


Expatriate mentoring: The case of a multinational corporation in Abu Dhabi



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Orientation: Despite numerous studies on the adjustment challenges faced by expatriates, not much emphasis has been placed on mentoring and what mentoring plans should entail. This also pertains to research on expatriate mentoring in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has experienced massive economic growth and an influx of expatriates from across the globe.

Research purpose: The main purpose of the study was to propose guidelines to a multinational corporation in Abu Dhabi on compiling an expatriate mentoring plan.

Motivation for the study: The prevalence of expatriate assignments to the UAE and the fact that multinational companies report high failure rates served as the motivation for the study.

Research approach/design and method: A mixed-method approach was followed, and a case study design was applied. A structured questionnaire was administered to 391 expatriate employees, after which principles for expatriate mentoring were formulated and presented to a focus group for discussion.

Main findings: The findings show that expatriates faced challenges regarding work-related and personal-level adaptations, which emphasise the need for an expatriate mentoring plan.

Practical/managerial implications: Principles for expatriate mentoring emanated from this study, namely structured interaction, clear objectives, target dates, regular reflection on challenges, formal evaluation and remedial action. These principles informed a proposed expatriate mentoring plan.

Contribution/value-add: The study contributes both theoretically and empirically to the compilation of an expatriate mentoring plan.

Introduction

Owing to the pervasive impact of globalisation, the contemporary business environment is highly competitive, and organisations need to employ the best talent to outperform the competition. In this regard, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has, because of enormous economic growth in the last decade and a deficit in local talent, embarked on the recruitment of large numbers of expatriate employees (AlMazrouei & Pech, 2015). According to Bashir (2012), more than 91% of the UAE's workforce consists of expatriates. Because of the influx of expatriates into the UAE, a hybrid-type culture has developed: On the one hand, Islamic traditional values prevail; on the other hand, expatriates with their cultural diversity from many different nationalities are tolerated. Moreover, the UAE has successfully combined Western management principles with traditional values and practices, for example, paternalistic leadership and customs regarding female dress code and time management, which is unique to the Arab world.

Companies that operate within this sphere are likely to experience an array of cross-cultural and other challenges such as work performance and retention (AlMazrouei & Pech, 2015; Bock & Schulze, 2016). In addition, multinational corporations (MNCs) are confronted with high failure rates of expatriate assignments, which include poor performance, premature termination and expatriates who are unprepared or ill-adjusted to the new setting. These challenges are not restricted to the UAE. It is estimated that there are around 889 146 MNCs worldwide that employ large numbers of expatriates (UNCTAD, 2017). According to Hansen and Rasmussen (2016), about 40% of expatriates are not adequately prepared for international assignments. In a 2013 survey, Maurer found that 42% of expatriate assignments were unsuccessful, while Purgal-Popiela (2011) states that one out of three expatriates performs below expectation. Pokharel (2016) reports that 7% of MNCs in the United States experience a 40% expatriate failure rate; 69% a 20% failure rate; and the remaining 24% a 10% failure rate.

Despite numerous studies on the adjustment challenges faced by expatriates (see Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Lee & Kartika, 2014; Okpara, 2016; Sonesh & DeNisi, 2016), there is a dearth of research on expatriate mentoring plans and the issues mentoring plans should address. Although formal training (e.g. pre-departure, post-arrival or cross-cultural training) has been a dominant strategy in preparing expatriates, expatriate mentoring per se has received little attention (Abdullah & Jin, 2015), and very few MNCs have expatriate mentoring plans in place (Cullen & Parboteeah, 2010; Sullivan, 2015). This is also the case with the corporation selected for this study: a large MNC in the oil and gas industry in Abu Dhabi that employs around 7150 expatriates.

Purpose

The main purpose of the study was to propose guidelines for the compilation of an expatriate mentoring plan to assist expatriates and their families with adjusting to living and working in the UAE.

Literature review

The globalised world of work

Globalisation is not a new phenomenon; what is unprecedented is the accelerated speed at which information and knowledge are shared, mainly because of the Internet and information communication technology, as well as the proliferation of international trade and investment (Austin, Chapman, Farah, Wilson, & Ridge, 2014). Globalisation has its roots in history, and humans have travelled and traded since early times. From the 16th to the 19th century, European powers expanded aggressively and colonised many parts of the world, notably Africa and Asia (Luthans & Farner, 2002). The Dutch East India Company (known in the Netherlands as the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or *VOC*) was established in 1602 and is considered to be the world's first international company.

