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Self-initiated expatriation: Implications for HRM

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Self-initiated expatriation: Implications for HRM

Abstract

The decision of an employee to move from their home country in order to work in another country/culture will create a myriad of issues for the employees to face. Every year, many employees take the decision to migrate. So far the literature has focused on the motivation to expatriate, on the one hand, or Human Resource Management (HRM) for international assignments within an organisation, on the other hand. Little regard is paid to the opportunities HRM can play in supporting the adjustment of self-initiated expatriates to the new organisation and culture. The paper derives assumptions based on Black et al.'s model of adjustment to help self-initiated expatriates to adjust and reach their performance potential more quickly. We argue that organisations should consider whether their current practices enhance or hinder the successful employment of self-initiated expatriates. Besides work-related HRM practices, HRM for self-initiated expatriates should consider expanding support into non-work areas, such as supporting partner relocation or helping to find accommodation.

Self-initiated expatriation: Consequences for HRM

Introduction

Global migration is an increasing trend demonstrated by the willingness of Europeans to migrate within and beyond the continent for employment (Strack et al., 2007). It is unclear, however, in how far organisations are prepared for the challenge of managing foreign staff.

The management of talent has been highlighted as the most challenging issue facing employers in Europe going forward to 2015 (Strack et al 2007). Competition for talent is not just about competing locally but competing globally, thus raising issues for HR as to who to attract and how to retain such talent. Some countries and some organisations take HRM practices quite seriously when it comes to competing for talent on the global market. For example, there are international job advertisement sites where organisations can publicise themselves as an employer of choice to candidates (<http://www.addjobs.co.uk/jobboards/international/index.asp>). For organisations, it can be highly attractive to have international staff, especially as the competition between companies grows more and more internationally. Especially, in areas of skills shortages, the competition for talent is ever-increasing. Therefore, adopting an internationally focused HR strategy may enhance competitive advantage for the company. However, incorporating an international focus to HR practices at many organisations seems to be in its infancy. In order to attract and retain international staff and compete on the global talent market, HRM within organisations needs to become more purposeful and proactive. This paper will outline how research in other areas of expatriation can inform HRM in organisations and enhance good practice. While most research in the area has been conducted using international assignees, self-initiated expatriation has recently gained more attention (e.g., Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari, 2008). However, research in this area has considered self-initiated expatriates as a relatively homogenous group. We argue that there are two major differences within the groups of self-

initiated expatriates to be taken into account: While some expatriates leave their country to pursue a career in a different country, others leave for personal reasons, such as to follow a relationship or simply for the love of a specific country. The former will go abroad on the basis of a job offer, whereas the latter will not necessarily have a job when they arrive in the new country. In the case of expatriates coming to a new country because he/she was offered a job (we can then here “career expatriates”), organisations may be more or less aware of their specific needs for training and development. However, the expatriates arriving for personal reasons (called here “private expatriates”) and applying while already in the country will be considered similar to home nationals as their status as an expatriate will be more of a chance issue, rather than something the organisation is prepared for. In this theoretical contribution, we concentrate on adjustment and acculturation using the framework of Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991). Using a differentiation of expatriates based on their motivation to go abroad, we will differentiate which HR practices are more or less relevant for which type of self-initiated expatriate. This differentiation is very much in line with recent calls for differentiation in HR practices which acknowledges that HR practices do not affect all employees in the same way (for a recent example see Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton & Swart, 2005). Our aim is to advancing knowledge to inform HR practices by providing a research agenda and developing propositions.

Expatriation: Some numbers

Research into expatriates has mainly focused on employees sent on assignments by their company (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, self-initiated expatriation where an individual achieves employment outside their home country is an equally important topic. Although absolute numbers for self-initiated expatriation are not available, evidence for the significance of self-initiated expatriation can be found. According

to the Institute for Public Policy Research 5.5 million British citizens live abroad (Sriskandarajah & Drew, 2006, see also Guardian weekend from the 27-01-07). The UK Office for National Statistics states that “in 2002, 125,000 people migrated from the UK to the European Union (EU), compared with 89,000 who migrated from the EU to the UK. This gives a net outflow of 36,000 to the EU” (Office for National Statistics, 2005), indicating the importance of migration within the EU.

