On-Site Adjustment Support for German Expatriates in the Republic of Ireland: An Exploratory Study

Thomas Hippler[1]

Introduction

Given the favourable investment conditions of comparatively low corporate taxes and a reasonably well skilled but - in a Western European context - still less expensive labour force, it is unsurprising that the Republic of Ireland continues to attract a considerable amount of foreign direct investment (FDI). The number of companies supported by the Irish Industrial Development Authority (IDA), whose task it is to attract mobile international investment to Ireland, has continuously grown from 670 in 1987 to 1117 in 1997 (IDA, 1996, 1997).

Among the overseas investors in Ireland, Germany is the second most important (German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 1997). Depending on the definition employed, there were about 230-250 German companies in Ireland in 1997 (German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 1997; O'Mahony, 1997). The number of IDA supported German companies grew from 117 in 1994 to 151 in 1997 (IDA, 1994, 1997). The year 1997 saw the highest level of German inward investment into Ireland ever recorded. Around 17 new greenfield projects and 10 expansions of existing operations were secured by the IDA (German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, News Release, 7 October 1997). A 1997 survey among German investors in Ireland found the corporate tax rate, manufacturing costs and financial packages/incentives to be the three most important location advantages of the country. The vast majority of German inves-

[1] University of Limerick, Ireland

tors increased their investment in Ireland between 1994 and 1997 and another 62 per cent plan to do so over the next three years (German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 1997). Between January 1998 and January 1999 eight new projects with a volume in excess of IR£100m have been announced (IDA, 1999). Ninety-eight per cent of all German investors surveyed endorsed the Republic of Ireland as an investment location (German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, 1997).

Entering a foreign environment

In most cases internationalisation involves the establishment of a temporary or permanent presence in a country other than that in which the company is based, bringing with it a need for international managers. Horsch (1995) found that 11 of the 20 German multinational companies (MNCs) he interviewed expected an increasing need for expatriates in their overseas operations within the next ten years.

Once the decision to use parent-country nationals (PCNs) has been taken, a structured expatriate management approach, including procedures for selection, training and support (predeparture, on-assignment and re-entry) of expatriates, should be developed (cf. Figure 1).

