MESTRADO EM
GESTÃO DE RECURSOS HUMANOS

TRABALHO FINAL DE MESTRADO
DISSERTAÇÃO

NEW TRENDS ON EXPATRIATION AND CHALLENGES FOR IHRM – A STATE OF THE ART

RUTE PEDROSA DOS SANTOS

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ORIENTAÇÃO:

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For the times they are a-changin

Bob Dylan

Acknowledgments

This accomplishment would not have been possible without the support and continuous
encouragement of the following people to whom I express my very profound gratitude:

Professor João Peixoto, an excellent thesis advisor but, above all, a friend who cares.

Professor Miguel Monjardino, who once taught me how to replace "I can't do this!" for
"how am I going to do this?".

All the professors and colleagues, from whom I've learned so much.

Stephanie White, a friend who went along this path beside me.

My mom, the strongest and most courageous person I know.

My grandpa Fernando, the most generous and inspiring person I know.

My sister Sara, who always takes care of me.

All my family and friends, who make me happy every single day.

Ramsés, a true partner for life.

And finally, a small but heartfelt acknowledgment: I dedicate this dissertation to a little
man called Francisco, who fills my life with joy.

Resumo

A globalização das economias, ao longo dos anos, levou ao aumento do número de empresas a operar internacionalmente. Consequentemente, o número de missões internacionais continua a aumentar, enquanto as empresas adoptam abordagens mais flexíveis. Surgem então alternativas às tradicionais missões de expatriados de longa duração, não sendo claro em que medida é que estas alternativas são menos disruptivas para a vida dos colaboradores. Apesar da crescente tendência entre as EMN (Empresas Multinacionais) em contar com estas formas de missões alternativas para levar a cabo negócios internacionais, o grosso da pesquisa e dos estudos permanece focado nas experiências dos tradicionais expatriados de longa duração.

Dado este contexto, o objectivo principal desta dissertação é estudar as novas tendências ao nível das missões internacionais em EMN contemporâneas, bem como as suas implicações na área da GIRH (Gestão Internacional de Recursos Humanos). A hipótese principal baseia-se na ideia de que a predominância da expatriação de longa duração, tanto na literatura como na prática dos gestores de RH (Recursos Humanos), tem conduzido a uma relativa negligência ao nível da gestão das novas formas de missões internacionais.

Palavras-chave: Expatriação; Flexpatriação; Missões Internacionais; Gestão Internacional de Recursos Humanos.

Abstract

The globalization of economies, over the years, has increased the number of companies operating internationally. Consequently, the number of corporate international assignments continues to rise and companies are adopting more flexible approaches.

Alternatives to the traditional long-term expatriate assignment are emerging but it is not clear to what extent they are less disruptive to employees' lives. Despite the growing trend among MNCs (Multinational Companies) to rely on these alternative forms of assignments to conduct international business, the bulk of the research remains focussed on the traditional long-term expatriate experiences. Given this context, the main aim of this dissertation is to study the new trends of international assignments in contemporary MNCs and their implications in the field of IHRM (International Human Resource Management). Our main hypothesis is that the predominance of long-term expatriation in both the literature and practice of HR (Human Resources) managers has led to a relative neglect of the management of new forms of dislocation.

Key Words: Expatriation; Flexpatriation; International Assignments; International Human Resource Management

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Abbreviations

HNCs – Host-Country Nationals

HR – Human Resources

HRM – Human Resource Management

IHRM - International Human Resource Management

MNCs – Multinational Companies

PCNs – Parent-Country Nationals

TCNs – Third-Country Nationals

1. Introduction

The globalization of economies, over the years, has increased the number of companies operating internationally. The freer economic environment of the twenty-first century, the reduction of restrictions on labor movement in certain areas and the constant development of technology have combined to mean that many companies operate internationally almost as soon as they are established (Brewster, Sparrow, Vernon, & Houldsworth, 2011). However, as the number of international assignments continues to rise and companies are adopting more flexible approaches, it can be assumed that "long-term assignments may now form only a small part of the total international workforce" (CReME, 2000:1).

Alternatives to the traditional long-term expatriate assignment are emerging but it is not clear to what extent these forms of more flexible assignments are potentially less disruptive to employees' lives (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007). The issues around their management are likely to represent a great challenge for IHRM (International Human Resource Management) professionals and academics in the twenty-first century (Scullion, Collings, & Gunnigle, 2007). Despite the growing trend among MNCs (Multinational Companies) to rely on these alternative forms of assignments to conduct international business, the bulk of the research remains focussed on the traditional long-term expatriate experiences (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012).

