

Selecting Candidates and Managing Expatriate Assignments in China

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To ensure the success of expatriate assignment in China, it is critical that the most suitable candidates are chosen. This article provides a strategic model for selecting, training, and supporting personnel and their families for assignments in China and for helping them adjust to Chinese cultures. Home-country reintegration strategies are also provided for developing experienced expatriates into global organizational leaders. Well-planned selection, preparation, support, and reintegration programs help to increase expatriates' overall assignment effectiveness and avoid the high costs associated with expatriate failures. The proposed model is based on Fernandez and Underwood's (2006) critical success qualities of expatriate managers in China and Avril and Magnini's (2007) success qualities for expatriates and their families. A prescription for expatriate effectiveness is proposed based on Lund and Barker's (2007) study of expatriate managers' effectiveness in China, along with models for promoting effective pre-departure preparation and new-country adjustment support. © 2010 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

China's emergence as a global economic power in recent years has attracted the world's attention. With its double-digit growth rates of the past decade, China is predicted to become the world's second-largest economy behind the United States by the end of 2010 ("China Predicted to Become," 2010). China also recently surpassed Germany as the world's largest exporter, with a 10 percent share of all global exports. Ranking second in terms of imports, China has an 8 percent share of all global imports compared to the United States' 13 percent ("WTO: China Overtakes Germany," 2010). Furthermore, China's population of nearly 1.4 billion offers an enormous potential market for foreign

enterprises interested in doing business in China. In 2008, there were more than 101,000 foreign enterprises legally operating in China, representing 2 percent of all enterprises in China (www.stats.gov.cn). Along with great economic opportunities, however, come great challenges associated with managing ventures in China.

Foreign managers entering China encounter a myriad of societal complexities, including lengthy bureaucratic processes, unfamiliar cultural norms, and personal and family adjustment issues associated with living in China. Finding the most effective candidates to manage operations in China, therefore, is critical. This article proposes a method for helping global enterprises to effectively select and retain the most suitable candidates for foreign assignments in China. The method stresses the strategic importance of managing assignments before, during, and after the posting.

In 2008, there were 217,000 expatriates legally employed in China, nearly three times more than in 2005 (www.stats.gov.cn). However, some studies have found that expatriate failure rates in China reach levels as high as 70 percent (Lund & Barker, 2007). "Failure" is defined as the early return or loss of an expatriate whereby a real or inferred financial loss can be calculated by the organization. The cost of one failed international assignment can range from U.S. \$250,000 to \$1 million for some organizations (Valner & Palmer, 2002).

The strategic importance of international experience is stressed by studies that find CEOs with six or more years of international experience rate higher on "organizational performance" and "individual value to the organization," as perceived by

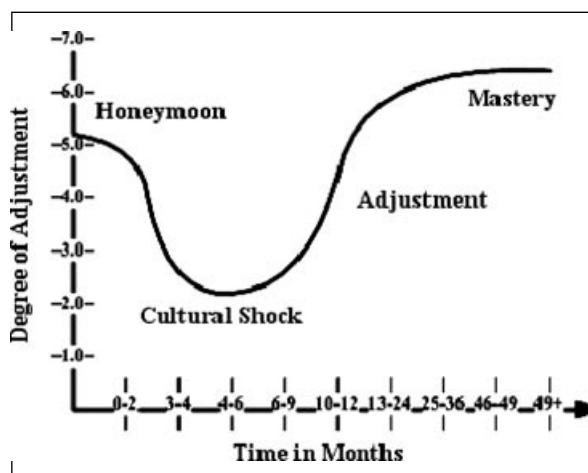
shareholders, than CEOs with little or no international experience (Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2001). Organizational performance was also found to be higher among global enterprises whose top five executives had foreign-country experience (Carpenter et al., 2001). Despite the importance and high expense of developing and maintaining managers with global experience, many expatriate managers leave their organizations shortly after returning from a foreign assignment, thereby depleting the organizations of the expatriates' wealth of international and country-specific experience.