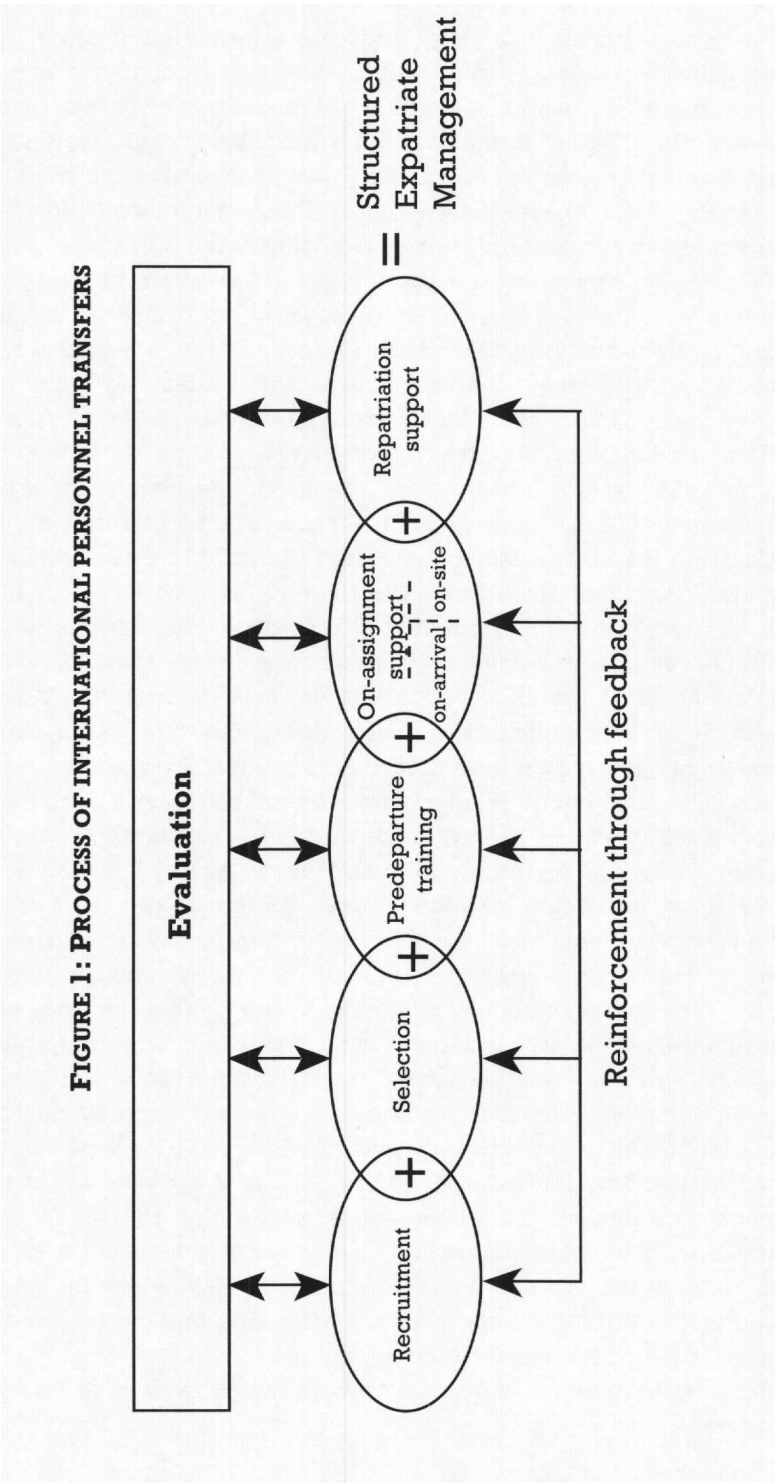


FIGURE 1: PROCESS OF INTERNATIONAL PERSONNEL TRANSFERS

The 'on-arrival' and 'on-site' support in particular deserve greater attention than they are usually accorded in practice. Arriving in a foreign country, an expatriate enters a socio-cultural environment which is entirely different to that which he grew up in, has been educated and trained in and has lived and worked in. This new environment consists of numerous challenging variables such as a different work environment (workforce structure, management style, decision-making process, motivation), a different private sphere (accommodation, acquaintances, leisure facilities, isolation), different social realities (family structures, structure of human relations, social hierarchy, wealth and poverty), different norms and values (right and wrong, good and evil, law, religion, ethics), different educational values (traditional education, autonomy, dependence), a different factual culture (type and style of construction, art, traditional technologies) and a different economy (Löber, 1992). A successful assignment is dependent upon the ability of the expatriate to adjust to these critically important variables. Adjustment has been defined by Dawis et al (1964: 8) as "the process by which the individual (with his unique set of abilities and needs) acts, reacts, and comes to terms with his (...) environment." But coming to terms with the new environment is not necessarily unproblematic. On encountering the foreign environment, the expatriate may experience disorientation, foreignness and sensory overload (Louis, 1980). He may be unable to cope with these experiences because of disillusionment, the unfamiliarity with local practices or the inability to speak the language (Tu and Sullivan, 1994). Because of the inability to cope, the expatriate may experience acute stress which can manifest itself in embarrassment, disappointment, frustration, impatience, anxiety, identity confusion and/or anger. These stress manifestations can result in physical and psychological responses like ulcers, chronic high blood pressure, migraine, asthma, eczema, sleeplessness, oversleeping, stomach disorders, change in sexual drive, depression, lack of motivation, homesickness, alienation and even substance abuse (Adler, 1991; Coyle and Shortland, 1992; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1988). In order to avoid the potential dangers of maladjustment, a number of adjustment support practices have been suggested. The support practices for on-arrival and on-site support involve ongoing familiarisation with the new environment through continued language training and cultural and social environment awareness training, coupled with practical support in entering this cultural and social environment as well as the work environment.

Even if the extreme negative physical and psychological consequences cited earlier do not manifest themselves, it is likely that a lower level of adjustment to the foreign environment will lead to the expatriate's failure to function effectively (Tung, 1981). It has been established that a rigorous selection procedure and comprehensive predeparture training can help the adjustment process (Tung, 1981). But predeparture training alone can, for different reasons, never be sufficient. Norms and assumptions collectively shared and interactively emergent in the new environment are usually not expressly codified but unconsciously enacted (Louis, 1980). This information cannot easily be transmitted as part of any written information or through, for example, role-play and simulation. Thus, any predeparture training is typified by its general character or orientation. The norms and values of micro-cultures (such as a team in the organisation at the foreign location) cannot be fully anticipated and on-assignment support has to provide for specific information being made available in response to the needs of newly arrived expatriates.

Support at the point of arrival

Whereas the term "on-arrival support" covers a period ranging between the actual point of the arrival and up to three months thereafter (Cavusgil et al, 1992; Harris, 1986) a certain amount of support has to be given *immediately* at the point of arrival abroad. Support at this point has to focus on resolving the immediate living problems. In order to address external, objective differences between the old and the new environment, Cavusgil et al (1992) suggest providing the expatriate family with a documentary on day-to-day issues in the new environment. Harvey (1983) suggests an even more comprehensive country-specific handbook giving information ranging from the philosophy underlying the educational process to where to get your clothes dry-cleaned to how the phone system works and what to do in an emergency.