This, together with the Industrial Revolution (which commenced from about 1760 in Great Britain), has paved the way for the globalised world of the 21st century. The Industrial Revolution, gave rise to machines being used in production, chemical manufacturing, iron production and the like. The revolution soon spread to all major European and North American centres, essentially conquering international markets. Between the 18th and 19th century, the need for raw material, and the subsequent Second Industrial Revolution, led many industrialised countries to colonise less developed regions and countries. These developments initiated the rise of MNCs (Arezki, Rota-Graziosi, & Senbet 2013).

The two World Wars of the 20th century and the opposing ideologies of socialism (advocated by the USSR) and capitalism (advocated by the United States and Europe) brought about a great deal of contention on how economic activities should be structured. After the Second World War,

the global market experienced accelerated growth and development as Europe recovered from the ravages of war. This also involved the liberalisation of international trade, which had been gaining momentum since 1989 following the collapse of socialism (Arezki et al., 2013). Since then, MNCs have become gigantic in scale, influencing political, economic and social development throughout the world (Okpara, 2016).

In the context of increased globalisation, organisations face distinct challenges. The most prominent of these challenges occur on a technological level, where increased digitalisation and virtualisation of the workplace are evident. Further challenges pertain to the increase in diversity and the continuous attempt to attract and retain the right calibre of talent (Deloitte, 2017).

Expatriates and the complexity of adjustment

In 2010 Noe already noted that the exodus of highly skilled individuals was becoming a dominant part of international migration. This tendency has persisted unabated, hence the prevalence of expatriate assignments worldwide. An 'expatriate' could be described as an individual working and residing in a country other than their native country. There are many terms referring to the types of migration occurring across international borders. 'Immigrants', for example, include individuals who live permanently in a foreign country; 'short- and long-term expatriate assignees' are nominated employees deployed internationally; 'international commuters' are employees who work in a foreign country, but return home regularly; 'self-initiated foreign workers' are individuals who undertake international work with no, or very little, organisational sponsorship; and employees undertaking extensive business trips (Point & Dickmann, 2012).

Numerous studies have focused on the adjustment issues of expatriates. According to Haslberger et al. (2013), adjustment should be viewed in terms of obtaining person-environment fit, and cognition, emotion and behaviour should be considered as part of the process. Ren, Yunlu, Shaffer, and Fodchuk (2015) found that expatriates who are not adequately instructed about cultural issues could develop feelings of job deprivation. This critical finding supports the importance of cross-cultural adjustment mentioned by Okpara (2016). Cross-cultural adjustment is the key element of expatriate success, as individuals need to feel secure and comfortable in their new environment. Another important element is the level of adjustment of family members to the new setting (Lee & Kartika, 2014).

In their study on the work-family interfaces of expatriation, Schütter and Boerner (2013) found four potential antecedents for the success of expatriate assignments: social support at work, developmental opportunities at work, family social support and family adjustment. Thus, it is clear that host nationals should support newcomers with regard to both work-related and personal-level adjustment.

Unfortunately, as Sonesh and DeNisi (2016) note that the relationship between host nationals and expatriates is often problematic, this is a big obstacle to adjustment progress. A study by Bock and Schulze (2016) on cross-cultural mentoring in UAE schools found that cultural, religious and language barriers posed significant challenges in the mentoring process, especially for the Arab world.

The adjustment challenges of expatriates could be explained by the Identity Development Theory of Chickering and Reisser (1993). Although it initially focused on the psychological development and adaptation of college students, this theory can also be applied to the adjustment of expatriates. The theory proposes seven stages that individuals go through in order to adapt to a new environment:

- *Developing competence* involves the development of intellectual, physical and interpersonal relations which enable an individual to function in a new environment. This stage also relates to attaining cultural intelligence and the ability to work with individuals from diverse cultural groups.
- *Emotion management* relates to dealing constructively with emotions such as anxiety, anger, depression, shame, guilt, etc. Knowing and becoming aware of these emotions are essential, as well as constructing ways in which they can be managed.
- *Moving through autonomy towards independence* pertains to the development of independence in the new environment by being able to function autonomously. This also involves attaining emotional independence and the ability to live according to own convictions.
- *Developing mature interpersonal relationships* relates to the development of awareness and understanding of different ideas, backgrounds and values. Mature interpersonal relationships imply that individuals have tolerance and appreciation (both interculturally and interpersonally) for innate human differences, as well as a capacity for intimacy.
- *Establishing identity* refers to the maturity of individuals. This implies that they know themselves and accept themselves as unique individuals. This notion is supported by the concept of 'emotional intelligence', which means that individuals know and understand themselves and are able to manage their emotions and interactions with others.
- *Developing purpose* is attained once individuals have a reliable sense of self and are able and willing to reach their full potential. This notion also relates to the concept of 'self-actualisation' promoted by Abraham Maslow.
- *Developing integrity* refers to individuals' rebalancing their personal values to create a match between their own value system and expectations from the new environment. This involves self-respect and respecting others.

