ORGANIZATION GOALS, INDIVIDUAL GOALS, AND EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENTS:
IDENTIFYING CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN A PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRM

A Thesis in
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by
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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the extent to which individual and organizational needs are addressed during expatriate assignments. The growing body of literature within global talent management provides ample evidence of leveraging internal talent to address organizational issues. However, the relatively sparse literature on addressing individual needs summons our attention to identifying career development during expatriation. This study builds upon Bolino (2007) in order to identify the extent to which the international assignment has the potential for individual career development. I identify four major themes that address organizational and individual goals during expatriate assignments: 1) International assignments address organizational goals, 2) the nature of international assignments and its potential to impact career development, 3) successful repatriation for career development, and 4) training and development to ensure successful completion of the assignment. A qualitative analysis conducted on the interview responses obtained from global mobility managers in a professional service firm validates these propositions. The results also indicate a unique approach adopted by the organization in order to provide international experience based on individual preferences, even when these deployments are not strategically tied to organizational goals. Limitations and direction for future studies are listed in the conclusion.
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INTRODUCTION

In today’s global economy, multinational companies (MNCs) are increasingly demonstrating the importance of effectively managing their international operation, realizing that the need to develop employees into future leaders with global competencies is top priority (Connor, 2000; Kohonen, 2005). As businesses continue to globalize, organizations more often rely on deploying employees to extended work assignments overseas (Stahl, et. al., 2002). These expatriate assignments not only enable the company to perform services in the global community, but also serves as a tool for developing global managers with the aptitude to lead the organization in the future (Kobrin, 1988; Shay, & Baack, 2004). In other words, globalization has created an increased demand for future leaders to possess high level of global awareness, and well-honed international skills, and expatriate assignments play a significant role in the development of such global managers (Bolino, 2007; Gregersen et al., 1998).

While the advantages to the organization seem apparent, expatriate assignments provide a unique opportunity for the individual as well, setting them on a path of career development with global mobility opportunities. The ample literature on self-initiated expats and organization-assigned expats has shown that individuals are actively seeking global opportunities and view these assignments as a career booster where, upon repatriation their newly acquired global skills and competencies are leveraged in the form of promotions and succession planning (Biemann, & Andresen, 2010; Vance, 2006; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). However, several studies indicate that this intuitive progression of expat assignment and successful repatriation is
not as smooth as we would expect. Individuals raise several concerns upon return regarding the lack of promotion opportunities, the subdued importance of global assignment within the organization and the loss of business, client and social network (Peltokorpi, & Froese, 2009; Suutari, & Brewster, 2001; Biemann & Andresen, 2010).

Other issues that plague the popular expatriate model within MNCs are: 1) the cost of employing expatriates (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). It has been estimated that expatriates cost three to four times as much as a domestic employee (Webb and Wright, 1996). 2) The fact that expatriates need to perform successfully in a foreign culture raises adaptation problems, especially during the early stages of expatriation (Suutari, & Brewster, 2001). 3) The cost of failure for international assignments is much higher than failure in the local business (Harzing, 1995; Dowling & Schuler, 1990). 4) Companies underestimate the complexities of the HRM function involved in international operations (Suutari, & Brewster, 2001) and failure to successfully complete the assignment can often be attributed to poor management of expatriates (Tung, 1984; Brewster, & Scullion, 1997).

This exploratory study identifies how a multinational professional service firm develops its expatriate assignments. The ensuing literature review validates the role of expatriate assignments in addressing organizational and individual goals and highlights common themes that arise. Training and development of assignees prior to departure to ensure organization success and subsequently career progression is identified as an HR practice that addresses both individual and organizational goals. It is important to note that I limit individual needs to career developmental opportunities in order to objectively view
individual needs. The following literature review draws upon studies in global talent management and career development to highlight the issues raised during expatriation from the organizational as well as the individual perspective. Since, I was unable to explicitly view the career progression of an expatriate upon repatriation, career progression of expatriates in this paper is identified through analyzing the nature of the international assignment such as, whether it results in skill development, or if it is linked to the core functions of the organization, and the kind of repatriation assistance provided by HR. These characteristics indicate an organizational attempt to implement succession planning and individual career development of the international assignees (Bolino, 2007).

**ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS**

Suutari and Brewster (2001) identified three main reasons why MNCs assign expatriates: 1) to address the lack of availability of management and technical skills in some developing countries; 2) to control operations locally (Torbiorn, 1985; Brewster, 1991); and 3) to maintain trust in key foreign businesses, or serve a representational purposes (Brewster, 1991). In order to address these core issues, organizations have taken a keen interest in leveraging existing talent within the organization (Collings, & Mellahi, 2009). To understand the HRM practices associated with expat deployment, we need to broaden our view to global talent management and its role in addressing organizational goals.

The definition of talent management varies among researchers, however, they highlight the importance of HRM in strengthening the talent pipeline. Creelman (2004) suggests that talent management is a mindset, whereby talent is at the forefront of organizational
success. Cappelli (2008) defines it as simply anticipating the needs of the human capital and implementing practices to meet it. Blass (2007) suggests that talent management refers to management processes and opportunities that are made available to people who are considered talent in the organization. To operationalize the definition further, McCauley and Wakefield (2006) note that talent management involves workforce planning, talent gap analysis, recruiting, staffing, education and development, retention, talent reviews, succession planning and evaluation. Stahl et al., (2007) highlight a three stem framework for talent management involving 1) recruitment, staffing, and succession planning, 2) training and development, 3) retention management.

In order to understand talent management in the context of a multinational organization, we would require to focus on global talent management. That is, to fully understand talent management in a global firm we need to be aware of the extra variables that come with operating in different cultural and economic contexts. Becker et. al, (2004) indicated that multinational corporations (MNCs) face the complex challenge of assuring themselves of future leaders who understand the business strategy and are able to manage operations across the world. The shift in the search for talent from national to global levels has further illustrated the necessity to look across borders (Sparrow et al., 2004).

The organizational need to sustain a competitive advantage in multinational companies has led to differentiated international HRM(IHRM) practices aimed at developing talent within the organization. Tarique and Schuler (2010) term this set of IHRM practices as Global Talent Management (GTM). Other reasons that are identified for the emergence of GTM are:
1) the growing recognition of the role of globally competent managers in ensuring the organization’s success (Bartlett, & Ghoshal, 1989; McDonnell, et. al., 2010). 2) Global competition has shifted organizational focus from the country level to regional and global levels requiring future leaders to be globally aligned (Sparrow, Brewster, & Harris, 2004; Gakovic, & Yardley, 2007). 3) To address perceivable shortages of managerial and professional talent to lead the organization (Stahl, et al., 2007; Sparrow et al., 2004; Neal, & Cavallaro, 2007). 4) To develop future business leaders with cross cultural awareness and an understanding of culturally complex markets (Sharma, & Bhatnagar, 2009; Scullion, Collings, & Gunnigle, 2007).

Collings and Scullion (2007) defines the role of global talent management in addressing this organizational need as:

“the strategic integration of resourcing and development at the international level that involves the proactive identification, development and strategic deployment of high performing and high potential strategic employees on a global scale” (p.102).

These organizational needs have given rise to three key streams of thought for effective global talent management (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). The first merely substitutes talent management for human resource management, often limiting their focus to recruitment, development, and succession planning. The second view builds on the one proposed by Capelli (2008), where GTM is defined as projecting employee and staffing needs and
managing the progression. The third stream is more generic that encompasses the
development of high performing, and high potential talent or talent in general (Tarique &
Schuler, 2010). However the strategic value of the human capital should refer not simply to
individual competencies but their potential to address organizational goals, such as
improving efficiency and effectiveness of the firm, exploiting market opportunities and

The organizational goals addresses the organizational need and provides the context within
which talent must be developed to be unique to that organization. Organizational goals
essentially highlight the importance to: produce leaders who understand the business
context and global strategy (Gakovic, & Yardley, 2007); equip top talent and high potentials
to become future leaders (Wolff, 2011); ensure future leaders have competencies to handle
globally spread operations (McDonnell, et. al., 2010); build a diverse, high performing
business team with mastery on industry to drive innovation and business (Neal, &
Cavallaro, 2007); deal with high attrition rate causing a decrease in skilled labor and to
emphasize the importance of cultural awareness to deal with a global presence (Sharma, &
Bhatnagar, 2009).