In cases where the expatriate is accompanied by a non-working spouse, immediately after arrival an additional strain is put on him or her because he or she has to set up the new household while the expatriate tries to settle into the new work environment. To ease this additional strain, Foster and Liebrenz (1977) and also Hays (1972) suggest that the expatriate be granted leave for the first critical week abroad in order to support his or her spouse as it would make a considerable difference to the spouse who is "(...) left at home facing the electrician, the telephone man, little Johnny's new teacher, and a

mountain of mislabelled boxes" (Foster and Liebrenz, 1977: 74). Savich and Rodgers (1988) make a less far reaching proposal suggesting that the expatriate should be granted flexitime at the beginning of the assignment to allow him or her time with the family.

On-arrival social support

A broad variety of social support practices which aim to assist the expatriate in his or her efforts to "make sense" (Louis, 1980) of his new environment have been suggested, including providing information about the nearest congregation of the expatriate's faith, introduction to social clubs like Lion's or Rotary's or an international club for all expatriates, introduction to other company families, introduction to other expatriates of the same country of origin who are deployed at the same location or social event allowances to join social clubs, sport clubs or other kinds of club membership (Adler, 1995; Brewster, 1991; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1988; Wirth, 1992).

Special attention has again to be paid to the expatriate spouse's on-arrival social support needs that are somewhat different from the expatriate's. At least when he or she stays at home to mind the household, his or her environment will differ considerably from the one the expatriate encounters. Whereas the expatriate has to deal mainly with his work environment and children have to deal with their new school environment, the spouse has only little natural "unavoidable" social contact. So social support for the spouse aims to combat the spouse's potential isolation and establish his or her own social network.

In order to promote family independent social contacts, Arkin (1993) suggests the bringing of the spouses of expatriates together. In some cases an international spouses club may exist. Foster and Liebrenz (1977) recommend the company to encourage other company spouses to take an interest in the newly relocated spouse and provide him or her with information about neighbourhoods, schools, local activities and serve as a source of new friendships.

On-arrival work-related adjustment support

The new work environment may be the most promising area for successful adjustment. Technical competence still seems to be the only selection criterion for expatriates broadly used (Mendenhall et al, 1987; Borg and Harzing, 1995; Horsch, 1995). So it is very likely that the expatriate has a superior expert or technical knowledge in comparison with the local workforce. Thus he or she has something "to offer" and can benefit from social support as a mutual, interactive

process. The adjustment support measures in the area of the professional and social work arena suggested include induction by the expatriate's predecessor, a special induction period and buddy systems between newcomer and co-worker (Horsch, 1995; Louis, 1980).

Ongoing on-site social support

In the ideal case the on-arrival support with regard to social integration has proven successful to an extent that no further formal assistance by the expatriate's company is needed; social support has become natural and need not to be arranged for by the company anymore. But at least as a fallback position a local trainer or coach to whom the expatriate can turn whenever he or she experiences severe difficulties with his social environment should remain available. It may also be advisable to continue an orientation on local and/or regional issues as an ongoing information might be grasped more easily by the expatriate than an "all-at-once" event. If events occur that he or she does not understand, an ongoing orientation could help the expatriate to find explanations for those events as they occur.

Adler (1991) emphasises the need for ongoing support for spouses beyond the on-arrival period. According to her, initial on-arrival adjustment support can only bring the spouse to a point "where the foreign environment no longer constantly frustrates her; it does not provide motivation, direction, and a meaning to daily life overseas" (Adler, 1991: 273). Spouses who give up work in order to accompany the expatriate abroad and who are not reemployed might find it especially difficult to create a meaningful life. Arkin (1993) illustrates this problem by citing one expatriate spouse: "Little things become major issues in your life because you've nothing to worry about except your washing machine not working" (Arkin, 1993: 54). A number of activities a 'trailing spouse' could engage in have been suggested in the literature. However, bearing in mind what is generally understood by the term "meaningful life" at the end of the 1990s, these suggestions may seem somewhat naive and outdated. Harvey (1983), for example, suggests that expatriate spouses as a group could engage in joint activity, e. g. for cultural exchange such as assembling a cookbook of their native dishes or producing and selling native handicrafts. As an alternative, he suggests giving the spouse a semi-official role as welcomer for international visitors. Wirth (1992) adds engaging in international schools or school teaching in the expatriate spouse's native language or church work as possible alternative activities.