Supporting expatriate adjustment through mentoring

From an MNC's perspective, the degree of adjustment of the expatriate is an important predictor of employee performance. From an expatriate's perspective, adjustment is a determining

factor of job satisfaction and psychological well-being. The following individual and organisational elements were found to be crucial in expatriates' ability to adjust to their new environment:

- Individual elements that influence an expatriate's ability to adjust involve mostly personal characteristics such as flexibility, a desire to adjust, interpersonal skills, self-confidence, cultural understanding, emotional stability, previous overseas experience, ability to speak the local language and the ability of family members to adjust to the new environment (Awais Bhatti, Mohamed Battour, Rageh Ismail, & Pandiyan Sundram, 2014; Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016).
- Organisational elements that influence an expatriate's ability to adjust include pre-departure preparation, the recruitment and selection practices used by the company, and organisational support (AlMazrouei & Pech, 2015).

Relocation and working in a new environment are multifaceted and complex processes, and expatriates and their families require the assistance of host organisations to succeed. The importance of assisting family members is emphasised by Zhu, Luthans, Chew and Li (2006), who found that up to 85% of expatriate assignments fail because of family dissatisfaction in the new environment.

Mentoring, and specifically having a mentoring plan in place, can be a strategy to provide the necessary support to expatriates and their families. The notion of a mentoring relationship originates from Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. The story tells of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, who, while taking part in the Trojan War, entrusted his son to his friend, Mentor, who was to educate the young prince. The term 'mentor' has since been used to refer to a person with broad and profound knowledge who is able to teach and guide the inexperienced (Zhuanga, Wu, & Wen, 2013).

For the purposes of the study, a 'mentor' is a competent individual who provides guidance, advice and continuous support to assist the mentee (the expatriate) in making the necessary adaptations to the new environment (Armstrong, 2010). The mentor needs to guide and support the mentee on a personal-level (i.e. living in a new environment, finding a place to stay, settling in of family members, etc.) and an organisational level (i.e. doing the job and adapting to a foreign work environment) (Werner & DeSimone, 2012). In their study, Zhuanga et al. (2013) found that the psychological support, role modelling and career development functions provided by mentors were positively related to the general adjustment of mentees, including better interaction with co-workers and job-related aspects. Although authors such as Cullen and Parboteeah (2010) and Zhuanga et al. (2013) propose mentoring as a strategy, there is a dearth of research on the issues to be addressed in expatriate mentoring plans.

As alluded to above, the UAE is a country deeply rooted in traditional Islamic practices. However, for continued economic growth, they have made trade-offs and allowed

expatriates from different nationalities and religions to join their labour force. This has led to the development of a hybrid-type culture in which Western values and beliefs are accommodated. This is especially pertinent in larger centres and cities such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The company investigated in this study operates in the oil and gas sector in Abu Dhabi – a sector which has been instrumental in ensuring the rapid growth of the UAE economy.

Around 10% of the world's total oil and gas reserves are situated in the UAE, and it is projected that this sector will continue to grow in the coming decades. To date, the biggest deposits of oil have been found in Abu Dhabi compared with other UAE regions. More than 85% of the total UAE oil capacity and 90% of total UAE reserves are controlled by the company in this study. The company employs around 7150 expatriates from over 70 different nationalities.

Research design

Method

Research approach

A mixed-method approach was followed in the study, which involved both a quantitative and qualitative phase. In the quantitative phase a structured questionnaire was administered, and in the qualitative phase one focus group discussion was held. The mixed-method approach was deemed applicable, as the adjustment levels of a large population of expatriate employees had to be established. The focus group discussion on the principles of expatriate mentoring provided additional insight into the complexities of expatriate adjustment and informed the proposed expatriate mentoring plan.

Measures

For the quantitative part of the study, the following measures applied: Owing to the complex adjustments expatriates need to make, only individuals with tenure of two or more years were included in the data gathering process. Expatriates with longer tenure were deemed better able to reflect on their experiences. The human resource department of the company provided information pertaining to the departments and positions of expatriate employees. This enabled the researchers to send all respondents a link to the questionnaire via Survey Monkey. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were ensured that responses would be treated confidentially.

