certain way’ (Welch and Welch, 2012: 611, see also O‘Brien and Linehan, 2014; Taminau and Heusinkveld, 2017) in relation to specific issues, it is important to consider not only behaviours, as emphasised in traditional role theory, but also the cognitive/interpretative dimension of role enactment (Lynch, 2007; Welch and Welch, 2012). Our study therefore seeks to explore (a) HR managers‘ role enactment in relation to CCT provision and (b) the factors that affect the enactment of these roles, as interpreted by the HR managers. To address these questions, we draw on an exploratory study conducted among HR managers from fifteen Israeli-based organisations and interviews with CCT professionals.

We start by providing a brief overview of the existing body of work on CCT with the view to identifying key elements of CCT provision that can be used to explore associated HR role enactment. We then outline the design and methods underpinning our study before presenting our results. The paper ends with a discussion of the identified HR roles in CCT provision and the factors that affect their enactment, as understood by the concerned HR professionals, the implications of which are considered in the final section of the paper.

CCT provision and HR roles

There is emergent consensus in the subject literature that CCT, typically defined in broad terms after Caligiuri *et al.* (2001) as interventions aimed at enhancing expatriates' effective operations in new cultures by increasing their knowledge and skills, has considerable potential to expedite and enhance expatriates' cultural adjustment and effectiveness (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Menipaz and Menipaz, 2011; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009). However, there is also considerable evidence to suggest that the success of CCT is contingent on a wide range of factors (Alexandra, 2016; Littrell *et al.*, 2006; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). In light of our research question, we focus our review on the most pertinent ones for the HR function. More specifically, our review identifies six core elements of CCT provision: (1) goals and needs analysis; (2) planning and customised design; (3) combination of general and culture specific content; (4) opportunities for experiential learning; (5) sequential learning cycles including pre- and post-arrival development and (6) systematic evaluation.

An important factor in CCT provision highlighted in the subject literature (e.g. Tarique and Caligiuri, 2009; Walter and Cookie, 2013) is a detailed analysis of assignment goals and training/ development needs. It has been recommended that the needs analysis should consider expatriate's inter-personal skills and experience and their and their family's needs to

appraise them in light of the job characteristics and assignment requirements (e.g. Budworth and DeGama, 2012; Joshua-Gojer, 2012; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014; Littrell *et al.*, 2006; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011; Wu and Ang, 2011).

Secondly, the literature emphasises the need for the outcomes of the needs analysis to be used in the subsequent planning, designing and delivery of the required CCT and recommends customisation of both training content and methodologies (e.g. Littrell *et al.*, 2006; O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2002; Walter and Cookie, 2013). Selmer (2000), for examples, illustrates how a projective needs assessment technique that he proposes can be used to propose the type of training needed. These recommendations for a customised training program resonate with Collings *et al.* (2007: 198) contestation that 'a standardised approach to international assignments is untenable'.

The third aspect of CCT provision highlighted in the literature refers to CCT methodologies. The existing body of work tends to build on Black and Mendenhall's (1989) typology which differentiates between factual, analytical and experiential CCT (e.g. Chien, 2012; Littrell *et al.*, 2006; Menipaz and Menipaz, 2011). Didactic or factual methods typically focus on tangible knowledge of topics such as: finance, cultural dimensions and language (e.g. Caligiuri, 2006; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014), whereas experiential methodologies are concerned with tacit knowledge (Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014) and aim to provide understanding of the local culture and improve language skills (Caligiuri, 2006). A further distinction is made between culture-specific and general cultural training, where general CCT focuses on enhancing sensitivity to general cultural differences and the understanding of other people's emotions (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011), whereas culture-specific CCT is concerned with technical information, societal knowledge and cultural values, manners and customs of a particular country (Menipaz and Menipaz, 2011). While the effectiveness of factual training methods is often questioned and cultural differences are seen as too subtle for the use of cognitive

methods (Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014), the literature also typically underscores the importance of country specific knowledge, interpersonal communication skills, business protocol and legal issues (Chien, 2012; Shen and Lang, 2009). Pulling together insights from available research (e.g. Chien, 2012; Friedman *et al.*, 2013; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011), there appears to be consensus in the subject literature that CCT should focus on fostering both general CC competencies and culture-specific skills.