Among more than 750 organizations surveyed in the United States, 25 percent of all managers were found to have left their employers within one year of completing a foreign assignment (Black & Gregersen, 1999). This was twice the rate of managers who had not had a foreign-country posting. In Germany, for example, 51 percent of managers who had recently returned from a foreign posting were found to be willing to leave their organization to find work elsewhere (Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). Managers who return from foreign assignments often find their foreign-country market knowledge, insights, relationships, technical skills, and new language abilities unappreciated and unutilized in the home office (Stroh, Black, Mendenhall, & Gregersen, 2005). As a result, managers with global experience may be lost to competitor organizations that actively appreciate the manager's global leadership potential. Such loss is exacerbated for organizations trying to develop a strategic presence in China, as effective expatriate managers with China experience and expertise are in limited supply and of great value to global organizations seeking long-term strategies in China.

Predicting Problems of Adjustment: U-Curve Theory

Various theories help to explain and predict expatriates' in-country adjustment experiences, the most highly cited being the U-curve framework of cross-cultural adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955). The U-curve has been used extensively since the 1950s and can be

Exhibit 1. U-Curve Framework of Cross-Cultural Adjustment (Liu & Lee, 2008; Lysgaard, 1955)



a valuable tool for helping expatriates and their families understand and anticipate their own cultural adjustment processes. Such understanding helps alleviate the confusion and uncertainty that often accompany adjustment challenges. Easing adjustment is especially pertinent in China with its high expatriate failure rates. Although the U-curve has its limitations, such as its lack of testing across non-Western expatriates, due to its general accuracy and the absence of viable alternatives, adjustment researchers use the U-curve extensively (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

The U-curve framework identifies four stages of cross-cultural adjustment (see Exhibit 1).

The first stage is the “honeymoon” in the initial weeks after arriving in the new country, wherein the expatriate and accompanying spouse or family members are fascinated with their adventure in the new culture, and everything seems new and interesting. *The second stage* begins as they start to cope with the challenges of their daily life and may become overwhelmed by certain aspects of the new culture. “Cultural shock” occurs in this stage, characterized by frustration and possible attitudes of

hostility toward the new country and its people. *The third stage* is the “adjustment” period, in which the expatriate and the family gradually adapt to the new country and accept the peculiarities of the culture with its various norms and values. In this stage, they are able to function more calmly without criticizing or rejecting the culture. Finally, in *the fourth stage*, “mastery,” the expatriate and the family are able to function and thrive in the new culture in a way that feels comfortable and normal to them (Liu & Lee, 2008; Lysgaard, 1955).

The U-curve encompasses factors such as the comfort and satisfaction levels of the expatriate and the family with the new culture, including their attitudes, nature of contact with locals, and difficulties and challenges encountered in the new country (Liu & Lee, 2008). The different stages of the curve suggest a progressive understanding of the culture and the perceived quality of living in the new country. These understandings and perceptions can help expatriates and their employers explain and make sense of the ongoing adjustment process. The needs of the expatriate can thereby be anticipated, and improvements can be made for future expatriate training and support programs.

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The Problems of Selecting and Supporting Appropriate Candidates

The success of any expatriate assignment in China depends upon:

- effective candidate selection;
- pre-departure preparation and training; and
- ongoing cultural adjustment assistance.

Substantial short- and long-term costs can occur for organizations with ineffective candidate-selection techniques and that neglect cultural adjustment preparation and support for candidates aiming to live and work in China. Associated costs include moving personnel and their families to and from China, salaries received while trying to adjust to Chinese cultures, and the cost of the expatriates’ poor performance on the Chinese operations. Such costs are of particular concern for organizations that send expatriates to China with its high expatriate failure rates. Some researchers argue that improved selection techniques and comprehensive in-country cultural training would improve the effectiveness of expatriates in foreign assignments (Hutchings, 2003). However, selection and training programs that incorporate cross-cultural components are rare or ineffective.

Failure of foreign assignments in China generally occurs in relation to one or more of the following factors:

- ineffective initial selection methods for the assignment;
- ineffective or nonexistent China-specific cultural adjustment training;
- inadequate or no ongoing help with daily cultural adjustment; and
- lack of a motivating, career-advancing plan for the expatriate after completion of the assignment (Stroh et al., 2005).

