The voice of the host country workforce: A key source for improving the effectiveness of expatriate training and performance

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Abstract

Past research in international management has generally failed to recognize the important contributions that can be made by members of a host country workforce (HCW) in achieving success in expatriate-managed operations. This study used exploratory field interviews with 47 host country human resource and middle managers in 45 different subsidiaries owned and operated by parent companies in six different countries to identify major forms of training design input from the HCW that could be beneficial for enhancing the validity of expatriate training. A taxonomy was developed of 10 beneficial training design input categories across three HCW employee levels of operative, supervisory/middle management, and upper management for enhancing the validity of expatriate training and overall expatriate performance effectiveness. These taxonomy categories are described here with illustrations from the field interviews. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

1. Introduction

The globalization of the workforce is one of the most significant trends that will affect workers in the 21st century (Ivancevich, 1998). However, even as national boundaries become increasingly more permeable, and the necessity for successful expatriate adjustment becomes more important, expatriate retention is woefully low. In fact, the failure rate of expatriate employees is quite high as approximately 16–40% of US expatriate employees return prematurely or fail to achieve performance expectations, and 20–25% leave their organizations within a year after

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returning to their home country (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Adler, 1986; Black & Stevens, 1989). While the variously cited 5–10% expatriate failure and premature return rate for non-US expatriates is somewhat better (Dowling, Welch, & Schuler, 1999) it could still be improved. Among strategies for success, such as matching the right people to appropriate foreign assignments, training has been identified as an important intervention to aid in the successful adjustment of expatriates in their foreign assignments (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992).

In fact, considerable work has been done to examine the appropriate kinds of knowledge, skills, and abilities to be included in the predeparture training of expatriates for foreign assignment. This work has recommended the predeparture training of general cross-cultural awareness skills (e.g., Copeland & Griggs, 1985) and more customized training content for the host country assignment, including language, customs, and other general country cultural information (Selmer, 1995). Other work has focused on training methods and processes, such as simulations, for effectively delivering the above knowledge, skills, and abilities to optimize expatriate performance (Black & Mendenhall, 1992, 1990). While this work has made an important contribution to the development of theory and practice, it typically has neglected an important source of input in the design of expatriate training—the voice of the local host country workforce (HCW—inclusive of host country nationals and third country nationals) with whom the expatriate will work.

Apart from the inherent ethnocentricity of this neglect, the value of past approaches to the design of expatriate training may be limited due to their emphasis upon generic principles of cross-cultural awareness, or upon general characteristics of a particular ethnic culture. For example, recent research (Paik, Vance, & Stage, 1996) suggests that management style preferences of workforce members across national boundaries can differ dramatically despite the presence of a common Chinese ethnic cultural background. Past approaches to the design of expatriate predeparture training may not adequately address the specific and unique workplace demands attendant to the expatriate assignment, especially those unique, expatriate assignment-specific workplace demands involved with HCW management and interpersonal interaction.

There may be a faulty assumption underlying this lack of predeparture training in foreign operation-specific or customized management skills related to the expatriate's new HCW management responsibilities. Often it is assumed that since these managers already have proven themselves to be competent on their home turf, they do not need additional training to succeed abroad (Dowling et al., 1999). However, particularly in Western countries, some management skills which work well with workers at home may not necessarily work well when applied abroad. At their level of implementation, management skills and practices are "local" in nature and not independent of the surrounding culture in which they are enacted. Several studies have asserted that traditional US and western-based management theory and principles which guide practice do not really have the universal applicability that their wide usage would suggest (Hofstede, 1980; Vance, Boje, & Stage, 1991; Vance, McClaine, Boje, & Stage, 1992).