This research focus falls within a fourth stream proposed by Collings and Mellahi (2009)
that emphasizes the identification of key positions in the organization that have the
potential to differentially have an impact on competitive advantage (Boudreau & Ramstad,
definitions by practically delineating the process, that organizations must: 1) systematically
identify the key positions in an organization that contribute to significant competitive advantage, 2) develop a talent pool of high-potential employees to fill these roles 3) develop differentiated HR practices to facilitate the filling of these position. This framework supports the notion that employee development along organizational goals leads to competitive advantage.

Based on this literature review, it is evident that organizations seek to leverage their internal talent to address global needs of the organization, and such global deployment assignments would help establish a pipeline of globally competent business leaders. Along with the organizational need to fill talent-gaps and developing management competencies, Edstrom and Galbraith (1977) identify a third reason of control and coordination. Control and coordination refers to the practice of using expats to ensure the quality of service provided to a foreign client and maintain the corporate standards expected (Edstrom, and Galbraith, 1977; Torbiorn, 1985; Brewster, 1991). Control and coordination also helps when an organization is setting up a new venture abroad.

INDIVIDUAL GOALS

The expatriation process when seen from the individual’s perspective tends to be a little more complicated. A growing literature in the difference between self-initiated expatriates (SE) and organization-assigned expatriates (OE) have further shed light on the complexities of expatriation. Self-initiated expats are defined as an individual who relocates voluntarily to a foreign country, without assistance and is hired under a local, host country contract (Biemann, & Andresen, 2010; Crowley-Henry, 2007; Inkson, et al., 1997). On the contrary,
organization-assigned expats are traditional transfers who are dispatched from their home companies to international posts (Edstrom, & Galbraith, 1977; Petlokorpi, & Froese, 2009). These two categories of expats show very differing views in what they expect from the eventual outcome of these global assignments due to their association with the organization. SEs have been distinguished from OEs on several work-related dimensions, Suutari, & Brewster, 2000; Inkson, et. al., 1997). Firstly, SEs take responsibility for their careers and intentionally move and work abroad while OEs are normally sent by the organization on long-term, i.e. one to four years, or short term assignments, i.e. less than one year assignments (Bolino, 2007). Second, SEs perceive overseas experiences as a means of self development or to achieve some other personal goal and do not go abroad to particularly satisfy company goals, while OEs seek to achieve company goals in order to benefit from the career progression and the increased opportunities that are offered on return (Miller, & Cheng, 1978). Third, SEs are likely to fund their own relocation, while OEs receive relocation packages (Peltokorpi, & Froese, 2009).

At this point it is essential to state that this study focusses primarily on the career development of an organization-assigned expatriate. Employees are generally willing to overcome the personal hardship of an expatriate assignment, believing that it will help them get ahead in their company (Mendenhall, et al., 2002). This notion makes logical sense such that, an employee who excels in the international assignment, learns about the overseas market, and develops cultural leadership skills would likely have better career prospects (Suutari, 2003). However, a disconnect between the assigning and repatriation of the expatriate suggests that this link between international experience and successful
repatriation in the form of career progression is not as robust as it should be (Bolino, 2007; Baughn, 1995; Selmer, 1999). Research indicates that only very few employees are promoted when they return home and most companies do not give their expatriates any post assignment employment guarantees (Black et al., 1992; Tung, 1998).

A review of the career theories surrounding career mobility provides insight into how the nature of the international assignment and the successful repatriation of the expatriate addresses the individual goal of career progression. First, human capital theory suggests that individuals tend to get ahead quicker when they are experienced, have noteworthy accomplishments and achievements (Bolino, 2007; Becker, 1964; Wayne, et al., 1999). From this perspective, an employee selected to go on high profile assignments would expectedly be assigned to a more influential position in the organization in order to properly leverage the skills and abilities developed abroad. The second model is Schein's career-cone model (1971). This model proposes that employees who move towards the core functions of the organization, where important organizational activity takes place, will advance more rapidly than those in more peripheral functions of the organization. Consistent with this theory, if expatriates are assigned to perform critical functions of the organization, their value to the organization would merit a promotion. This idea of working in critical functional areas associated with rapid promotions has been well documented (Siebert, et al., 2001; Gunz, & Jalland, 1996; O'Hara et al., 1994). The third model states that career development practices in the form of mentoring and other support have been linked to career success as well (Wayne et al., 1999; Ng, et al., 2005). The first two models suggests that the strategic value of the international assignments to the organization can in itself
serve as a career development indicator. For example, an expatriate working on a high priority assignment would be an asset to the firm, especially if the skills developed through the international assignment are transferrable to the home-country firm. While the organization benefits from developing this individual to a future leader, the employee benefits from the succession planning and promotions.

Along with the nature of the assignment, HR practices of repatriation has also shown to affect career development. Successful repatriation is a result of three core practices (Bolino, 2007), 1) connectivity mechanisms, 2) repatriation assistance, and 3) career development plans. Building on the third career model referring to career development practices of mentoring and providing support, connectivity mechanisms include assigning expats with mentors to keep them connected with home offices while working overseas, or allowing expatriates to visit the home office on a regular basis (Mendenhall, et. al., 2002; Hauser, 1998). Repatriate adjustment is supported by a number of studies where expatriates are provided help to successfully repatriate back to home organizations (Black, 1992; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). This includes helping to ease reverse culture shock, and facilitate other adjustments (Harvey, 1989; Baughn, 1995). Career development plans involves succession planning for the individual in the form of promotions or more strategic assignments. However, employees often complain about not having improved career opportunities upon return from the international assignment (Bolino, 2007; Harvery, 1989). Expatriates that have returned have also complained that they experience an ‘out of sight out of mind problem’, which could adversely affect their careers (Stroh et al., 1998).
The trend of boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) has further emphasized the need for organizations to consider the career development of their international assignees. While bounded careers or organization-oriented career theory has been limited to organizational dominance of the individual’s lives, boundaryless careers relates to an increasing tendency of individual’s to make transitions across roles, organizational, or occupational boundaries, rather than rely on organizational development processes (Arthur, & Rousseau, 1996). The shifting trend of responsibility of career development from organization to individual, and the emergence of boundaryless careers has led to two significant organizational issues (Parry, & Proctor-Thomson, 2003): 1) individual’s are now urged to take charge (Bell, and Stae, 1989), find mentors (Arthur, & Rousseau, 1996), and network profusely (Thomas and Higgins, 1996). 2) There has been a desperate acknowledgement within organizations of the dwindling supply of successful and effective managers (Crainer, & Dearlove, 1999). The practice of career development, would decrease the need of individuals seeking challenging careers elsewhere and would aid organizations to strengthen the organization's talent pipeline. Stahl et. al., (2002) argue that individuals adhering to the boundaryless career perspective view international assignments as an opportunity for skill acquisition and personal development. Thus, foreign work experience is considered by these assignees as enhancing their internal rather than external careers (Jokinen, et al., 2008; Schein, 1996).

In order to avoid losing highly skilled employees, HRM practices must be tailored to successful repatriation. Repatriation problems of loss of status, loss of autonomy, loss of career direction, and undervalued international experience results in many expatriates
eventually leaving their company upon return (Adler, 1986; Tung, 1997). Many MNCs have started to address this repatriation program to the extent of assisting the involved families for successful repatriation (Handler, & Lane, 1997).

**ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL GOALS**

International assignments pose several daunting challenges to the assignee, such as leaving behind a home, family, social and professional networks. Expatriates also face the challenges of adjusting to new cultural and work environment. Training in competencies and cultural awareness prior to the assignment would ensure successful completion of the international assignment. Training and development programs are unique in that, it requires an organizational as well as individual commitment to be successful. The career value of training and development is highlighted in the human resource view of career development. Training and development of individuals prior to the international experience will help the individual to successfully perform that job and achieve the organizational goals, which would lead to career development (Bolino, 2007). This shows an interaction of individual goals and organizational goals, where the firm invests heavily in comprehensive training programs (Tucker et. al., 2004) to develop talent and individuals need to be invested in these programs to develop their careers.