Exhibit 2 provides a framework for addressing these factors and illustrates the components of an effective international assignment. The framework’s pertinence to China is given particular emphasis in this article. Exhibit 2 also illustrates the strategic importance of using foreign assignments for developing effective global leaders who can lead their organizations through periods of international expansion. Effective global enterprises also have clear strategies for preparing expatriates for more than just one international assignment as a key

Exhibit 2. Effective Expatriate Development Cycle (Adapted from Stroh et al., 2005)



component of developing knowledgeable and experienced global leaders.

Criteria for Selecting Appropriate Candidates

When selecting candidates for assignments in China, it is important to recognize that effective past performance in Western-country contexts may not be a predictor of effectiveness in China. Although past performance is an important consideration for selecting candidates, Western management styles differ dramatically from the Chinese management styles found in China. Western management styles and practices are typically governed by legal and organizational rules and regulations and are commonly driven by the directive of maximizing shareholder wealth. Chinese management styles, in contrast, are primarily governed by Confucian ideals that value relationships and the maintenance of interpersonal and societal harmony. In the Confucian context, relationships are more important than the maximization of shareholder wealth. Although Western and Chinese managers share common day-to-day organizational processes, their managerial styles, and the ideologies that govern those styles, are fundamentally different (Lund & Barker, 2007).

Fernandez and Underwood (2006) identify a series of success qualities critical for expatriate managers in China. These qualities are arranged in three levels: (1) professional qualities; (2) personal global qualities; and (3) personal China-specific qualities. Candidates for an assignment in China, for example, are

Exhibit 3. Professional Qualities of Candidates for Assignments in China (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006)

- Level 1: Professional Qualities
- Solid technical and corporate expertise
 - Proven management experience
 - Ability to manage difficult situations
 - International experience
 - Willing to accept a longer-term position in China

most suitable if they can first prove their professional qualifications in other foreign assignments, thereby demonstrating their personal ability to work in challenging international environments. Prior international experience in developing countries in particular can help the candidates adapt to the unique cultural and business challenges of China. Any prior positive experience in China is also an advantage. We also add to this list a necessary fourth set of criteria related to the candidate’s personal traits and family circumstances.

Professional Qualities

Candidates’ professional qualities are emphasized first (see Exhibit 3). These qualities include *solid technical and corporate expertise* and *proven management experience* and are important because Chinese employees may have very high expectations of expatriate managers. As Chinese managers gain expertise in global business practices, they expect expatriate managers to contribute to their learning experience with new knowledge and skills. Expatriate managers who do not meet

these expectations may quickly lose the respect of their Chinese colleagues (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006).

The *ability to manage difficult situations* is critical for expatriate managers in China. Every manager must manage challenging situations and relationships with employees, business partners, executives, regulators, competitors, and customers. In China, relationships can be more complex and difficult to manage for expatriates because of distance from headquarters, language barriers, and a vast array of cultural differences that may vary from region to region. An expatriate manager, for example, who does not understand the important structures, protocols, and interpersonal subtleties of China's intricate system of network relationships will be ineffective in China. Such relationships in China are generally referred to as *guanxi*. In Mandarin, *guan* means "gate" and *xi* means "link." The concept represents a gateway connection between two people created by a link of mutual obligations and benefits. In order to manage difficult situations and complex relationships in China, the expatriate first needs to be aware of the cultural contexts that may be at the root of some difficulties. Cultural training, individual study, and experience over time can help expatriates in China to be better equipped to manage any challenging situations.

Prior *international experience* can help predict an expatriate manager's effectiveness in China. Managers who have a realistic understanding of the difficulties that may arise managing in foreign cultures, from their own international experience, will be better suited to adjusting more quickly to the uniquely challenging Chinese business environment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). Because of the time and effort required to adapt to living and working in China, it is also suggested that expatriates be *willing to accept a longer-term position in China*. Expatriates with assignments of less than three years tend to invest less effort into adapting to local cultures and

Exhibit 4. Personal Global Qualities of Candidates for Assignments in China (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006)

Level 2: Personal Global Qualities

- Multicultural mind-set
- Commitment to learn
- Able to detect and understand change
- Listening skills

languages, knowing that they will soon be leaving for another assignment (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006).