For the qualitative phase, the following measures applied: Participants had to have tenure of more than 2 years; they must not have participated in the quantitative part of the study; they were selected from all six departments of the company (administration, safety, operations, maintenance, projects and human resource management); and they were from different nationalities.

Participants

For the quantitative part of the study, a structured questionnaire was administered to 391 expatriate employees.

According to Israel (2003), for any population between 7000 and 8000, a sample size of 378 is sufficient. The sample of 391 could thus be regarded as sufficient. Simple random sampling was applied to select participants. Simple random sampling, also known as chance sampling, means that all items in the population have an equal chance of inclusion in the sample. The sample included employees from all six departments in the company.

For the qualitative part of the study, nine expatriate employees were initially invited to participate in one focus group discussion, but only six were available on the day of the discussion. These individuals were from different nationalities (United Kingdom, India, Philippines, New Zealand, Romania and South Africa), they had not participated in the quantitative study and they represented the six departments of the company. As qualitative research is less structured and formal, participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the focus group.

Measuring instrument

As indicated above, the Identity Development Theory of Chickering and Reisser (1993) served as a conceptual guide for the development of the structured questionnaire. This theory provides a valuable basis from which to study adjustment challenges as illustrated by previous research (see Coe-Meade, 2015; Moreau, 2017). The questionnaire was further informed by the research of Awais Bhatti et al. (2014) and Caligiuri and Bonache (2016) on the individual elements of expatriate adjustment and that of AlMazrouei and Pech (2015) on the organisational elements.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A captured demographics (nationality, gender, age, employment level and tenure), Section B captured work-related adjustment challenges, and Section C captured personal-level adjustment challenges. The questionnaire was piloted on 26 January 2017 using five expatriate employees from the human resource management, safety and operations departments. All the respondents included in the pilot study had more than 2 years of service and were from different nationalities (Arabic, British, Jordanian, South African and Indian). The respondents indicated that they understood the questionnaire and that the questionnaire was neither ambiguous nor difficult to understand.

Once the data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, the researchers were able to ascertain the challenges expatriates and their families were facing. The results from the quantitative study supported the need for an expatriate mentoring plan. Subsequently, principles were formulated and presented to the focus group for in-depth discussion and feedback. The focus group discussion was conducted for 2 hours on 17 June 2017. As the participants did not want their responses to be electronically recorded, a research assistant took detailed notes while the main researcher facilitated the discussion. The research assistant

