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American Transfer Policies: Costs and Benefits

William F. Glueck

This article reviews Canadian-American business relations, describes how Canadian can be affected by transfer policies, discusses the causes, the costs and benefits of this policy and examines some policy implications for personnel administration in Canada and the United States.

Canadian and United States businesses are closely related. Many Canadians are employed by American firms and are affected therefore by their policies. One aspect of the personnel policies of American corporations has received little attention. This is the policy of transferring management personnel as part of manpower and management development programs.

This article will briefly review Canadian-American business relations. Next, it will briefly describe how Canadians can be affected by transfer policies. Then it will discuss the causes, extent of use of frequent geographic transfers, and the costs and benefits of this policy. Finally, some policy implications for personnel administration in Canada and the U.S. will be given.

Canadian-American Business Relations

The amount of influence of American corporations on the Canadian economy has become an important policy question for Canadians. Recent statistics indicate that foreign corporations have invested $33,000,000,000. in Canada. About 50% of this represents ownership of Canadian enterprises and foreigners control 60% of Canada's mining and manufacturing and 75% of her natural gas

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and petroleum capacity. [1] Seventy-five percent of this foreign ownership is American. Professors Litvak and Maule of McMaster University point out that 22.5% of Canada's Gross National Product is in exports and 75% of Canada's import and export trade is with the United States. Only about 20% of U.S. imports and exports are with Canada and they represent a much smallr percentage of American GNP than is the case with Canada. [2]

Canadians have rightly been concerned with how the American ownership has affected Canadian subsidiaries on such issues as trading with Communist nations, American anti-trust laws, military alliances, tariffs, balance of payments and others. Partially as a result of these statistics, [3] Walter Gordon led a group that studied the problem and rendered a report with recommendations. [4] Legislation was introduced to develop guidelines on good corporate behavior.

This article is concerned primarily with the treatment of Canadian employees of U.S. owned corporations. The Gordon Commission recommended that American subsidiaries be « Canadianized, » that is, have Canadians on the boards of directors, and staff key positions with Canadians. One of the « Guiding Principles of Good Corporate Behavior » phrased it this way :

> To work toward a Canadian outlook within management through purposeful training programs, promotion of qualified Canadian personnel and inclusion of a major proportion of Canadian citizens on its board of directors. [5]

An earlier study by the National Planning Association (USA) and Private Planning Association of Canada, funded by the Carnegie Foundation, had concluded that Canadians were hired and promoted at the technical and professional level. But it also concluded that top managers and Boards of Directors of American subsidiaries were not « Canadianized. » Those subsidiaries with « outside » Canadian directors were better corporate citizens than those with « inside » Boards of Directors. Thus, the

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1 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canadian Balance of International Payments,* Ottawa, 1965.

2 I. A. LITVAK and C. J. MAULE, « Guidelines fort the Multi-National Corporation », *Columbia Journal of World Business,* July-August 1968, pp. 35-42.

3 *Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects,* Final Report, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1958.

4 « Foreign Ownership and the Structure of Canadian Industry, » *Report of the Task Force on the Structure of Canadian Industry,* Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1968.

Report concluded that with the exception of a few strong Canadian personalities, major decisions were made in the U.S. [6] These recommendations, of course, were not received with universal acceptance, but have been the subject of serious study and some action.

I have talked with some Canadians and their feelings toward American transfer policy follow the same pattern of response as Americans in American companies :

1. American companies are transferring them to the United States and they do not wish to leave Canada.
2. (The reverse of 1). Because of the recent efforts to « Canadianize » the subsidiaries, some executives are « locked into » their present positions. As one Canadian executive said :

> If I were running our subsidiary in California, I could look forward to any number of better jobs with either the parent company or with another one of our U.S. operations. As it is, the very fact I am a Canadian makes it desirable for the company to keep me here. [7]

