

Chapter 6

The Future of Mobility: Key Areas That Play a Significant Role in Expatriates' Future Decisions

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ABSTRACT

The globally mobile workforce of international professionals has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Closed borders and entry restrictions for foreign residents have left many expatriates separated from partners and family members. Previously held assumptions about the ability to travel whenever needed have been severely challenged, thus leaving some questioning the attractiveness of living and working abroad. The expectations of mobility that individuals as well as organizations used to have are changed. The research aimed to assess the impact of factors like travel and other restrictions on the priorities of expatriates and on their willingness to consider future mobility, as well as how the disruption affected expatriates' concept of family. The research shows that organizations will have to examine if expatriation is a sustainable strategy. Both expatriates and organizations are more than ever subjected to local government regulations concerning the acceptance and conditions of life and travel for expatriates.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought previously unimaginable changes in people's lives and ways of working around the globe. As new variants and new waves continue to cause disruption and hardship, the world is also experiencing a period of social, racial, environmental and economic upheaval which looks

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like it will continue to be felt for some time. This research concentrates on just one group of people: the globally mobile workforce of international professionals and their families - or expatriates - and on the particular challenges and complications which have affected them.

This group has been significantly impacted by the pandemic's effects on travel. Closed borders, canceled flights and the introduction of new visa, quarantine and entry restrictions for foreign residents have resulted in many expatriates being separated for long periods of time from partners, family members and friends and unable to return to the countries where they have homes and jobs. Previously held assumptions about the ability to travel to see relatives in case of emergency or whenever needed have been severely challenged at this time and for the foreseeable future, leaving some questioning the attractiveness of living and working abroad.

BACKGROUND

This chapter identifies the terms relevant to the study. It defines the globally mobile workforce of international professionals and their families and the different kinds of expatriates that participated in the study. It explores the changes in the concept of global mobility, as well as the requirements of the global talent pool of which expatriates are a part. It also briefly describes the background of the study, including the global pandemic.

Definition of Terms

Expatriates

Expatriates are people who live and work outside of their home country. This common definition of the expatriate can be discussed and questioned, because it offers many possible interpretations. In international management literature, the term 'expatriate' is used in reference to the people who are moved across borders to work, more particularly in multinational corporations (Berry & Bell, 2012). The reasons for expatriate employees are diverse, from career development for young potentials to control or implementation of changes in host countries' subsidiaries. Especially in career advancement, foreign experience is seen as an imperative. Even in education, there seems to be a "mobility imperative" for educators and students (Cairns, 2014, p. 46; Cairns et al., 2017).

Others undertake assignments abroad independently as self-initiated expatriates. Self-initiated expatriates usually relocate to a country of their choice for personal, cultural or development reasons, without a definite period in mind (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). In contrast, company-assigned expatriates represent the organization that sends them for a clearly defined assignment and time horizon.

Another category of expatriates are older people who retire to places with favorable characteristics such as climate or the cost of living (Balkir & Kirkulak, 2007; Gibling et al., 2009). Recently, a new trend in expatriation reflecting the changing global economy, seems to point to the use of home-grown expertise rather than relying on foreign experts to drive their economy (Groves & O'Connor, 2018), meaning that the hegemony of Western expatriates will be questioned (Farrer, 2010; Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Leonard, 2010). Even so, these local or regional employees are expected to have some international experience and global expertise. The sample of the study comprises expatriates from the different categories.

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