Furthermore, both theoretical (e.g. Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014; Littrell *et al.*, 2006) and empirical work on the subject (e.g. Caligiuri and Tarique, 2009; Chien, 2012; Waxin and Panaccio, 2005) consistently highlights the benefits of experiential training methodologies which focus on active learning and creating a context for knowledge application. In particular, country-specific experiential training, such as pre-departure trips to the host-country and international experience, are considered to be the most significant predictor for adjustment (Hutchings, 2005; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011; Shen and Lang, 2009; Waxin and Panaccio, 2005). Attempting to provide some synthesis of the topic, it has been argued that a program that combines different methodologies and one which juxtaposes explicit with factual knowledge (Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014) is likely to generate the best results (e.g. Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013).

Another recurring theme in the literature is linked to sequential CCT delivery which promotes recurring learning cycles (e.g. Littrell and Salas, 2005). In this vein, Lenartowicz *et al.* (2014) propose a four stage CCT model which comprises: a) the Clarion call- some form of intercultural experience to promote the building of the tacit knowledge, b) debriefing – guided reflection on the experience with the help of a competent trainer, c) revision – gaining further insights about the foreign culture in order to deepen and refine the reflection, d) recurring experience – acquisition of more real life intercultural experience which can be subject to the earlier stages of reflection. While this theoretical model might require further

empirical support and contextual nuance, it can provide a useful platform for further reflection on CCT as a sequential process which facilitates sequential learning cycles. It is often recommended that CCT models should combine pre-departure and post-arrival training and support (Hutchings, 2005; Littrell *et al*, 2006; Shen and Lang, 2009) and ought to match the timing of training with the appropriate choice of methods (Littrell *et al*, 2006; Tarique and Caligiuri, 2009). Eschbach *et al* (2001) therefore consider high-rigour training programs as those of varied methodologies, beginning before departure and continuing during the assignment.

Finally, the investigation of the factors affecting CCT effectiveness generally emphasizes the importance of a thorough evaluation of CCT programs and their effectiveness, as part of a carefully designed process (Walter and Cookie, 2013). Proposed evaluations of CCT programs usually include evaluation of reaction, behaviour, learning and finally performance parameters (Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000). Littrell and Salas (2005) further note that a systematic evaluation of CCT provision should be carried out consistently and regularly and use multiple criteria as the basis for success/ failure evaluation.

A parallel line of investigation pertinent to the issue of CCT provision focuses on HR roles and the International HR function. While there has been considerable interest to demarcate HR roles, this has largely involved theoretical debates and prescriptive models, rather than empirical investigation of how HR roles are enacted (O'Brien and Linehan, 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Stiles and Trevor, 2006). The extant literature has largely centred on the domestic context (e.g. Caldwell, 2003; Conner and Ulrich, 1996; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockback, 2005), with considerably less attention paid to the HR function in international settings (Welch and Welch, 2012). Work on the international HR function tends to focus more broadly the changing role of the global HR function (Scullion and Starkey, 2000; Thite *et al*, 2014). While there is an emerging body of work on HR roles linked to specific functions,

such as global talent management (e.g. Farndale *et al*, 2010; Tarique *et al*, 2010), it is often conceptual. An important contribution to the debate has been made by Welch and Welch (2012) who have explicitly focused on HR roles in the international context and have identified five such roles: service provider; policy police; strategic partner; change agent and a new welfare officer role. As the authors emphasise, ‘a fuller understanding of IHR roles requires consideration of how they are enacted and why they are performed in a certain way’ (op cit: 611), in particular in light of the recognition that HR roles might be enacted differently in relation to different HR issues (Procter and Currie, 1999). This understanding of roles departs from traditional functionalist conceptualisations of role theory which conceive of roles as largely determined by externally placed expectations (Lynch, 2007) and instead highlights actors choices and agency in role enactment (Mantere, 2008; Taminau and Heusinkveld, 2017). While it needs to be acknowledged that how HR roles are enacted will ‘be the result of its interactions [and negotiations] within the organization’ (Procter and Currie, 1999: 1089), the cognitive/interpretative aspect of role enactment by the role holders, here the HR professionals, should not be overlooked (Lynch, 2007; Welch and Welch, 2012). In our study we therefore explore (a) HR managers’ role enactment in relation to CCT provision and (b) the factors that affect the enactment of these roles, as interpreted by these managers in order to contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of HR roles in CCT provision than suggested by prescriptive generic models.