To improve the effectiveness of expatriate training, one line of research recommends that the experienced inputs of former expatriates of a particular foreign assignment be used to customize the learning experience for newcomers (e.g., see Bird, 2001). This experience-based input could be advantageous, as it would provide very specific information about the unique work demands of their assignment. However, while this approach makes sense in theory, it has been less successful in practice for several reasons. Often, former expatriates (now repatriates) are quickly reabsorbed back into the HCW with maximum new work involvement and no time for repatriate input. Many times expatriates leave the company altogether, often because of poor company repatriation efforts. Thus, regrettably, the seasoned expatriates' potentially valuable knowledge and experience gained from the expatriate assignment are often not effectively shared within the company headquarters, or they are lost altogether.

However, even where this past expatriate operation-specific experience results in knowledge creation for the benefit of future expatriates assigned to the same operations (Bird, 2001; Kamoche, 1997), this source is still limited by its one-sided perspective. The missing piece of the puzzle is input from those who are managed by expatriates—the HCW. As Vance (1995) has asserted, incorporating HCW perceptions of how management style and particular behaviors affect their work into new cross-cultural training for expatriates could be valuable in ensuring maximum expatriate training validity and ultimate HCW productivity. The present study builds upon this line of thinking by developing a taxonomic model, grounded in field research, of potentially beneficial HCW training design inputs. This model describes how incorporating the perspectives of the HCW can be a valuable approach to increasing the validity of expatriate training and overall performance effectiveness.

2. Method

Open-ended, exploratory interviews, each lasting 30–60 min, were conducted in person and by telephone with 18 English-fluent personnel directors and general managers (10 and 8, respectively) from 16 maquiladora operations (representing ten US, one Korean, and five Japanese multinational firms) located in Tijuana and Mexicali, Mexico; and with 29 US personnel directors and general managers (18 and 11, respectively) employed in eight Japanese, six German, five British, five Korean, and five French foreign-owned subsidiaries located in California, New York, Illinois, and Florida. The HCW in each host-country operation were almost exclusively local nationals of that host country. Thus, a total of 47 different interviews were conducted with HCW representatives from two very different host countries, and who were employed in 45 different foreign subsidiaries with parent company headquarters located in six different countries.

All of the US personnel directors and managers interviewed were US-born, while all of the personnel directors and four of the eight general managers interviewed in Mexico were Mexican nationals, with the other four general managers working in

Mexico being US-born and residing across the border in the US (e.g., in nearby San Diego and Calexico). The number of parent company expatriates assigned to these operations ranged from 1 to 15, and most had a total of 3–5 assigned expatriates with 10–15 host country managers and first level supervisors. The primary purpose of the expatriate assignments appeared to be for strategic control and filling specific staffing needs (e.g., see Ondrack, 1985). The interview data were collected in 1997 by one of the present authors and 12 research assistants, each sample collected by one researcher in one-on-one in-person and telephone interviews.

The size of the subsidiaries varied greatly, with the number of employees in these operations ranging from 45 to 1500. These foreign subsidiaries represented several different industries, including electronics, computer technology, metal parts manufacturing and assembly, consulting, food and clothing manufacturing, banking and financial services, medical and pharmaceutical products, printing, retail, airline, automobile, hotel, and shipping and transportation. Therefore, the sample attempted to reflect considerable breadth to optimize the generalizability of the findings in this study.

The above exploratory interviews examined ways in which input from a HCW could be useful in enhancing the effectiveness of expatriate training and preparation for optimizing expatriate performance. Due to their distinct nature, the three major employee levels of operative, supervisory/middle management, and upper management were examined separately in terms of their particular ''input benefits'' that could contribute to effective expatriate training. Each HCW representative simply was asked to (1) describe the nature of predeparture training of expatriates assigned to their host country operation, (2) describe the kinds of observable performance problems that expatriates they have known tend to have in carrying out their foreign assignments, and (3) identify, if possible, based on personal knowledge or experience, particular potential HCW training design input benefits from each of the three employee input levels that could address these performance problems. Since the purpose of this exploratory field study was only to identify and describe potential HCW training design input benefits and to begin to construct a comprehensive taxonomy, no effort was made to quantify the relative importance of these benefits to expatriates and their organizations nor the frequency with which the benefits occurred (Bailey, 1982).

