

CHAPTER 4

THE PREPARATION, SUPPORT AND TRAINING OF EXPATRIATES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Though many larger companies are attempting to stabilise or reduce their number of international assignments, the expatriate workforce is growing because of the steady increase in small- and medium-sized companies entering the international marketplace. Considering the fact that failure rates for international assignments average 45 percent, employers should understand how to best support expatriates (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997:70).

International assignments from anywhere, to anywhere – whether in business, diplomacy, employment, technology transfer, education or whatever – typically involve journeys to strange lands. They are encounters with new ecologies: new and diverse socio-cultural, physical, and biological environments. That certainly is the case with assignments to, from, or in a region as ecologically diverse in these respects as Asia and the Pacific: from Perth to Tokyo, Chiang Mai to Auckland, Suva to Calcutta, Honolulu to Jakarta, Beijing to Los Angeles, Seoul to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore to Cebu. Those new ecologies present several significant challenges to assignment success. To the degree that assignees are able to deal effectively with these challenges, their assignments will be successful. To the degree that they are unable to meet one or more of them, their success will be less than optimal – often they fail altogether. Thus effective preparation, support and training for international assignments need to be based on sound research-supported models of the skills required to meet the challenges of those assignments for the assignees, themselves, their families accompanying them, those managing them and the host with whom they are working (Fontaine, 1997:631).

According to Britt (2002:22), the second annual Global Expatriate Study, a survey posted on the Internet in five languages to which 709 expatriates from more than 200 MNEs responded, found that expatriates want their employers to:

- Provide cross-cultural and language training for employees and offer cultural assistance to employees' families
- Communicate on health and safety issues for most host countries
- Provide generous benefits packages tailored to international workers' needs

- Help executives balance personal and professional responsibilities while on assignment

To reach “strategic partner status” in globalisation, employers must focus on the difficult problems of integrating expatriates and their families into their host country – not just the “easy” issues of moving households and managing tax implications. They must recognise the difference between expatriates, then use that recognition as a departure point for developing expatriate policies. The cost/benefit ratio of serving a small pool of expatriates may seem high, but the company’s investment in expatriates may be the key to future success (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997: 74).

4.2 PREPARATION

According to the second annual Global Expatriate Study, nearly 40 percent of the 709 expatriates who responded to the survey said they were not prepared adequately for an international assignment, 56 percent cited poor coordination between local-country and home-office HR departments, and 35 percent said they expected to leave their current employer within five years (Britt, 2002:22; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:242).

According to Fitzgerald-Turner (1997:70-72; Ball et al, 2006:554), MNEs should hire a relocation service in the host country to relocate expatriates. A relocation service can make the difference between productive employees able to focus on challenges at work and distracted and frustrated individuals who feel the company has deserted them. Services provided may include obtaining immigration and work permits, car and home insurance and drivers’ licences; locating housing; negotiating leases; facilitating connection of residential utilities; finding doctors and sorting out health-care issues; selecting schools and helping clients assimilate into the new culture. She further adds (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997:72; Sievers, 1998:S9; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:242) that MNEs should provide pre-departure assistance and ongoing consultation for expatriates and their families. Expatriates rarely get any pre-departure assistance beyond tax advice and relocation of household goods. It is crucial that, at the very least, basic language skills and cross-cultural training be provided. Pre-departure assistance should also address critical family issues such as what the partner will do, children’s schools, medical coverage and making friends. In addition, basic household issues such as temporary living accommodation, obtaining appliances compatible with foreign electrical services, banking needs and shipment logistics should be addressed. The most

successful expatriate families develop action plans for the first two weeks, one month, three months and nine months, with key milestones they are striving to achieve.

According to Halcrow (1999:44-48), a recent survey entitled *Measuring Expatriate Success*, a survey of HR professionals to which 337 HR professionals responded, it was found that although the average expatriate assignment lasts 2.7 years and costs hundreds of thousands of dollars, there is still a large gap between identifying the broad business purposes (such as opening a new market or facilitating a merger) and setting specific goals for the assignment. Just 33.5 percent of respondents say their organisation always sets measurable goals for assignments. Another 22.5 percent set measurable goals 75 percent of the time. But almost a third (31 percent) set measurable goals half the time or less, while 13 percent say measurable goals are never set for expatriate assignments. Respondents to the survey acknowledge that inadequate planning is a problem. Almost two-thirds of the respondents say that the lack of a defined goal has impeded the success of assignments and another 57 percent say ambiguity in communicating the goal to the assignee has been a problem.