Ongoing on-site work-related adjustment support

Once the expatriate has gone through the initial stages of work adjustment, the active management of the work adjustment can be replaced by a more passive monitoring of the expatriate's performance and behaviour and minor interventions when necessary. For doing this, two suggestions have been put forward: the appointment of a host-country mentor (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Oddou, 1991; Chowanec and Newstrom, 1991; Wirth, 1992) and supportive on-site performance appraisal. Performance appraisal can be used as a control tool or as a development tool. Used as a development tool, it may reduce the expatriate's uncertainty about "how he (or she) is doing" and may demonstrate areas for potential improvement. An expatriate performance appraisal interview is a conventional one which has been supplemented by the factors deriving from the expatriate's entry into the foreign and culturally different work environment. The expatriate will gradually gain confidence as he or she becomes more and more familiar with the new work environment and the process and criteria of performance evaluation. Based on this knowledge and confidence, the expatriate will be able to make realistic self-appraisals and thus further reduce uncertainty (Louis, 1980).

Language training

Any foreign language speaker who has learnt the language merely at school or in predeparture training will experience considerable differences between what he or she has learnt and what is used in everyday conversation once he or she has entered the foreign environment, no matter what degree of proficiency he or she had achieved before. So ongoing language instruction is important to facilitate casual conversation at the work site (Oddou, 1991) and thus the adaptation process. Casual conversation can be an all-important assistance in the sense making process. Oddou (1991) found ongoing language instruction to be one of the proposals expatriates themselves made with regard to improving their international experience.

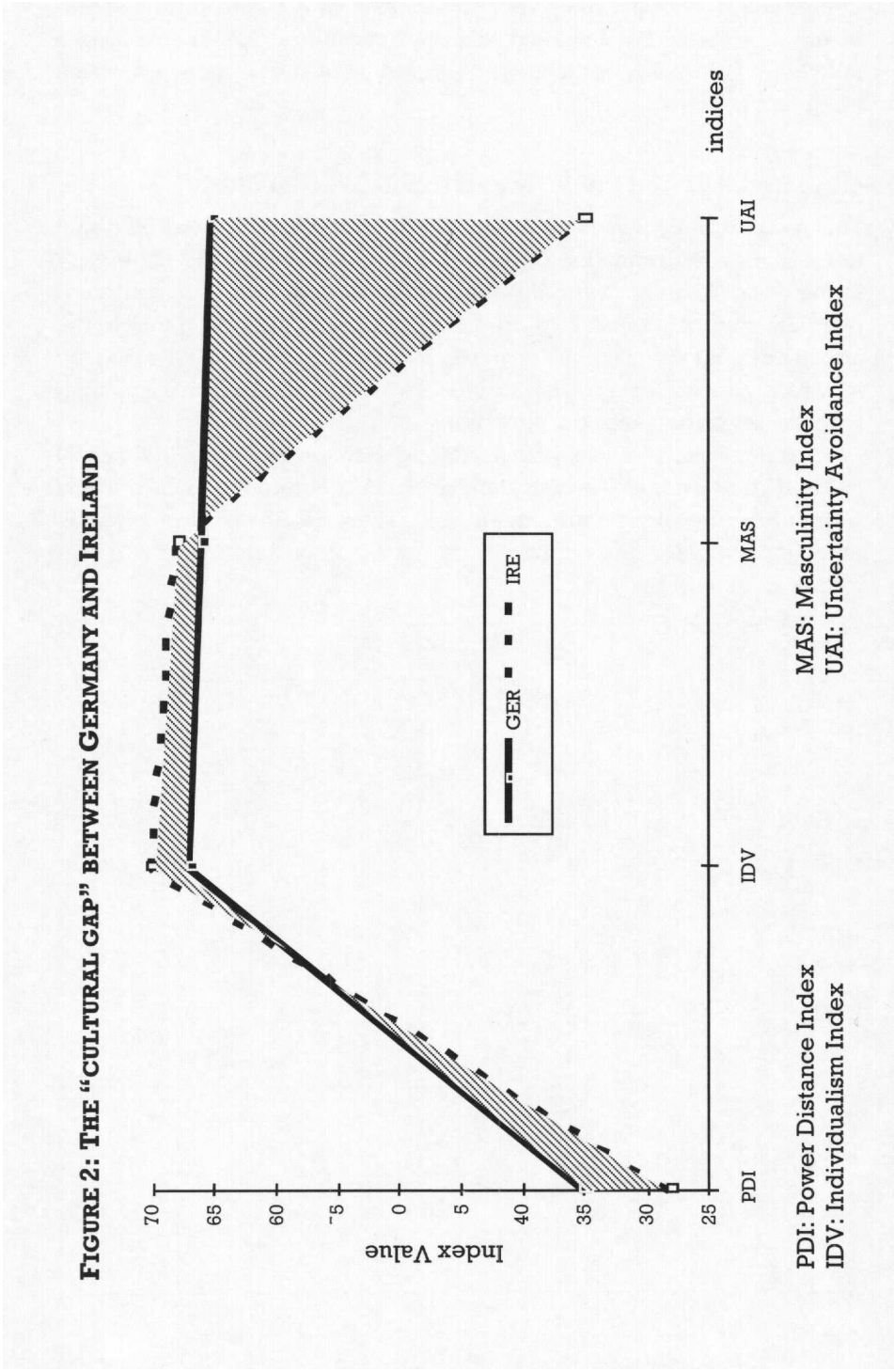
Copeland (1995) points out that again the needs of the expatriate spouse might be different from those of the expatriate him- or herself. For non-working spouses conventional language lessons might not be sufficient as they might lack opportunities to practice the language and thus fight their potential isolation. Inhibition might be another hindrance which leads to even further isolation which again does not allow for practice which leads to further inhibition, etc. To combat this vicious circle, Copeland (1995) suggest the establishment of ongoing