If Canadian feelings parallel American expressions on this matter, however, the great majority are in the first category. Recent studies indicate that 80% of American college graduates (likely candidates for management) locate themselves within one half day's driving distance from their home, their wife's home or their college. Numerous American executives complain (privately or anonymously) that they do not want to be transferred from their present locations. This is especially true if they identify « home » as several areas with strong regional feelings (e.g., Texas, Southern States, West Coast, or Eastern Seaboard). Many examples exist of these executives leaving the company rather than moving from Atlanta to New York City, or New York to a small southern town. Canadian managers transferred from Toronto to, for example, Wisconsin have told me they wish to return to Canada, want to keep their Canadian identity, citizenship, and culture, but « what can I do ? » All of this leads us to the questions : what causes American firms to transfer executives ? How frequent are transfers ? Is the rate increasing ? What are the costs and benefits of this practice ? These questions will be dealt with now.

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5 Departement of Trade and Commerce, *Foreign Owned Subsidiaries in Canada,* Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1967, pp. 40-41.

6 John LINDEMAN and Donald ARMSTRONG, *Policies and Practices of United States Subsidiaries in Canada,* Canadian American Committee, National Planning Association and Private Planning Association of Canada, 1960. See especially Chapters 4 and 9.

7 *Ibid.,* p. 37

Transfers and American Practice

Geographic transfers are a relatively recent phenomnon in America. At one time, few executives were moved. They were promoted to the top of a plant, store, facility, and made perhaps one move : to the home office. Today, things are different for many. In fact, some Americans question whether it has gotten out of hand. Consider several case studies reported recently :

> A young marketing manager for an oil company is moved from Cincinnati to Buffalo to Chicago to Fort Wayne to St. Louis in a six year period . . . [8]
> A retailing manager moved to seven cities in fourteen years and counting intercity moves (related to his work) had moved twenty-eight times in twenty-six years . . . [9]
> Allied Van Lines reports it has a list of « corporate nomads » whom they have moved ten times or more . . . [10]
> Another oil executive moved six times in eleven years, whose nine year old son had never finished a single grade in the same school . . . [11]
> A Johnson's Wax salesman moved from Racine, Wisconsin to New York to Chicago in ten months, his child in three kindergartens that year . . . [12]
> Union Carbide [13] and Dow Chemical [14] report they have doubled the number of executives moved per year in 1967 as they did in 1961.
> Ford Motor Company reports that it transferred 686 executives in its international division in 1967. [15]

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8 Richard MARTIN, « Corporate Gypsies », *Wall Street Journal,* April 26, 1969, p. 1.

9 *Ibid.*

10 « Price of Success ? Growing Job Demands Shatter the Marriages of More Executives, » *Wall Street Journal,* May 10, 1967, p. 1.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Time,* September 30, 1967, « Corporate Nomads, » in Modern Living Section.

13 *Ibid.*

14 « Labor Letter, » *Wall Street Journal,* July 30, 1968, p. 1.

15 Frederick SEIDNER, « Survey Reveals New Moving Trends, » Public Relations Board Inc., Chicago, September 3, 1968. *The First Traffic Managers Forum on Moving,* April 24, 1968, Evansville, Indiana, Atlas Van Lines.

This can be compounded, of course, if the executive is in the international division and is moved around the world rather than from state to state. It is estimated that about 250,000 executive and professional families are transferred each year in the U.S.

To answer some of the questions posed at the beginning of this section, a research project was undertaken. In depth and fairly lengthy interviews (one to two and one-half hours) were conducted with Vice Presidents — Personnel or similar individuals with approximately thirty corporations whose regional or national headquarters were located in the Midwest or Southwest United States. The firms varied in size (from 6,000-123,000 employees) products and services (consumer products, military hardware, producers' goods, insurance, utilities) and other characteristics. The findings should be helpful in giving preliminary understanding to the dimensions of this problem.

Causes of Geographic Transfers

The first aspect of this topic is : Why do companies transfer executives ? It was felt that the answers to this question could shed some light on the topic. Three causes seemed to be involved : relocation of physical facilities ; manpower needs at various locations ; and career development practices of the companies.