According to the same survey (Halcrow, 1999:44-48), one in four MNEs does not begin formal repatriation discussions (to address not only the move home, but next job assignments as well) until three to six months (Black, 1991:17) before the end of the assignment. But 4 percent wait until only two months before the return to discuss it, while 27 percent of respondents say their organisation may not have a repatriation discussion at all. According to one respondent, their organisation gives expatriates information about their return before they leave. Allen & Alvarez (1998:37) suggest that companies develop a specific component in their corporate expatriate preparation programme that emphasises repatriation survival skills for employees being sent on international assignments.

According to Sievers (1998:S9), the majority of global companies do not have formal policies to address the needs of their expatriates' families, and that it is imperative that companies respond to these issues by developing comprehensive, flexible and interactive programmes specifically for spouses and families. She suggests that the spouse be involved from the beginning. More and more companies now include spouses in informational sessions with relocation managers prior to the transfer (Hill, 2003:616; Solomon, 1994:3; Shay & Tracey, 1997:33). DuPont, for example, invites the employee and spouse to attend an orientation session where they can ask specific questions about any aspect of the transfer. Their intent is

to recognise that the international move is very much a family dislocation and the extent that the spouse can feel a part of each step is important. Another way companies help employees and their families feel informed about the transfer is to put them in touch with other families who have already made the move. Shell International employees simply contact Outpost, a network of 40 information centres set up for Shell expatriates and their families in 30 countries around the world. Staffed by the spouses of Shell's expatriate employees, Outpost centres provide a comprehensive and personal briefing service to anyone who is considering or has accepted an international assignment. Outpost staff answer questions ranging from "What should I pack into my air freight?" to "Are there other families there with a disabled child like mine?" In addition to providing information before a family move, the Outpost centres have structured welcome groups who help new families settle in after their arrival (Sievers, 1998:S9-S10).

According to Frazee (1998:23; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:387), before an MNE puts an expatriate family on an aeroplane, it is important that it helps them take preventative measures to safeguard their health. In the 1996-1997 International Assignee Research Project, 65 percent of international transferees surveyed were not provided with a pre-departure medical briefing about benefits and in-country practices, and 38 percent were not offered pre-departure medical exams or immunisations (Frazee, 1998:23). In order to better prepare expatriates for international assignments Frazee (1998:23; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:386-391) recommends the following:

- Expatriate families should have full physical and dental examinations before leaving their home countries.
- A doctor should review their medications. The expatriates should be able to leave with a year's worth of necessary medications.
- Expatriates should be adequately immunised against illnesses that exist in the destination country.
- Expatriates should have access to an international employee-assistance programme.
- Instructions should be provided about food and water precautions.
- Expatriates should be informed about local driving practices and motor vehicle safety, as well as personal safety in the host country.
- Expatriates should be provided with local medical referrals and a procedure for emergency medical situations.

4.3 TRAINING

Training is the process of altering an employee's behaviour and attitudes in a way that increases the probability of goal attainment. This training process is particularly important in preparing employees for international assignments because it helps ensure that their full potential will be tapped (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:481). Hill (2003:616) adds that an intensive training program might be used to give expatriate managers the skill required for success in a foreign posting. Training programmes are useful in preparing people for international assignments for many reasons. These can be put into two categories: organisational and personal (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:485-487):

- **Organisational reasons.** Organisational reasons for training relate to the enterprise at large and its efforts to manage international operations more effectively. One primary reason is to help overcome ethnocentrism; the belief that an individual's way of doing things is superior to that of others. Ethnocentrism is common in many large MNCs where managers believe that the home office's approach to doing business can be exported intact to all other countries because this approach is superior to anything at the local level. Training can help home-office managers to understand the values and customs of other countries so that when they are transferred internationally they have a better understanding of how to interact with local personnel. This training can also help managers to overcome the common belief among many personnel that expatriates are not as effective as host-country managers. Another organisational reason for training is to improve the flow of communication between the home office and the international subsidiaries and branches. Quite often, international managers find that they are not adequately informed regarding what is expected of them, while the home office places close control on their operating authority. This is particularly true when the international manager is from the host country. Effective communication can help to minimise these problems. Finally, another organisational reason for training is to increase overall efficiency and profitability. Research shows that organisations that closely tie their training and human resource management strategy to their business strategy tend to outperform those that do not (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:485-486; Bird & Beechler, 1995:40).
- **Personal reasons.** Although there is overall organisational justification, the primary reason for training international managers is to improve their ability to interact effectively with local people in general and their personnel in particular. One early study that surveyed 75 companies in England, Holland, Belgium and Germany found that some of