There is extensive evidence within the global talent management literature for the development of technical competencies and soft skills (Gakovik, & Yardley, 2007; Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Neal, & Cavallaro, 2007; McDonnell, et al., 2010), however there is very limited evidence of training provided to international assignments on cross cultural and
work-life adjustments. Vance (2006) stated that comprehensive training programs represent one of the key upstream consideration for effective global performance. The heavy cost of training plays a big part in whether such training is offered or not (Tucker, et al., 2004; Cheng & Lin, 2009). Cultural training could be used to increase cultural sensitivity and improve working relations in the host country (Mol et al., 2005a). Cultural training also help with cross-cultural adjustment, which refers to the degree to which expatriates are psychologically comfortable and familiar with different aspects of a foreign environment (Black, 1988). Alternatively, cultural awareness can also be understood as the degree of ease or difficulty that expatriates have with various issues related to life and work abroad (Takeuchi, Mainova, Lepak, & Liu, 2005).

Firms that invest in training and development also benefit from creating a unique workforce with firm-specific skills that cannot be replicated. However, the firm can only provide this training, but the level of development is dependent on whether these programs are valued by the employee to achieve their individual goals. Tarique and Schuler (2010) emphasize the importance of aligning organizational strategy to individual goals in order to develop a competitive advantage. Incorporating employee needs during development is reflective of the resource based view, that firms adopt an ‘inside-out’ perspective to implement product market strategy and sustain a competitive advantage (Sharma, & Erramilli, 2004; Ekeldo, & Sivakumar, 2004). In order to maximize profits, the firm would have to be unique such that they possess distinctive competencies, technology, brand name, corporate culture, such that their assets are not easily tradable (Diericks, & Cool, 1989). This competitive advantage is created by intangible assets such as intellectual assets and
relational assets (Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998) of the firm. The intellectual and relational assets, although two separate assets are not independent of each other (Sapienza, et. al., 2005). The relational asset of the firm helps provide access to new/existing clients. The human capital is then relied upon to provide service to these clients. As the human capital increases its knowledge base through development and training programs, it will provide an opportunity for the firm to take up new or previously impossible tasks. Several researchers (Barney, & Arikan, 2001; Sirmon, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007; Hitt, et. al., 2006) ascertain the need to effectively manage this intellectual capital, in the form of human capital, to develop a competitive advantage to the firm.

Firms can attain this unique human capital that possess technical competence and cultural awareness, through HRM practices aimed at training and development. Training could include both instruction based (ex: formal training programs to build management and leadership skills) and experience based learning (ex: job rotations, international assignments). The importance of instruction based learning in developing leaders is reflected through over a decade of attempting to revise management programs to meet the needs of the organization in order to develop more effective leaders (Dowd, & Liedtka, 1994). Instruction-based learning in the form of graduate courses, or formal instructions in the case of organizations, is ideal to acquiring new competencies and applying them (McEvoy et al, 2005). However, beyond acquiring and applying the competencies learnt, experience-based learning is required to increase the knowledge that leads to mastery and the ability to influence others (McEvoy, 2005). Rhee and Sigler (2009) proposed a model of leadership development with an Integrated Multidimensional approach where experience
in the form of action learning and competency development in the form of instructional learning are combined to develop leadership capabilities. The implementation of this multidimensional approach has been identified as an established model for development within organizations (McDonnell et al, 2010; Gakovik, & Yardley, 2007, Sharma, & Bhatnagar, 2009).

**METHODODOLOGY**

This study explores the role of expatriate assignments in addressing organizational and individual goals in a professional services firm, ProServe Co (see Appendix). Based on the literature review I identified four themes of expatriate assignments which address organizational goals and individual goals, they are: 1) the nature of the assignment and its potential to impact organizational goals, 2) the nature of the international assignment and its potential to impact career development, 3) how repatriation impacts career development, and 4) how training and development are used to ensure successful completion of international assignments.

I seek to analyze these themes within the context of a professional service firm by further disaggregating the themes to the following variables based on the literature review:

**Organizational Goals**

1) International Assignments address organizational goals by:

   a) Developing globally competent leaders

   b) Leveraging worldwide capabilities to deal with talent shortages
c) Control and coordinate the quality of service internationally

**Individual Goals**

The role of expatriate assignments in addressing individual goals (career development) is two fold, one by analyzing the nature of the international assignment, and second by analyzing the repatriation assistance provided. These are identified by themes 2 and 3.

2) Nature of assignments and its potential to impact career development:
   a) How expatriate assignments result in skill increase linked to career development
   b) The role of core function assignments in career development

3) How repatriation impacts career development and the importance of:
   a) Staying connected when the expat is abroad
   b) Repatriation assistance to ensure smooth transition to and from host-country
   c) A career development plan established prior to departure

**Organizational and Individual Goals**

Training in cultural and technical competencies ensure successful completion of the assignment resulting in achieving organizational goals. Training simultaneously results in skill development of the individual, which according to the human capital theory leads to career development. Thus, the following themes highlights how training and development address both organization and individual goals.
4) Training and Development to ensure successful completion of the assignment:
   a) Developing cultural competencies prior to successfully adapt to host country
   b) Develop technical competencies to ensure successful completion of the assignment

I seek to observe these themes in ProServe Co., a multinational partnership of member-firms that function under the ProServe banner (see Appendix). The headquarters of ProServe Co. is located in the United States. This study is a smaller project of a larger study commissioned in 2010. After lengthy confidentiality agreement negotiations, and several emails between an HR talent representative in the Global Mobility function and Dr. Farndale, assistant professor at Pennsylvania State University, we had a 17 candidate-list of talent reps to interview. Due to schedule conflicts only 5 interviews could be conducted.

These five interviewees were part of the Global Deployment function at ProServe. Specifically, I interviewed the head of the global deployment office, who is the person with the most liaison between the global mobility assignments and the business function, and is responsible for setting US strategy. I further interviewed the global director, the head of global assignments and a global mobility professional within the global mobility and immigration function of the business. These individuals are in direct contact with the assignees on expatriate assignments. A fifth interviewee was a talent professional from the audit function of the business.
Thus, we were able to interview professionals who were involved in various tasks such as planning mobility policies, implementing the policies, the administrative tasks associated with expatriation and even an inpatriate assignee within the mobility function. The interviews were conducted through video-conference due to geographic constraints. Interviews were arranged at convenient times at one of the video conference facilities at the Pennsylvania State University. Each interview was recorded, with permission, and lasted approximately 1.5-2 hours. Two interviewers were present for each interview in order to ensure that the flow of the conversation addressed the required data to be collected.

The interview questions revolved around the major themes that have been identified in the literature. The conversation initiated with identifying who the firm targets for international assignments, and why these assignments are of strategic value to ProServe. We further questioned about the repatriation process and the extent of training and development prior to the international assignment. These questions fit in a broader conversation regarding other related topics on how ProServe’s mobility experts fit within their talent management model, the extent of centralization of the practice of global mobility, how these assignments were ‘sold’ to their employees, and performance measures to identify success rates of the international assignment. More specifically the conversation revolved around the following questions:

- “Why does ProServe rely on expatriate assignments?”
- “How does ProServe address both individual and organizational goals during expatriate assignments?”
- “What kind of assistance is provided to expatriates?”
- “What kind of training and development programs are implemented prior to departure”

The recorded interviews were then transcribed and coded according to the themes highlighted in the proposition. The qualitative analysis was conducted using NVIVO 7. The data analysis involved identifying themes that provide support for how expatriate assignments are tailored in order to address both organizational and individual goals during expatriate assignments.

FINDINGS

This section is divided into four sections. Section I highlights quotes that describe expatriate assignments as essential for a multinational organization to a) develop globally competent leaders; b) leverage their worldwide capabilities to deal with talent shortages; and c) control and coordinate the quality of services in foreign locations. Section II describes the career development value of these assignments based on the literature on the career-models (Schein, 1971; Bolino, 2007). Here, I identify responses that highlight whether these international assignments a) increases the skills of the expat; and b) whether these assignments are core services of the organization. Since I was unable to explicitly view the career progression of an employee at ProServe, this indirect analysis of the characteristics of the international assignment sheds light on the career developmental value of these assignments.
Section III further attempts to identify the career development value of the international assignment by highlighting the level of involvement of HR in the successful repatriation of the expatriate by a) keeping expats connected with the organization; b) actively providing assistance for repatriation; and c) outlining a defined career plan. Section IV provides some evidence of technical or soft-skill competency development in order to successfully complete an assignment and a minor investment by ProServe in cultural development training for easy acclimatization to the host-country. This section also highlights ProServe actively attempting to tailor international assignments along individual needs such as dealing with spousal transfers, interest in travel to a new location, or simply personal preference. Tables I-IV lists specific quotes that support these themes.