Given this context, the main aim of this dissertation is to study the new trends of international assignments in contemporary MNCs and their implications in the field of IHRM. Our main hypothesis is that the predominance of long-term expatriation in both the literature and practice of HR (Human Resources) managers has led to a relative neglect of the management of new forms of dislocation. It is possible that the concentration on traditional movements has biased the practices of HRM (Human

Resource Management) towards a few of contemporary assignments, whilst alternative forms of mobility remain to be tackled.

The motivation to study the topic of alternative forms of international assignments and their repercussions in IHRM was fostered by two events. First, an exploratory interview performed with the Portuguese MNC Sonae Sierra's Head of Human Resources, Pedro Soveral Rodrigues (appendix 1). Among other issues, he stated that, in his company "expatriates end up being almost like the spoiled children who receive all the help and attention (…) and what worries me most are the employees who, as I told you, fly on a permanent basis". This answer, along with some other passages from the interview, suggested that the topic of managing alternative forms of assignments could be very relevant from a business practice perspective. Later, an invitation to join a team of investigators to work on a paper about expatriation and strategy in contemporary MNCs (Corado-Simões, Peixoto, Aurélio & Pedrosa, 2016)[1], led to the confirmation that, while the processes of traditional long-term assignments have received considerable attention, the issues related to alternative forms of assignments were under-researched in the literature.

The methodology used in this dissertation was mostly based in literature review. First, handbooks and other references on HRM and IHRM were consulted. Then, in order to identify and include as many articles as possible, various databases were consulted (e.g., Scopus, JSTOR: Journal Storage, ProQuest, Mendeley, among others), using general terms such as expatriation, impatriation, flexpatriation and IHRM. After that, a search was made to find articles involving specific terms encompassing the new types of assignments (e.g. short-term, business traveller, commuter and virtual mobility

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[1] "From expatriation to compatriation: A strategic view of human resource management in networked MNEs", paper presented at the 6th EIASM (European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management) Workshop on Expatriation - New Trends of Expatriation – held in Catania, Italy, September 15-16, 2016.

assignments). A total of 139 relevant articles were found. They were then stored and analysed through the use of the software Mendeley - a valuable work tool which enabled a better organisation of the readings and also an easiest management of the references throughout this dissertation.

The present dissertation is structured in six sections, including this introduction. In the second section, the major concepts involved will be explored and a review on the emerging forms of corporate international assignments will be made. This will be followed by a summary of the primary factors that led to the emergence of those alternative assignment types. The third section will start by clarifying the main differences between HRM and IHRM and then, the challenges arising from these non-traditional forms of global mobility will be addressed, with a review of some of the latest research that has been made on the field. Finally, in the forth section, major conclusions will be presented, as well as, the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. New forms of expatriation and international mobility within MNC's

2.1. Concepts

2.1.1. Expatriation, Impatriation and Flexpatriation

Expatriation

History is plenty of examples of how nations and businesses have been sending their members abroad, with the most various aims. In the ancient Greek world, for instance, traders were sent to ensure trading conditions, with written sources of Homer and Hesiod attesting to the existence of trade (*emporia*) and merchants

(*emporoi*) from the eighth century B. C. (Aubet, 2001). But traders are only an example amongst others such as armies, crusaders, missionaries or ambassadors, which have been moving around the world for centuries. These people can generically be considered expatriates.

However, during the late twentieth century, globalization and the dawn of companies' internationalization have created a new class of expatriates: personnel of MNCs who go overseas, assigned by their companies, to accomplish a job related goal. MNCs rely on those employees, many of who occupy key positions in the overseas operations.

It is sometimes assumed that expatriation, as a research subject, has most of its foundations on the seminal work of Anders Edström & Jay Galbraith (1977) about the general motives to expatriate and, later, on the studies of Tung (1979, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1987, 1988), Black (1988), and Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou (1991), with a North American perspective, and on the work of Brewster (1991), from Europe – United Kingdom. However, a substantial body of expatriate research existed well before the 1980's. The emergence of these studies can be situated in the 1960's, when the role of expatriates began to be recognized as essential to foster organizations' growth into international markets.