Personal Global Qualities

Personal global qualities are also essential for expatriate managers in China (see Exhibit 4). The first two of these qualities are a *multicultural mind-set* and a *commitment to learn*. The multicultural mind-set is the willingness to recognize the limitations of one's own culture and adapt to elements of the host country's culture. In China, this adaptation involves a commitment to learn about the country's deeply rooted cultures and business practices and to avoid preconceived ideas about how to function in the new culture. To be effective in China, the expatriate manager must be continuously flexible and adaptable to the different business cultures that vary from region to region (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006). Such adaptability, however, does not mean giving up one's home-country business culture to adopt local business cultures. Rather, it is the ability to find a workable balance of the business practices between the home country and those found in China. Expatriates need to use their own judgment, based on their past experiences, skills, and training, to find a suitable cultural balance that is effective for them in China.

A strong commitment to learn means that expatriate managers need to spend considerable effort learning about Chinese national and regional cultures and about their influence on social and business behaviors in China. This type of commitment is more

likely to occur among expatriates who sincerely enjoy living in China and engaging with its people and cultures, know that they will stay a relatively long time, and are keenly aware that their future careers depend upon their effectiveness in China (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006; Hutchings, 2003). Learning about the influence of culture on local and national Chinese behaviors also helps the expatriate to understand social and economic changes as they occur in China.

Being *able to detect and understand change* is critical for expatriate managers in China's fast-growing markets, because they need to find effective ways to keep informed about cultural, social, and economic developments as they occur. *Active listening skills*, therefore, are essential for learning about China's complex social and business cultures (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006). The expatriate managers need to continually listen and sincerely try to understand the intentions and expectations of their Chinese customers and colleagues. Such sincerity can also generate a degree of respect for the expatriate from the Chinese customers and colleagues. Once an expatriate manager understands the most effective ways to manage people in China, deal with local markets, and engage with customers, he or she is ready to begin developing effective strategies for growing the organization's Chinese operations. Learning, sincere listening, and understanding, therefore, are essential for expatriates wanting to operate effectively in China.

Personal China-Specific Qualities

Expatriate managers in China also need to adopt attitudes of *humility and patience* rather than the directive approach commonly applied by Western managers (see **Exhibit 5**) (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006). Directive approaches impose ideas on peers and subordinates. Subtle styles that involve indirect influencing and coaching are more effective in China. Expatriates using aggressive management styles in China tend to be ineffective (Lund & Barker, 2007). Aggressive, directive styles promote

Exhibit 5. Personal China-Specific Qualities of Candidates for Assignments in China (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006)

Level 3: Personal China-Specific Qualities

- Humility and patience
- Maintain own organization's business principles
- Quickly perceive and adapt to changes
- Skill of relationship building (*guanxi*)
- Language abilities (Chinese)

one-sided, win-only scenarios that are not conducive with the Chinese cultural business environment.

Goodwill, for example, can be established in China by showing respect and sincere appreciation for employees, peers, clients, and friends, and by admitting lack of knowledge in certain areas. Patience is essential in order to implement organizational changes in China. It is unlikely that a new expatriate manager could substantially change a Chinese organization's operations or cultures over a short period, as such changes would challenge deeply rooted organizational and social norms. However, if expatriates present themselves with humility and patience as part of a cooperative Chinese team effort, they would more likely gain the support of colleagues for incrementally introducing new approaches. Much patience is also needed for gaining approval from government and organizational officials; in negotiating with clients, suppliers, and distributors; in cooperating with joint venture partners; and in building demand from Chinese consumers.

Additionally, humility and patience are essential in relation to the time and effort required to begin to understand China's cultural and business environments. Understanding and adapting to Chinese business cultures does not mean simply accepting and adapting local practices. Expatriate managers are also required to maintain the strengths of their own organization's business principles, ethics, and key organizational culture traits (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006). The expatriates, however, can use their cross-cultural skills to find a suitable

balance between adhering to local cultures and maintaining the ethics and values of their home organization.

