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Employee Transfer: a Review of Recent Literature

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INFORMASI ARTIKEL

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the current state of research on organization's support for transferred employee during relocation by identifying and analyzing issues about work relocation. And to present the alternative approaches in handling relocation to be more supportive toward employees. This research used systematic literature review method to conduct a brief selective review of relocation theories and its applications. The results obtained, based on literature reviews and analyses, are the identification of several issues about employee relocation such as stress, relocation packages/programs, willingness to relocate, perceived organizational support (POS), family issue - spouse and children, and politics in transfers. The findings suggest that organizations should be more supportive toward employees.

1. Introduction

Relocation is a reality that will face most employees who work at multinational or nationwide organizations, especially for the one who sits on the middle management position or above. In the eyes of organizations, relocation may have many different meanings as a tool for knowledge transfer, employee development, and human resource distribution. For employees, it is a challenge. Wilkinson & Singh (2010) identified that out of the 40 most stressful life events, 12 can be directly associated with international relocation of a family. Others, such as an argument with a spouse, a change in sleeping or eating habits, or a vacation, can be indirectly related with the relocation process. International relocation, as such, can be an extremely potent stressor for the entire family.

The problems with relocation can be divided into two types: work related and non-work related. Work related such as adaptation to the new work environment and new responsibilities. Non-work related in forms of decision about family, new housing, socioemotional stress etc. The employees succeed level on relocation more or less determined by organization's support to overcome those problems.

Researches about relocation have been documented in many journals. These literatures discussed relocation from many aspects, as we will review in the results section. In this paper I try to identify what are the issues about relocation and to find the alternative approaches, if any, in handling relocation to be more supportive toward employees based on previous researches in the last seventeen years.

2. Research Method

For the design of this study, I used robust systematic literature review approach. In this study I used secondary data from scientific journals and other documents such as articles about relocation that were collected from the internet. To analyze the data, I used content analysis technique.

3. Findings

The findings highlighted several issues about employee relocation.

Frank (2000) found that both personal and workplace characteristics influence how employees will respond to a relocation experience. While managers are unable to influence employees' personality characteristics, certain

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work-related factors are controllable. That's why it is important to do worker relocation planning.

Providing a well-tuned relocation benefits package that meets needs can give employers the edge in bringing in and keeping valuable employees (Mumma, 2001).

An undesired relocation can induce a loss of performance, withdrawal responses, lower quality of work - in brief, dysfunctional behavior and even to managers leaving the company (Mignonac, 2002).

Gender and family structure influence others' perceptions of how committed an applicant is to pursuing a job opportunity that requires relocation, as well as anticipated family resistance to a relocation (Allen, Eby, Douthitt, & Noble, 2002).

Relocation practices traditionally concentrated on the physical and qualifiable, or "hard", side of the move. The policies of help selling houses and making new living arrangements, shipping belongings, paying for house-hunting trips, and so on. Recently many organizations realized that there is a significant need to provide the "soft" services, or more of a concentration on the psychological effects of the relocation. Education and support to both the expatriate and the family are being provided. The other new development is the use of professional transition or relocation services because they are able to provide so many services that normal HR departments cannot (Rushing & Kleiner, 2003).

Managers who were laterally transferred had less positive perceptions of their work group's performance and cohesiveness and reported poorer overall health and more health symptoms than managers who had not been transferred. They also perceived receiving significantly less recognition from their immediate superior and reported poorer overall health than managers whose transfers involved a promotion (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004).

Inclusion of career development oriented criteria in the employee transfer decision is associated with positive perceived organizational support (POS) for career development and satisfaction with developmental opportunities provided by the organization (Prince, 2005).

Research has suggested that cultural knowledge of a new location, prior experience and/or formal education of cultural and social practices, and language skills assist in faster acculturation, greater tolerance of, and reduction of uncertainty in, new environments. Yet the organization is not prepared to invest time and resources in providing its transferees with thorough briefings on their new locations, nor does the organization appear to be giving consideration to transferring people that have requisite language and other cultural skills. The decision to relocate an employee is being based primarily on technical skills with an expectation that the transferee either will not encounter any difficulties (work or non-work) in the new location or that he/she will have to address these problems him/herself. Much of the onus is placed on individual transferees to seek out support,

assistance and information for themselves as the organization does not provide adequate notice of transfer, an insufficient handover period or induction training. This is lamentable as has been noted the benefits of such to achieve the anticipatory socialization regarded as a crucial factor in adjusting to new jobs in a domestic context. The organization has given little consideration to the impacts of relocation for either transferees or their families; a situation which has not only psychological stresses of the transferee and his/her family, but also immediate costs for the organization as the employee takes time to perform at work (Hutchings & Ratnasari, 2006).

Organizations need to take care of the trailing spouse because spouse willingness to relocate internationally can have a dramatic effect on the employee's desires to accept an overseas assignment. Several factors affect the spouse's global relocation decision including previous international assignment and length of assignment (Larson, 2006).

When there is change in the work environment, employees experience loss and grieving. Although a new physical work environment promises greater comfort and functionality, it is not enough to satisfy people to give up what they have and what they are familiar with. Therefore there is a need to understand employees and their behavior in their work environment to help companies to work on effective definitions of the spaces employees occupy and successful implementations of physical environment change projects. The applied changes in the physical environment can succeed to the extent that the individuals in the organization themselves adapt to change. Therefore, change management requires understanding of how individual adapt. However, in understanding the employees' transition one must also consider the role played by previously established familiar routines (habits) by employees toward their workplaces. In other words, place attachments which are known as previously formed emotional bonds to the physical environment play this critical role in establishing routines in the place (Inalhan, 2009).