Indirect evidence for the prevalence of self-initiated expatriation comes from a study on international assignments by Riusala and Suutari (2000) who contacted 1,100 expatriates. Of the 448 returned questionnaires, 147 (32.8 percent) had to be excluded because they came from self-initiated expatriates. As far as EU citizens are concerned, the ongoing expansion of the EU has offered its citizens many possibilities: rather than having to focus on their home labour market, Europeans are free to live and work all over Europe (see Article 39 of the treaty establishing the European Community (treaty of Rome), European Union, 1957). With the Schengen-Treaty ratified in 1985, borders, as far as labour mobility is concerned, became largely a thing of the past within the EU (European Union, 2000). This means that migration has become quite easy within the EU and the regulations will enhance migration even further.

Self-initiated expatriates: Definition and differentiation

We define self-initiated expatriates in this paper as employees who decide to migrate to another country for work. For our theoretical analyses, however, we will, focus on self-initiated expatriates who give up their position in their home country prior to migration, rather than those on a career break spent abroad. Self-initiated expatriates initiate their expatriation and find a position in another country by themselves.

As mentioned earlier, a large amount of the prior literature on expatriates has focused on employees undertaking international assignments. These two groups of expatriates can be

contrasted to each other. Employees on international assignments have a job arranged for them by their company before they leave their home organisation. In contrast to self-initiated expatriates, employees on international assignments usually receive training prior to leaving for assignment. In addition, a typical package for international assignees can include culture and language training as well a compensation package that takes into account educational benefits for children, rental supplements etc. (Peterson, Napier & Shim, 1996, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005). The job of an employee on an international assignment is usually restricted in its time perspective, anything from 3 months to 5 years. The time perspective for self-initiated expatriate is less clear. Excluding career breaks here, self-initiated expatriates can plan to stay for a period of time or for good but this will usually not be predetermined. See table 1 for an overview of differences between self-initiated expatriates and employees on international assignments.

Table 1: Overview of differences between self-initiated expatriates and employees on international assignments

	Self-initiated expatriates	International assignees
Initiation	Self	Company
Pre departure preparation, training etc.	Self	Company
Time-perspective	No limit	Limited
Job secured prior to expatriation?	Yes or No	Yes
Compensation package	No	Yes
Support in non-work issues	No	Yes

In terms of HRM and employee needs, another group from which to differentiate self-initiated expatriates are other organisational newcomers with prior job experience. The reason

for this is the different levels of knowledge that self-initiated expatriates and organisational newcomers bring to their new workplace. Whereas the organisational culture prevalent at their new workplace is unknown to both self-initiated expatriates and organisational newcomers, the latter are familiar with the country's culture. Both self-initiated expatriates and organisational newcomers will know the characteristics of the job from prior experience and will not know the specific job characteristics of the position they are just starting. The organisational newcomer, in contrast to the self-initiated expatriate, may, however, know what the position comprises of on a country level (e.g., the hours of work), even if the specifics vary between organisations and on different levels of the job. Table 2 provides an overview of the differences between initiated expatriates and organisational newcomers.

Table 2: Overview of differences between self-initiated expatriates and employees on organisational newcomers

	Self-initiated expatriates	Newcomers
Country culture	Unknown	Known
Organisational culture	Unknown	Unknown
Job characteristics (general)	Known	Known
Job characteristics (country level)	Unknown	Known
Job characteristics (organisation)	Unknown	Unknown

Self-initiated expatriates: Motivation to go abroad

Motivation to go abroad and work can differ considerably. While some expatriates go abroad to start a new job and maybe enhance their career, others may have been actively recruited by

organisations that cannot find a specific skill locally. Additionally, others expatriate for personal reasons, including love for a specific country or to pursue a romantic relationship. Although at first glance, the motivation for expatriation may seem to be less relevant for HR practices, we will argue in the following that it is very relevant indeed.