**SECTION I - Exploring the nature of the assignment and its potential to address organizational goals.**

**Developing Global Leaders**

ProServe actively invests in developing its employees into future global leaders, and succession planning for future leaders is constantly at the forefront of organizational need. “A couple of years down the road, they know they’re going to need a lead client service partner on some particular insurance industry client up in Canada. And they have one there now, but they’re thinking about their succession plan, who’s the next partner to take over that role?” (Talent Professional). Future leaders with a global mindset are essential for managing the globally spread operations of ProServe, “the head of our tax practice spent two or three years in Australia” (Global Deployment Director).
International assignments are viewed as a tool to develop this global leadership. The significance of this leadership assignment has been reflected in existing business leaders as well, “we looked at a long list of leaders in AERS (a business function) and a good number of them, a high percentage of them, did in fact have international assignments” (Talent Professional). This emphasis on international experience speaks towards the values of the firm and what’s important to the firm from a development standpoint, this leads the HR function towards “selecting firm leaders who have global experience” (Talent Professional). The experience is highly recommended to get on a career path towards a global leader (Global Deployment Director)

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<th>Develop Global Leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“partner moves. are more hand-selected. that evolves from partner conversations and specific selection”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“you need this opportunity to get this global leadership”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the US firm might actually. want to put somebody in another country. and its really for our benefit, not for the host country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“someone who is asked to take on a specific client opportunity based on a need has a richer package. than someone who’s saying I want to take on this experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we do this by showing that we are growing our future leaders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“(referring to global deployment). it is about developing our US people but also making sure that our US client entities are serviced”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“(referring to firm select). its going to be a senior manager that we want to get to partner, or maybe its a more junior partner that we are trying to elevate to a more senior (position).”</td>
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</table>
**Develop Global Leaders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“there is the need in the foreign country but at the same time, there’s an element of succession planning that we’re trying to create here before the current leader retires”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“we looked at a long list of leaders in AERS and a good number of them, a high percentage of them, did in fact have international assignments”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“(referring to firm select). that’s more of. when a leader in the firm needs a very specific global experience as part of their development”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we only want to send people that we believe have a long-term commitment and value to the US firm.”</td>
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</table>

**Table I(a):** Quotes supporting the development of globally competent leaders

These assignments at ProServe are called firm select. “Firm Select.. is when they want to develop a senior manager into a partner” (Global Assignments Professional). However due to the huge expense involved with international assignments, only a select few are nominated for these assignments. “ We have very few in the firm select, that’s more of a, when we have a leader in the firm who needs a very specific global experience as part of their personal development” (Global Mobility Director). However, sometimes firm select could also be used to elevate a more junior partner to a more senior opportunity (Global Assignments Head).

Thus, we see the strategic use of international assignments to achieve the organizational goal of developing future leaders, a quote from Head of Global Assignments can summarize the practice:
"We look at high potentials, high performers, up and comers, future leaders, to say: you know what, you need this global expertise. You need this opportunity to get this global leadership (position). And so, as a result we've tapped the individual to send them on a global opportunity and because we've identified this person we have the need to develop this person.”

Leveraging talent worldwide

ProServe being a professional service multinational organization has developed an efficient way to leverage its talent to serve globally dispersed client needs. These international assignments are limited to high performers in the organization, “because we want to invest in folks that we think are really long-term” (Talent Professional). These decisions to send employees on international assignments stem from a need to address a specific business issue, “so they (the decision for international assignment) belong with the leaders in the business because it’s about what their (client’s) business’ needs are” (Global Deployment Director). This results in business leaders keeping their eyes open for potential talent within the organization in order to address specific client issues that may arise (Global Assignments Head). In smaller member firms, the partners may get very involved with the process, where they know their managers by name and their abilities and what they want from them” (Global Assignments Professional).

International assignments that stem from the addressing a specific client need are called Client Select. This is usually initiated when one of the member firms says, “I have a client where I really need this skill, US do you have someone who possesses this very specific
niche/skill?” (Global Mobility Director). This greatly narrows the target pool where its a kind of “search and selection” (Global Mobility Director) to try to match the skill need with the individual employee. The process is further complicated when the chosen talent is reluctant to go. An example of this is provided by Global Assignments Head:

“... they have small children and everything, they were reading it was not a safe environment, not a good place to bring up their kids and they were very resistant. You saw the firm come to say, ‘well, we’ll hire you a driver, we’ll higher you and additional security guard and we’ll hire you whatever it takes to make this happen because you are the person that we found is going to be the best person to fill this role.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Leveraging Talent Worldwide</th>
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<tr>
<td>“our clients dictate the need and the importance of it (international assignments) and so if our clients are truly global, we need to be too... thats the business case right there”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If we don’t have enough US staff members here, we bring over our folks from our India office”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I know you wanted to go to France, but I have an Argentina opportunity. Would you be interested in this one?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Here’s our budget,... who are we looking to send out this year?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“(referring to silo mentality)... I have a better opportunity... I really need you to do this” (negative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leveraging Talent Worldwide

“... there’s always the challenge of someone who has top talent on their team and whilst they recognize a global experience would be wonderful from a career standpoint they may not want to be... giving up a great resource.” (negative)

“client select is one of the member firms who says, I have a client where I really need this skill... do you have someone who possess this specific niche/skill ”

“(referring to a client need). they have a skill gap, .. a specific need for a project or leader or subject matter expertise”

“(referring to client select). we call that a kind of... search and selection because there is a skill need that we have and we’re trying to match that with the individual employee”

“Person who’s being tapped by client need possesses something very specific”

“the cross border engagements is in direct correlation to what our clients needs and where their businesses are going”

“whatever it takes to make this happen because you are the person that we found is going to be the best person to fill this role”

Table I(b): Quotes identifying the leveraging of worldwide talent at ProServe.

This works the other way around as well. Sometimes, business leader will coax a potential assignee out of an international assignment in order to prevent loss of talent from their team. However, this silo mentality is slowly being overcome by the culture at ProServe that dictates the importance of global assignments, and “so if your clients are truly global, we need to be too” (Global Mobility Director). This is further stressed by business leaders who understand the value of wanting high potentials to to take assignments in countries where they service clients for the value-added experience they will bring back (Global Deployment Director).
ProServe further leverages its talent through internal staffing agencies, such as ProServe India, from where roughly 2,400 people a year come to support engagement here in the US (Global Mobility Director). This serves as a talent reserve to recruit from during peak seasons. This internal sourcing provides a “great channel” for recruiting employees “who understand our culture, our business, and the nature of work what we do” (Global Mobility Director).

Control & Coordination of quality of service

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<th>Control &amp; Coordination</th>
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<tr>
<td>“the partner here really wanted somebody looking over the piece, the audit work that was going on in Switzerland”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“its developing a service line in another member firm or a specific location.. so when my partners go out, it’s generally for a very specific reason”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m supposed to get the same experience. We want to service our clients regardless of where they’re located”</td>
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</table>

Table I(c): Quotes identifying control and coordination at ProServe

Due to the highly dissociated nature of the organizational structure at ProServe, control and coordination could pose a problem in centralizing these international assignments. ProServe not only recognizes the need for a global presence in order to service an international client but also the need for global expertise (Global Assignments Head). This need is also reflected in business leaders who insist on someone looking over the work being done in the international subsidiaries of a local client (Talent Professional). Usually, tasks of strategic importance such as setting up a new member firm, or developing a service line in another member firm are undertaken by business leaders or partners in
ProServe (Global Deployment Director). This is essential to ensure consistent quality of service. To quote the Director of Global Deployment:

“If I go to McDonald’s, the hamburger I get in country A and country B is supposed to taste the same right? I mean I’m supposed to get the same experience. We want to service our clients regardless of where they’re located. We want to feel that they have the same quality, that they’re getting the same level of professional wherever they are. The way to do that is through, you know sharing of resources and experiences and education.”