One of the most prominent example is Perlmutter's (1969) seminal article, which highlights the importance of the headquarters orientation towards subsidiaries in an international enterprise. The author distinguishes among three types of orientation, based on the attitudes of MNCs headquarters executives, namely: ethnocentric (home-country oriented); polycentric (subsidiary oriented); and geocentric (world-oriented). In MNCs with an ethnocentric orientation, managers from the home-country – parent-country nationals (PCNs) - are considered superior and, for this reason, should be the ones recruited and developed to hold key positions everywhere worldwide. The MNCs

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following a polycentric orientation, on the other hand, considers that subsidiaries should be as local in identity as possible, and focus on developing people of local nationality – host-country nationals (HCNs) - for key positions. MNCs with a geocentric orientation do not equate superiority with nationality, hence, the best employees are recruited and developed in the world for key positions everywhere in the world, and that could include third-country nationals (TCNs). Since then, these three orientations have become the standard way to describe MNC staffing policies (A. Harzing, 2004), emphasizing the role of expatriates in the internationalization of the companies.

Between the 1980's and 1990's, research about the management of expatriates was abundant (e.g. Chang, 1997; Harvey, 1998; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987; amongst many others), having assumed a sharp relevance in the IHRM literature. Hence, the management of expatriates was, for decades, one of the major issues within IHRM research, sometimes considered a synonym of IHRM (Brewster et al., 2003).

Nearly all the research studied Western employees assigned by their organizations to missions abroad for relatively long periods – the traditional notion of expatriates (Bonache et al., 2001). Although the term expatriate could literally include all employees working outside their home-country, it is mainly associated for PCNs (and sometimes TCNs) working in foreign subsidiaries of the MNC for a pre-defined period of between two and five years (Reiche & Harzing, 2010). A detailed definition of the concept is offered by Aycan & Kanungo (1997:250), who describe expatriates as "employees of business and government organizations who are sent by their organization to a related unit in a country which if different from their own, to accomplish a job or organization related goal for a pre-designated temporary time period of usually more than six months and less than five years in one term". However, it should be

noted that, in the literature, there is no consensus regarding the exact length of the expatriate assigment, and the only agreement is that those assignments are relatively long, unlike short-term assigments and business travels.

As Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann (2014) clearly distinguish, corporate or assigned expatriates differ from self-initiated expatriates because the first are sent abroad, managed and funded by the company, usually receiving an expatriate contract, while in the case of self-initiated expatriates, the first key binding activity to move internationally is solely made by the individual, who undertakes the international work experience with little or no organizational sponsorship[2].

Regarding the motives that MNCs have to send expatriates out to their foreign subsidiaries, the previously mentioned Edström & Galbraith's (1977) typology remains one of the most cited. The author identifies three general motives for making this type of transfers: the first is to fill positions, which mainly concerns the transfer of technical knowledge to developing countries, where qualified local nationals are not available; the second is management development, giving the managers experience to use in future important tasks in subsidiaries abroad or with the parent company; the third reason identified is organisation development, through socialization of expatriates and the development of interpersonal linkages across MNC units.

More recently, Harzing (2001) identified three control specific roles of expatriates: the bear, the bumble-bee, and the spider. Bears act as a means of replacing the centralisation of decision-making in MNC highlighting the degree of dominance these assignees have over subsidiaries. Bumble bees are used to control subsidiaries through

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[2] In this dissertation, in order to narrow the focus, self-initiaded expatriates are excluded from analysis. However, it is important to note that this category of expatriates can also bring challenges, for IHRM as well as domestic HRM, as it deals with an increasingly multicultural workforce, thus deserving further research.

socialisation of host employees and the development of informal communication networks. Finally, spiders, weave a network of informal communication within the MNC.

For most expatriates, their mission involves relocation of the family and personal lives to a different environment and, as such, it has been recognized as a challenging and strategically significant aspect of IHRM (Forster, 2000). Focusing on this distinguishing element of an expatriate job – the complexity added by the intercultural environment in which the assignment takes place - studies from authors such as Hofstede (1980) and later, Trompenaars (1993), reinforced the idea that expatriates were generally home-country employees relocated by their companies to culturally distant locations. Along the same vein, Laurent (1986) argued that national cultures and the differences between them have an impact on HRM, strongly suggesting that attention should be paid when deciding policies in foreign operations. More recently, Ghemawat (2001) reinforced the idea that "distance still matters", highlighting the importance of cultural distance but, at the same time, drawing attention to other dimensions that can make foreign markets considerably more difficult to access, namely: geographic distance (i.e. the actual physical distance between countries), administrative distance (i.e. colony-colonizer links, currencies, trading arrangements) and economic distance (i.e. in-come, distribution-channel quality).