interaction between expatriate spouses and native speakers in small-group structures. For enacting this ongoing interaction she proposes matching volunteers with newly arrived spouses or conversational language courses.

Objectives of and background to the present study

This study was designed to explore what relocation support is given to German expatriates assigned to the Republic of Ireland especially in the areas of on-arrival adjustment support and ongoing on-site adjustment support. It also explored the adjustment support given to the accompanying spouse. Furthermore, it wanted to establish the degree to which those German expatriates and their spouses are satisfied with the relocation support they receive.

Placing Ireland and Germany along Hofstede's (1980) indices of cultural dimensions, Germany and Ireland reach more or less equal scores in three of the four dimensions. There is, however, a remarkable gap between the scores in the uncertainty avoidance (UA) dimension (cf. Figure 2).



This dimension expresses the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. Countries exhibiting high UA maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Low UA societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles and deviance from the norm is more easily tolerated.

Hofstede (1980) used the UA dimension and the power distance (PD) dimension, which expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed unequally, to assign the countries to clusters. The dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance are of a particular importance when organisations (and thus adjustment to an organisation) are concerned. These dimensions affect the structuring and functioning of organisations because they deal with the two central points of any organising process: How to distribute power (who decides about what) and how to control uncertainty (e. g. in the quality of output or for assuring continuity). By transferring the index values for power distance and uncertainty avoidance of all countries included in his survey to a coordinate system, Hofstede (1980) built four clusters (the four quadrants) and labelled these clusters summarising their distinctive features. Using this categorisation, Germany falls into the category of a "well-oiled machine" country where organisations rely on rules, procedures and clear structure, whereas Ireland falls into the category of a "village market" country where organisations rely on ad hoc solutions to problems as they arise and where many of the problems can be boiled down to human relations difficulties.

A German expatriate to Ireland will have to be prepared for working and living in what Hofstede (1980) labels a "village market" culture. If educating or changing the locals is the expatriate's objective, he or she has to know what kind of culture to work with or against. Otherwise the German expatriate is likely to create a lot of rules and procedures and wonder why they are not followed as strictly as he or she presumed and the local Irish on the other hand will wonder why the German so totally relies on formal rules and procedures and is so impervious to any personal approach to do things differently if the situation - in view of the locals - suggests to do so.

Methodology

Research in the area of on-arrival and on-site support is quite rare although surveys have found this stage of the assignment to be one of

the most promising for improving the expatriate experience (Guzzo et al, 1993).

Given that there are no records of Germans entering Ireland as part of an intra-organisational job assignment, it is almost impossible to ascertain the exact number of German expatriates in Ireland as a result of the FDI described above. In order to establish, on an institutional level, to what extent German companies make use of expatriates, an initial 116 companies, which had been extracted from the German-Irish Chamber for Industry and Commerce's "Directory of German Firms in Ireland", were asked to indicate whether there were German nationals within their enterprise assigned to Ireland by their parent company. Of the 82 useful answers produced by these companies, 61 (= 74.4 per cent) declared that they did not use German nationals within their organisation at the time of the survey. Consequently, only one-quarter of the companies surveyed did use expatriates. Twenty-seven expatriates from 21 different companies and 17 spouses, married to assignees from 14 different companies, participated in a questionnaire-based mail survey. Of the 21 companies which produced answers from expatriates, 16 belong to the manufacturing sector and five to the service sector. Only two of the 21 companies were classic "multinationals". The majority belonged to the sphere of small and medium sized businesses.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Expatriates									
Sex		**Age**		**Marital status**		**Service in Ireland**		**Previous overseas experience ≥ 6 months**	
Male	26	≤ 30 years	2	Married/ living with a partner	25	≤ 6 months	2	yes	9
Female	1	31-40 years	6			6-12 months	5	no	18
		41-50 years	11	Single	2	12-60 months	12		
		≥ 51 years	8			≥ 60 months	8		
Spouses									
Sex		**Age**		**Marital status**		**Time since arrival in Ireland**		**Previous overseas experience ≥ 6 months**	
Male	0	≤ 30 years	2	Married	14	≤ 6 months	0	yes	7
Female	17	31-40 years	6	Living with a partner	3	6-12 months	4	no	10
		41-50 years	8			≥ 12 months	13		
		≥ 51 years	1						