The notes from the interviews were recorded by hand and were combined and analyzed by one of the authors for evidence of potential input benefits using procedures of domain and theme analysis in taxonomy development (Spradley, 1980; Carney, 1972). Each observation or quote from the notes was assigned a descriptive category of some type of HCW training design input benefit, and then these notes were organized into groups with the same category labels. Some similar category groups were combined under more meaningful and inclusive categories, according to Carney's (1972) ''pragmatic reduction,'' to separate the array of category groups or cells into a smaller number of classification categories. On occasion, labeled notes in a single category group were, upon further analysis, deemed to be sufficiently dissimilar to place them into two separate groups of related but distinctly different categories.

Ten categories of HCW potential training design input benefits finally emerged across the three employee input levels, and are listed in Fig. 1. These ten category groupings were then analyzed for similarities across categories, and finally contrast dimensions were examined through componential analysis for further taxonomy conceptual development. These category groupings and contrast dimensions were reviewed individually by the 12 research assistants to check validity and determine agreement of category development. This approach is common in similar exploratory field studies involving taxonomy construction (Bailey, 1982).

3. Results

In the foreign subsidiaries of this study, most of the expatriates received very little predeparture training for the expatriate assignment. A notable exception was a French computer services firm which provided most of their expatriates with cross-cultural, technical, and managerial predeparture training over 6–12 months. In all cases, however, the personnel directors and managers interviewed believed that the effectiveness of the learning processes, formal and informal, contributing to the

**Potential Host Country Workforce Beneficial Inputs for
Enhancing Expatriate Training**

HCW Employee Level	HCW Input Categories
Operative Level	• General HCW management style preferences
	• Information about workplace norms and preferences *specific* to the assignment
	• Critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions
	• Socioeconomic context
Supervisory & Middle Management	• Critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions
	• Experience-based input for design of expatriate training
	• Mentoring as a form of on-the-job coaching
Upper Management	• Experience-based input for design of expatriate training
	• Input for design of diversity and cross-cultural awareness training for parent company (e.g., delivered at MNC headquarters)
	• Integration of parent company strategic planning and goals with needs of host country operation to form more realistic expatriate goals and performance expectations

Fig. 1. Potential host country workforce beneficial inputs for enhancing expatriate training.

training of the expatriates they worked with could be greatly improved. The expatriate training that was provided generally consisted of host country language instruction and very general concepts about the host country culture. But this training is very basic and generic in nature (e.g., Copeland & Griggs, 1985), and is typically provided by external trainers specializing in general host country culture.

We now will describe and provide examples of each of the ten potential HCW input benefits for improving expatriate training effectiveness that were identified in this study. Commonalities among the categories within each of the three employee levels will be addressed, as well as distinguishing characteristics or contrast dimensions that make each category unique within its employee level.

3.1. Operative level

Four major categories of potential input benefits were identified at the operative employee level: general HCW management style preferences, information about workplace norms and preferences specific to the particular expatriate assignment, critical incidents of past interactions between the expatriate and host country employees, and the socioeconomic context. Each of these categories relates to the specific world view and belief system of the particular HCW corresponding to an expatriate assignment.

3.1.1. General HCW management style preferences

As suggested by previous research, specific subsidiary data based on recent surveys of HCW operative employee expectations regarding management style preferences would be useful to include in the design of training of expatriates for a given foreign operation (Vance et al., 1991). It is increasingly being recognized that there is not a universal appropriate leadership approach or management style for all national cultures, and it is important that management practices and behaviors fit the expectations and preferences of a given culture to encourage productive interactions (Vance & Ring, 1994). For example, the HCW of a Southern California branch of a British computer services firm reportedly prefers and reinforces an informal, flexible, egalitarian-working atmosphere. Unless appropriate predeparture expatriate training is provided to fit the local culture of this particular work site (which of course could differ dramatically from more formal working atmospheres in other industries and work sites in Southern California), this preferred HCW management style and work atmosphere likely will continue to cause difficulty with British expatriates, who were described as generally accustomed to a much more formal working atmosphere and a rigid hierarchical structure and chain of command.