Research context and methodology

The scarcity of studies on HR role enactment in CCT provision calls for an exploratory qualitative research design (Birkinshaw *et al.*, 2011; Bryman and Bell, 2011). We chose Israel as a suitable context for two primary reasons. First of all, despite the rapid changes of its economy over the past few decades (e.g. Luxembourg, 2012; Tzafirir *et al.*, 2007), there are still very few studies of its IHRM practices. We agree with Thite *et al.* (2014) that the

HRM scholarship could be valuably enriched by insights from a wider variety of contexts and we see Israel as one of such underexplored albeit very promising contexts. Secondly, Israel has a disproportionately high number of international firms (Harpaz and Meshoulam, 2010; Luxembourg, 2012; MFA, 2013), which increases the strategic role of HR professionals in addressing the challenges related to CC management (Harpaz and Meshoulam, 2010; Tzafrir *et al.*, 2007), the understanding of which can be of relevance for other settings.

Our study is based on twenty interviews carried out with purposefully selected participants. In order to fully realise the potential of our exploratory design (Braun and Clarke, 2013, Poulis *et al.*, 2013), we used a combination of purposeful and maximum variation sampling. We approached seventy nine international companies operating in Israel in a variety of sectors and differing in size and volume of expatriation. The majority of the identified companies were Israeli multinationals, while some were subsidiaries of foreign corporations that made use of expatriate assignments. In order to obtain richer insights, we also sought access to local relocation and CCT companies. This approach enabled us to compose a sample of twenty participants: fifteen HR professionals whose responsibilities included, but were generally not restricted to, the provision of CCT, as well as five CCT professionals. Tables 1 and 2 provide further details of our sample:

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The interviews, which took place from mid-June 2014 until September 2015, were conducted in Hebrew by the first author of the paper and lasted on average an hour. All but three were recorded and transcribed. In cases where participants opted out of the digital recording of their interviews (HRM3, HRM8, RP2), detailed notes were taken. In line with the exploratory

nature of our study, the interviews started with general process oriented questions about the organisational processes which are triggered following a decision about relocation which were subsequently supplemented by a range of probing questions about the six identified aspects of CCT provision: needs analysis, planning and design, content, methodologies, pre-post arrival development and evaluation.

Data analysis

After interview transcripts were translated by the first author into English, the second author joined the analysis which was accomplished in a number of iterative circles recommended in the literature (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2011). After the familiarisation and first-order coding, we turned to the adductive approach to data analysis (Locke *et al*, 2008) and focused on the development of more theoretically informed and thematically-based codes related to CCT provision and HR roles (e.g. *_CCT content*‘, *_post-assignment support*‘, *_experiential methodology*, *_change agent*‘, *_welfare officer*‘). All transcripts were re-coded using the refined coding list. The final stage entailed looking for wider patterns and connections in data linking the identified patterns of role enactment with the cognitive/interpretative element of role enactment - HR managers‘ accounts of factors affecting the performed role. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of our data, we juxtaposed this data with the insights from CCT professionals.

Finally, we re-examined our interpretation in light of the contextual differentiation of our sample. To our surprise, the differences in the volume of expatriation did not reveal any significant differences in the identified patterning of data and did not trigger reformulation of our interpretation. We also did not observe any identifiable industry specific factors. Yet, this

can be quite plausibly linked to the exploratory, and by extension, more limited sample size. The key insights of our analysis are presented in the next section of the paper.

CCT provision and HR roles

As our analysis reveals, HR managers' involvement in CCT provision is most strongly manifested in their adoption of a dual role of a resource broker and policy implementer. While evidence of the enactment of roles identified by Welch and Welch (2012) was also found, it was more scarce. Below, we consider the identified roles before we move on to discussing the reasons behind the identified patterns of role enactment.

Resource broker and policy implementer

Interview data provide a strong indication of the dominance of two HR roles associated with CCT provision: resource broker and policy implementer. In light of the prominence of outsourcing in our data and the involvement of other internal functions, we see the role of a resource broker, rather than the service provider role identified by Welch and Welch (2012), as more accurately reflecting the pattern in our data. The dominant dual focus on the resource broker and policy implementer roles is clearly visible across all six elements of the CCT provision identified in the subject literature. However, it also indicates a narrow technical preoccupation in its enactment.