Relocation of physical facilities and/or division of a business led to a fairly large number of individual transfers, but quite irregularly. Typical examples are the building of a new plant at a new location that is to be staffed from existing plants : new regional headquarters are established ; home office is moved from a small town to New York City. But these events do not take place frequently (one large company had two such events in the last thirty years).

The second cause of executive transfers is the manpower needs of the company at its various locations. Typically, an executive is needed at a location for various reasons (a new position is created, retirement or promotion of an executive, etc.). The management examines its inventory of executives at this location and considers executives at other locations. It is decided that the better executive for the position is located elsewhere. So, he is transferred. This can then cause a chain reaction of transfers to fill openings created by this one transfer.

As can be determined from the data in Table I, 94% of the firms with accurate data (five companies had imprecise data on this) who transferred executives (six companies transferred almost no executives) stated that the main cause of these transfers was the manpower needs of the company.

TABLE I

Rates of Change in Executive Transfer Rates

Past Rate of Transfer	Increasing		Steady		Decreasing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
High	5	20	1	4	0	0
Moderate	11	44	1	4	1	4
Low	4	16	2	8	0	0
Total	20	80	4	16	1	4

But an increasing reason for executive transfers was the third cause : that the company had developed (formally or informally) a career plan for development of its executives. About one-third of the companies who transferred executives said they had developed or were developing such a career plan and that it was a factor in transfers. Thus, only 6% of the companies listed this as the primary cause of executive transfers, but one-third considered this as an important supplementary cause of transfers.

A word or two on career development should be helpful in an understanding or this cause of transfers. Career development can be confused with management development, so first, the two will be contracted. In the past, management development for many companies consisted of a formal program, prepared and administered by the personnel/industrial relations department. It normally involved a set of courses or exercises that were standardized and presented to all promising executives. Today many corporations have abandoned this for a new approach which might be more properly called career development. These programs or approaches attempt to develop executives as professionals on a more individualized basis — using different approaches for different executives or types of executives. The corporation hopes that competent executives will make a career with the firm. For our purposes, a career consists of « a long commitment to an occupation and/or workplace in which an individual places his economic life chancs in a particular occupation or organization. » [16]

[16] Joseph GUSFIELD, « Occupational Roles and Forms of Enterprise, » *American Journal of Sociology*, LXVI, pp. 571-580.

So, to attract the competent executive and to keep him, the corporation and the executive develop a career path for him that involves a mix of different positional experiences in a location, transfers and more experience in other locations, and management development or formal courses away from the position. So, at certain points in various executive careers, it is desirable for them to be transferred to enrich their experiences and develop their career. Many companies are now making some transfer decisions with this factor in mind.

Earlier in this paper, references were made to data which indicated that geographic mobility was increasing. One other indication that it was increasing is the Atlas Van Lines Survey. At a seminar for traffic managers responsible for the physical movement of household goods of executives, the 56 traffic managers were asked if the practice was increasing. A majority indicated that the number of executives transferred had doubled in the last five years. [17] But Atlas' survey consisted of asking the managers while away from their records at a conference to fill out a survey. And one of these questions was : has the number of executives transferred increased and if so, by how many ? In this research, each personnel executive was asked to compute the percentage of executives who were transferred each year. Percentages would appear to give more meaningful data for interpretation of trends in this policy. As Table II reveals, 80% of the companies had experienced increasing transfer rates. One company deliberately reduced its rate, four held them steady. The percentage increase was small. For example, a typical increase was from 4% per year in 1961 to 5% today. There were, however, many differences in these rates. The companies experiencing « high » transfer rates in the past (Table II) moved 11% of their executives yearly or more. In the middle management period, the executives employed by these companies remained in one location two to three years. The low transfer rate companies moved 4% of their executives or less. Typically, the executives moved once or twice at most in their career. The middle group transferred executives at the middle management level and they remained in one place five or six years, with three or four moves in a career typical.