The ability to *quickly perceive and adapt to changes* that occur continuously in China's business environments is another essential characteristic for managing effectively in China. Changes in government regulations, competition, and consumer tastes can occur rapidly in China. Such market changes are especially poignant in relation to the country's large population, its 2001 inclusion into the World Trade Organization, and its trading influence around the world (www.wto.com). The speed of being able to perceive and adapt to changes is also a key indicator of an expatriate manager's effectiveness in China. The apparent paradox of the need for speed and the need for patience is one that expatriates need to consider, embrace, and comfortably master in order to be effective in China.

Skill of relationship building is particularly important for expatriates, who need to demonstrate an ability and patience for forming and maintaining strong and mutually positive relationships. Key relationships in China (*guanxi*) may include colleagues, business partners, suppliers, government officials, customers, and any other individuals related to the expatriates' business and personal life in China. *Guanxi* exists between families because of kinship ties, between classmates or workmates because of shared history or goals, and between business peers as they assist each other in business matters to varying degrees (Hitt et al., 2002; Luo, 2002).

This skill of relationship building, or *guanxi* development, is critical in China and is one of the most difficult skills for Western managers to learn and use effectively. Building *guanxi* requires a careful balancing between developing positive aspects of a relationship while maintaining one's own ethics and values and the ethics and values of the home organization. Without *guanxi* in China, however, it is nearly impossible to succeed in any business

Exhibit 6. Other Personal and Family Qualities of Candidates for Assignments in China (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Lund & Barker, 2007)

Level 4: Other Personal and Family Qualities

- Emotional maturity
- Maintaining organizational and cultural harmony
- Establishing and nurturing hierarchical relationships
- Supportive family and/or spouse relationships
- Adaptability of the family
- Gender

context (Lund & Barker, 2007). The importance of *guanxi* can even surpass the value of having Chinese-language abilities in many business and social contexts. While translators can always be used to bridge language barriers, *guanxi* necessarily requires direct personal involvement and is essential for nurturing and maintaining effective business relationships in China.

Chinese-language abilities, of course, provide a clear advantage for any expatriate manager in China. Although translators and interpreters may be available and Chinese colleagues and clients may speak varying degrees of English, expatriates can gain considerable respect and acceptance in China by speaking at least basic levels of Mandarin (Stroh et al., 2005). Such acceptance may in turn open doors of opportunity for *guanxi* relationships and business ventures that would otherwise be inaccessible to the expatriate.

Personal Traits and Family Circumstances

Assessing candidates' professional qualities, work history, and Chinese-language abilities, if any, is relatively easy through résumés and references. Determining personal qualities (see Exhibit 6), such as the ability to adapt and thrive in different cultures and one's capacity for tolerating high levels of ambiguity, is more difficult.

Emotional intelligence, or *emotional maturity*, is stressed in recent studies as a key indicator of a candidate's capacity for adjusting to a foreign culture.

Emotional maturity encompasses the ability to assess and express one's own emotions; management of emotion in one's self and in others; the capability to channel one's emotion to promote intellectual and emotional growth; and the capacity to generate appropriate emotions to assist in problem solving (Avril & Magnini, 2007). A candidate's emotional maturity can be assessed during the recruitment stage by applying hypothetical scenario-based questions designed to test the candidate's behavioral responses. Other assessments include asking candidates to recount their past behaviors in relation to cultural-related circumstances at work. Although emotional maturity is necessary for expatriate managers to be effective in China, few recruiters are adequately trained to test and interpret emotional maturity.

In a study exploring the effectiveness of expatriate managers in China, Lund and Barker (2007) find that expatriates' effectiveness is most positively influenced as they *maintain organizational and cultural harmony* and *establish and nurture hierarchical relationships* at all levels within their organizations in China. These findings reflect the Chinese Confucian ideals of individual virtue, interpersonal harmony, and societal order, which are integral to life in China (Bond, 1991). Such ideals are reflected in one of the more deeply ingrained Confucian teachings in China that identifies the five most important hierarchical relationships by which humans ought to abide. In descending order of importance, these relationships include sovereign with subject, father with son, husband with wife, elder with younger, and friend with friend (Fan, 2000). Each relationship is coupled with a corresponding principle governing that relationship. These principles include loyalty and duty, love and obedience, obligation and submission, seniority and model subject, and trust (Fan, 2000). Expatriate managers in China need to have at least a basic understanding of these principles in order to begin to understand the deeper foundations of Chinese culture. A deeper understanding of the culture in turn leads to a greater

understanding of how to adjust, adapt, and thrive within Chinese society.