3.1.2. Information about organizational norms and preferences specific to the particular expatriate assignment

Although general information about HCW management style preferences can be useful in preparing an expatriate for an assignment and providing a general framework for understanding a culture, it is possible that norms and preferences regarding appropriate managerial practice and behavior can differ considerably

within a given HCW or national culture. For example, past work on organizational culture has demonstrated that many different organizational cultures exist in US HCW work environments (Schein, 1997). Specific information should be obtained from the particular HCW corresponding to an expatriate assignment to help refine broad or general cultural portraits to better fit the specific HCW situation. Of course, expatriates often are noted as carriers, whether conscious or not, of parent company culture to foreign subsidiaries (see Dowling et al., 1999, p. 54). Prior to departure, their clearer understanding of potential clashes between their parent company culture and the *specific* foreign subsidiary culture-based values and behavioral expectations can help to avoid or minimize unnecessary and wasteful conflict, or where foreign subsidiary culture change is desired by the parent company, how this change can be effected most cost effectively.

3.1.3. Critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions

Rather than the general trends in the categories discussed above, training design input from specific critical incidents of effective and ineffective expatriate management behavior involving the operative HCW also could be obtained from interviews with HCW operatives themselves, and from personnel records of past problems. These critical incidents could be very useful in developing very valid case studies and role play scenarios for expatriate training (Paik, Vance, & Stage, 2000; Mohrman, Resnick-West, & Lawler, 1989). In the same British subsidiary mentioned above, British men were reportedly very chauvinistic, and their expressed attitudes and treatment of women within the US HCW was a significant source of conflict and friction. One UK expatriate had to be returned to the home country due to repeated warnings and offenses related to sexual harassment. This kind of experience-based HCW critical incident input therefore would be vital for providing customized predeparture training for British expatriates and avoiding similar costly problems in future.

3.1.4. Socioeconomic context

It also was mentioned frequently in the interviews that in-depth training (both predeparture and on an ongoing, self-study basis) related to the entire socioeconomic context of the HCW would be very beneficial for effectively preparing expatriates for their foreign assignment. This predeparture and ongoing training, much more broad-based and non-work related than the categories above, would deal with HCW language and idioms, labor law, lifestyle and living conditions, food and drink, beliefs, traditions, host country history and economy, and other aspects of the HCW culture. One Mexican personnel director in Tijuana indicated that it would be beneficial learning for his operation's American expatriates, who lived across the border in the US, to go visit the meager, flimsy shacks just a few blocks away where most of the operative level employees lived. He believed that such a first hand learning would increase expatriates' sensitivity to and understanding of the HCWs world, and thereby contribute to their managerial effectiveness in the expatriate assignment.

3.1.5. Supervisory/middle management level

Three major categories of potential training design input benefits were identified at the supervisory/middle management employee level, namely critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions, experience-based input for the design of expatriate training, and mentoring as a form of on-the-job coaching. Each of these categories relates to the frequent and close professional interaction between the higher-level, likely more educated and experienced HCW member and the expatriate.

3.1.6. Critical incidents of past expatriate/HCW interactions

These interviews with HCW managers and supervisors can also expose specific critical incident information, particularly from this employee level's more experienced perspective, which could be used as customized, company-specific lessons learned regarding behaviors to emulate and those to avoid on the part of expatriate managers. These critical incidents could deal with the quality of past expatriate interactions with both operative host country employees as well as the host country supervisors and managers themselves, especially based on their likely closer working relationship. As at the operative level, these critical incidents can be very useful in developing compelling and valid cases and role play scenarios, with company-specific desired behavior examples and non-examples (Reigeluth, Bunderson, & Merrill, 1978) to promote higher-levels of learning among expatriates (Bloom, 1956).