Expatriates differ regarding the question whether or not they prepared a job for themselves before going abroad. In terms of HR practices, this differentiation is relevant for several reasons. For example, expatriates that have applied for a job and move abroad to take up that position will probably be more prepared for the job related aspects of their move, though maybe not for the intercultural challenges. On the other hand, expatriates who move to a certain country because of the country rather than the job may be more prepared for intercultural challenges than for the challenges involved in starting a new job abroad. In addition to the differences within the group of expatriates, the company involved may have more or less interest in a successful acculturation, depending on whether they particularly wanted the expatriate prior to expatriation and, consequently, spend more effort in helping the expatriate to adjust. Expatriates that live in the country before applying for a job, in contrast, may be considered more equally to other (home) applicants. This interest of the organisation in the expatriate will differ considerably depending on the local labour market. If the labour market is characterised by skill shortage, organisations usually have more interest in the successful adjustment of the expatriate. We can assume that the source of support may differ considerably depending on the expatriates situation and the situation of the local labour market. In the following, we will review prior research on self-initiated expatriates and international assignees in order to derive propositions for HR practices relating to self-initiated expatriates. We will then differentiate these hypotheses on the basis of our differentiation of self-initiated expatriates introduced above.

Self-initiated expatriation and career

Self-initiated expatriation can be regarded in the context of modern careers where individuals manage their own careers (e.g., the boundaryless or the Protean career, see Inkson, 2006, or the global boundaryless career, Carr, Inkson & Thorn, 2005). The protean career concept was introduced by Hall (1996) who claimed that careers in the 21st century are “... driven by the person, not the organization, and [careers] will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and the environment change.” (p. 8). This statement is certainly valid for self-initiated expatriates (see also Baruch & Hall, 2004). This is underlined when looking into the reasons for migration: According to Carr et al. (2005), there are five main reasons for migration: Economic factors, political factors, cultural factors (such as the choice of a similar culture but in a country with greater economic possibilities), family factors (e.g., family reunion), and career factors (such as professional development). From interviews among 30 British expatriate academics, Richardson and McKenna (2002) derived four metaphors for reasons for leaving: explorer; refugee; mercenary; and architect. Three of those, namely, the explorer, the mercenary and the architect leave their country in order to gain something in the other country (interesting experience, financial rewards or career-building, respectively). “A refugee” is mostly interested in leaving the country he/she presently works in. Similar to the explorer metaphor, Richardson and Mallon (2005) report those topics in connection to self-directed migration of academics include desire for adventure and new experience. Presuming, these reasons will be similar for other self-initiated expatriates, especially knowledge workers. This is supported by Hall (2005). He analysed migration among high-skilled knowledge workers in general and concludes that besides pay issues, the possibility to “pursue problems that interest them” (p. 948) is most important for high-skilled knowledge workers.

International assignees may volunteer for an assignment abroad but are operating within the career development opportunities of their company. The responsibility for the

employee's career consequently is more in the hands of the company than the individual. Hall and Moss (1998) call for a relational approach that companies should take towards their employees' careers where employers provide opportunities, rather than manage employees' careers. As Selmer (1999) puts it, the responsibility for career development lies both with the individual and the organization. In the case of self-initiated expatriation, although individual expatriates have taken responsibility for their career to a great extent, the company which employs them still has a duty to contribute to their development. As is obvious from the above cited literature, much research has focused on expatriation as driven by one's career or professional interest. However, this definition of self-initiated expatriation only applies to self-initiated expatriates that go abroad to take up a job and not for those that expatriate for personal reasons. The latter seems to be an under-researched group in the expatriation literature.

Self-initiated expatriation and HRM

Whilst one can argue quite easily for the need of HRM initiatives for self-initiated expatriates from the perspective of their personal well-being, the question may arise why HRM for self-initiated expatriates is important to organisations, especially if the expatriate was not "invited" to come and join the organisation from abroad but applied while already in the country. One could argue that if an individual decides to expatriate, his or her adjustment and acculturation is his or her own responsibility. However, in order to gain advantage from self-initiated expatriates, organisations must try to smooth the transfer from one country to another. As Aycan (1997) puts it: "Organizational assistance reduces the time the expatriate has to spend on these issues and facilitates adjustment to the new work setting" (p. 445). Consequently, professional HRM policies and practices can assist the expatriate to perform at the expected standard from early on. HRM can become a unique selling point for the individual

organisation in the competition for global talent. An example is developing an employer brand that is communicated internally and externally and, crucially, during the recruitment process to attract talent (Glen, 2006).