SECTION II - Exploring the nature of the assignment and its potential to impact career development.

Assignments leading to skill development

ProServe views international assignments as a way to increase experience in existing skills. Repeating assignments with existing clients is seen as way to increase proficiency in that task (Talent Professional). Since international assignments are limited to the the high performers in the organization, “we send our best and our brightest to different kinds of engagements to broaden their experience” (Global Deployment Director), ProServe believes it better to develop and refine the expats existing skills through these assignments. These experiences are seen as a way “to build the same portfolio of experiences” relative to their career path (Global Mobility Director).
International assignments are viewed as a way to provide experiences that couldn’t possible be provided in the home country (Global Deployment Director). “Significant client exposure” is essential for a junior partner to rise to the rank of partner (Talent Professional). For more senior partners, “a lot of assignments are built with the succession plan in place at the beginning” (Talent Professional), thus delineating direct value in the experience that these assignments provide towards career development of the expatriate.

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<tr>
<th>Increase Skill</th>
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<tr>
<td>“for the best client service, you’re that same person repeating for numerous years when they bring they bring the value from prior years and the experience”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“in the next couple of years, they need to get her.. some significant client experience”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“she’ll just have exposure to more people with that particular industry experience that she needs”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m still looking to build the same portfolio of experiences, relative to my career path”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“the whole intent was that they come here and build a certain set of skills to take back to their home country”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“the whole intent is to go lead a particular industry so that you would be equipped to have the skills and expertise and build those networks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“its still going to be transferrable skills that resulted from that assignment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we send our best and brightest to different kinds of engagements to broaden their experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“when I return back to my home member firm.. I’m going to bring all of that experience with me”</td>
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</table>
Increase Skill

“they’re gaining experience that I couldn’t possible give them here in the US”

Table II(a): Quotes identifying the skill development value of expatriate assignments.

The international experience is meant to provide value upon return, “the whole intent was that they come here and build a certain set of skills to take back to their home country” to leverage the “transferrable skills that resulted from that assignment (Global Assignments Head). International assignments are structured to equip future leaders with skills and expertise and build networks to be able to lead a particular industry (Global Assignments Head).

To quote a Talent Professional on the relevance of international assignments on skills development:

“She’s just going to work on audit clients... she’ll just have exposure to more people with that particular industry experience that she needs. But she’ll just have really, two or three years of hands-on experience of larger industry clients. So it’s really in the work that she’s going to do that’s going to give her that experience to take home.”

Performing Core Assignments

Not surprisingly, expatriate assignments entail core functions of the organization such as rotations among “subject-matter expert desks” situated worldwide (Global Assignments
Head). International assignments that are core to the strategic plan of the firm would indicate development of core competencies in the expatriate, which would lead to career development through succession planning. International assignments involve ProServe’s strategy to enter strategic markets, this is reflected in the big increases in the number of assignments to these developing markets (Global Assignments Head). These assignments are also strategically important in dealing with specific client needs, for example: “US have a lot of Japanese clients and they want Japanese-speaking folks servicing their clients. And so we have a very good relationship with the Japan firm to say: we need so many people over here to service Japanese Services Group” (Global Assignments Head), these niche-type programs highlight the versatility of what is “core” to ProServe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perform Core Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“when they come back two years later, you know they have a better view of how the consolidation works”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the plan is to bring her down to NY. work on some significant US insurance companies, get that experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“each busy season there is a give and take of people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“send people over, cause that’s definitely a market that strategically we want to be in”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the firm will gain knowledge when they do return”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“(referring to smaller member firms). the expectation is that they do bring back whatever best practices they can find out there”</td>
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</table>

Table II(b): Quotes identifying that expatriate assignments at ProServe are related to the core functions of the business
Along with providing expatriates with experience in core functions of the firm, these assignments also depict value to the firm, since “the firm will gain knowledge when they do return back to Chile in this case” (Global Assignments Professional). Repeated experience in core functions of the organization provides expats the opportunity to better understand how the process works and gain significant experience (Talent Professional). Along with a more aligned workforce, international assignments also provide unexpected firm-specific benefits which is expressed below by Global Assignments Professional:

“The expectation also is that they do bring back whatever best practices they can find out there. And that is very general expectation. Best practice is more like different ideas. That is what you gain when you are out. The practice in the Chilean firm, we do things the way we do them because that’s the only thing we know on how things are done.”

SECTION III - Exploring how repatriation impacts career development.

Staying connected to home firm

ProServe strongly encourages and mandates constant interaction between the expat and the home office, “so we stay in touch throughout the year,” (Talent Professional), “they’re by no means out of sight out of mind”. The global mobility function in ProServe ensures this by having a mentor or, a partner for seniors and managers, looking after the expat while they’re away. This ensures that they are still “very connected to their leadership, to their business, to their colleagues..” (Global Assignments Head). This connectivity is so robust
that a "US professional that's out on an assignment does get reviews at the same time the rest of the domestic US professional are" (Global Deployment Director).

Partners/mentors are expected to stay in regular touch to deal with three primary processes, “goal setting at the beginning of the fiscal year, a mid-year review process, and then an end of year process” (Talent Professional). Thus, partners/mentors are requested to connect at least four times a year (Global Deployment Director). This interaction is essential since these partners/mentors are “the ones who will be helping with their careers and are going to have to repatriate them” (Global Assignments Head), “its not just saying, you know, go to the member firm, we don’t hear from you for two years, and then we try to fit you back in” (Talent Professional). To quote the Director of Global Mobility:

“The importance of connectivity I think it’s very critical to that person’s comfort level that I’m going to stay connected and understand what’s going on, the changes that are being made and I’m going to have some physical support when I come back, someone who’s going to kind of hold my hand and guide me with things if you will, to make sure that that’s seamless and that I don’t really miss a beat and that the firm is signing up for that.”
**Staying Connected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“So we stay in touch with them throughout the year”</th>
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<tr>
<td>“(three processes). the goal setting at the beginning of the fiscal year, a mid-year process and then an end of year process”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Every client service has a mentor.. seniors and managers, its typically a partner”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“One of the things we think helps the process is keeping them with a US mentor all along the way”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“specifically about connectivity in the market place and staying connected.. thats a role that the counsellor is designed to play”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“importance of connectivity I think is very critical to that person’s comfort level”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we ensure that the sponsoring partner stays very close”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The HR manager in the office that they left also will continue to play a role to just check in... around performance management, and goal setting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the US professionals that’s out on an assignment does get reviewed at the same time the rest of the domestic US professionals are”</td>
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</table>

**Table III(a):** Quotes identifying how expatriates are kept connected to home-firm.

HR managers often check in around performance management and goal setting, counseling, and compensation (Global Mobility Director). This is to enable the expats to reach out to say “this isn’t going well” or “I’m having a hard time with this” so that the issue can be rectified through having conversations with the “host-counsellor”. HR’s role in this area of maintaining connectivity is exemplified through this quote by an international assignee from Chile, currently working in the global mobility function in the US office. She talks about her interactions with her sponsoring partner back in the Chile office:
"The principal that we work with in FAS, we have calls weekly with her and we
review each of the assignees we have in place that are going out, coming in,
returning, repatriating, or that are out there. She ensures that all of the talent
and partners are kept in touch with their expats. We do all the process and she
does all the following up to keep in touch with people, which has been maybe
one of the difficulties we had in the past. Its like we send someone out and, for
some reason, people forget they are out. And part of her job is to ensure that we
do not forget, that we keep in touch, that we help, and that we know what is
happening with them."

Repatriation Assistance

The partner’s role continues from staying connected to eventual repatriation of the expat as
well. The partner signs the “assignment agreement” accepting responsibility for
successfully repatriating the expat back into the firm (Global Mobility Director). These
partners look into the “value proposition of letting this guy go out for two years and then
coming back,” and how to fit them back and what’s the plan?” (Talent Professional). This
step is crucial to the repatriation phase since if assignees are not advised on what to expect
when they return, “they are going to demand things that I cannot do and no one can do for
them” (Global Assignments Professional). The pre-departure talks and continued
correspondence also makes the assignee aware of some of the changes that may occur by
the time they return, such as returning to a different office, or different laptop, having to fill
out a new W-2 or W-4 form (Global Assignments Head). Sometimes the changes are so large
that the person would require to repatriate to a different city based on the business need
Repatriation assistance also helps deal with “reverse culture shock” (Global Mobility Director).