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The effectiveness of expatriate managers in China is also positively related to the extent to which the expatriates have *supportive family and/or spouse relationships* in China (Lund & Barker, 2007). For this reason, it is important to consider the family status of candidates, with particular attention to their spousal relationship and, if they have children, on the entire family's likelihood of being able to effectively adapt to living in China. Along with the *adaptability of the family*, the candidates' *gender*, *age*, and *family situation* may also influence their suitability for a posting in China, depending upon the extent to which they are involved or expected to be involved with the daily care of their family (Adler, 2002). Selecting the most suitable expatriate candidates, therefore, needs to be a holistic process that involves both personal and family factors as well as technical and work-related considerations.

A Method to Promote Successful Expatriate Assignments in China

Based on these criteria, we propose the following process to help global enterprises select, train, and retain suitable candidates for foreign assignments in China. This method stresses the strategic importance of managing assignments before, during, and after the posting in order to provide long-term benefits for both the expatriate and the enterprise.

The Selection Process

Selecting the most suitable candidate for an assignment in China can be a challenging and complex process. The likelihood of selecting the most suitable candidate is increased in relation to the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the professional and

personal information provided about each candidate. The selection process is also dependent upon the quality of the assessors and the selection techniques that they apply. A well-designed, well-implemented selection process is one that assesses a candidate's work-related materials and personal qualities and allows the candidate and the spouse or family, if any, to demonstrate their abilities and aptitudes for adapting to Chinese society (Black et al., 1991). Where feasible, it is important to conduct interviews with both the candidates and any accompanying family members in order to assess the entire family's suitability for living in the new culture.

A well-designed, well-implemented selection process is one that assesses a candidate's work-related materials and personal qualities and allows the candidate and the spouse or family, if any, to demonstrate their abilities and aptitudes for adapting to Chinese society.

Interview questions during the selection process should focus, in part, on the assessment of emotional maturity traits in order to predict whether the expatriates and their family members will be able to adjust effectively to the assignment, and to cultures in China (Avril & Magnini, 2007). These traits include (Avril & Magnini, 2007):

- **Tolerance for ambiguity:** They must have the ability to function in situations with unclear rules and parameters where contexts, relationships, and processes may not make immediate sense to them.
- **Low goal and task orientation:** They must be patient and realistic with task and goal targets and not be oriented toward quick results that can lead to disillusionment and frustration.
- **Open-mindedness:** They must be receptive to diverse ideas and actively listen to others' points of view.

- **Tolerance for differences:** They must have the ability to recognize and accommodate differences in others and be able to live in close proximity with people who may have behaviors and beliefs fundamentally different from their own.
- **Communicativeness:** They must be able to communicate and express themselves clearly in a way that welcomes discussion and feedback.
- **Empathy:** They must acknowledge and appreciate how others feel about certain situations and be able to identify with them intellectually and emotionally.
- **Flexibility:** They must have the ability to continuously consider alternate ways of doing things.
- **Curiosity:** They must demonstrate a sense of cultural adventuring and a willingness to try doing things in a new and different way.
- **Warmth in relationships:** They must be socially adaptable and possess abilities for socializing with new people in unfamiliar contexts.
- **Motivation:** They must be self-motivators and self-supervising, able to work in unstructured environments.
- **Self-reliance:** They must demonstrate a strong sense of resourcefulness and self-awareness in a way that allows them to confidently deal with situations in which results may be ambiguous.

Interview processes that are able to assess some or all of these emotional maturity traits will help ensure that the most suitable candidates are selected. Labor and privacy laws in some countries may preclude spouses and family members from being interviewed. Such preclusion increases an organization's risk of hiring a less suitable candidate. This is an important consideration, because the inability of expatriate spouses and families to adapt to new-country cultures is a primary factor of expatriate failure (Adler, 2002).