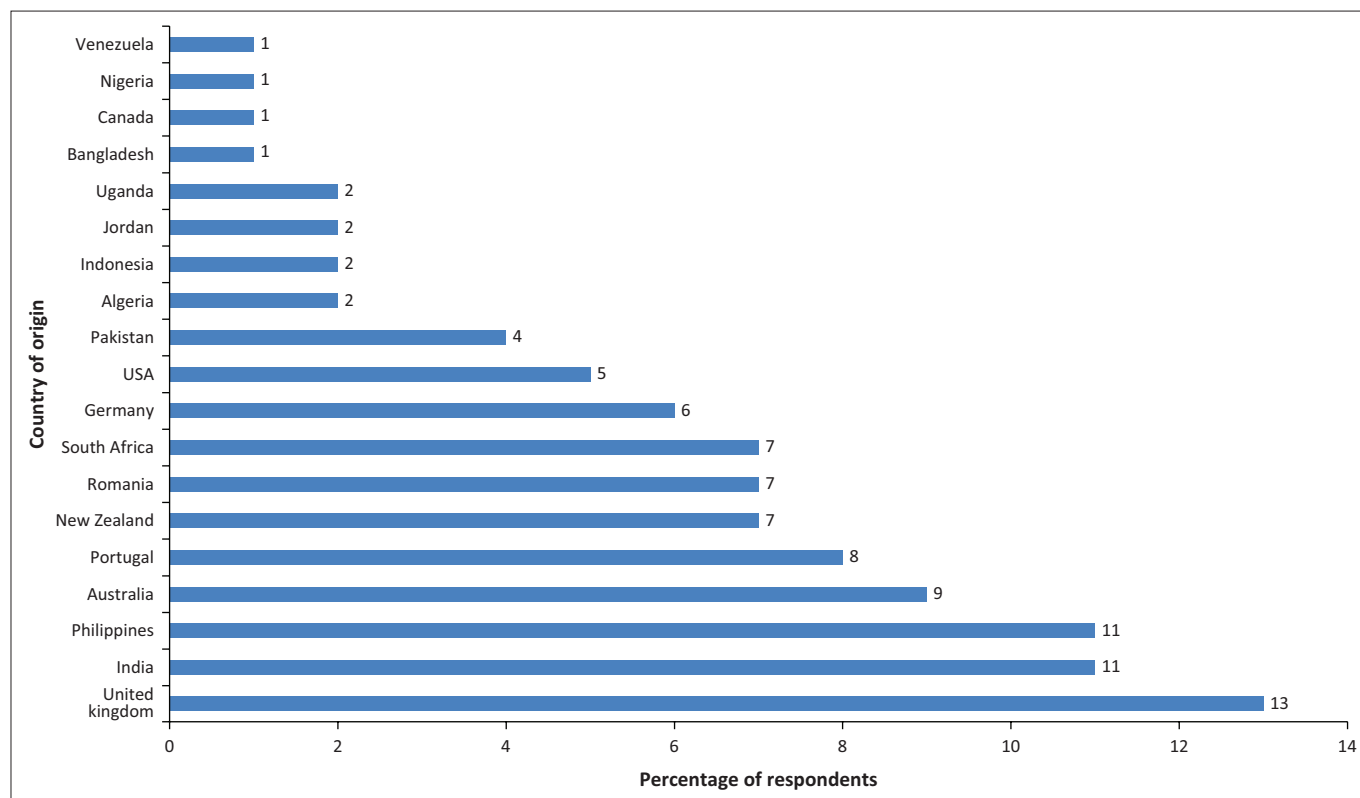


FIGURE 1: Expatriates' country of origin.

was briefed prior to the focus group discussion, and participants were informed that their responses would be treated as confidential and anonymous.

Design

A research design involves the framework or plan that is used in a study to guide data collection and analysis (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), a research design is a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information to increase the understanding of a particular phenomenon. The research design applicable to this study was a case study, as the focus was on a single MNC.

Analysis

The results from the quantitative study were captured in Microsoft Excel and both descriptive and inferential statistics were performed on the data. Statistica 13.2 was used for inferential data analysis. As indicated above, the quantitative data analysis enabled the researchers to formulate expatriate mentoring principles which were discussed in the focus group.

The responses from the focus group were transcribed by the research assistant. As qualitative data analysis is often inductive in nature, the researcher aimed to elicit reflections from the participants. The data analysis was thus not very structured and procedural (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). The reflections from the participants served as valuable inputs in refining the final proposal of the expatriate mentoring plan.

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	%
Gender	
Male	77
Female	23
Age	
Between 23 and 30	25
Between 31 and 40	43
Between 41 and 50	21
Between 51 and 60	11
Employment level	
Entry	5
Artisan	8
Supervisory	32
Specialist or junior management	29
Middle management	15
Senior management	11
Tenure	
Between 2 and 5 years	41
Between 6 and 10 years	32
More than 10 years	27

Results

Figure 1 shows the country of origin of the respondents and that the majority of respondents were from the United Kingdom (13%). Other countries included Venezuela, Nigeria, Ghana, Bangladesh, Uganda, Jordan, Indonesia, Algeria, Pakistan, United States, Germany, South Africa, Romania, New Zealand, Portugal, Australia, the Philippines and India.

Table 1 displays the demographic profile of the respondents with regard to gender, age, employment levels and tenure.

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents were men, from the age group between 31 and 40 years. The majority of respondents were employed on supervisory level and most had been employed for 2–5 years.

The next section presents the responses pertaining to work-related adjustments (Section B of the questionnaire). The Pearson chi-square test was applied, using a significance level of 0.05. The equality of proportions was tested at 1 degree of freedom. The Disagree and Agree columns were combined to enable the analysis.

According to Table 2, a significant proportion of respondents indicated in question 2.1 that they had not been well prepared on what to expect prior to arriving at their new work environment. This applies to most of the findings

(e.g. question 2.2 on being well informed, question 2.4 on getting adequate training, question 2.5 on being equipped with the necessary tools, question 6.6 on the line manager being helpful, etc.). This shows that respondents were not adequately prepared for their new work environment. The exceptions, where there were no significant differences between the proportions of respondents who disagreed and those who agreed, occurred at questions 2.3, 2.8, 2.9 and 2.13 (respectively referring to whether the selection process had been fair; good work was recognised by the organisation; job satisfaction was experienced; and whether respondents felt overloaded).

The responses pertaining to personal-level adjustments (Section C of the questionnaire) are presented in Table 3. The Pearson chi-square test was applied, using a significance

TABLE 2: Pearson chi-square test results for work-related adjustment.