Despite criticisms, (arguments against Hofstede's study are well synthetized in Jones' (2007) paper) Hofstede's research on IBM's employees represents a landmark, providing scholars and practitioners with a highly valuable insight into the structure of national cultures and the dynamics of cross-cultural relationships. Since then, within culture-focused research, several models have been developed, one of the most recent being the GLOBE model presented by House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta

(2004). GLOBE is a long-term programmatic research effort, designed to explore effects of culture on leadership, organizational effectiveness, economic competitiveness of societies, and the human condition of members of the societies studied. Thus, this model contributed for a better understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices.

The relevance of culture is also revealed by the number of studies on expatriate adjustment which, over the years, were carried out to analyze the degree of fit or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel with different aspects of foreign culture (Black & Stephens, 1989; Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004).

Increasingly, research focussed on understanding the experiences and challenges involved in the expatriation process (of both expatriates and their families) and, as Scullion & Brewster (2001:351) noted back in 2001, "few scholars and managers would still regard expatriate HRM as a field still in its infancy". Studies have been addressing the issues associated with selection, training, appraisal and compensation, as well as the experiences of those employees upon return home (i.e. repatriates) and the expatriation process is commonly considered to include three distinct phases, namely: the pre-assignment stage (selection and preparation); the actual assignment; and the post-assignment stage (i.e. repatriation) (Bonache et al., 2001).

Tung (1988), back then, recognized that an often neglected area of research in IHRM was the subsequent career path of the individual upon return. Career advancement opportunities and relocation were identified as two key issues of repatriation and, as the author notes, "while the issues associated with expatriation are manifold and complex, those pertaining to the reabsorption of the expatriate (…) upon completion of an overseas assignment are equally as nebulous", emphasising that the process of re-entry

after many years abroad could become a traumatic experience for both expatriates and their families, since it includes settling into a new position, a new home, and, in some cases, the spouse's searching for a job.

Since expatriate assigments are increasingly used nowadays for knowledge transfer and management development purposes, the retention of repatriates is even more crucial for MNCs to benefit from those transfers in the long run (Reiche & Harzing, 2010). But retention of repatriates can be a problematic issue and if, one the one hand, it is known that companies which support the individual throughout the expatriation and repatriation processes enhance their chances of retaining the employee after the assignment (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007), on the other hand, literature (e.g. Harzing & Christensen, 2004) suggests that the level of dissatisfaction of repatriates regarding the repatriation process is quite high, and this dissatisfaction is one of the major reasons for leaving the company.

Impatriation[3]

Another traditional source of global staffing is through impatriation, which consists in the process of selectively transferring HCN managers and/or TCN managers into the home/domestic organization of a MNC on a semi-permanent to permanent basis (Harvey, Speier, & Novicevic, 1999). According to those authors, the main advantages that impatriates may bring to headquarters are the understanding of local contexts and cultures on foreign operations, easier communication with host units and local public authorities, and new ideas and perspectives.

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[3] In the literature, there is no consensus regarding the term's spelling. Several authors use the term "inpatriate" (e.g. Harvey & Buckley (1997); (Harvey et al., 1999); Reiche (2006)), while others opt to replace the "n" for "m", using the term "impatriate" (e.g. Al-Rajhi et al. (2006); Harzing (2004)). In the present dissertation, for the sake of uniformity, the term "impatriate" was adopted because, if meant to be antonymic to expatriate, the spelling seams more appropriate, since the antonym of export is import.

While reflecting on the important differences between domestic and impatriate managers, Harvey & Buckley (1997) address the issues that arise in the impatriation process. In the same vein, Reiche's (2006) study highlights that expatriates and impatriates differ along several dimensions and therefore have to be treated as distinct subsets of international staff. According to this author and others (e.g. Al-Rajhi, Altman, Metcalfe, & Roussel, 2006), research on impatriation is still in its infancy and an effort should be made to isolate impatriate issues, contributing in this way to a better understanding of the impatriate experience, but also to provide a more differentiated perspective on international staff in general.