In terms of international assignments, HR management can focus on two parts of the process: support prior to leaving and support on-site (Suutari & Burch, 2001). Mostly, research has focused on training expatriates in their home country (e.g., Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). With respect to self-initiated expatriates, the receiving company cannot support expatriates prior to their emigration. That means that HRM in this case has to focus on supporting expatriates in their host country. In other words, the focus of HRM is on the adjustment of expatriates after expatriation has commenced.

Adjustment to the new culture or acculturation works in four stages (Black, 1988): The “honeymoon” stage, a frustration stage, and a stage where some new behaviours have been adopted. In the fourth stage, adjustment is complete (see also Hofstede, 2001). According to Hofstede (2001), three different results of acculturation can be differentiated: (a) Continue to feel alien and discriminated against, (b) bicultural adaptation, and (c) going native. Only the latter two can be described as successful acculturation.

Black and colleagues (e.g., Black, 1988; Black et al., 1991) introduced probably the most elaborate model of adjustment. They differentiate between three types of in-country adjustment, namely, (a) work adjustment, (b) adjustment to interaction with host nationals, and (c) adjustment to general environment (p. 304). In addition, according to Black (1988), adjustment can be subjective or objective. Subjective adjustment describes how comfortable expatriates feel in their new role. Objective adjustment refers to the mastery of role requirements and performance. Combining these two different approaches leads to a three x two table of adjustment requirements that an expatriate is to achieve (see Table 3). The best result for an expatriate and his/her employer would, of course, be successful adjustment with

respect to all facets. Table 3 points out some possible results of expatriates subjective and objective work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and general adjustment, respectively.

Table 3: Facets of adjustment

	Work adjustment	Interaction adjustment	General adjustment
Subjective adjustment	Job satisfaction	Feeling at ease in interactions	Not feeling alien
Objective adjustment	Performance	Cooperation with home nationals	Accommodation, social life

As self-initiated expatriates cannot be prepared by their host country's company prior to their expatriation, anticipatory adjustment, as Black et al. (1991) call it, cannot be provided by the employer is up to the expatriate him-/herself. With respect to adjustment in the host-country, Black et al. (1991) distinguish between individual, job, organisational culture and non-work factors influencing adjustment. Individual adjustment refers to self-efficacy and skills (relation, perception). Job antecedents include role clarity, role discretion, role novelty, and role conflict. Organisational antecedents comprise organisation culture novelty, social support, and logistic help. Non-work factors include culture novelty and family-spouse adjustment (Black et al., 1991, p. 303). However, as anticipatory adjustment cannot be expected to have taken place, tasks that would otherwise have been dealt with prior to expatriation will be on the agenda after arrival in the host-country. In terms of HRM, the fact that the expatriate will arrive without prior preparation by the company will put more emphasis on the selection process and therefore the individual antecedents of adjustment. In the following, we will outline propositions for HR support for successful expatriate adjustment. We will concentrate on objective adjustment as this is the type of adjustment that HR can probably influence the most and that is also easier to control in terms of successful

adjustment. However, in a later part of this paper, we will outline how HR support can influence the individual's effort for subjective adjustment.

Selection

Black et al. subsume self-efficacy, relation skills and perception skills under individual antecedents of adjustment. In research about international assignments, one factor that often emerges as a key factor in the failure of international assignments is the selection on the basis of technical rather than intercultural skills (Black and Gregersen, 2007; Harris & Brewster, 1999). While employees on international assignment can be prepared for their future intercultural encounter, this is not possible (at least it is not possible for the organisation) in the case of self-initiated expatriates. In order to be able to 'fit in' and interact successfully with host nationals, it is therefore preferable for self-initiated expatriates to possess good cross cultural skills prior to starting their new position, or, as Tharenou (2003) suggests possess receptivity to working abroad. Harris, Brewster and Sparrow (2003) concur that expatriates essentially should possess soft skills. This may be quite difficult to assess, especially if the future employer wants to avoid treating the expatriate differently from a 'home' applicant. Prior work experience, however, may include working with colleagues from different countries. Consequently, this type of cooperation can serve as a clue for interpersonal and cross-cultural skills.