In line with the subject literature (e.g. Cligiuri and Tarique, 2006; Tarique and Caligiuri, 2009; Walter and Cookie, 2013), our data point to a consistent HR involvement in an individual pre-departure needs assessment. However, a more detailed analysis reveals a narrow focus on expatriate's technical and financial needs. Consideration for technical needs of the expatriate's family was discussed by all but two of the interviewed HR managers. In

only a handful of cases attention to psychological needs was mentioned. During this stage, the HR role was largely linked to offering a policy briefing and an explanation of available support. As one manager explained, "*I consult with the employee, explain to them what might be, what they want to emphasise ...*" [HRM8]. However, while references to 'softer needs', as the HR managers themselves described CC, psychological and emotional needs, were also found, our data do not show a systematic assessment. This observation is supported by interviews with CC trainers who observe that HR managers find it difficult to identify specific cultural training needs. It is also worth noting that the needs analysis did not always appear to be grounded in an analysis of the assignment goals.

Similarly to the generally low importance attached to CCT at the needs assessment stages, the other core elements of CCT provision highlighted in the literature also appeared to be downplayed. They were superseded by preoccupation with a logistically smooth transfer: "*... a significant part [of what we do] is how to construct the process properly, so that the kids mainly go through it well... We choose up front not to go into the inter-cultural issue*" [RC1]. In this respect, the most visible role enacted by HR managers was one of a resource broker coordinating a successful provision of services by others. Customising, designing and careful planning were accordingly only marginally applicable to CCT provision. Our analysis points to the availability of a portfolio of CCT tools which, however, do not appear to be utilised as part of a comprehensive customised CCT package, but functioning as part of a cafeteria style system. One of the most commonly used CCT tools offered to expatriates were pre-departure field trips, mentioned by a quarter of participants, language training, typically offered to the children and spouse and CCT workshops. Again, the role of HR was in these case one of a resource broker and coordinator. Interestingly, the most common CCT tool - pre-assignment visits to the host-country - were typically not considered to be part of CCT, nor were the provided

orientation briefings and language training highlighted in the literature (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Caligiuri, 2006, Littrell and Salas, 2005).

When more focused CCT was offered, in less than half of companies, it was restricted to the pre-departure preparation stage and was culture-specific, factual and of low rigour. It was often restricted to a small number of one-on-one consultation meetings, or a half-day group session - the content of which was difficult for the HR managers to describe in detail. The following quote is a case in point: *"He was linked to someone who basically gave him orientation in the Chinese culture and everything. ... I can't tell you there were many meetings there. [HRM4]"*. This observation was also reinforced in interviews with CC trainers. In the words of one trainer: *"If they give us maximum time, then we can include all that. But usually they don't. And they then want us to focus on a very specific culture, rather than a global mind-set" [TR3]*.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the training included some elements of experiential learning which have attracted considerable academic attention (e.g. Caligiuri, 2006; Lenartowicz et al, 2012). In all cases when more focused CCT was provided, it was an outsourced service, seen as mandatory only in exceptional cases. Typically, such focused CCT was presented as an additional aspect of the available support: *"If an employee asks for it, they can participate in a relocation preparation workshop, and we have a supplier that can provide them with it. But truth be told – most people don't ask for it at all" [HRM9]*. In a number of cases, CCT aimed at preparing and supporting children rather than the expatriate: *"Today we do allow ... an emphasis on the cultural, educational, psychological aspect of preparing children for the transition"[HRM8]*.

Although the subject literature (e.g. Hutchings, 2005; Lenartowicz *et al*, 2014; Littrell *et al*, 2006; Shen and Lang, 2009) highlights the benefits of CCT that is sequential, delivered over a longer period of time and comprises both pre- and post-arrival development, our data point to a considerably more limited practice provision, strongly reliant on pre-arrival training. Unlike trends described in available reports (e.g. KPMG, 2017), a majority of HR managers in our study mentioned a termination of employment relations with expatriates. The provided post-transfer support, except for some technical assistance, was negligible. The main exception being rare examples of language training.