Are All Companies the Same ?

The data reported thus for reveals overall trends in transfer. Breaking the data down into categories should give it more meaning. It was thought

[17] Seidner, *op. cit.*

that the type of role chosen by the executive might affect geographic mobility. For example, the Atlas study found that the most frequently moved executives had the following characteristics : the average age : 25-34 for 40% of transferrees, 35-44 for 25% ; earnings : from $7,000-12,500 for 40%, $12,500-20,000 for 27% : functions : 48% were salesmen/sales managers, 20% branch/plant managers, and 18% technical service/sales engineers.

TABLE II

Rate of Change in Transfer Rates

Past Rate of Transfer	Increasing		Steady		Decreasing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
High	5	20	1	4	0	0
Moderate	11	44	1	4	1	4
Low	4	16	2	8	0	0
Total	20	80	4	16	1	4

In this study, role differences based on level of management, function performed, and line versus staff were examined. First of all, most firms transferred middle managers. Apparently, first line managers are developed and observed at one location prior to a transfer. No firm moved primarily top or lower managers. Seventeen of the 25 moved middle managers, two moved all levels, and six moved hardly any managers. This finding was statistically significant. There was a tendency to move marketing and general managers more frequently than research, engineering, personnel or finance, but there were variances by firm's policies, and the results were not statistically significant. No firm transferred staff employees exclusively, six transferred both line and staff executives, 19 transferred only line executives.

Characteristics of the employing corporations were thought to influence the transfer rate. Several were examined. Firms that were complex (in number of product divisions) did not transfer more frequently than noncomplex firms ; nor did firms in more volatile industries than older and established industries. Firms that had tall organization structures did not have statistically significant different transfer rates from flat structures. There were differences based on two factors, however. Table III presents the transfer rates of firms compared with the number of their locations. There appears to be a tendency that the larger is the number of operations, the greater is the transfer rate.

TABLE III

Past Rate of Transfer and Number of Locations in Firms

Past Rate of Transfer	Many		Few	
	#	%	#	%
High	5	20	0	0
Moderate	8	32	6	24
Low	1	4	5	20
Total	14	56	11	44

But more important, the data in Table IV indicate that if the firm had a variety of size operations, the more likely it was that executives would be transferred than in similar size operations companies. This was statistically significant. This also implies fairly large numbers of locations, but the condition normally was described as follows : we have three types of plants : about 30% of them employ fifty people or under (the small plants) ; medium plants employ 75-150 (40%) ; and the other 40% are larger than 250 employees. What these companies did is to « test » their potential top executives in the small plant, season them in the middle ones, and mature them in the large ones. But they had to move them to develop them. If the plants were all about the same size, they could elect to transfer or season them in these locations. And it was much more likely that they did not transfer them, thus saving the heavy costs of transfer.

TABLE IV

Past Rate of Transfer and Variety in Size of Plants or Locations.

Past Rate of Transfer	Varied Size		Similar Size	
	#	%	#	%
High	5	20	0	0
Moderate	10	40	4	16
Low	0	0	6	24
Total	15	60	10	40

In summary, the individual most likely to be transferred is a middle manager employed by a firm with many sizes of operations, in a marketing or general management operation. The least likely executive to be transferred is one employed by a company with one or a few operations (or similar sized ones), not a middle manager, and in staff work (such as engineering, research, or personnel).