Similar to success and failure in international assignments (Larson, 2006), another factor that will influence the success of self-initiated expatriates is prior foreign experience. This again is quite easy to assess from a CV, without the need to put the potential expatriate through additional selection processes beyond those that all applicants have to undergo.

Taking into consideration, the motivation to go abroad, we can assume that expatriates who migrated for private reasons may already be familiar with the countries culture as they

are living in the country and have made the choice for a specific country rather than a specific position. Therefore, the question whether or not they possess soft skills will be less relevant. However, a different issue will be to assess their qualifications. As they want to be in the country for personal reasons, it is quite possible that they are willing to accept a position that has a low fit with their prior work experience.

Whereas one may consider selection to relate to the organisations ability to practice effective selection strategies for self-imitated expatriates, there is also the issue of how candidates select the organisation. In contrast to an assignment, the self-initiated expatriate chooses the organisation he/she wants to work for. Therefore, HR interventions can play a vital role in developing their organisation as an employer of choice Thus, positively engaging with potential candidates is arguably as important as the actual formal selection process.

Proposition 1a: With respect to “career expatriates”, prior cooperation with colleagues from different countries and prior foreign experience serve as an indicator in interpersonal and cross-cultural skills. Self-initiated expatriates who have cooperated with colleagues from different countries and/or have prior foreign experience will more easily adapt to their host countries than others who have not cooperated with colleagues from different countries or have prior foreign experience. Self-selection plays a role in the selection process.

Proposition 1b: With respect to “private expatriates”, social skills can be taken more for granted but technical skills will need closer examination.

Definition of position

Black et al. (1991) include role clarity, role discretion, role novelty, and role conflict in their antecedents of in-country adjustment. For self-initiated “career expatriates” one’s first thought

may be that nothing much changes, for example, an accountancy role or academic position in the UK will have a combination of work activities which are broadly similar in most countries. However, the actual work-load and context may be very varied in different countries. Even if the self-initiated expatriate remains in their preferred field of work, there can be variations in the role requirement which comprise tacit assumptions about cooperation that may be very different in different countries. A 'home' national will most probably be aware of this tacit assumptions but a self-initiated expatriate will need more information and support in understanding the expectations. However, "private expatriates" may need more support in adjusting to the work role as their position may differ from their prior work experience. Thus, it is even more vital to them with an accurate picture of the organisation's expectation toward them.

Proposition 2: In addressing job-related antecedents of adjustment, giving a clear definition of a position will have a positive effect on self-initiated expatriate work adjustment. This will be especially true for "private expatriates".

Mentoring

Probably the most important point to address for the expatriate is cross-cultural awareness. Research into cross-cultural training has shown that such training is generally effective in terms of expatriate adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005).

Referring to Brislin (1979), Waxin and Panaccio (2005) differentiate three methods of cross-cultural training, namely, cognitive, affective and behavioural (p. 52). This links in with the three facets of cultural intelligence that Early and Ang (2003) distinguish, that is, the cognitive, the motivational and the behavioural facet (p. 67). This differentiation highlights the fact that expatriates need not only to know what is the right behaviour in a different

culture, they also need to be motivated to show that behaviour and, maybe most important of all, be able to demonstrate it. Given the clear benefits cross-cultural training can have during adjustment (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005), the host country HR can ensure that such training is facilitated.

However, in order to enhance interaction adjustment while at work, organisations can use other options, such as providing a mentoring system or using co- working systems. These techniques provide direct learning possibilities and opportunities to clarify questions while working on a specific task and will therefore support especially interaction adjustment. We can assume that this is less relevant for “private expatriates”. However, though they are familiar with the culture of their country of choice, they may still need to be advised on business practices. We therefore assume that both types of expatriates benefit from mentoring.