3.1.7. Experience-based input for the design of expatriate training

This level involves employees who have much more experience interacting with expatriates than at the operative level. Their considerable experience takes them beyond the awareness of specific instances or cases that are utilized in critical incident analysis. Interviews with these supervisory and middle management level HCW employees could help identify important general areas of knowledge and procedure for predeparture training which, based upon their overall past experience, lead to successful expatriate performance. Their experience in the foreign operation potentially provides a considerable knowledge base (e.g., Bird, 2001 for his discussion of experience-based tacit knowledge) that should not be ignored if valid expatriate training is desired. From their significant interactions with expatriates leading to the formation of generalized expatriate practice trends, they represent potential "subject matter experts" whose experience can provide a valid resource in a comprehensive needs assessment (Goldstein, 1991; Ulschak, 1983). For example, one American project manager working for a British subsidiary indicated that, based upon her perception of a general trend from her overall experience, British expatriates could greatly improve their interaction with the American HCW by displaying less of what she perceived as arrogance.

3.1.8. Mentoring as a form of on-the-job coaching

HCW managers and supervisors can also serve as ongoing coaches and even mentors to expatriates to help them make decisions which are appropriate for the host country's socioeconomic context, and to maintain positive relations and open

communications with all HCW employees. This form of HCW on-the-job training input, which unlike the previous two categories involves both optimally valid training content for positive training transfer (Wexley & Latham, 1991) and training process, can promote effective ongoing learning for expatriates while early in the field, which is increasingly being considered as the time when the most productive expatriate training occurs (Bird, Osland, Mendenhall, & Schneider, 1999).

A Korean shipping firm in our study formally assigns mentors to employees. This firm provides Korean expatriate mentors for their US HCW managers, as well as provides new Korean expatriates with US mentors. Mentors typically provide three types of support to their proteges, which includes role modeling, vocational or career support, and social or emotional support (Scandura, 1992). Role modeling occurs when the mentor demonstrates appropriate behavior for the expatriate proteges, such as giving critical feedback in a constructive manner. Vocational support enhances the career of the expatriate protege by providing sponsorship, visibility, protection, and challenging assignments (Noe, 1988). In contrast, emotional support includes such activities as a counseling, coaching, friendship, and acceptance (Ragins & Cotton, 1991). Past research has found that expatriates with HCW mentors gained an important source of socialization and support (Black, 1990; Brein & David, 1973).

Not only could organizations formally assign mentors to expatriates such as with the Korean shipping firm, but they also could support and reward the development of informal relationships. Organizational leaders could do this by linking informal mentoring to performance appraisal criteria, sponsoring social events to facilitate interactions among the HCW managers and expatriates, and recognizing efforts of successful pairs.

3.2. Upper management level

Three major training design input benefit categories were identified at the upper management level: Experience-based input for the design of expatriate training, input for the design of diversity and cross-cultural awareness training for the parent company, and integration of parent company strategic planning and performance goals with the existing needs and conditions of the host country operation to form more realistic expatriate goals and performance expectations. Far more than the previous lower employee-input levels, the training design input benefit categories at this level have important implications for organizational learning and development in addition to improved expatriate training. Although contrary to the findings of Ondrack (1985) nearly two decades ago regarding the tendency for North American and European MNEs to use only parent company expatriates as sources of organization development, and more recently with the continued limited and rather ethnocentric focus upon expatriates as the virtually sole source of company knowledge creation and learning through their foreign assignment experience (Bird, 2001; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Kamoche, 1997), there is strong evidence of how input from HCW executives can lead to valuable organizational learning and development and company headquarters.

3.2.1. Experience-based input for the design of expatriate training

As with the supervisory/middle management level, members of the HCW at this level have considerable experience working closely with expatriates in the host country (many of whom might even be their subordinates). In addition, at this executive level, HCW managers may receive considerable experience interacting with parent company headquarters, including years of "inpatriate" experience living in the parent company culture and working at company headquarters (also see Dowling et al., 1999). These executives may now possess a strong conceptual link to parent company corporate strategy and the internal political/cultural environment. From this fuller experience-based perspective they can provide additional useful inputs for the appropriate design of training for expatriates assigned to their own host country operations.