Limited enactment of other IHR roles

Welch and Welch (2012), building on the work of Ulrich (1997) and Caldwell (2003), discuss HR managers performing the roles of a change agent and a strategic partner. Substantial evidence of the enactment of the role of a strategic partner related to CCT provision did not emerge from our data except for two companies where HR managers insisted on a stronger alignment between the relocation policy and the wider corporate strategic objectives. Similarly, the change agent's role was limited. It was in less than a quarter of interviews that we found indication of HR managers actively seeking to improve available practice provision and in making policy change. Our analysis suggests that this tendency was closely linked to limited practice evaluation.

Despite consensus in the literature as to the need for systematic practice evaluation (e.g. Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000; Lenartowicz *et al*, 2012), only 3 HR managers described an evaluation process. While others generally agreed on the importance of evaluation, they did not describe an evaluation of preparation and support practices. Some admitted to the lack of such processes: "*Truth be told we never did it.*" [HRM6]; "*we don't have a regular process of assessment... I agree that it's very important*" [HRM9]. Specific evaluations of CCT

programs were only referred to by 3 HR managers, describing informal feedback received from employees, mostly shortly after training. Two CC trainers also highlighted the lack of formal and longitudinal evaluation of CCT programs: “...no one has this kind of follow-up. Our assumption is that it is very helpful” [TR3]. Unsurprisingly, the lack of evaluation is related to a hindered process of planning and designing formal and cohesive policies and limits the perceived need for change.

Similarly, the enactment of the welfare officer’s role was very limited. Admittedly, HR managers often discussed the challenges relocation can pose, especially for the expatriate’s family. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that HR managers sought to mitigate the emotional challenges by coordinating technical support for the transfer. In this context, some mentioned gestures, such as sending expatriates’ flowers and chocolates „so they have a nice landing” [HR 14], whereas others discussed the addition of an absorption package - someone to accompany you, to open a bank account and tell you where to shop” [HR 8]. Over half of our participants mentioned trying to contact expatriates after arrival to check how they were settling in. An important practice, albeit one discussed by less than a quarter of our participants, referred to brokering initial contact between the expatriate and the local HR or other expatriates: “Something on the emotional level ... doesn’t exist, we simply create it ourselves, for example I „matched” employees that that moved to Canada This only teaches us that it is needed.” [HR 11] The perceived importance of the need for emotional support was, by and large, relatively low. As one manager admitted: *–maybe the softer elements are lacking. but it's not a must.* [HR 5]

Factors affecting the HR role enactment in CCT provision

While pointing to a range of contextual factors, our analysis highlights the importance of the cognitive/ interpretative factors in how HR managers enact their CCT related roles. Arguably one of the key factors is linked to perceptions of CCT effectiveness.

Our data suggests a fairly limited understanding of the complexities associated with effective CCT provision. It is therefore not surprising that none of the HR managers unequivocally endorsed the value and effectiveness of CCT, which was seen as contingent on the perceived cultural distance of the assignment location. This belief was echoed in the experiences of CC trainers, one of whom noted that "*The place where we have the highest rate of failure in relocations is the United States. Which is considered easy. ... our thesis is that people don't prepare. They will prepare more for Korea.*" [RP1]. In fact, a number of managers stated that it was impossible to prepare expatriates for the challenges of their assignment, as vividly summarised by one of them: *–They adapt, and honestly – even if I do give them a package of three sessions with – a counsellor of sorts – at the end of the day they will meet reality ... There can be no 100% preparation for such a thing... You cannot do too much in these courses. Not everyone is suitable for relocation.* [HRM4]. As the quote indicates, our data also points to a shared belief among a large proportion participants that recruitment and selection can in fact mitigate the adaptation challenges associated with expatriation and reduces the need for CCT provision: *–People who make transitions ... are already programmed to begin working at a different location. We give some sort of support, but it's not that if it didn't exist then their efficacy would be lower.*" [HRM12]. Another manager admitted that they were *“willing today to invest more in the selection process.”* [HRM 4]

Similarly, several HR managers suggested that routine work in global companies reduced the need for CCT for expatriates as they were learning the required skills and acquiring the

global mindset on a daily basis: *" people don't need, or don't ask for, this Cross-Culture ... in a global company you are taught on the run."* [HRM9] Relatedly, perceptions about relocation as a career move benefiting the expatriate and therefore *–not a punishment but ... a big „perk“ ... an opportunity*” [HRM 15] further undermined the perceived need to provide extensive support and allowed HR managers to shift responsibility for suitable preparation to expatriates.