ProServe differentiates between a successful assignment and reintegration in the firm, and the Global Mobility function is aware of how this “plays directly to the satisfaction of employees and ultimately their retention” (Global Mobility Director). Successful repatriations are often showcased during orientations for new hires which increase the favorable responses to these international assignments (Global Assignments Head). However, this is not always the case, there are times when expats return and no plan has been made for them (Talent Professional). Sometimes an expat may return to find himself in the same cube or office they left, and wonder “why did I do this for the last three years?” (Global Assignments Head) Sometimes creative strategies must be developed on how to maximize learning and transfer it back to the home-firm (Global Assignments Professional).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Repatriation Assistance</th>
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<tr>
<td>“they’ll look at what’s the value proposition for them letting this guy go out for two and he coming back, and how do I him back in?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“a number of the partner moves have that strategic repatriation process in place at the beginning.. but not all of them”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“its one thing to have had a successful assignment, it’s another to reintegrate with the firm and be meaningfully deployed”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“they (expats) need to hear about these measurements and how that contributes to the success of the firm”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repatriation Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;often times, the culture shock is equally or more significant upon the return to the country&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I (sponsoring partner) am committing to ensuring that they (expat) will be successfully repatriated to this firm&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;there may been.. some discussions, before they even left US soil&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I think we (expat and partner) will both have to be very creative on my return to see how to maximize my learning here and be able to transport that back to my member firm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“If.. I don’t tell them from the beginning what to expect.. they are going to demand things that I cannot do and no one can do for them”</td>
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**Table III(b):** Quotes identifying the repatriation assistance provided to expats.

Sometimes, simply having a repatriation strategy is not enough for someone to detach from their existing client network to go on an international strategy. This is highlighted by a quote by the Head of Global Assignment emphasizing the transferability of skills upon repatriation which has led to eventually quitting ProServe:

> “Their is not recurring work and so the worry is- I’m going to go on an assignment and I’m going to have a really difficult time getting plugged back in. I’ve lost the nature of my network that I’ve worked so hard to build and the nature of any engagement is very different”

**Career Development Plan**

“At (ProServe) we want our professionals to guide and direct their own careers” (Global Deployment Director). This motto works well especially due to their self-select
international assignments, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. However, firm selects have more strategic assignments that are linked to succession planning (Talent Professional). The career prospects for non-partners are discussed either through discussions with business leaders (Global Assignments Professional) or by looking up the career options associated with different assignments on their global site (Global Assignments Head).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Development Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“so when she comes back, maybe she’ll be the lead senior manager on that engagement”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“we continue to manage the career development process.. so .. we have a dual performance management process in place”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“its kind of hard to say.. in order to go to the next level you need to have this under your belt”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“there aren’t many opportunities, there are reasons why some people don’t want to take it”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“firm selects tend to be more strategic partner types of assignments. And so.. a lot of assignments are built with the succession plan in place at the beginning”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“in some cases the plan is you’re going to serve that client for two years and.. when you come back, you’re going to be able to the lead client service partner role”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we’re not capitalizing on a very substantial investment in them and their career and this assignment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ultimately where your are going to be more on the fast track for promotion and the opportunities will come quicker if you have a global assignment”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we want our professionals to guide and direct their own careers”</td>
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Table III(c): Quotes highlighting the career development plan prior to departure
Depending on the opportunities available, people may either advance in their career (Talent Professional), or at least make strides in the right direction (Global Assignments Head). While a promotion to partner or principal may not occur immediately, “ultimately... you are going to be on the fast track for promotion and the opportunities will come quicker, if you have a global assignment. However, international assignments cannot be made a pre-requisite to making partner in the firm, since many more qualified individuals may not be able to go on international assignments due to personal reasons (Talent Professional). However, getting global experience is valued in the firm and especially valuable to differentiate oneself for more senior promotion opportunities (Global Deployment Director).

The following quote from Global Assignments Head illustrates what would be considered ideal at ProServe:

“We’re not capitalizing on a very substantial investment in them and their career and this assignment and so it is something that we’ll need a big push with our business leaders that we need to have these conversations before we leave the US soil.”

SECTION IV - Training and Assignment Success, and Addressing Non-Career Motivated Individual Needs

Cultural Awareness

Cultural Awareness training at ProServe includes both instruction based and experience based training although it has not fully permeated the ProServe culture as a required or essential tool. Cultural awareness program help an assignee quickly acclimate to a foreign
environment in order to successfully complete the assignment. This successful international assignment would then lead to the expat’s career development, thus addressing both individual and organizational goals. International assignees can make use of the ‘Cultural Navigator’ that is like a personal assessment based on the country the expat is being assigned to. The cultural navigator “provides feedback on a variety of different cultural dimension” that shows the variances between personal cultural preferences and those of that particular country (Global Mobility Director). Everybody in the mobility function at ProServe is trained on cultural orientation indicator, which enables them to train/debrief assignees on cultural variances (Global Assignments Head). Although the cultural indicator provides a cultural snap shot of people’s immediate business environment tendencies, a mis-match does not result in a ‘deal-breaker’ (Global Assignments Head). However, they are coached/counseled on how to adjust to the foreign environment.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cultural Awareness</th>
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<tr>
<td>“we also prepare them with.. a tool called the Cultural Navigator”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“there are a lot of opportunities for our people to work with our India colleagues and resources”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“prepare people for global assignments through.. cultural awareness programs that we have in the firm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we have affinity groups.. we call it the IBRG”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“we do a communication wheel.. compare it to the country that they’re ultimately looking to go to”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural Awareness

"at least coaching and counseling that individual that your mannerisms and reactions may be different than that culture”

"we had everybody in Mobility trained on cultural orientation indicators, and so we became trainers”

"we spend a lot of time educating our professionals who are going to US or US India on what our culture is, our structure of organization and that kind of stuff”

Table IV(a): Quotes identifying how cultural aptitude is developed in expats.

International Assignees can also make use of the IBRG- International Business Resource Group at ProServe. The IBRG comprise of “foreign nationals who have strong interests in assignments or travel and or cultural differences” (Global Assignments Head). International assignees can even learn more about the culture in their country of interest through the 24/7 online library that has books from around the world, although these again stem from personal interest and are not mandated by ProServe (Global Mobility Director). Constant feedback from assignees regarding culturalization helps to constantly refine the cultural training needs at ProServe.

ProServe leverages it’s internal staffing resource in India to provide experiential based cultural training as well. For example, re-assigning potential expatriates to work with their Indian colleagues within the US helps provide “exposure” of a different culture (Global Mobility Director). Also due to the close collaboration between the US office and US India office, assignees going to and fro can avail of “cultural type of program”, which prepares expats through educating them on what the structure, and culture of ProServe is and how it relates in that culture (Global Deployment Director).
A succinct quote by Global Assignments Head helps to understand why people may not want to participate in cultural development programs:

“people are overwhelmed with all the things they need to do before they leave the country. I have to plan my child’s education, I have to get all my shots, I have to plan the shipping and housing and it's just overwhelming for them (assignee). When we make the ask of, ‘before you go, let’s take some time and let’s talk about the culture in the country you’re going to,’ they’re going, ‘I don’t have time for this, this is crazy!’”