Work-related adjustments	Disagree	Agree	Total	df	<i>p</i>
2.1 I was well prepared on what to expect prior to arriving in my new work environment.	225	166	391	1	0.003*
2.2 I was well informed of my employer's expectations before I departed from my home country.	239	152	391	1	0.000*
2.3 The selection process was fair.	188	203	391	1	0.448
2.4 I was provided with adequate training to fulfil my new employment roles and responsibilities.	292	99	391	1	0.000*
2.5 I was equipped with the necessary tools to enable me to perform my job.	248	143	391	1	0.000*
2.6 My line manager was very helpful in assisting me to adjust to the new environment.	291	100	391	1	0.000*
2.7 I received sufficient performance feedback from my line manager.	303	88	391	1	0.000*
2.8 Good work is recognised in my organisation.	203	188	391	1	0.448
2.9 I am experiencing job satisfaction in my new role.	205	186	391	1	0.337
2.10 Workforce diversity is well managed within my organisation.	107	284	391	1	0.000*
2.11 My new colleagues were welcoming and helpful.	129	262	391	1	0.000*
2.12 Company information (like policies and procedures) are easily accessible.	70	321	391	1	0.000*
2.13 I often feel overloaded with a heavy workload.	195	196	391	1	0.960
2.14 I have received continuous social support from my supervisor.	329	62	391	1	0.000*
2.15 I have received continuous social support from my colleagues.	140	251	391	1	0.000*
2.16 I feel secure in my position at the current organisation.	251	140	391	1	0.000*
2.17 I have often considered resigning from my current employer.	286	105	391	1	0.000*
2.18 My organisation has repatriation support functions in place.	292	99	391	1	0.000*
2.19 Overall, I feel satisfied with the level of support my organisation provided me in adjusting to my new working environment.	303	88	391	1	0.000*

Note: Numbers in bold indicate significant values.
df, degrees of freedom.

*, Indicates a significance level of 0.05.

TABLE 3: Pearson chi-square test results for personal-level adjustment.

Personal-level adjustments	Disagree	Agree	Total	df	<i>p</i>
3.1 My family and I received cultural training pertaining to the new environment before leaving our home country.	348	43	391	1	0.000*
3.2 The selection processes used by my organisation ensured a suitable match.	114	277	391	1	0.000*
3.3 My employer managed all logistical arrangements (e.g. flights and transportation) effectively.	70	321	391	1	0.000*
3.4 I was provided intermediate accommodation when we arrived in the UAE.	63	328	391	1	0.000*
3.5 I received assistance with securing a permanent residence.	212	179	391	1	0.095
3.6 I received assistance with furniture shipment from our home country.	331	60	391	1	0.000*
3.7 My employer provided Arabic language tuition for my family.	368	23	391	1	0.000*
3.8 My employer assisted with schooling arrangements for my children.	346	45	391	1	0.000*
3.9 My employer assisted with obtaining work permits.	65	326	391	1	0.000*
3.10 My employer provided assistance with employment opportunities for my spouse or partner.	361	30	391	1	0.000*
3.11 I was supplied with tax advice and guidance.	297	94	391	1	0.000*
3.12 My family was supported with a social welfare programme.	352	39	391	1	0.000*
3.13 My employer supplied me with a social buddy to assist with the adaptation.	352	39	391	1	0.000*
3.14 I am experiencing a good work–life balance within my current organisation.	128	263	391	1	0.000*
3.15 Overall, I am satisfied with the assistance my employer provided my family.	262	129	391	1	0.000*

Note: Numbers in bold indicate significant values.
df, degrees of freedom.

*, Indicates a significance level of 0.05.

level of 0.05. The equality of proportions was tested at 1 degree of freedom. The Disagree and Agree columns were combined to enable the analysis.

Table 3 indicates significant differences in proportions of agreement for all the findings, except question 3.5 on securing a permanent residence. Most of the respondents agreed that the selection process had produced a suitable match (question 3.2). The findings further confirm that the organisation had assisted respondents with logistical aspects such as finding accommodation (question 3.4), obtaining work permits (question 3.9) and finding work-life balance (question 3.14).

The organisation had not, however, adequately assisted with aspects such as cultural training prior to leaving the home country (question 3.1), appointing a social buddy (question 3.13, where the disagreed responses were overwhelming), providing language tuition (question 3.7), assisting with the schooling needs of children (question 3.8), finding employment for spouses (question 3.10) and providing support with accessing the social welfare programme of the country (question 3.12).