3.2.2. Input for the design of diversity and cross-cultural awareness training for the parent company

Upper level HCW managers and executives represent a vital source of training design input for shaping the global orientation and multicultural thinking of the company as a whole. Their experienced input can lead to the design of very relevant, customized diversity and cross-cultural awareness training for the entire multi-national organization which can help draw the corporate mindset from limiting and dysfunctional ethnocentric patterns of thought and practice. In fact, their mere presence and meaningful interaction with other home country managers at the parent company headquarters can lead more informally to a greater awareness of differing yet valuable perspectives and experience sets that can enhance the overall global orientation at company headquarters necessary for competing in the global marketplace.

3.2.3. Integration of parent company strategic plans and performance goals with the reality of the host country environment

Although much of the current literature considers the important role of the expatriate and the expatriate assignment in knowledge creation and organizational learning to beneficially guide company direction and strategic decisions (Bird, 2001; Kamoche, 1997), HCW executives also are positioned to potentially provide helpful input to parent company decision makers who set business policy and performance expectations for those who are given an expatriate assignment. Unlike the previous categories that relate to expatriate training and subsequent learning about *how* to effectively carry out the expatriate assignment, this form of input benefit relates more to enhancing the validity of just *what* the business objectives of the assignment will be in the first place. Two Mexican managers that were interviewed indicated that, from their experience, the greatest source of expatriate poor performance was not the lack of appropriate predeparture training. Rather, they believed that the most frequent and major problems were due to the inappropriate policies, practices, procedures, and expectations that the expatriate brought as special assignment directives from parent company headquarters. What was expected of them for the

expatriate assignment was not well grounded in the reality of the host country, leading to unnecessary and avoidable frustrations and difficulties.

This reluctance to adapt to the realities of the host country and learn from HCW executive input seemed to be most common in the German, French, and US MNCs. One German multinational corporation (MNC) fell into serious problems by ignoring US HCW senior management input and attempted to run its US subsidiary like a German company. It expected that the US HCW executives learn about and adopt the German MNCs culture and work practices in managing the US-based operation, while the German expatriates and company headquarters refused to learn from the US HCW perspectives. Korean and Japanese subsidiaries operating in the US tended to more frequently promote members of the HCW to senior and top decision-making levels of management in the subsidiary. However, even these organizations seemed to do so out of a commitment to a general decentralization strategy of "let those manage who know the country best", rather than due to actual US HCW executive influence on parent company learning and decision making in specific matters. This "hands off" or laisse-faire approach tended to discourage a genuine exchange of ideas and perspectives of the parent MNC with the HCW executives. This lack of exchange represents missed learning opportunities for those decision makers at company headquarters to get new cross-cultural inputs, perspectives, and insights on an ongoing basis, and collectively changing the corporate mindset and contributing to organizational learning to build a truly global orientation for the organization (Bird, Taylor, & Beechler, 1998).

4. Discussion

Contrary to the large amount of past research in international management in general and on the expatriate assignment in particular, which virtually ignores the HCW as a useful source of information and guidance, we have identified in our taxonomy several forms of HCW needs assessment training design input at different employee levels that can contribute to more effective expatriate training and, ultimately, to expatriate performance. For today's organizations to build a truly global orientation, we believe that HCW input from these employee levels could be very beneficial in guiding the needs assessment process (Wexley & Latham, 1991) leading to the development of effective performance objectives and the actual design of expatriate training.

In addition to training *content* that is much more valid and customized than what is typically provided in traditional expatriate training (which also has been accused of simply teaching and reinforcing unproductive and inflexible stereotypes), our taxonomy of beneficial HCW training design inputs also suggests at least four forms of training *process* that can lead to enhanced expatriate training. First, as-mentioned before, the critical incident approach at both operative and supervisory/middle management levels can yield not only valid, customized training design content for a particular expatriate assignment, but it can also enhance the effectiveness and depth of learning through the use of case studies and reality-based role play scenarios.