Proposition 3: At work support such as mentoring and co-working enhances interaction adjustment for self-initiated expatriates.

Non-work-related aspects HR

Dealing with non-work-related issues is a feature of HRM that is more relevant to expatriate HR practices rather than home HR practices. Other non-work-related factors can be derived from Suutari and Burch (2001): In their study regarding on-site training and support for international assignees, Suutari and Burch (2001, table 3) derive eleven support practices from their interviews: arrival and reception; accommodation; shopping/banks; transportation; public authorities; local laws/rules; health care system; schools/day care; free time possibilities; partner work arrangements; and family social activities. Shaffer and Harrison (1998) examined the effect of work, non-work and family influences on work and non-work satisfaction of expatriates. Partner adjustment and partner satisfaction influenced expatriate

non-work satisfaction. Also, partner adjustment and living conditions had an impact on interaction and cultural adjustment. Although these results are based on research on international assignees, it makes obvious the wider HRM needs of expatriates as opposed to home nationals. Shaffer and Harrison (1998) mention four HRM aspects related to partners: job search assistance; assistance with obtaining work permits/ visas; continuing education; and allowances for professional seminars and conferences. This research indicates that there is a clear need for HRM practices to switch focus from the expatriate employee only to including partner issues (see also recommendations by Richardson & Zikic, 2007).

Coming to a new country often sets challenges in very practical terms. These may include taxation and custom and excise issues (see Baruch, Steele & Quantrill, 2002, for an example of a company providing support for taxation issues). Finding out about the rules and regulations in other countries can take a while and will prevent the expatriates from performing effectively in the first stage of expatriation, if only because he or she will be off work to organise these practicalities. Therefore, support from HR can ease the transition for an expatriate.

In Baruch's et al. (2002) study, accommodation was among the four most important motivators for single expatriates for expatriation. Whereas accommodation may not serve as a motivator for all expatriates, finding a place to stay can be quite stressful, especially when the expatriate does not speak the local language or is not familiar with the local rules and regulations. Especially, when an expatriate migrates for the job, HR can in this case facilitate help in finding accommodation and helping with the legal issues involved.

According to Suutari and Burch (2001), the use of network possibilities, whether formal or informal, is advisable for companies, maybe especially during the first stages of expatriation. HR initiatives to develop informal networks or communities may help the transition and give support to better integration and adjustment. However, all these more

practical issues will be less relevant for the “private expatriate”. They will have found accommodation and arranged the necessary papers before starting a new position.

Partner/spouse matters will be, of course, least relevant for those who came to the country to live with a local partner.

Proposition 4: Addressing non-work-related antecedents of adjustment, such as intercultural training, family adjustment and practical issues will have a positive effect on self-initiated expatriate adjustment. This will not be relevant for “private expatriates”.

Objective and subjective adjustment: HR support and reciprocity

So far, we have argued for the influence of HR support on different facets of objective adjustment. Subjective adjustment, in contrast, will be more related to the expatriates own attitudes and efforts. For successful expatriation this means that both the organisation and individual have to join their efforts. However, organisational and individual efforts are not independent as recent research by De Vos, Dewettinck and Buyen (in press) on career self-management and organisational career management and their joint effect on organisational commitment suggests. In terms of employment contract and reciprocity, one can expect that the more an organisation invests into an expatriate’s adjustment, the more he/she will engage in adjustment effort as well. If, however, the expatriate does not perceive support in adjustment efforts, he/she may feel that it is not worth putting effort into adjustment him/herself and, consequently, will rather tend to look for a position in a different organisation or even a different country.

Proposition 5: HR support for adjustment is positively related to self-initiated expatriate's own effort with respect to adjustment. HR support and individual efforts together lead to successful overall adjustment.