Costs and Benefits of Transfers

Companies and executives both benefit when executives are transferred. The executive is promoted faster than if he had to stay in one location and await an opening. Corporations match positions with executives with greater speed, since they need not wait for a replacement to be trained at the old location. However, there are costs to both corporation and executive. It can cost the corporation $5-10,000 [18] to pay for transfer costs. The executives have economic losses in sale of houses, furniture and household goods adjustments and so on. Perhaps more important, there are family social costs : ties with friends and relatives are cut, loss of voting rights because of residency requirements, etc. [19] These have been viewed seriously enough that some American corporations are now experiencing resistence to frequent transfers. This takes various forms from reluctance to move to resignation. Many executives refuse to be moved again. Firms indicated that refusal rates varied. Many firms said their rate of refusals and dissatisfaction was low because they made it quite clear during the recruiting process that regular moves were part of the life with their companies. If they did so, the junior executives would expect this and might be resigned to it or even desire this. If not, they might resent it later on. The firm that said it had the most trouble with this problem was a conglomerate, growing rapidly by acquisitions of smaller firms. Many of these firms were in small towns. One explanation of the seriousness of this problem is that there developed a wide divergence between the expectations of the executives and the actualities. I suggest that many

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[18] This is based on estimates of cost of transportation of household goods and family, housing allowances or subsidies, and miscellaneous expenses such as house hunting trips, temporary living expenses, etc. For two studies of benefits paid by American corporations during transfer see :

Geneva SEYBOLD, *Company Payments of Employees Moving Expenses,* « Studies in Personnel Policy No. 154 (New York : National Industrial Conference Board, 1956).

J. Roger O'MEARA, « Employees on the Move, » *Management Record,* 22, 9, pp. 1-14.

K. K. WHITE, *Reimbursing Personnel for Transfer and Relocation Costs,* AMA Research Study 67 (New York : American Management Ass'n, 1964).

[19] One other cost may be loss of promotability. Business Week recently confided to the executive that wants to become a top manager :

> You should not get yourself on a fast-transfer list that means periodically moving around the country to do the same work, even if the pay gets a little greener each time. The transfer list can bury a young man.

« Personal Business, » *Business Week,* September 28, 1968, p. 145.

joined these smaller local firms because they have locally oriented (not cosmopolitan) views. That is,a significant part of how they saw themselves and their career rotated around an area where they knew the firm, had their relatives and friends, went to school, etc. If they became upwardly mobile, they expected to become plant manager in this small town, which brought with it prestige in the community, positions on the Boards, etc. Suddenly the firm is acquired and the executive is asked to leave this to become « another one of the executive team » in a larger city, with loss of local prestige, and move to unfamiliar circumstances. It would appear that this wide divergence of expectations and realizations would cause more dissatisfaction than regular moves for one who accepts that as a way of life (doesn't every company do it ?).

Corporate reactions to refusals to move varied widely from « that's O.K. » on the part to the low frequency movers or personnel-short operations to « he should leave us, if he's young enough. » The general response for the moderate or high movers was :

> We have no corporate policy on refusals to transfer, nor do we officially have an « up or out policy ». Individual managers may feel that way, though. And really, we tell them when they come with us that they should expect to be moved. If they are young enough, we do them a favor by suggesting they look elsewhere. If older, we make very clear that this will substantially reduce their choices for promotion.

In practice, this can and does mean stagnation in their present position, or even a reduction in level, many admitted. Most made the distinction between pressing family problems as a reason and what several called « finicky » reasons. If a man had a deaf child and there were no schools in the new area, all firms would accomodate such problems. Many gave the man several opportunities to move before « writing him off. » « Finicky » reasons included preferences for one area for whatever reasons. One of the executives left the firm over such a « finicky » reason : his former firm wanted to transfer him from a large Midwestern city to a small Georgia town. He left the company over this and he was more understanding of « finicky » reasons than most of the interviewees.

Top management must begin to formally evaluate the total costs of very frequent transfers on the executive and his family as well to determine how great the loss in productivity is when many promotable executives are « shelved » or punished in this way.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper has discussed the policy of many American corporations of geographic transfer of the firm's managers. This can affect Canadian executives directly, if they are employed by Canadian subsidiaries of American firms, or indirectly if Canadian firms begin to emulate American practice. The interrelationships between American and Canadian firms were traced and some findings about transfer policy were discussed. Basically, many American firms are increasing the numbers and percentages of executives transferred each year. General managers and marketing executives at middle management level of multi-plant and many-sized plants are most likely to be transferred. Costs and benefits of these policies were described.