After a preliminary analysis of the results, a subset of the initial sample was personally interviewed and field notes taken. This subset comprised eleven expatriates from seven different companies and three spouses, married to assignees from three different companies. Since the interviews could not be tape-recorded, only indirect use of interview data will be made in the subsequent results and discussion sections, rather than using actual quotations. Given the small sample sizes, the results of the present study cannot be taken to be representative. At best they represent a first indicator of what the reality of relocation support is for German employees assigned to the Republic

of Ireland and their spouses and provide some anecdotal evidence of the problems that occur.

Results

TABLE 2: EXPATRIATES' SATISFACTION RATINGS

Area of support	n	very dis -satisfied 1	2	3	4	5	very satisfied 6	M	SD
on-arrival adjustment support regarding the new work environment	25	4	6	6	2	4	3	3.2	1.6
on-arrival adjustment support regarding the new private and social environment	25	6	1	3	1	3	1	2.5	1.4
ongoing adjustment support regarding the new work environment	24	9	1	9	2	3	0	2.5	1.4
ongoing adjustment support regarding the new private and social environment	24	9	7	4	0	4	0	2.3	1.4

On-arrival adjustment support

At least 21 expatriates received work-related on-arrival adjustment support, among which an induction by the expatriate's predecessor was the most often granted. Twenty expatriates got introduced to social support groups such as other corporate families or other local expatriates. The importance of these contacts in particular have been stressed by most of the interviewees. Other support practices broadly discussed in the literature were of minor importance. Only an orientation about local facilities was at least given to a third of the expatriates, but none of them was granted any social event allowances or received any on-arrival orientation about national or regional issues (this corresponds to only three expatriates who got a country briefing prior to departure). An expatriate manual was also a rare feature

among those surveyed in the present study (5 cases). In none of the cases was a relocation agency involved. More people (11) were offered on-arrival language training than predeparture language training (8).

The mean of 3.2 of the reported satisfaction with work-related on-arrival adjustment support is close to a neutral position. Nevertheless, nearly two-thirds of the expatriates rated it rather negative. The mean of 2.5 of the reported satisfaction with on-arrival adjustment support relating to the private sphere is more negative and clearly on the dissatisfaction-side of the scale. Most of the suggestions made by the respondents to the questionnaire and in the interviews were aimed at gathering information, be it from other expatriates, Irish families or other sources.

Ongoing on-site adjustment support

There is hardly any ongoing on-site adjustment support provided at all. Only two expatriates received ongoing on-site language training and the same number received ongoing orientation about national or regional issues. The number of cases (4) in which a mentor of any kind was assigned to the expatriate was rather insignificant. In those four cases where a mentor had been assigned there was no clear preference for any of the different concepts (home country or host country mentor or both). Three expatriates requested a mentor in the suggestions-for-improvement section of the ongoing on-site adjustment support section of the questionnaire. Satisfaction with work-related ongoing on-site adjustment support (mean = 2.5) is considerably worse than for work-related on-arrival adjustment support (mean = 3.2). Only about one-fifth of all respondents chose the "rather satisfied" side of the scale. Nine out of 24 respondents gave the lowest mark of "1" (= very dissatisfied).

Ongoing on-site adjustment support regarding the private sphere was judged even slightly worse (mean 2.3). Only four out of 24 respondents were on the "rather satisfied" side and again nine chose the lowest mark. This again indicates that a majority of the expatriates surveyed saw the support they were offered as thoroughly unsatisfactory.

Amongst the suggestions made by the expatriates to improve ongoing on-site adjustment support, language training for advanced learners was the most often mentioned. Another suggestion was feedback talks at regular intervals.