However, authors such as Dowling, Festing, & Engle (2008) argue that the term impatriate has created a certain level of confusion surrounding foreign assignments and, probably, doesn't add much to the prior definition of expatriate. Impatriation, as mentioned above, has been described as the relocation of employees from host-countries to headquarters but, when these host-country nationals are transferred into MNCs' parent-country operations, they can also be considered as expatriates. Therefore, the authors argue that it is questionable "whether the term inpatriate adds enough value to justify its use" (Dowling et al., 2008:4).

Flexpatriation

Moving away from expatriation and impatriation, which imply staff relocation for relatively long periods, new forms of global assignments are being utilized by MNCs in response to changes in the international business arena.

The term flexpatriate comes to describe employees which circulate between different locations in a short-term basis, varying from a few days and up to one year (Shaffer et al., 2012). The major difference between flexpatriates and long-term expatriate assignments is that, usually, relocation of the employee and the family is not necessary

(Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2009). Flexpatriates travel from the home-country location to other parts of the world, returning shortly after, and appear as a response to the organization's need for flexibility Yet, as Mayerhofer et al (2004) argue, flexpatriates' impact on the success of operations abroad may be just as great and require as much skill, adaptability and resilience as longer-term placements.

The specifications of these flexible assignments tend to move flexpatriates from the human resource departments' orbit. While on the one hand, the management of expatriates is subject to direct and permanent intervention from the human resource departments (in matters such as training, accommodation, family support, repatriation and career development), flexpatriates, on the other hand, tend to be supervised by operational managers, and it is under the budgets of these operational departments that they travel and act internationally (Rego & Cunha, 2009).

Flexpatriation encompasses a range of more flexible options, some of which are explored in the following section.

2.1.2. Short-term assignments, Business traveller assignments, Commuter assignments, Virtual mobility, Transpatriation, Compatriation

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, we have been witnessing the emergence of new forms of non-standard international assignments in various forms. Bonache & Cerviño (1997), for instance, found in their empirical study of Zara that the Spanish company was able to reach the three strategic goals that characterise the transnational corporations - local sensibility, global integration and organisational learning, without the use of expatriates. As substitutes, Zara has developed several HR practices such as: temporary foreign assignments for start-up operations; the hiring of competent local managers (a tendency which departs from the ethnocentric orientation (Perlmutter, 1969) and denotes the importance of cultural sensibility in businesses (Ghemawat,

2001; Hofstede, 1980)); socialisation of local managers into the corporate culture; extensive use of international management meetings; auditors from headquarters; and formalisation and centralisation procedures. In this way, the authors highlighted the role of short-term assignments as alternatives to classic forms of expatriation, paving the way for new approaches on the issue.

Studies from the Centre for Research into the Management of Expatriation (CReME, 2000) reported the emergence of new forms of international working and the list of most prevalent alternative assignments included options such as short-term, business traveller and commuter assignments (CReME, 2000; Collings et al., 2007; Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Welch et al., 2007; Welch et al., 2003). It can be argued, however, that virtual assignments, or 'armchair travellers' equally qualify for the list (Meyskens et al., 2009). These new forms arise as opposed to permanent transfers which are no longer seen as the only solution for delivering services to certain parts of the organizations (Roberts et al, 1998). Indeed, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2012), with its sample database of 900 companies, predicts that the assignee levels will increase by 50 percent until 2020 (from the 2009 levels), and the era where assignments meant a three or four-year relocation, followed by a return home, is coming to an end.

Short-term assignments

Short-term assignments can be defined as transfers abroad that range in duration from longer than a business trip, but shorter than the typical long-term assignment, lasting, usually, less than one year (CReME, 2000; Harris, 2002; Tahvanainen, Welch & Worm, 2005) and, in some cases, assignments last even less (i.e. up to six months (Suutari, Brewster, Riusala, & Syrjäkari, 2013)). Frequently, short-term assignments are used for skill transfer and management development (CReME, 2000), responding to a need to

solve problems of highly technical nature, where mobile teams of experts – so called trouble-shooters – are sent to solve a particular operational problem.

Business traveller assignments

In business traveller assignments, employees undertake frequent international business trips but do not relocate (CReME, 2000). Business travellers communicate regularly with the home-office, while maintaining their family and personal lives at the home-country location (Meyskens et al., 2009).