Are there solutions to the problems presented ? I think so. Several have been tried by some who believe that executives who have a voice in their careers are more satisfied and productive than those who feel that the computer at headquarters has matched his IBM card and a position.

Briefly, one firm has made all transfers subject to approval of the executive at the new location. If after six months the executive and family feel that this is not the location for them, they are returned to the older location and reinstated, no questions asked.

One other system is simpler but has more significant implications for management authority. When a position opens up, the manager responsible for filling the position notifies all concerned of the opening. He invites all those interested to contact him. He need not be limited to those who apply, but those who have tried the system find more candidates are considered this way (and better ones) than if they did the selecting themselves. This avoids the « passed over » problem. One year an executive might apply, the next not.

These systems seem especially appropriate to the Canadian situation. It inculcates the best of the findings of modern behavioral science and allows for an entirely Canadian or Canadian and international career for all Canadians. It is hoped that American corporations will begin to use these systems soon.

COÛTS ET BÉNÉFICES DES POLITIQUES AMÉRICAINES DE MUTATION DU PERSONNEL DE CADRE

Cet article examine les politiques de nombreuses compagnies américaines en matière de mutation géographique des cadres. Ceci peut avoir un impact direct sur les cadres canadiens, s'ils sont employés par des filiales canadiennes de firmes américaines ou indirectement si les compagnies canadiennes commencent à imiter les pratiques de leurs voisins du Sud.

Plusieurs firmes américaines ont l'habitude d'accroître le nombre et le pourcentage des cadres mutés à chaque année. Les directeurs généraux et les cadres moyens attachés au marketting à l'intérieur des compagnies multi-firmes et multi-établissements sont les plus sujets à connaître de tels changements.

Il y a des bénéfices et des coûts à de telles pratiques. Du côté bénéfices, notons la promotion plus rapide des cadres qui acceptent de déménager et la meilleure allocation des ressources par les compagnies souvent prises avec des vacances d'emploi qui nécessiteraient une longue période de formation si elles recrutaient en dehors de la compagnie. Les coûts sont cependant très sérieux, et ce tant pour les compagnies que pour les cadres eux-mêmes. Pour les premières, il peut en coûter entre $5,000. et $10,000. pour couvrir les frais de déménagement. En plus, notons les pertes économiques des cadres eux-mêmes au moment de la vente de leur maison, de leur ménage, etc. S'ajoute à tout cela un coût social, peut-être plus important : les liens avec les amis et les parents, les changements d'école pour les enfants, etc.

Les compagnies à caractère plus démocratique ont beaucoup plus essayé de trouver des solutions aux problèmes présentés que les compagnies qui ne s'occupent que de la production. Par exemple, notons le système qui veut que la mutation soit approuvée par le cadre lui-même une fois rendu au nouveau lieu de résidence. Si après six mois d'essai le cadre (et sa famille) n'est pas satisfait de la nouvelle résidence, il peut retourner d'où il vient et être réintégré dans son ancien emploi. Il existe un autre système plus simple mais qui a des conséquences plus sérieuses vis-à-vis l'autorité de la direction. Lorsqu'une vacance d'emploi se crée, le cadre responsable avise tous les intéressés du nouveau poste et les invite à le contacter. Cette invitation à faire faire le premier pas par ceux qui sont sujets à remplir la vacance d'emploi fournit plus de candidats que si les cadres responsables choisissaient eux-mêmes ceux qui sont aptes à remplir le nouveau poste.

Ces systèmes semblent grandement appropriés à la situation canadienne. Ils permettent la meilleure application des théories des sciences du comportement et donnent la possibilité à tous les Canadiens de connaître une carrière entièrement canadienne ou canadienne et internationale. Il est à souhaiter que les corporations américaines commencent à utiliser ces systèmes dans un avenir très rapproché.