Expatriates and the Performance Management System

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International assignments form an integral part of the life of the church. Even if financial considerations change their scope and direction, they are still vital elements of the organization. The twenty-first century has brought new challenges that call for a fresh look at the issue of expatriation. On one hand, globalization and technological advances make the implementation of the assignment plan easier. The spread of the internet around the globe, the opening up of many countries to outside influences as well as the availability of better equipment and a better equipped workforce in terms of skills allow for a smoother process than before. On the other hand, the existence of dual career couples, knowledge-based management, political crises all over the world, as well as rapid advances in technology raise issues that need to be addressed properly, lest the whole effort of repatriation leads to a waste of resources.

The purpose of this article is an exposé of one aspect of a performance management system as it relates to expatriate management. Concern has been raised about applying to non-profit organizations, church institutions included, an applied system of measures inherent to a typical performance management system. It is stated that not-for-profit organizations differ radically from for-profit institutions because of their inherent value systems. It is argued that the heavy emphasis on measures and results present in performance management programs may divert attention away from the core element of the mission of not-for-profit organizations (Lindgren 2001:285). Yet, these problems are not confined to the non-profit sector only. The for-profit sector faces the same difficulties. Schemenner, Roger,
Vollman, & Thomas (1994:58) use the terms “gaps” to describe the lack of emphasis on what is critical to the organization. According to these authors, gaps come about through a failure to use the right measure. Admittedly, the difficulty of solving these problems is more complex in the case of non-profit organizations because often their mission and values are expressed in abstract terms. Further, often their activities are service oriented and cannot be reduced to numeric figures. Yet performance management, if understood in its totality, can still play a useful role within these organizations.

“ensuring constancy of purpose, clear job descriptions, and clarity of what constitutes a job done well, focusing improvements in areas of priority and so forth.”

Expatriate management studies have focused on various aspects of the employment of expatriates. The hiring, training, and repatriation processes have often been researched separately and/or as a whole (less often) to give an idea of the issues that confront management in this area. On the other hand, very few studies have focused on the link between strategy and performance of expatriate employees. One way of addressing this problem is through an integrated performance management system. Michael Armstrong (1994:41) presents the aspects of an integrated performance management system as follows:

- Clearly communicated links to organizational strategy
- Individual performance goals
- Generation of regular feedback on progress
- Discussion on opportunities for performance improvement
- Establishment of links between performance and rewards

The first aspect deals with employee performance management system. The second aspect addresses the following issues:

A performance management system brings several benefits to the organization. Through its design, management, together with employees, come to a common understanding of the mission of the organization, the expectations of each party, and how to meet such expectations. In fact this alignment between the mission of the enterprise and its activities represents the core of the system. Chennel, Dransfield, Field, Fisher, Saunders & Shaw (2000) state that the principle of alignment addresses the following issues:
nization. Armstrong states that an organization needs to know why it is necessary to send out expatriates. In other words, it needs to constantly revise the significance of the international assignment. As the environment changes, so does the relevance of the strategic move. As organizations move from one stage to another (infancy, adolescence, maturity), the need ranges from very low to very high. It is up to the organization to determine the stage it is at, and to match that stage with the required manpower (Adler 1990).

In the case of the church, for example, one can consider the ground breaking stage (no Adventist presence or a pioneer school or a pioneer hospital, etc.); then the growing stage (new members are baptized, churches grow at an increasing rate, or an increasing number of students, patients, etc.); and the maturity stage (churches are full, a certain level of status quo is reached). Often after that stage, new efforts are made to increase membership again, therefore the volume of church growth will increase but the need for manpower is different than from the initial growing stage. At each stage, a different set of skills is required: technical expertise, mentorship abilities, supervisor, etc.

Related to the above idea, but going in another direction, is the fact that with the political events happening all over the world, new territories are now open to the gospel. Countries differ in many ways from the traditional “fields” visited by missionaries in past decades. Because of such differences, the training methods and assignment styles need to differ too in order to meet the needs of these regions. In the corporate world firms face the same challenge. In a study done by Aahad Osman-Gani, the author deplores the lack of empirical comparative studies on expatriates coming from different places and working in different countries (2000:215). According to him, there is a need for a deeper understanding about comparative expatriate management issues for training and expatriate development purposes. Can that be said in a church context, too?

What are the implications of these stages for the expatriate? First of all, the stages are sequential and need to follow each other to be effective. Even if there may be an overall international strategy, individual units (divisions, conferences, and unions/missions) may still have individual strategies within the broader framework depending on the stage where they are. Some units may need a strong workforce to help in stage 1, others may need only technical or administrative assistance, still others may need expatriates to take over broader responsibilities. Anne Harzing (2001:457) states that expatriate management should therefore not be treated as a one-size-fits-all function but should rather be tailored to the strategic need...
of the unit in terms of selection, training, and appraisal.

As a result, the need for training, support and preparation will vary even within a single company (division, conference, union). Organizations that clearly identify their goals in each stage will have more successful expatriation process, which will result in better international performance of expatriates (Varner & Palmer 2002:9).

The second aspect advanced by Armstrong (1994:41) deals with individual performance goals. Harzing and Christensen (2004:623) state that, in the light of the alignment principle, top management needs to explain the goals and expectations to the missionary based on the needs of the field of assignment. Furthermore, the organization needs to clarify how the individual goals of the expatriate fit into the wider organizational strategy. After all, the worker does have goals, too, and it is not in the interest of the organization to overlook these goals. Why? Because the alignment of the individual’s and organization’s goal greatly encourages the success of the assignment.