Pre-Departure Cultural Training

Once selected, candidates enter a training process designed to prepare them for their new tasks and inform them of the standards by which their

performance will be evaluated. A continuous feedback process between the candidates and the organization helps to ensure that candidates clearly understand their new roles in the organization. Effective training for assignments in China includes four basic elements: a standardized orientation to the organization; an integrated induction into the organization's physical and cultural environments; task-based training; and China-specific cultural training (Hutchings, 2003). Such training helps alleviate any ambiguity the candidates may have about their roles in the organization.

Effective training for assignments in China includes four basic elements: a standardized orientation to the organization; an integrated induction into the organization's physical and cultural environments; task-based training; and China-specific cultural training.

Pre-departure cultural training helps the candidates understand and anticipate cultural challenges that they may encounter in China. Such training also helps to instill realistic expectations and open-mindedness toward the new country and business environments. China-specific training includes components about Chinese business culture, social and business etiquette in China, Confucian interpersonal communication styles, intercultural conflict resolution, and how to develop business relationships or *guanxi* (Hitt, Lee, & Yucel, 2002; Hutchings, 2003). Family members joining the expatriate in China should also participate in cultural training to prepare them for life in China and their role in supporting the candidate. By anticipating adjustment challenges before they occur, initial in-country adjustments and culture shocks can be minimized (Selmer, 2001).

Effective pre-departure training programs must be reasonably manageable without being overly comprehensive. Excessive information can be

overwhelming and discouraging for some candidates and their families. Along with culture-specific training, basic understanding of China's long history is useful, as is a general knowledge of the country's economic reforms of recent decades and the influence of these reforms on China's economic growth. Without firsthand experience in China, however, candidates may find it difficult to contextualize certain historical, political, and social information (Stroh et al., 2005). Once in China, such information can help the candidates make sense of their new and unique experiences in the country. Postarrival training then becomes essential in order to help ease day-to-day life processes such as shopping, taking local transportation, speaking and understanding basic phrases, finding familiar or palatable food, and engaging in social etiquette (Hutchings, 2003).

Helping Expatriates Adjust in the New Country

We noted previously that the U-Curve theory shows that adaptation to a new environment is an ongoing process. While pre-departure cultural training is critical for helping to ensure a smooth and effective start in China, rigorous in-country training is the most effective, due to its immediate relevance (Hutchings, 2003). Furthermore, regional cultures across China differ considerably from one another and any cultural training, pre- or postarrival, needs to consider these differences. While concepts conveyed during pre-departure training may be difficult to comprehend, motivations for learning local cultures increase after arriving in China due to the immediate need to survive and thrive in the region. The candidates' (now in-country expatriates') initial encounter with the new work and living environments also provides a foundation from which they and their families can begin to learn and understand the region's deeper cultural values, norms, and behaviors. Such understanding can then be applied practically during their daily interactions as they experience the unique adjustment challenges of living in China (Stroh et al., 2005).

To reduce the risk of assignment failure, it is important that expatriates and their families also receive strong social support from Chinese colleagues, where possible, to help their initial adjustment proceed smoothly (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Such support is particularly important, as expatriate failures tend to occur within the first six to 12 months of an assignment (Lund & Barker, 2007). Social support may include help with basic daily necessities such as housing, schooling, shopping, assistance finding employment for spouse and teenage children if requested, and the introduction of the whole family to leisure, social, and cultural activities.

Although the need for pre-departure and in-China cross-cultural training and ongoing social support is paramount, organizations commonly neglect such training and support when sending managers to foreign postings. Training programs that do exist tend to be ineffective, designed and run by unqualified individuals appointed by their organizations (Hutchings, 2003). Some organizations are unwilling to risk investing in cultural training and support programs because of historically high expatriate failure rates (Hutchings, 2003). Although this is a circular argument, there also exists the problem of how to develop an effective cultural training program and who would be best qualified to design and implement it.