Our analysis suggests that the limited enactment of roles associated with CCT provision among the studied HR managers was also linked to their beliefs about the limited need for support in light of the assistance available thanks to Israeli support networks and the perceived general resilience of the Israeli who *“are much more survival oriented than other cultures. If you put us somewhere - we will manage. It's something very much ingrained in our culture.”* [HRM11] All interviewees suggested that many expatriate needs, mostly in relation to post-arrival support, are addressed by local support of Jewish communities or veteran Israeli expatriates. Such support was mostly referred to as naturally occurring and spontaneous, perhaps encouraged, but not managed by the HR function: *–Our guys in the United States just found the Jewish community, and once you connect with the Jewish community ... they go out of their way to help Israelis and Jews.* || [HRM5]; *–I advise many of them ... to approach other Israelis and get tips from them. ... I thought I could perhaps construct an initiation program... But it's done by itself. It's not something you have to do in a structured manner. They take care of each other.*” [HRM8] About half of the interviewed managers also expressed a belief that the limited CCT provision was, at least partly, attributed to the Israeli expatriates who did not ask for the training and did not see its value.

Finally, contextual factors linked to limited resources, the often low volume of expatriate assignments and other high priority HR tasks were related to the low provision of CCT in the studied organisations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Responding to calls for more empirical work on HRM roles and role enactment (O'Brien and Linehan, 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Stiles and Trevor, 2006) in international settings (Welch and Welch, 2012) and in relation to specific HR issues (Procter and Currie, 1999) and in light of reported challenges with CCT provision (e.g. Brookfield, 2015), the current study sought to explore (a) HR managers' role enactment in relation to CCT provision and (b) the factors that affect the enactment of these roles, as interpreted by the HR managers. In contrast to traditional functionalist conceptualisation of role theory, our study turned attention to actors' agency (Mantere, 2008; Taminau and Heusinkveld, 2017) and the behavioural and cognitive/interpretative aspect of role enactment (Welch and Welch, 2012; Lynch, 2007) thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of HR roles than the one offered by prescriptive generic models. Taking Welch and Welch's (2012) roles as a starting point, we identified and described two primary HR roles enacted in the context of CCT provision: a resource broker and policy implementer. Unlike participants in Welch and Welch's (2012) study, the HR managers from our focal companies described HR roles related to CCT provision as primarily linked to policy execution through resource brokering, rather than service provision. We see this as an important addition to the generic roles identified in the literature (e.g. Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockback, 2005) in light of the continuing devolution and fragmentation of the provision of services traditionally confined to the HR function and the increasing role of outsourcing (e.g. KPMG, 2017). Similarly, contrary to the literature which advocates a stronger strategic involvement and driving policy improvements (e.g. Conner and Ulrich, 1996; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich and Brockback, 2005), our data point to a more reactive HR role enactment in the context of CCT provision which consists of responding to the needs articulated by the expatriates. Our study points to a consistent tendency among HR managers to present expatriates, rather than themselves, as responsible

for articulating CCT needs, and simultaneously seeing oneself as required to perform the role of brokers and coordinators responding to service requests, rather than agents pro-actively seeking to identify and analyse CCT requirements, as recommended in the literature (e.g. Caligiuri and Tarique, 2006; Walter and Cookie, 2013).

Our attention to the cognitive/ interpretative aspect of role enactment, often underemphasized in traditional roles studies (O'Brien and Linehan, 2014; Lynch, 2007), has allowed us to shed more light on additional factors affecting the identified pattern of role enactment and thereby contribute to studies considering the causes behind the often reported unfulfilled potential of CCT (e.g. Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014; Littrell *et al.*, 2006). At the most general level, our study highlights the significant impact of HR managers' understanding and perceptions of the effectiveness of CCT provision play in its delivery. An important and somewhat troubling finding is that the majority of the interviewed HR managers displayed a limited awareness of both CCT designs and the challenges involved in expatriate adjustment, which echoes with the earlier more tentative observations in the subject literature (e.g. Edwards and Rees, 2011; O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2002). In particular, we found the limited knowledge of the challenges expatriates can face when adjusting to new cultural and social settings and a belief that careful recruitment reduces the need for CCT provision to be associated with a tendency among the interviewed HR managers to view expatriate adjustment as causing primarily technical difficulties. It was these technical aspects of relocation that consequently received most attention from HR professionals and contributed to the dominance of low-rigour CCT programs. Notably, while a number of non-technically orientated CCT initiatives recommended in the literature, such as briefings, language training and pre-assignment visits (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Caligiuri, 2006, Shen and Lang, 2009) were in fact often provided, they were not recognised by our participants as part of a CCT package – a finding which has an important implication for both practice and future research on the topic. From a