Two contrasting approaches have emerged from the social science research evidence on parenting after relocation: one arguing that a child's welfare is best preserved by protecting the relationship with the primary caregiver and allowing the relocation; and the other claiming that a child's welfare requires frequent, regular interactions with both parents, thus militating against relocation. These polarized positions have not been helpful since they give mixed messages and therefore fall short in aiding our understanding about whether or not a proposed relocation might be beneficial, especially for the children's development and well-being (Taylor & Freeman, 2010).

Relocation disputes are difficult to settle and if cases do settle, it tends to be because one parent gives up rather than because they reach a reasonable compromise or other satisfactory resolution of their dispute in the best interests of the children. Issues on both sides of the

equation are the cost of the dispute and chances of settlement (Parkinson & Cashmore, 2010).

Stress is a central element of international relocation. Stress is defined as a psychological state that develops when an individual faces a situation that taxes or exceeds internal or external resources available to deal with that situation. There are major components of stress: uncertainty concerning outcomes, lack of control over situations, and ambiguity concerning expectations. In the United States of America, The State Department such as Transition Center and Family Liaison Office (FLO) provide a comprehensive set of initiatives which can help to reduce stress in the foreign-service family through pre-departure training, comprehensive guidebooks, social networks and online resources (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010).

Otto & Dalbert (2012) identified that there are three personality dispositions (neuroticism, openness to experience, uncertainty tolerance) and three social orientations (social norms - in terms of perceived social endorsement of relocation mobility, individualist orientation, collectivist orientation) as the predictors of relocation readiness. Participants with high levels of neuroticism and collectivism to be less ready to relocate, whereas participants who were open to experience, uncertainty tolerant, had an individualist orientation, and perceived their family, partner, and friends to endorse relocation mobility reported higher relocation readiness. To conclude, endeavors aimed at strengthening the readiness to relocate should seek support in the social environment and should help members of the workforce to cope productively with uncertainty.

Bashir (2012) found that there is a positive relationship between organizational support and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment that includes work, general and interaction adjustment. Thus, the way in which organizational support programs affect the expatriate's perceived organizational support (POS) should be of particular importance for making decisions regarding which programs to offer.

Chapa & Wang (2014) added that genders, gender role characteristics, age, marital status/parenthood, and cultural dimensions are important predictors of the willingness to relocate.

Andresen & Margenfeld (2015) conceptualized employee's international relocation mobility readiness (IRMR) as an individual's general intention to change his or her dominant place of residence for work reasons, crossing international borders. Their study revealed that it is positively related with attitudes toward the behavior (high boundaryless mindset), previous international work experience as well as social norms (perceived positive attitude of the social environment toward international relocation mobility).

Langdon, Rowland, & Biggs (2016) made a comparison of family support services for resource, health, and defense communities in Australia that helped in understanding different successful types of support provision (professional, practical, and social support). A mixture of all three types of support was found to be perceived as important. The Australian Defense Force provides a mixed spread of services which include high-quality 24-hour support services, and DVDs depicting realistic deployment for families, in addition to funded education programs to assist with spousal employment. The resources industry provides a myriad of free social-support services and limited practical and professional services. The health-industry support may be much harder for families to engage because of their limited perception of its availability. Investigating the viability of providing realistic previews of the Fly-In-Fly-Out (FIFO) lifestyle for the resources industry and for health professionals wishing to undertake FIFO style employment may be worth considering in an effort to improve family relationships while the worker is away. In addition to improving the perception of access to social-support services for FIFO health professionals, the social-support services are generally preferred by family members and should be promoted. It was necessary to understand the importance of individual requirements for a particular service type, and that support services provided by employers should be tailored to suit the employee and their family.

Benefits of job rotation may be reduced if carried out too frequently or for narrow partisan reasons. Frequent transfers and postings in a civil service characterized by life-long contracts negatively impact on-the-job learning, accountability for results, and incentives to acquire skills. But Cyan & Pasha (2017), in their analysis shows that a change in elected government and desirability of a position increase the frequency of transfers. It is, thus, important that governments introduce civil service reforms that decrease the role of politics in transfer-posting decisions, and allow the civil servants to complete their tenures. The transfer process should be protected not just from the politicians seeking control over the civil service, but also from self-seeking civil servants jostling for positions. This could be a pertinent step toward improving the quality of the civil service infrastructure of many developing countries.

4. Conclusion

The findings conclude that there are several issues about relocation including stress, relocation packages/ programs, willingness to relocate, perceived organizational support (POS), family issue - spouse and children, and politics in transfers that should be addressed by organizations in their relocation planning.

The alternative approaches in handling relocation can follow the examples from the findings such as the use of professional relocation services, pre-departure training, comprehensive guidebooks, social networks and online resources etc.

Out of literatures that had been reviewed, 31.6% are about international relocation and 68.4% are about domestic relocation. Furthermore, there is only one article, from Hutchings & Ratnasari (2006), that discussed about relocation in Indonesia.

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