Regardless of such challenges, it is ultimately the responsibility of the organization to provide the most effective training that is within the organization's means to provide. Expatriates and any accompanying family members, likewise, have a responsibility to proactively seek out and learn as much as they can about China and its cultures before arriving in the country and going through the adjustment process.

Motivating Expatriates for the Next Global Assignment

Along with understanding the adjustment process, a deeper insight is also needed for how to continually motivate expatriates for further assignments in China and for their subsequent global

assignments. To pursue effective global strategies, organizations need both culturally adaptive managers in foreign offices and home-country managers who possess comprehensive and firsthand understanding of global markets and individual country cultures. Managers' experience-based understanding and expertise is particularly important when dealing with the rapidly developing markets and deeply ingrained cultures of China. Motivating qualified managers to accept assignments in China and other countries is a critical investment and a key component in the development of an organization's long-term global strategy.

To pursue effective global strategies, organizations need both culturally adaptive managers in foreign offices and home-country managers who possess comprehensive and firsthand understanding of global markets and individual country cultures.

Motivations for expatriate managers typically involve monetary or promotion-based benefits that can vary widely depending on the organization, the location of the assignment, and any industry compensation norms that may exist. Expatriate managers also need to have a clear understanding of how their performance during an assignment in China benefits their own personal career and life goals. Expatriates that perceive long-term benefits to themselves and their family will more likely accept additional assignments in China or elsewhere (Adler, 2002). With each foreign assignment, the expatriate's potential for becoming an effective global organizational leader is enhanced.

Developing Effective Global Leaders

Global strategic advantage is increased among organizations that recognize, reward, and utilize the wealth of firsthand experience offered by expatriate managers returning from foreign assignments. Such managers can be developed and nurtured into

effective global leaders. Returning expatriates, also referred to as “repatriates,” offer unique and valuable insights about foreign subsidiaries, competitors, markets, and national and regional business cultures, norms, and behaviors. Repatriates who feel their experiences are appreciated and strategically utilized by their organizations tend to have higher commitment levels, as they may be keen to share what they have learned in China (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992). Assignments designed for repatriates, therefore, need to actively appreciate and utilize the repatriates’ international and China-specific experiences and insights and nurture their current and future leadership potential.

Repatriates who feel their experiences are appreciated and strategically utilized by their organizations tend to have higher commitment levels, as they may be keen to share what they have learned in China.

Managers with prior work experience in China, predictably, are more likely to adjust more effectively to the cultural and organizational environments of any subsequent assignments in China. Expatriates who adjust well in China, however, and who willingly accept additional assignments in China are rare (Lund & Barker, 2007). It is critical, therefore, that the global and China-specific leadership potential of such managers be recognized, nurtured, and utilized for the development of future global strategies.

Conclusion

Selecting the most suitable candidate for an assignment in China is a challenging yet critical component of an organization’s global strategy. The most suitable candidate is one who rigorously maintains or increases the effectiveness of organizational strategies as they proceed through the selection stage to the point of returning to the home country after the

China assignment. Effective expatriates are developed and nurtured through:

- rigorous candidate-selection techniques;
- pre-departure and postarrival culture-specific training for candidates and their families; and
- the provision of daily-life social supports once in China.

Organizational global strategies can benefit from expatriates’ valuable China experiences as the expatriates share their wealth of knowledge within the organization during and after their assignments. Managers who have completed effective assignments in China, thereafter, can be utilized as experienced organizational global leaders and mentors in the home country, other countries, or additional assignments in China.

With the high expatriate failure rates, and the unique cultural challenges associated with working in China, well-managed and fully integrated selection, support, and end-of-assignment reintegration programs are critical. Organizations can utilize the rigorous research-based model proposed in this article as a guide to enhance the strategic effectiveness of foreign assignments in China. In summary, the key elements of the model include:

- the selection process of Fernandez and Underwood (2006);
- the critical expatriate qualities proposed by Avril and Magnini (2007);
- the expatriate effectiveness prescription offered by Lund and Barker (2007); and
- the preparation and adjustment insights proposed by Stroh et al. (2005).

Future research can further test, validate, and confirm the model’s benefits in order to continually develop its strategic importance for promoting the effectiveness of any challenging expatriate assignment in China.

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