the biggest complaints about managers by their personnel revolved around personal shortcomings in areas such as politeness, punctuality, tactfulness, orderliness, sensitivity, reliability, tolerance and empathy (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:486; Zeira & Harari, 1979:42). As a result, an increasing number of training programmes now address social topics such as how to take a client to dinner, effectively apologise to a customer, appropriately address one's international colleagues, communicate formally and politely with others and learn how to help others save face. Another common problem is expatriate managers' overruling of decisions, often seen at lower levels of the hierarchy. When a superior who is from the host country takes a decision and the expatriate does not agree with it, the expatriate may appeal to higher authority in the subsidiary. Host-country managers obviously resent this behaviour because it implies that they are incompetent and can be second-guessed by expatriate subordinates. Still another problem is the open criticising by expatriate managers of their own country or the host country. Many expatriates believe that this form of criticism is regarded as constructive and shows them to have an open mind. Experience has found, however, that most host-country personnel view such behaviour negatively and feel that the managers should refrain from such unconstructive criticism. It simply creates bad feelings and lack of loyalty. In addition to helping expatriates to deal with these types of personal problems, training can be useful in improving overall management style. Research shows that many host-country nationals would like to see changes in some of the styles of expatriate managers, including their leadership, decision-making, communication and group work (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:486-487).

The training that a person undergoes before expatriation should be a function of the degree of cultural exposure that he or she will be subjected to. Two dimensions of cultural exposure are the degree of integration and the duration of stay. The integration dimension represents the intensity of the exposure. A person could be sent to a foreign country on a short-term, technical, trouble-shooting matter and experience little significant contact with the local culture. On the other hand, a person could be in Japan for only a brief visit to negotiate a contract, but the cultural interaction could be very intense and might require a great deal of cultural fluency to be successful. Similarly, an expatriate assigned abroad for a period of years is likely to experience a high degree of interaction with the local culture from living there (Beamish et al, 2000:193).

One set of guidelines suggests that for short stays (less than a month) and a low level of integration, an information-giving approach would suffice. This includes area and cultural briefings and survival-level language training, for example. For longer stays (2–12 months) and a moderate level of integration, language training, role-plays, critical incidents, case studies and stress reduction training are suggested. For people who will be living abroad for one to three years and/or will have to experience a high level of integration into the culture, extensive language training, sensitivity training, field experiences and simulations are the training techniques recommended. Effective preparation would also stress the realities and difficulties of working in another culture and the importance of establishing good working relationships with the local people (Beamish et al, 2000:193-194; Wild, Wild & Han, 2003:461-462). Griffin & Pustay (2002:587) adds that before an enterprise can undertake a meaningful training or development program, it must assess its exact training and development needs. This assessment involves determining the difference between what managers and employees can do and what the firm feels they need to be able to do.

Two of the most common reasons for expatriate failure are the inability of a manager's spouse to adjust to a foreign environment and the manager's own inability to adjust to a foreign environment (Hill, 2003:617; Shay & Tracey, 1997:33). Training can help the manager and spouse cope with both these problems. Cultural training, language training and practical training all seem to reduce expatriate failure. Despite the usefulness of these kinds of training, evidence suggests that many managers receive no training before they are sent on foreign postings. One study found that only about 30 percent of managers on one- to five-year expatriate assignments received training before their departure (Hill, 2003:617; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:274; Black, 1988:282; Deresky, 2002a:399; Baliga & Baker, 1985:34-36).

4.3.1 Cultural training

Cultural training seeks to foster an appreciation for the host country's culture. The belief is that understanding a host country's culture will help managers empathise with the culture, which will enhance their effectiveness in dealing with host-country nationals (Hill, 2003:617; Shay & Tracey, 1997:32). It has been suggested that expatriates should receive training in the host country's culture, history, politics, economy, religion and social and business practices (Hill, 2005:629; Baliga & Baker, 1985:37; Shay & Tracey, 1997:34-35). If possible, it is also advisable to arrange for a familiarisation trip to the host country before the formal transfer, as this seems to ease culture shock. Given the problems related to spouse adaptation, it is

important that the spouse and perhaps the whole family be included in cultural training programmes (Hill, 2003:617; Shay & Tracey, 1997:33).