practical perspective, a lack of awareness of what constitutes an effective comprehensive CCT undermines the chances of high-rigour CCT provision and its potential benefits (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2014).

Building on the point above, our study has identified a related tendency to underestimate the need for post-arrival support and frame any potential challenges as being addressed by the host country and the local expatriate communities. This second shift of responsibility also undermines the perceived need for HR managers' involvement in CCT provision, this time round in the post-arrival stage, and provides some explanation of the general lack of post-arrival CCT for expatriates discussed in the subject literature (e.g. Eschbach *et al.*, 2001; Hutchings, 2005). Our study suggests that the problem of insufficient post-arrival support stems not only from the lack of understanding of the importance of formal tailored post-arrival support (e.g. Haslberger, 2008; Hutchings, 2005) and the limited awareness of the various types of post-arrival CCT, such as interaction training, host or home mentorship (e.g. Crocitto *et al.*, 2005; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013), but it is also related to HR managers' preconceptions about expatriate attributes and skills and interpretations of expatriates' unmet needs. In our study, post-arrival needs were seen as sufficiently addressed by voluntary local support of Israeli and wider Jewish support networks, reducing the perceived need of HR managers for formal post-arrival support. While in line with Welch and Welch (2012), we found evidence of HR managers concern for expatriate emotional well-being, our findings suggest a tendency to focus on alleviating stress by, quite paradoxically, focusing on the technical aspect of the expatriate transfer, which points to a more complex enactment of the welfare officer's role than so far described in the literature. Finally, our study illustrates how the discussed perceptions of met needs and low failure rates lower the perceived need for practice evaluation. This limited evaluation, in turn, hinders the ability of HR managers to strategically design and plan CCT provision thereby limiting its potential benefits espoused in

literature (e.g. Ananthram and Chan, 2013). More broadly, then, our findings can be used to suggest that role enactment studies, which often focus on negotiating role expectations among different stakeholders (e.g. Taminau and Heusinkveld, 2017) or reconciling diverse role expectations (e.g. O'Brien and Linehan, 2014), might be usefully extended by focusing on the role of the cognitions and interpretations of the role holders on particular patterns on role enactment.

Implications for practice

Despite limitations associated with the exploratory design of our study and concern with generalisation to theory (Yin, 2009), rather than to population, our findings have implications for practice. Since, as our data suggest, HR managers partly design and implement practice according to what they believe are expatriate unmet needs and what they perceive as effective HR tools, their awareness of the challenges of expatriate adjustment processes is crucial, as is relevant knowledge of the different training methodologies. Organisations should therefore allow, if not encourage, HR managers to develop professional expertise in the field of CCT and allocate to this end adequate time and budget resources. HR managers can benefit from personally participating in various CCT programs, instead of assuming a resource broker's role.

Furthermore, building on the observations by O'Sullivan *et al* (2002) and Ananthram and Chan (2013), we argue that organisations need to ensure that current relocation processes are continuously and thoroughly evaluated to allow practice improvement. HR managers should consider developing a more strategic, albeit also a flexible approach to CCT provision, which could replace the sometimes favoured ad-hoc solutions, and offer comprehensive support. Technically, the effective use of CCT can be increased by enhancing the rigour of training through more process-driven and spread out programs, including more experiential methods

and content focused on developing cultural sensitivity, as well as providing training for expatriate families. Finally, as support practices for expatriates both reduce adjustment challenges and signal organisational commitment to the expatriates (Wu and Ang, 2011), the post-arrival support should not be entirely delegated to the host country HR team and the local expat community.

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