Develop competencies to successfully perform the assignment

At ProServe, the process of selection of individuals for assignments results in a segregation of top performers and average to low performers. Since only top performers are selected for the international assignment, the concept of talent development is defined by the experiences they have already gained. The 5-point rating scale differentiating performance levels will further be explained in the discussion section. However, ProServe does provide the opportunity to build those required experiences. If someone checks shows an interest in doing an assignment, the mobility team reviews the application to identify if this is the right person and how to build the required skill (Global Assignments Head). For example, if someone (with a high performance rating) says “I really want to have a career specifically industry based in banking and working on banking clients, so the development per se for that would be the type of banking clients that we introduce that person to over time” (Global Mobility Director).
The logic for this type of competency development makes sense such that the individuals who did not possess the skills would not be asked to go on international assignment for that job (Global Assignments Head). Based on their performance rating, the level of communication and executive presence and other skills required could be ascertained (Global Assignments Head). However, ProServe also has a Learning Center which offers thousand of different course opportunities and international business programs, but these need to be self-initiated (Global Mobility Director). At ProServe it is expected that if a person has to be chosen for an international assignment, “the core competencies and those technical competencies will have already had to have been met” (Global Assignments Head).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develop Competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“remember, the competencies are all around”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“more from the portfolio of experiences that they develop”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Learning Center where there are thousands of different course opportunities”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“the core competencies and those technical competencies will have already had to been met at least at their present level”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chilean firm has been working.. on very intensive English training for everybody”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“for most of my assignments around the world, there is no a program that we’ve put together”</td>
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Table IV(b): Quotes identifying the development of competencies for successful expatriation.
Other attempts at developing competencies to serve international clients are in the form of language development. The language barrier between north and south America, and a lack of people who can speak either English or Spanish with business proficiency reduces the population of globally mobile talent between the two regions (Global Assignments Professional). It is surprising that smaller member-firms are addressing this issue with greater enthusiasm than the US, actively seeking to develop English language competency in the top talent. The Global Assignments Professional delineates the practice in a Chilean member-firm:

“The ones that qualify do get intensive language training, which means two things, basically. One, they have to cut in half the work they do for clients. So to be able to study you have to dedicate to study... So what we did was take them out of certain clients and let them in others that had less demanding timings... And the other thing is that we did send them out, like to Canada or US, for six/seven weeks to only study, which again is a very high cost, at least for a small member firm”

**Individual Preferences**

Distinct from the literature and specific to the unique multi-national partnership model of ProServe, we see that personal preferences are a major component of the international mobility assignments. This does follow the theme from the data such that a prospective self-select candidate would require to have the performance rating scores and the
capabilities to perform that job prior to being deployed. However, self-select provides the opportunity for people to simply “raise their hand” (Global Assignments Head).

These assignments are unique in that, they do not stem from any strategic benefit to the firm, that is, “they’re not going to have gained any significant industry or client exposure” (Talent Professional), “there’s really no strategic play for us, for that person to be in Cyprus and then come back”. The self-select is viewed as a method to retain talent within ProServe, “because they know, when you say no to something like that, you very much risk that person leaving to do it somewhere else" (Talent Professional). Thus, a self select is when an individual desires global experience and feels that generally speaking, the firm could leverage their talents and skills but not for a specific need that they have (Global Mobility Director).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Individual Preferences</th>
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<tr>
<td>“there’s a job in the UK. I want to apply for that”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Out of 10,000 AERS professionals, at least 3000 would respond in one way, shape or form”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My spouse has got an assignment to go to Germany for two years... can you help me?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“they’re not going to have gained any significant industry or client experience”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“a true self select will probably take a pay cut”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Individual Preferences

| “kids out of college, probably 50% or higher are saying ‘yeah, send me’” |
| “when your only asset is people, you know if you say no to something like that, you very much risk that person leaving to do it somewhere else” |
| “we’ll (mobility function) stay involved” |

Table IV(c): Quotes identifying how individual preferences are addressed through expatriate assignments.

Expatriate assignments for self-select are provided with the same support structure as firm-select assignees, but once they arrive at the host-destination “they’re pretty much on their own” (Global Mobility Director). Self-select assignees are kept connected to the business, but although they are appraised by the host-firm, the intent is “let’s not forget them” (Global Assignments Head). However, pure self-select assignees (“I want to go to Cyprus”) will have to take a pay cut and match peer-level salary. Often trailing spouses seek international assignments, where the function will “call the member firm and make connections for that individual” (Talent Professional). In such situations it is essential for the local firm “to try to show the value that that individual can bring to that practice and convince them that this should be a mobility assignment” (Global Deployment Director). People generally choose self-select when they personally feel their career requires an international assignment (Global Mobility Director).
Global Assignments Professional who self-selected her job posting in US recounts the process:

“I used to go into the website that we have for mobility where all the assignments are posted and one day I saw one that actually fit my abilities, and it was this mobility role. Actually I remember I went to my former boss and I said, ‘look, this is on the website, what do you think about it?’ and she was very supportive, mentioning that if this is something you really want to do... So I ended up signing in for this, got accepted, moved to the US and started working for the mobility assignments in the US”

**DISCUSSION**

The globally dispersed operations of ProServe provides a unique infrastructure within which talent management occurs (see Appendix). Leveraging its international member-firm network, we find evidence that this professional service, multinational firm, develops global leaders through expatriate assignments. This is synonymous with the definition for talent development proposed by Collings and Mellahi (2009) as, the identification of key positions in the organization and developing high potential employees to perform successfully in that role. We see that the organization seeks to build its future global leaders through providing them with key strategic experiences, which are essential for that global role. Succession planning is at the forefront of the organization’s agenda where limited strategic assignments are allocated to high performers. ProServe uses a 5-point rating scale in order to assess the performance rating of their employees, 5- possible termination and 1-
exceptionally well (possible promotion). These international assignments are generally limited to the 1s and 2s. Here, again we see how these expatriate assignments are managed under the broader principles of global talent management.

ProServe also acknowledges the issue raised by Suutari and Brewster (2001) of addressing the lack of availability of management and technical skills. The client-select as identified from the data emphasizes the importance of having a global presence in order to service global clients. Here, talent shortages in a member firm are seen as development opportunities for a select few who are being prepared for leadership roles in the organization. The ability to transfer a specific skill from one geographic region to another to address a client need elaborates the effectiveness of the network created among the member firms. We also see evidence for the need to control operations locally (Torbiorn, 1985) and ensure consistent quality (Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977). These tasks of strategic importance were generally undertaken by the business leaders. This makes logical sense since, these tasks ensure the quality and consistency of service and ProServe would employ only the best of its talent to be the face of the organization abroad. However business leaders are aware of the value of someone overlooking the work being done in international subsidiaries of a local client in order for that person to develop global expertise. Again we see a constant mindset of global leadership and succession planning, which is essential for such a wide-spread organization.

In order to address career progression issues related to expatriation, and since I was limited to interviewing primarily members of the mobility function, I decided to analyze the
the by-product of the international assignments to infer whether these assignments would result in career development or not. The interview responses supported the notion that these international assignment resulted in skill development of the expat assignee. Global assignments are seen by the business as an opportunity to equip, develop and refine existing skills. International assignments also provide future global leaders and networking opportunities in order to be able to lead the industry. From these responses we find support for the human capital theory perspective of career development as proposed by Bolino (2007), that these assignments which lead to skills development could result in career progression. Except for the true self-select assignees, we see that at ProServe, the international assignments generally address core functions of the business. This provides evidence for Schien’s (1971) career-cone model. The interview responses highlight how these assignments are initiated due to a client need, and for a professional service firm, servicing is the core function. Thus, we find evidence that these assignments address both the human capital theory to career development and Schein’s (1971) career cone model, hinting towards possible career progression of the assignees involved.

The qualitative analysis responses provide support for each of the three core practices identified by Bolino (2007) for successful repatriation. In order to leverage the skills developed through these assignments, it is essential to have repatriation strategies in place to prevent an out of sight, out of mind problem (Stroh et al., 2008). We see an active effort in ProServe to prevent this phenomenon from occurring. Continuous performance appraisals, goal setting, and constant communication with business leaders at home prevent an expat from being forgotten during long-term strategic planning. Repatriation
assistance is guaranteed in the form of an ‘assignment agreement’ that is signed between the sponsoring partner and the expat. This ensures that a senior member of the organization is involved in both deploying as well as repatriation. ProServe has a concrete succession plan in place only for strategic assignments which are generally limited to business leaders or future business leaders. However, they do highlight the necessary competencies required to make partner in the firm, and each completed international assignment is seen as a career advancing move. Support for these practices exhibit evidence for the robust repatriation plan that is set up at ProServe. However, it needs to be noted that if employees perform a number of tasks and they yet do not progress in their careers, it would lead them to eventually leave the organization, taking with them all their experiences (Harvey, 1989). Thus clear cut career development plans must be implemented in order to prevent loss of talent, and knowledge.