Spouse adjustment support

At least 16 of the spouses got introduced to social support groups. Among these support groups, other corporate families or spouses were most common (at least 11 spouses were introduced to these). Again an orientation about local facilities was given to about one third of the spouses. Other support practices (social event allowances, on-arrival language training or a counsellor) were of minor importance. None of the spouses was granted an on-arrival orientation about national or regional issues. In seven of those 14 cases in which the spouses stayed at home to run the household, the expatriates were enabled to assist their spouse in setting up the household. Granting the expatriate one to five days leave was the most common practice.

TABLE 3: SPOUSES' SATISFACTION RATINGS

Area of support	n	very dis-satisfied 1	2	3	4	5	very satisfied 6	M	SD
on-arrival adjustment support	15	6	6	1	2	0	0	1.9	1.0
ongoing adjustment support	15	8	5	1	1	0	0	1.7	0.9

Four spouses asked for a contact person who at the beginning of the assignment looks after the newcomers and organises and assists with their entry into the local community. The mean for the reported satisfaction with on-arrival adjustment support was 1.9.

There was no substantial ongoing on-site adjustment support at all. Only one spouse was offered ongoing language training and another one had a counsellor available. This is reflected in the mean of 1.7, which is even lower than the mean of satisfaction with on-arrival adjustment support. The most extreme expression of dissatisfaction (point "1" on the satisfaction rating scale) was the most often chosen rating option (eight out of 15). Thirteen out of 15 chose one of the two most negative options. Only one spouse was rather satisfied.

Discussion

On arrival-adjustment support

The fact that none of the expatriates was given any on-arrival orientation about national or regional issues gives reason for some concern. Several of the interviewees stated that such an orientation would have been of great benefit to them as it would have made it easier for them to get access to the local community. If they had known about the locals' circumstances and the country's current affairs, adjustment would have been easier. The expatriates obviously seek information to combat their insecurity of how to approach the Irish both professionally and privately. Further research would be required into what importance the expatriates ascribe to on-arrival adjustment support in order to assess the present findings against that background. The fact that in none of the cases a relocation agency was involved is equally surprising. Given the size of most of the assigning companies, it is understandable that they cannot operate a sophisticated and well structured predeparture training and on-site support network. So it would have seemed an obvious solution to delegate those tasks to an external relocation service agency. The fact that more people (11) were offered on-arrival language training than predeparture language training (8) is another finding difficult to comprehend. Since no-one can expect an expatriate to perform to his highest potential without being able to communicate properly, starting language training at the point of arrival can result in the expatriate's low effectiveness in the first phase of his assignment. But although on-arrival language training is offered more often than predeparture training, the number of expatriates (11) having been offered this training is still startling. Any relocatee will confirm that no matter what level of language proficiency he or she will have reached in school or training institutions before relocating, the idiom actually used abroad (use of word and phrases, short forms, ascribing different or additional meanings to words, etc.) differs considerably from what has been learned before. So even a good English-speaker needs some monitoring and assistance at least in the beginning of his or her assignment. Several interviewees complained they could not fully participate in communication and felt restricted because of their limited language skills which had reached a 'sound get-by level'. One expatriate who had previously been assigned to the United States stated that, when having arrived at his rural location, he found it extremely difficult to communicate.

The 80 per cent of expatriates who rated the area of on-arrival support related to the private sphere rather negatively suggest that this is a field which requires considerable improvement. Given the suggestions respondents made for improvement, the most promising areas seem orientation about and the introduction to Irish customs and practices and the Irish themselves.

Ongoing on-site adjustment support

Remarkable here are the nine out of 24 respondents who gave the lowest mark in their satisfaction rating. Since respondents usually tend to avoid extreme positions (Moser and Kalton, 1972) those having chosen a "1" on the rating scale must have been very determined in their depreciation of what they were offered. To assess these findings properly, the importance ascribed by the expatriates to ongoing on-site adjustment support would have to be explored. The finding that only in an insignificant number of cases a mentor was assigned, confirms an assessment by Horsch (1995) that there is a huge gap between the significance ascribed to the mentor concept in literature and its actual application. The regular feedback talks suggested by some expatriates might not serve any immediate business purpose, but demonstrate to the expatriate that he or she and his or her needs are not forgotten and may thus improve their motivational state.

Spouse adjustment support

The mean of 1.9 of the reported satisfaction with on-arrival adjustment support indicates considerable dissatisfaction and is even lower than the mean of 2.5 of the satisfaction expatriates reported with regard to on-arrival adjustment support concerning to the private sphere. This finding, supplemented by the interviews, indicates that spouses felt rather neglected in terms of on-arrival adjustment support. This is also reflected in the suggestions made for improving spouse relocation support. The even lower mean of 1.7 for spousal satisfaction with ongoing on-site support and the fact that only one spouse's satisfaction rating was on the rather positive side of the scale can again be interpreted as an indication of perceived neglect. But again it would have to be ascertained how important ongoing on-site support is deemed by the spouses concerned.