According to Shay & Tracey (1997:34), the following questions must be answered to develop cross-cultural training programmes that adequately prepare managers for international assignments:

- What should be the content of a cross-cultural training programme?
- How should the programme be structured?
- Who should do the training?

One of the most economical and useful models for cross-cultural training delineates objective and subjective characteristics of culture. Objective characteristics are tangible and observable: currency, government system, architecture, language and so on. Programmes that emphasise the objective aspects of culture help managers understand what to expect in their daily routine and the social dynamics they will encounter. The information should create an awareness of the general dimensions on which culture differ and the likely effects of the differences on expatriates (Shay & Tracey, 1997:34).

Objective-based programmes typically focus on managing change and coping with the stress that accompanies an international assignment (Shay & Tracey, 1997:34-35; Harrison, 1994:22). The preparation and adjustment associated with cross-cultural assignments can induce a great deal of anxiety and pressure. Expatriates must therefore have an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills that will help them manage the culture shock, prepare them for the initial and continuous challenges they will face and reduce the likelihood of premature returns (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35).

It is not enough, however, for expatriates to learn about the salient objective characteristics that distinguish the host culture from that of their home country. Expatriates must also understand the more elusive subjective characteristics: customs, values, beliefs, norms and so on. Cross-cultural training programmes that incorporate subjective cultural characteristics help trainees develop a deeper understanding of the values and beliefs that influence behaviour in the host country: for example, attitudes about work (e.g., individualism versus collectivism), authority (e.g., relevance of organisational hierarchy) and punctuality (e.g., “island time”). The importance of subjective cultural characteristics cannot be overstated.

Without a thorough grounding in those aspects, an expatriate may arrive at the host property and mistakenly think that because the front desk, kitchen equipment and room furnishings look the same as those in New York City, the property should function as it might in New York City. While the objective aspects (e.g., the reservations system) may operate the same, the people will not necessarily perform their jobs the same way. Understanding the objective aspects should help to make the expatriate feel comfortable in the new environment, and a comprehensive understanding of the subjective aspects of the host culture will facilitate acculturation and enhance performance. Cross-cultural training programmes should include both objective and subjective aspects of culture (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35).

The more general, objective cultural characteristics should be presented before the more specific subjective cultural characteristics. It is important to develop a general awareness of cross-cultural issues first. Managers who have a broad understanding of a culture can generalise that knowledge to many cultural contexts. Once they learn about general cultural issues, they are ready to acquire the various social-interaction skills necessary to be effective in the host country. The format, proceeding from the general to the specific, is an effective strategy for achieving desired learning outcomes in any training programme (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35).

To facilitate an understanding of the objective culture, passive methods, such as lectures, reading and videos can be used. Those methods can be effective for learning about history, geography, climate, population demographics and the economy of the host culture. For developing more specific knowledge and skills, experiential methods, such as cultural assimilators and role-playing, are most appropriate (“cultural assimilators” refers to communication exercises or practice involving brief intercultural interactions to assist members of one culture in adjusting to members of another culture). The behavioural skills are acquired through practice, repetition and immediate feedback about performance. In this stage of training the managers not only learn about the culture but practise their newly acquired understanding and skills in situations that don’t carry the risks involved with learning on the job and in the culture (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35).

It is suggested that trainers should have the following characteristics and qualifications (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35):

- Previous experience of living abroad

- Personal experience with the challenges associated with culture shock
- A comprehensive knowledge of the host country
- A clear understanding of the values of the home culture and the host culture and the ability to differentiate between the two on various dimensions
- A positive attitude about experiencing new cultures and value systems

Trainers should have a thorough grounding in both the empirical and the theoretical literature on expatriate acculturation and should interact one-on-one with the trainees throughout the programme. The best source of trainers may in fact be a company's present and former expatriate staff (Shay & Tracey, 1997:35).

4.3.2 Language training

English is the language of world business; it is quite possible to conduct business all over the world using only English. Despite the prevalence of English, however, an exclusive reliance on English diminishes an expatriate manager's ability to interact with host-country nationals. A willingness to communicate in the language of the host country, even if the expatriate is far from fluent, can help build rapport with local employees and improve the manager's effectiveness (Hill, 2003:617; Ball et al, 2006:553-554). Despite this, a study of 74 executives of USA multinationals found that only 23 believed knowledge of foreign languages was necessary for conducting business abroad (Hill, 2003:617; Baliga & Baker, 1985:35; Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:453). Those enterprises that did offer foreign language training for expatriates believed it improved their employees' effectiveness and enabled them to relate more easily to a foreign culture, which fostered a better image of the firm in the host country (Hill, 2003:617; Rugman & Hodgetts, 2003:346).