Discussion, limitations, future research, and conclusion

From the lack of literature in this area, we may conclude that few companies actively and systematically engage in expatriate HRM when dealing with self-initiated expatriates. Using Baruch and Altman's (2002) taxonomy of corporative expatriation and repatriation practices, one may assume that with respect to HRM for self-initiated expatriates most companies fall under the category of expedient organisations: their approach to HRM of self-initiated expatriates will be ad-hoc and pragmatic rather than following an embedded HRM policy. To put it again in Baruch and Altman's (2002) words: they are merely managing chaos (p. 252).

Taking into account different aspects of adjustment, we derived a set of propositions for successful self-initiated expatriate adjustment. Our theoretical review took Black et al.'s (1991) model as a starting point to derive assumptions on which factors can help self-initiated expatriates to adjust better to their work, interaction and environment. Figure 1 provides a summary of our propositions regarding how different HR practices influence different types of adjustment. We argue that for the different types of adjustment, different HR practices are more relevant. We initially focused on objective adjustment as subjective adjustment is difficult to evaluate for HR, on the one hand, and difficult to influence, on the other hand. However, joint efforts for adjustment are necessary to achieve successful adjustment. On the basis of reciprocity, we expect that HR support stimulates the self-initiated expatriate's own effort for adjustment, ultimately leading to successful adjustment.

Engaging in HRM can positively affect organisations in several domains. First, a good recruitment strategy can give them a strategic advantage over other companies in that they

will be able to attract good candidates, thus, combating the growing challenge of managing talent. Second, training and mentoring as well as support in non-work issues will render organisations' international staff effective in a shorter period of time than when these issues are not taken into account. Taking into account the different motives for employees to expatriate, can help to choose HR practices that are relevant for the adjustment of the individual. In the context of international assignments, Dickmann, Doherty, Mills and Brewster (2008) recently found a marked difference between the reasons expatriates give for accepting an assignment and the reasons that organisations believe are relevant in this context. This highlights that an analysis of the needs of the individual expatriate, taking into account his/her individual background can help to choose the right HR practice to ensure successful adjustment and retention. Offering different types of support to choose from is one way forward that organisations should consider. Given that line managers are more and more on the fore-front of HR (Perry & Kulik, 2008) and that they are considered vital for the success of HR policies (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), the possibilities for support should be pointed out to the relevant line manager who can then pick and choose together with the expatriate and find the most appropriate support.

Our analysis of HRM for self-initiated expatriates is entirely theoretical. We did not conduct a study into the actual international HR practices in organisations. These may be quite different between organisations and between countries. Indeed the debate regarding HR practices and academic theory are duly noted as a raft of scholars acknowledge that academic theory and actual evidence based practice of HR activities vary greatly (Cascio, 2007; Guest, 2007; Latham, 2007; Lawler, 2007; Rynes, 2007; Giluk & Brown, 2007; Rousseau, 2007; Saari, 2007). While we were aiming at general propositions for HRM for self-initiated expatriates, an analysis of the actual practices would provide us with knowledge about the possible gaps to be filled by organisations' HR practices. Similar to Tung's (1987)

comparison of the management of international assignments in different countries, future research could focus on the differences between organisations in different countries and how they approach the management of expatriates. Especially combining this analysis with recruitment and retention numbers would further our insight into the HRM of self-initiated expatriates.

Our theoretical analysis focused on self-initiated expatriates. While our propositions maybe generalisable as far as larger companies are concerned, many self-initiated expatriates will work in small or medium size companies that may not even have an HR department. However, some of our propositions can be emulated by expatriate networks that may be utilised by employer organisations in order to maximise expatriates' well-being and performance even in very small enterprises. Increasing globalisation places emphasis on employers to utilise HR interventions to enhance their selection of candidates and increase their competitive advantage over other organisations in the growing competition for global talent. So, while in some countries skill shortage already forces companies to engage positively with expatriates and even actively recruit abroad, we argue that the HR practices outlined here will be beneficial for all companies that employ expatriates.

Although we have differentiated between two types of self-initiated expatriates, many more types exist. For example, we have not taken into account entrepreneurs who go abroad to start a new business, either in their current business area or a totally new type of business. Entrepreneurs are, of course, not members of organisations and thus cannot be reached by HR practices. Nevertheless, support can be given on a country level, for example, as far as legal issues, language or cultural differences are concerned. This would support these expatriates' chances of successful integration.