Discussion

Outline of the results

Quantitative study

The respondents from the quantitative part of the study represented 19 countries were mostly between 31 and 40 years of age, and mostly (77%) men. This shows that the company seems to employ individuals from a variety of countries, mostly younger men. The majority of respondents were employed at supervisory level and had tenure between 2 and 5 years.

Regarding the work-related challenges, some aspects emerged as prominent. Respondents indicated that they had not been adequately informed of the expectations of the employer before departing their home country. According to Kawai and Mohr (2015), proper preparation of individuals is essential prior to departure, as this can reduce confusion and frustration. Only 25% of respondents agreed that they had been provided with adequate training to fulfil their new roles and responsibilities. Training of newly joined expatriate employees is key to the success of an expatriate assignment (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). It can thus be concluded that respondents in general had not been well prepared prior to their arrival in their host country.

Seventy-four per cent of respondents disagreed that their new line managers assisted them in adjusting to their new work environment, and 77% disagreed that they received sufficient performance feedback from their line managers. Furthermore, 84% of respondents disagreed about having received social support from their supervisors. These findings indicate a lack of proper assistance from line managers.

Regarding social support from work colleagues, 64% of respondents agreed that they did, in fact, receive social

support from colleagues, and 64% of respondents felt secure in their current position. According to Imran, Majeed, and Ayub (2015), job security is an important variable that directly affects employees' organisational satisfaction and their level of commitment. However, 77% of respondents disagreed with feeling satisfied with the overall support received from the company. Because perceived organisational support is crucial for effective expatriate adjustment (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014), this is a significant finding that needs to receive attention from management.

Regarding personal-level adjustments, the findings reveal that 89% of respondents disagreed that their family members had received cultural training pertaining to their new environment. Forty-six per cent also disagreed to having received assistance from their organisation to ship their furniture from their home country. Only 6% of respondents agreed that they received Arabic language tuition for themselves and their family members. According to Bock and Schulze (2016), the ability to speak Arabic in the UAE is important in order for expatriates and their families to adjust successfully. Ninety-two per cent disagreed that their employer provided assistance with employment opportunities for their spouses or partners. Moreover, 90% of respondents disagreed that their families received support with accessing the social welfare programme of the country, and a further 93% indicated that the organisation did not support them with a social buddy.

Thus, the findings show that personal challenges were not sufficiently attended to, which could contribute to failed expatriate assignments within the company. In this regard, the literature (see Cole & Nesbeth, 2014; Lee & Kartika, 2014; McNulty, 2012; Sarkiunaite & Rocke, 2015) highlights expatriate family adjustment and family satisfaction as key elements in preventing failed expatriate assignments.

Qualitative study

Based on the literature review and quantitative analysis, the following six principles of expatriate mentoring were formulated:

- **Structured interaction:** Expatriate mentoring should take place in a structured environment with coordinated interaction between mentors and mentees. Line managers should also be part of the process, as it is imperative that they be aware of the challenges expatriate employees are experiencing.
- **Clear objectives:** Mentees need to set specific objectives on what they aim to achieve with mentoring. These objectives should be informed by their own work and personal goals.
- **Target dates:** Target dates should be articulated clearly in order for expatriates to achieve specific objectives by specific dates.
- **Regular reflection on challenges:** Expatriates need to reflect regularly on their work-related and personal challenges. Areas of immediate concern also need to be stipulated regularly.

- Formal evaluation: Parties involved should evaluate each other formally and on a regular basis. This includes the evaluation of mentees by their mentors and line managers, and mentees evaluating their mentors and line managers.
- Remedial action: All parties should be open to remedial action. This applies to mentees, mentors and line managers. Remedial action should be committed to in writing.

As indicated previously, these principles were discussed during the focus group session and the following inputs were captured:

- Structured interaction: Because the primary mentor is often not available, the mentee needs an alternative person who could assist with immediate challenges, hence, the rationale for having a secondary mentor. There was consensus that the secondary mentor be appointed and available (with no official responsibility) as a stand-in for the primary mentor. The important role of the line manager in assisting with expatriate adjustment was discussed as well, and the group agreed that the line manager needs to form part of the mentoring committee, together with the primary and secondary mentor. The group also proposed that the second-line manager forms part of the mentoring committee, if applicable.
- Clear objectives: The need to set clear objectives were reiterated as well as aligning these objectives with the Personal Development Plan (PDP) for each individual – as this does not always happen. Concerns were also expressed with regard to the commencement of the mentoring process: It was suggested that mentoring start prior to the employment process and not form part of the induction process. Mentoring should be a separate structured process, according to the group.
- Target dates: Although expatriate employees should set realistic targets for themselves, the group felt that the frequency of mentoring meetings should be stipulated. It was suggested that specific target dates be mutually agreed upon in writing. The group agreed that expatriate mentoring should apply not only to newly appointed expatriates but also to those who move to other positions.
- Regular reflection on challenges: The principle of regular reflection also relates to the frequency of mentoring. In this regard, some focus group members reiterated that the frequency of mentoring be based on individual needs and challenges. Some individuals might require more frequent interaction with the mentor or mentoring committee than others.
- Formal evaluation: In keeping with the advantages of having a constructive relationship, some members of the focus group expressed the need for parties to formally evaluate each other. This would imply the formal evaluation of not only the mentee but also the primary and secondary mentors, as well as the line manager and second-line manager, if applicable. Thus, the mentoring plan should include formal evaluation guidelines and an evaluation rubric for this purpose.