Another benefit of language training is for monitoring competition. MNEs often locate near their competitors because new developments by these enterprises are most likely to be reported in local newspapers and in other sources. It is frequently possible to learn more about what a competitor is doing through local news media than one could ever find out if the investigation were conducted from MNE headquarters (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2003:346).

4.3.3 Practical training

Practical training is aimed at helping the expatriate manager and family ease themselves into day-to-day life in the host country. The sooner a routine is established, the better are the prospects that the expatriate and his or her family will adapt successfully. One critical need is a support network of friends for the expatriate. Where an expatriate community exists, enterprises often devote considerable effort to ensuring that the new expatriate family is quickly integrated into that group. The expatriate community can be a useful source of support and information and can be invaluable in helping the family adapt to a foreign culture (Hill, 2003:617; Sievers, 1998:S9).

According to Fitzgerald-Turner (1997:74; Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003:216), MNEs should monitor their internal systems and people in order to determine whether they really are a global company. MNEs should make sure that they are not so “headquarters centric” that they unknowingly create barriers for expatriates. Questions such as the following should be asked:

- Can the accounting staff translate foreign currency?
- Are phone conferences scheduled with faraway time zones in mind?
- Do procedures accommodate entirely different systems internationally?

Companies operating internationally need to invest in global awareness training and education for employees at all levels in the organisation that are involved with global operations. This modest expenditure will result in a much greater return on all the investments being made in the enterprise’s global expansion (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997:74).

4.4 SUPPORT

According to the second annual Global Expatriate Study (Britt, 2002:21-22), companies should do more to support their expatriates and relieve those employees’ fears about growing political tensions around the world in order to shore up the productivity of employees sent on international assignments. Expatriates who believe they are not getting enough information about health and safety issues have less peace of mind and feel less productive, according to 55 percent of the 709 international workers who responded to the survey. Employees working in other countries want their companies to provide them with security bulletins, contingency plans and emergency guidelines to keep them up to date about potential adverse

conditions. Only 20 percent of the respondents said their companies were keeping them informed (Britt, 2002:21-22).

According to Hanrehan & Bentivoglio (2002; Briscoe & Schuler, 2004:382), family members accompanying employees assigned to foreign worksites have always been a major focus of international HR programmes, and the September 11 terrorist attacks and the conflict in Afghanistan have increased concerns for their safety. Assignees in at-risk areas are not requesting an early return home, but some workers are asking employers to send their family members home or move them to a more secure environment. Many enterprises are trying to accommodate these requests, but such a change in the family's residence raises a number of HR and international assignment programme issues, some of which have a potential tax impact. If the assignee's family is relocated from the international work location to their home or another location, the organisation must decide whether to allow increased home leave for assignees. This may appear to be strictly an international HR issue, but the organisation and the assignee also face tax implications of more frequent trips home, as well as the cost of maintaining dual households. Regardless of the tax implications, HR managers must determine the number and duration of reimbursable home leave trips they will provide. Prior to September 11, most North American based companies allowed one trip home per year, but that policy generally assumed that the family would be travelling together. If the assignee (with family) remains in a potentially unsafe work location, the company may be required to re-evaluate and upgrade security arrangements, which could increase expenses: for example, providing a car and driver to employees (Hanrehan & Bentivoglio, 2002).

MNEs should never assume that "no news is good news" – and should maintain regular contact with expatriates. It is suggested that an expatriate should be telephoned weekly during the first 60 days of expatriation and monthly thereafter for the first year (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997:72; Chohanec & Newstrom, 1991:70). It is further recommended that flexible expatriate policies should be designed. Instead of allowances and premiums governed by arbitrary rules, MNEs could provide a fair budget and a choice of support services. This approach spends employers' money more wisely and gives expatriates the sense that the MNE understand the challenges their families will face (Fitzgerald-Turner, 1997:72-74).