Expatriate failure

Because of the rather unstructured approach at the interview stage, the level of analysis does not permit any detailed conclusions. Two of the descriptions ascertained in the interviews, however, seem archetypal for leading an expatriate towards failure. In both cases premature return was imminent, because of difficulties the expatriates had in dealing with the Irish environment. Both reported severe clashes with their respective subordinates. Both perceived their Irish environment as hostile and unreasonable. It seems a reasonable speculation that this perception was - at least partly - caused by their parent companies' attitude towards international personnel transfers and a misconception (or lack of knowledge) of Irish and corporate culture on part of the expatriates. According to the assignees, their company did not know of cultural (work-related as well as general) differences between Germany and Ireland. Furthermore, they explicitly stated that they were not interested in these differences. If there were differences and those were resulting in difficulties, it was the expatriates' task to master them. The attitude of those sending them was "just go and do". This might have been asking too much of the expatriate. An expatriate cannot deal with cultural differences he or she is not aware of. When somebody experiences rejection, he or she instinctively flees to standards and norms of behaviour which he or she thinks can be relied on as generally accepted. In the case of the two expatriates, these generally accepted norms were what they believed to be the corporate culture. Their account of what they retreated to as "corporate culture", suggests the assumption that they mistook German culture for corporate culture. It seems likely that they behaved according to a pattern described by Adler (1991: 58-59): "When they work for a multinational corporation, it appears that Germans become more German, Americans become more American, Swedes become more Swedish and so on..." A so-called "village-market" culture clashed with a "well-oiled-machine" culture. Formalism, strict rule obeying without any space for ad-hoc negotiation, keeping communication factual and addressing one's subordinates as a functional element within a bigger organisation to the benefit of which he or she has to contribute, originates from German history and culture (Schroll-Machl, 1996) and not from corporate culture which itself is rooted in national culture. Without having him or her informed about Irish culture and without having made the expatriate-to-be aware of his or her own culture and the resulting basic assumptions which direct perception and lead to selective perception, sending a German to work in

Ireland is nothing but a gamble. In most cases the "players" won. But in at least two cases they obviously lost. Becoming more and more "correct" and formal, the two German expatriates alienated the Irish workforce more and more, up to the point where in both cases general works assemblies had to be called to ease a highly tense situation which was close to getting out of control.

The crucial moment where it was decided what kind of relationship German executives and Irish employees were to establish was probably at their first encounters. Kitsuse (1992: 35) reports the experiences of an international HR manager: "Employees managing foreign nationals ran into gaps in communication and management style that bedevilled them for months. 'You usually have one chance to make an impression on people (...) and if you're unlucky enough to make a poor one, you have a long time to get over it.'" Without having been informed, the two expatriates were entirely unaware of the situation and had no chance to manage their first encounters consciously.

It has to be emphasised again: The entire scenario just described is entirely speculative. It is also highly unlikely that the failure of the two expatriates is mono-causal. But the conclusiveness of the outlined, mutually amplifying, causes and effects might usefully serve as a warning not to underestimate the importance of cultural awareness in the process of assigning employees abroad.

Conclusion

A vast amount of literature on international HRM (IHRM) nearly exclusively deals with IHRM in MNCs. Most surveys compose their study sample by choosing companies fulfilling certain criteria out of a list of MNCs (see, for example, Horsch, 1995 or Arthur Jr. and Bennett Jr., 1995). But in many regards expatriation is much harder for expatriates of small- and medium-sized companies than it is for those of MNCs. The survey questionnaire was derived from literature on IHRM, i. e. mainly literature about IHRM in MNCs. Several expatriates stated that they had heard of those support practices mentioned in the questionnaire, but that they would be virtually unthinkable in their (small) company. Further research in the area of expatriate management in small- and medium-sized companies (especially from the company's perspective) might reveal further interesting insights. Bearing in mind that according to Steinmann (1989) small and medium sized companies contribute 30-35 per cent of the entire German FDI, such research seems well warranted. It does also seem worthwhile since ex-

patriates of small- and medium-sized businesses face the same problems as expatriates of MNCs do, perhaps even bigger problems. No matter what size the assigning company is, an expatriate has to enter a foreign environment and try to adapt to it. The expatriate of a MNC can (usually) rely on a more or less extensive expatriate community. The expatriate of a small- or medium-sized corporation is more likely to be on his own. Another important question to explore is the importance expatriates in small and medium sized businesses ascribe to relocation support and the support practices in the different areas mentioned.

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