- Remedial action: The focus group expressed concerns related to remedial action and commented that line managers also be subjected to remedial action, not only mentees. It was proposed that remedial action for mentees, mentors and line managers be formulated regularly, in writing. The assumption is that this process would enhance the reciprocity of the mentoring relationship, emphasising that both parties need to contribute to forming a constructive relationship.

Based on these principles, the following outline for an expatriate mentoring plan was proposed: (1) details of the mentee; (2) the mentoring objectives; (3) details of the primary and secondary mentor; (4) details of the mentoring committee which includes the line manager and second-line manager, if applicable; (5) an analysis of the mentee's short-, medium- and long-term career goals; (6) work-related adjustment challenges of the mentee; (7) personal-level adjustment challenges of the mentee; and (8) target dates for meeting specific objectives; followed by (9) a formal evaluation of the mentor by the mentee, according to an evaluation rubric; (10) a formal evaluation of the mentee by the mentor, according to an evaluation rubric; (11) a formal evaluation of the line manager by the mentee according to an evaluation rubric; and, finally, (12) remedial action for the mentee; (13) remedial action for the mentors; (14) remedial action for the line manager; and (15) signatures of all relevant parties.

Practical implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following principles should be applied to expatriate mentoring and incorporated into expatriate mentoring plans: structured interaction, clear objectives, target dates, regular reflection on challenges, formal evaluation and remedial action.

Limitations and recommendations

One limitation of the study is that only one MNC in the context of the UAE was investigated. However, the study provides specific principles that can inform the compilation of expatriate mentoring plans, which might be useful to other MNCs.

Based on the literature, quantitative analysis and reflections from the focus group discussion, the following guidelines are proposed for compiling expatriate mentoring plans:

- Expatriate mentoring should ideally involve a primary and secondary mentor.
- An expatriate's line manager should be part of the mentoring process, as it is necessary for the line manager to understand the work-related and personal challenges expatriates are facing.
- A mentoring committee should be appointed for each expatriate employee, consisting of a primary and secondary mentor, the line manager and possibly a second-line manager.

- The mentoring committee members should evaluate each other regularly. Evaluation intervals should be mutually decided upon in writing.
- An expatriate mentoring plan should contain clear mentoring objectives, as well as an analysis of the mentee's short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- The mentoring objectives should be aligned with the employee's PDP and job-specific roles and responsibilities.
- Target dates and actions should be decided upon and articulated clearly.
- Expatriate mentoring should stimulate regular reflection on the part of the mentee pertaining to work-related and personal-level challenges. This aspect is highly personalised, as mentees will have different needs and challenges.
- Expatriate mentoring should not only apply to newly appointed expatriate employees but also to all expatriate employees changing roles within the organisation.
- Expatriate mentoring should be implemented during the initial stages of employment and not as part of the formal induction programme.
- Remedial action should apply to mentees, mentors and line managers alike.

These proposed guidelines for expatriate mentoring involve an intense process in which mentees, mentors and line managers are in constant interaction and the challenges expatriates face can be dealt with in a structured and coordinated way. Although it is likely to be time consuming, this approach is aimed at showing the commitment of the company towards the successful adjustment of expatriate employees. This concurs with Kawai and Strange (2014) who found that perceived organisational support has a positive impact on expatriate adjustment.

Conclusion

Owing to the complexity of working and living in a foreign country, MNCs must support expatriates in adjusting to their new environment. One way of doing this is having a formal mentoring plan in place. This paper proposed specific principles that can guide the formulation of an expatriate mentoring plan. The principles include structured interaction, clear objectives, target dates, regular reflection on challenges, formal evaluation and remedial action.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

D.K. conceptualised and wrote the article. T.F.D. assisted with the literature review and conducted the data gathering for both phases of the study.

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