The issue of expatriate failure is one that has been extensively researched. It comprises problems such as premature return, low performance, adjustment problems, personal problems, etc. According to Harzing and Christensen, failure of the expatriate may be perceived as such only by the organization, but not by the employee himself/herself (2004:621). For example, an expatriate may perceive his performance overseas as a successful one because he/she has been able to build many churches. Yet from the organization point of view, his/her performance is below par because he has not been able to mentor and train his successor. Clearly, what is called failure is anything that negatively affects the organization, because its goals have not been reached. The employee may perceive to have reached his/her goals but, strategically speaking, this is not enough for the organization. The question then should not merely be: How can we replace a particular expatriate? Rather, management needs to ask the following questions: Is there an alignment between his/her goals and the unit’s goals? Is there something missing in the process that hindered all the goals to converge towards the same mission?

Harvey (1997) cited by McCaughey & Bruning (2005:23) states that expatriate assignment success does not depend only on the individual or only on the organization for both the organization and the individual share responsibility. The part under the direct control of the organization is a position-related issue: the impact of the assignment on the individual, adjustment to the host-country office, assignment duration, and adequacy of training provided before departure. In another
study, Iris Varner and Teresa Palmer argue that training should not focus on meeting the individual goals, whatever they are, but rather it should center on meeting the organization’s goals (2001:9). Clearly, the organization’s goals take precedence. Training should try to match the expatriate’s knowledge, skills, and competencies with the needs of the particular field of assignment. Ideally, it is therefore the responsibility of the organization to discuss with the employee his/her goals before the assignment is finalized in order to make sure that the goals match.

In accordance with the alignment principle, two-way communication is necessary to ensure that the goals of the organization are being carried out. Feedback on the employee’s progress would also help reveal any adjustment difficulties or other kinds of difficulties that might be occurring in the field. An added advantage of this type of communication is that it helps headquarters determine the stages through which the unit is going through so adjustments can be made. Ellen and Claus Harshman (1999:3) went even further by pointing out the ethical dimension that affects both the content and structure of any form of internal communication.

Communication in progressive organizations is designed to help employees understand the business and their role in it. According to Ann Willis, vision and mission provides the foundation for an empowered organization (1999:69). Objectives provide the yardstick for measuring success, and should be put in writing, understood, and posted in plain view. Employees must have an overview of the whole process as perceived by top management. Letting employees know where they are actually contributing and where they can be more

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involved is one way of encouraging improvement. To master the practices of dialogue and discussion is the type of communication that counts in the alignment principle.

Performance management believes in the dynamic nature of the environment where organizations operate. As changes happen and are imposed on organizations, their strategy needs to change accordingly; hence, the activities leading to their strategy need continuous revision. At the same time, the mission or the essence of the organization does not change. It is necessary therefore to have programs in place to constantly remind employees of the significance of the mission as tactics are altered to meet the ongoing objectives. This is where a training center can play a major role in establishing a link between the mission, strategies, and necessary activities that need to be performed. Training should not be confined to predeparture time only, but should be available throughout the expatriate’s assignment.

A fifth aspect pointed out by Armstrong (1994:44) is the issue of reward. The modern workforce is mostly composed of knowledge workers who are techno-savvy, aware of market realities, and have many opportunities to change jobs and careers. Expatriates, through their work experience, acquire a wealth of knowledge, skills, and opportunities. When employees put this knowledge and experience to use in accomplishing the mission of the organization, tangible progress can be observed. In as much as that wealth is valued by the employing organization, the appropriate rewards should follow. These rewards have to be perceived as having value by the employee in order to motivate him/her to stay with the organization. Innovative, dynamic compensation strategies together with recognition should be used to acknowledge the contribution of the employee to the fulfillment of the strategic objectives.

Money is not the only reward even though it is important. Another complementary factor that can enhance compensation strategies is employee development. Giving an employee an opportunity for professional and career growth, tailoring the need

Expatriates are often not satisfied with a company’s internal communication, and feel isolated and cut off from headquarters.
for development according to the stage of the place where he/she is working, and noting their preferences can be a way of enhancing the value of the reward system (Mohapatra, 2005).

Peter Senge in his book *The fifth discipline* describes how an aligned team produces a synergy that is hard to defeat in terms of efficiency (2000:235). He further states that alignment is a prerequisite to team development and empowerment. In fact, according to him, if this precondition is missing, individual empowerment and team development would be counterproductive to the accomplishment of the mission. Senge goes on to explain that this special type of synergy happens within a special type of environment and with the right kind of leadership. In a performance management framework, leadership is the “driver” element that allows clear and visible objectives to be set, quality values to be affirmed, and employees to be rewarded. But just as a ship with a captain but without a crew will not accomplish much, an organization needs to be seen as a whole. Every element has a role to play and needs to play it well. The commission to the church is divine, but the human element has its place in accomplishing it. It is crucial that a partnership between the Supreme Leader and the stewards converge towards one goal: fulfillment of the mission.

**Notes**

1 A system that ensures that the strategies that have been set up are implemented and are producing outcomes that are in the best interest of the stakeholders and in accordance with the organizational vision, mission, and objectives. The results of such an implementation should be translated through specific areas, such as customer satisfaction, financial stability, community well-being, etc. The organization endeavors to manage its resources (human, financial, technological, etc.) in order to bring out the best it can within the limits of its environmental constraints. A systemic approach is needed since all the elements are important for continuous improvement. Improvements are continuous for constant changes call for new strategies and tactics as organizations move towards their overarching goals.

2 A concept whereby every effort within the organization converges towards the accomplishment of the mission and the fulfillment of the initial vision set by the organization. Hence, strategies are geared towards that end so that from the strategies every process and activity contributes to the end with the aid of all available resources. The presence of a monitoring mechanism (such as performance metrics) ensures that such convergence is taking place in a balanced and comprehensive manner.
Works Cited