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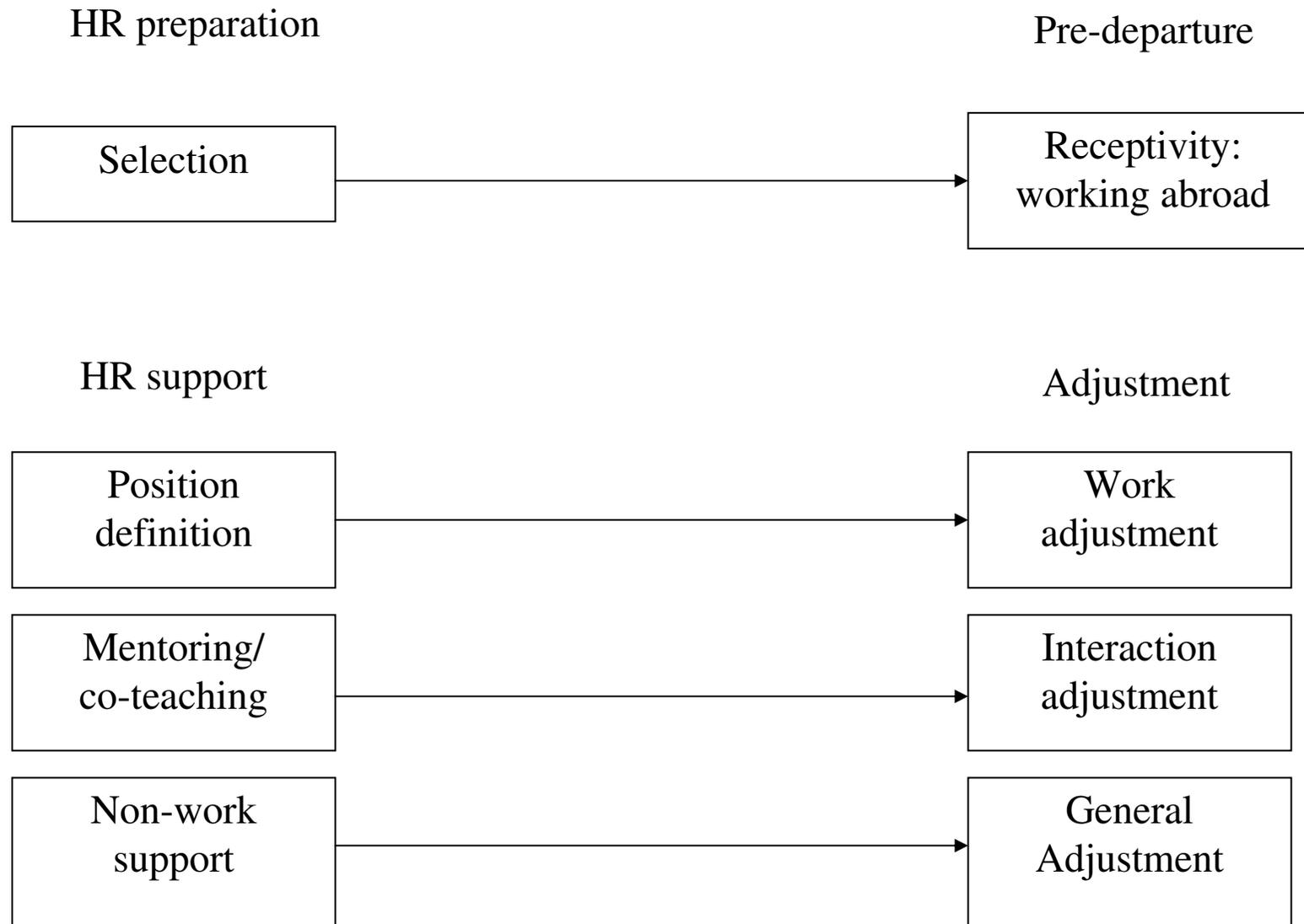


Figure 1: HR and adjustment