Second, at the supervisory and middle management HCW level, coaching and mentoring represent ongoing training processes that can provide invaluable instruction for the expatriate at a point when it can be immediately applied. Third, input of the HCW at the upper management level can create a process of change in MNC culture and mindset regarding diversity and cross-cultural issues and sensitivity, which in turn can greatly influence the quality of expatriate training. Finally, input from the upper management HCW can enhance the validity of the expatriate assignment process itself by ensuring that MNC strategic plans and goals as they related to the expatriate assignment are in line with the reality of the host country environment of the expatriate operation, thus increasing the likelihood of effective planning and resource allocation necessary for expatriate assignment success.

It should be noted that, although the expatriates involved in the companies in this study were senior executives and technical professionals assigned primarily for strategic control and filling specific staffing needs, the emphasis upon particular sources of inputs for guiding expatriate preparation and training could depend upon the primary purposes of the expatriate assignment which could differ, such as whether the expatriate assignment is primarily for strategic control and specific staffing needs, individual learning and skill development, or for organizational knowledge creation and organization development (Kamoche, 1997; Ondrack, 1985). For example, information gained from the HCW operative and supervisory levels can be very helpful in identifying possible sources of friction and forms of unproductive behavior on the part of the expatriate that could interfere with success in fulfilling the specific staffing need or contravene successful strategy implementation, and which therefore should be avoided. Where individual learning and global skill development are the primary focus of an expatriate's assignment, a special emphasis might be placed on on-the-job coaching and on-site mentoring provided by HCW supervisors and mid-level managers. And where organizational learning and knowledge creation form the primary purpose of an expatriate assignment (e.g., Downes & Thomas, 2000), input from experienced, senior-level members of the HCW, where available, particularly those who have a strong understanding of company culture and strategy—perhaps through their own developmental inpatriate experience—can be very useful in guiding the sense-making efforts of the expatriate and supplementing or reinforcing expatriate insights that are later taken back to company headquarters and contribute to organizational learning. With particular regard to the increasing imperative of systematic knowledge creation and organizational learning, future research might beneficially explore more fully the many different sources and ways in which HCW input can and should be gathered and integrated into organizational decision-making and practice. The virtually exclusive focus in the literature of the expatriate as having a solitary role in this important area should not continue.

A limitation of the present research relates to the possible generalizability of the results. Although the two host countries in this study differed in terms of economic development, and one had Anglo roots while the other Hispanic, both were North American host countries. There is a question of whether the inclusion of host

countries from other regions of the world, particularly those that are culturally or industrially very different from the present countries, would lead to a different taxonomy. Future research should test the present taxonomy through similar qualitative research in host countries in other regions, such as Europe and Asia. And since our present individual host country and industry type sample size are small, this further research involving more industries and host countries will also increase the number for overall host country and industry type that would provide greater credence to our overall results in taxonomy development.

It should also be noted that the data provided in this study came only from middle and upper-level HCW manager perspectives. It is possible that their perceptions of the potential training inputs from the operative level were filtered through their managerial lenses. Future research should also be conducted with direct input from the operative level which might yield new insights and different results. And since the present student sought only to identify possible forms of beneficial HCW input for enhancing the validity of expatriate training, future research that assesses the relative value or priority of the various HCW sources of input could be useful.

Our hope is that the taxonomy developed and examined here will be helpful to managers in general, and Human Resource professionals in particular, in guiding more comprehensive training needs assessment and design efforts leading to more valid expatriate training programs and performance objectives, as well as to promote more inclusive and comprehensive processes for productive learning. Furthermore, the HCW can also be a valuable source of learning for the parent company itself in managing its cultural diversity and developing more realistic expectations, policies and procedures for the management of its foreign operations. Globalization is an increasingly compelling reality, and to enhance their global competitiveness, organizations should broaden their horizons to consider the perspectives and input of all employees, both at home and abroad, for improving managerial performance.

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