MNEs are also likely to offer much less help to employees as they return home than they were given at the outset of the assignment, despite the fact that experts say the return home can be

just as great an adjustment. Almost three-quarters of respondents to the Measuring Expatriate Success survey say that expatriates are given home-finding assistance when they return. Only 30 percent say that employees receive orientation counselling (to address such issues as the financial implications of a return) and only 21 percent report the providing of career counselling (Halcrow, 1999:48).

Sievers (1998:S9) makes recommendations on how MNEs can support the trailing spouse and families of expatriates while on an international assignment. According to her, the MNEs should help the spouses find employment. The issue of spouse's employment grows more significant as the number of dual career couples rises. Many women do not want to sacrifice their careers for the sake of their husbands' overseas transfers. In addition, though the majority of trailing spouses are still women, it is becoming more common to find a trailing husband who is possibly derailing his career by moving (Sievers, 1998:S9; Scullion & Linehan, 2005:144; Hill, 2003:616). She further recommends that MNEs provide support to their expatriates' families by helping to establish clubs and social organisations. BASF, the multinational chemical corporation, provides financial and administrative support for Deutsche-Auslaender Verbindung (the German-American Connection), a group started by a few BASF expatriate families living in Germany. The DAV, as it is called, has developed into a fully chartered organisation with a roster of programmes to help families settle in and enjoy their experience in Germany to the fullest. It has also published a practical manual which covers every aspect of living and working in Germany as an expatriate (Sievers, 1998:S9). Sievers (1998:S9-S10; Ball et al, 2006:556) lastly recommends that MNEs ensure local education options for children. The question of education in another country has always been a critical factor in employees' decisions about international assignments. In the past, many companies offered boarding school as the only viable educational option. These days, fewer families are willing to send their children away to school during an assignment. In response, companies with significant expatriate populations in particular locations are working to ensure that there are local schools offering internationally accepted curricula. For example, many multinational corporations promote the use of the International Baccalaureate system of pre-collegiate education, which is recognised in 70 countries.

McNerney (1996:6; Sievers, 1998:S9) adds that if the trailing spouse has to give up a job in the home country, the expatriate's employer can give him or her a stipend to use in finding employment in the new country or acquiring new skills through continuing education. In

some cases, the employer may assist the spouse in finding employment in the new country or even subsidise the loss of income.

4.5 SUMMARY

Effective preparation, support and training for international assignments need to be based on sound research-supported models of the skills required to meet the challenges of those assignments for the assignees, themselves, their families accompanying them, those managing them and the host with whom they are working. However, 40 percent of 709 expatriates who responded to a survey said they were not prepared adequately for an international assignment. According to the same survey, 55 percent of the 709 respondents felt that they were not getting enough information about health and safety issues and as a result had less peace of mind and felt less productive.

In order to better prepare expatriates for an international assignment, MNEs should focus on aspects such as hiring a relocation service to help with finding work permits, car and home insurance, locating housing and negotiating leases, finding doctors and sorting out health care issues. MNEs should also ensure that expatriates have a clear understanding of the objectives of the assignment as well as make sure that they are adequately prepared for repatriation even before they leave on the assignment. One of the major causes of expatriate failure is the inability of the spouse or family to adapt to the international environment. As a result it is imperative that MNEs respond to these issues by developing comprehensive, flexible and interactive programmes specifically for spouses and families.

By training expatriates for an international assignment MNEs are attempting to alter employees' behaviour and attitudes in a way that increases the probability of goal attainment. When providing training to expatriates MNEs should focus on providing cross-cultural training, language training and practical training. Specifically, cross-cultural training should start by focusing on the tangible and observable objective characteristics of culture, such as architecture and language, and then move on to the more subjective characteristics of culture such as customs and values.

Lastly it is important to provide expatriates on an international assignment with proper support. After the September 11 terrorist attacks the safety of expatriates has grown in importance, forcing MNEs to re-evaluate their expatriate policies. MNEs should consider

moving the families of expatriates out of unsafe regions and increase the home leave trips offered to expatriates to go and visit their families. The support offered to spouses and the family of expatriates should also receive special attention. If a trailing spouse has to give up a job in the home country, for example, the expatriate's employer can give him or her a stipend to use in finding employment in the new country or acquire new skills through continuing education. MNEs should also ensure that there are local education options for expatriates' children.

Having focused on what the literature says should be done in terms of preparation, support and training of expatriates, we still need to answer the question: What are South African MNEs doing in terms of preparation, support and training in order to better prepare their expatriates for international assignments? But before this can be answered it is important to look at the methodology that was used to answer this question.