Due to the huge expenses incurred from inadequately performing an international assignment, it would be reasonable to assume that ProServe implements training programs, both competency and cultural in order to ensure success. However we see very limited use of both. ProServe implements a cultural navigator in order to highlight the cultural distance in mannerisms between expat and host country. This coupled with partaking in affinity groups (IBRG) is the only major source of cultural training. ProServe however, does leverage its global presence to provide short and long term assignments for expats to and from India in order to develop cultural awareness. This not only saves cost, which is generally a huge determinant on whether these development programs are offered (Tucker, et. al., 2004), but it also ensures that skills developed at these locations are firm-
specific. Similarly, the competency development takes a firm-specific turn, where the local assignments that individuals undertake are themselves a form of experiential training. This makes sense since expats are expected to work on similar projects during their international assignments, thus it would be beneficial to the firm to develop individuals along the needs of the firm (Tarique, & Schuler, 2010). There are also instruction based training from the Learning Center where employees can initiate their career development by building necessary skills. The training and development at ProServe shows a tendency to develop employee skills according the firm requirements. This would ensure a steady supply of competent individuals in the succession pipeline to lead the organization.

A very interesting and unexpected find from the interviews was how ProServe tailors its international assignments to suit the personal needs of its employees. Similar to self-initiated expats where individuals relocate voluntarily, for a pay cut and our hired under the host country contract (Biemann & Andresen, 2010), ProServe offers an option of self-select where individuals have the opportunity to simply ‘raise their hand’ and express their interest to go on an international assignment. Since this is solely in response to a personal need, wanting to travel, or international experience as key for personal career development, or due to spousal relocation, ProServe’s unique policies ensure that individual needs are addressed while retaining that talent within the firm at minimum cost. These self-select assignments do not produce any strategic value to the firm, yet the logic behind it is to prevent the loss of talent. Self-select assignments generally impose pay-cuts to peer-level salary, and minimum assistance in relocation, however they are still repatriated as any other expat assignee. This unique perspective of going through minimum
hardship to retain a talent seems ingenious especially in an industry where skills are highly transferrable.

While the results do support the notion of addressing both the organizational and individual need, it needs to be emphasized that international assignments are mainly focussed on addressing a specific organization need. At ProServe, expatriates are primarily employed to address specific firm or client needs. However, the developmental value in the form of experience learning is not discounted, which results in career development of the expatriate as well. While career development planning is not always implemented, individuals are monitored based on the level of their global exposure and experience gained, which opens up new avenues for their career development within the organization. Thus, while career development may not be directly addressed, it does occur as a talent retention strategy, thus addressing the individual goals as well. Even the self-select program at ProServe exhibits this talent retention strategy, where ProServe provides international assignments to talent in the organization, however, there is an active effort to align these individual interests to organizational goals: “I know you wanted to go to France, but I have an opportunity in Argentina, would you be interested?” (Global Assignments Head).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a couple of limitations to this paper which need to be addressed in order to build on the research. First, only 5 interviews were conducted. Although we tried to interview agents from different parts of the mobility function, the responses may not cover the whole story. Second, this study simply identifies the major themes that surround organizational
and individual goals. Although the context-specificity has added to the literature on expatriate assignments, this exploratory study leaves room for more in-depth empirical research where each of the themes can further be objectively measured. For example, a longitudinal study analyzing the training and development prior to departure, the assistance provided on assignment, and the career development of an individual can objectively highlight the extent to which these assignments result in career progression. Similarly identifying the number of assignees that have been promoted to partners or business leaders and their success in the organization would highlight the extent to which these assignments help to identify and develop future business leaders.

A further limitation stems from the fact that these results cannot be generalized across industries. This study simply builds on the propositions raised by Bolino (2007) on effective career management of expatriates and while we do see a link between the responses and the literature, we see a distinct twist based on the corporate structure which emphasizes the context-specificity of any HR practices. Thus using this research as a template, we can further identify whether these themes stand out in different industries as well. Future studies exploring the same themes in various other industries could add to the validity of career development during expatriation.

Another implication for future research stems from how the questions evolved as the conversations progressed. I have listed the broader questions in the methods section, however I found it more informative to narrow our conversation through the following questions:
- “Do these assignments always serve an organizational goal?”

- “What are the career opportunities that a person has upon return from an expatriate assignment?”

- “Is this reflective of the career planning done prior to departure?”

- “How do you train and develop your expats to ensure successful completion of the assignment?”

- “How do you ensure successful acclimatization to host-country culture?”

- “What other resources can the expats make use of to prepare themselves for the assignment?”

- “What sort of assistance do you provide to expats on assignments?”

- “To what extent do the expats need to report to the leaders at the home-firm?”

- “Is the same assistance provided to all types of expatriate assignments?”

- “To what extent are expats kept connected to the home-firm”

- “Upon return, how do you leverage the skills developed by the expat?”

- “When the expat returns, does he return to the same job as prior to departure?”

The streamlining of the questions to the practices at ProServe provides future researchers an understanding of what to expect from expatriate assignments in a professional service firm. This could provide valuable insight into how questions need to be tailored to the specific industry type. While this may raise generalization issues, it provides future studies with a clearer understanding of how expatriate assignments may vary among different industries.
CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the global talent management, especially of expatriates in a multinational professional service firm. While organizational needs have been extensively studied in the GTM literature, this paper contributes to how these practices impact individual goals as well. The qualitative data provides support to the principles of global talent management and career development of expatriates. The insight into how ProServe addresses individual non-career oriented needs exhibits a very forward-thinking approach by the business leaders to understand the fluctuating needs of its employees. With developing markets providing lucrative incentives for market capitalization, the future of Global HRM promises exciting new practices and policies to efficiently leverage internal talent along organizational goals, while providing unique development opportunities to the individual. This study should be considered a pilot study and it is essential to build on these organizational and individual themes that arise during expatriate assignments in order to fully understand the processes behind expatriation.
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APPENDIX

ProServe Company Profile

ProServe is a multinational partnership of member firms that operate under a single banner, ProServe Co. and is one of the largest professional service firm in the world. The services at ProServe include financial services of audit, tax, and other financial consulting. The expatriate assignments include providing these services to a global clientele across more than 20 industries. ProServe generally targets undergraduate college students and faces a large volume of applications from this pool. This eventually results in high turnover in order to maintain a high potential, highly effective workforce. The career aspirations of most of the individuals are to become partners, principals or directors in the firm and ProServe’s recruitment practices play a role in attracting and selecting only candidates who have similar aspirations. Expatriate assignments at ProServe are limited to high-performing employees who have a performance rating of either a one or a two out of a five point scale. Thus these individuals already show the competence and aptitude required for the job. This practice of selecting individuals who already possess the requisite skills is reflected in the limited training that ProServe provides to its expat assignees prior to departure. It is the corporate culture for individuals to voice their opinion to take-up particular assignments and increase proficiency in a particular service. Once these individuals gain the necessary competencies they are then marked on the ‘radar’ for strategic assignments that could potentially lead to roles with more responsibility within the organization.

The expatriate assignments are classified as Firm Select, Client Select, and Self Select. Firm Select generally focusses on developing specific competencies in the individual in order to develop them into future business leaders. Client Select focusses on a particular client need and expatriate assignments help to leverage talent worldwide to address these needs. Self Select is generally reflective of an individual need to travel and is not strategically tied to the organizational goals. ProServe insists on Self Select in order to prevent loss of talent to competitors especially due to the high-transferability of skills across firms.

Due to relative recent development of these expatriate programs, the cultural development programs prior to departure are not fully established. Since mostly the expatriate assignment stems from a business or client need, employees are coaxed into accepting these assignments and assistance is emphasized during the assignment in order to address issues related to adjustment and living in the host country. Since employees deal with providing professional services to clients in the home-country, the importance of networks is significantly higher in these individuals since these practices vary among countries. Thus repatriation is highly emphasized in order to “sell” these expatriate assignments to employees and ensure successful repatriation back into the home-firm. If an expat is sent as a firm or client select, they are generally well connected with the business leaders in the home-firm to the extent that their performance evaluations are also conducted home-firm with feedback from business leaders in the host-country. Expatriates on self-select assignments are generally evaluated by the host-country and they are often disconnected
from the home-firm except during repatriation. These individuals also face a pay cut to peer-level salary.