As Mayerhofer et al. (2004) note, business traveller assignments serve as a means to coordinate quality and timeliness across borders, necessitating frequent trips among multiple production locations and the home office. Therefore, this type of assignment occurs mainly for the purpose of managerial control, but is also used for projects, client engagements, and for business development as well (CReME, 2000).

Commuter assignments

Commuter assignments are special arrangements where the person concerned commutes from the home country on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to the place of work in another country (CReME, 2000).

Besides the skill transfer, this type of assignment comes as a solution to address personal and family life issues coupled with the traditional long-term assignments (CReME, 2000).

Virtual mobility

In virtual assignments, employees must articulate with one or several remote locations, meaning that they may have to cross multiple cultural boundaries and time zones, sometimes without even leaving their office chairs. Welch et al. (2003:42) define virtual

assignees as employees who are physically located in the home unit, that may or may not be the company headquarters – it could be in another subsidiary unit and may also have responsibilities in the country where they live.

Virtual mobility came to address needs such as decentralization and global interrelation of work processes, and its growth has been enabled by improvements in information technology, to the extent that teams nowadays collaborate and communicate via e-mail, telephone and videoconferencing (Reiche & Harzing, 2010).

Recently, Lirio (2014) noticed that, in the IHRM literature, very little has been written about the use of technology in building a global career, with few exceptions such as the study of Welch et al. (2003) which explored the concept of virtual international assignments as an alternative to traditional expatriate assignments.

Transpatriation and Compatriation

In the literature, the traditional way of analyzing international assignments has been looking at the classical expatriation cycle of selection and preparation, actual assignment and, at last, repatriation, with focus on the specific location to which the assignment is intended (Reiche & Harzing, 2010). However, while single-country assignments are far from being extinct, other types of global work are emerging, encompassing more than one assignment, to more than a single country (Shaffer et al., 2012).

Still during the early 1990s, some contributions acknowledged that expatriation, as dealt with in the majority of studies, was no longer an adequate form of managing transnational firms. As Adler & Bartholomew (1992:60) emphasize: "foreign assignments in transnational firms are no longer used primarily to get a job done in a foreign country (expatriation) or to socialize foreign country nationals into the home

country headquarters' culture (inpatriation), but rather to enhance individual and organizational learning in all parts of the system (transpatriation)." Thus, the authors introduced the concept of transnational manager, or transpatriate, whose role diverges from the traditional expatriate's in several dimensions: first, transnational managers are not focused on a single country nor limited to managing relationships between headquarters and a single foreign subsidiary; second, transnational managers, unlike their predecessors, do not focus on becoming expert on one particular culture, but they must learn about many foreign cultures' perspectives, tastes, trends, technologies, and approaches; third, transnational managers must be skillful at working with people from many cultures simultaneously, therefore they cannot continue dealing with each country's issues on a separate basis; fourth, transnational managers need cross-cultural skills on a daily basis, throughout their career, not just during foreign assignments, but also on regular business trips and in daily interaction with foreign colleagues and customers; fifth, transnational managers interact with foreign colleagues as equals, rather than from within clearly defined hierarchies of structural or cultural dominance and subordination.

Much more recently, but along the same vein, Corado-Simões, Peixoto, Aurélio & Pedrosa (2016:16), introduced the concept of compatriation, intended to provide a new perspective to understand international staff assignments in network-like multinational enterprises in the twenty-first century. The concept is intended to provide a wide umbrella under which the more diverse types of international movements within MNCs take place. As the authors argue: "the label is intended to underline that for the analysis of international assignments to make sense, it needs to be seen from corporate strategy lenses." In other words, such assignments should not be envisaged as individual

movements of people from headquarters to other units, but rather from a company strategy perspective.

2.2. Factors leading to the emergence of new forms of assignments

In this section, an attempt will be made to synthetize and enumerate some of the main factors which have increased the search for alternative forms of assignments:

First, the difficulties of expatriate management and repatriation have been increasingly identified, along with the costs associated, as expatriates can be prohibitively expensive (Allerton, 1997; Peixoto, 1999) and often leave the company after repatriation to join forces with a competitor (W. M. Baker & Roberts, 2006). Besides, expatriate failure (i.e. the early return to the home-country because an inability to perform in the overseas assignment) occurs very often, primarily because the expatriates or their spouses and families fail to adjust to the new location (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Griffin & Pustay, 2007; Tung, 1987). Apart from the costs to the organisation, expatriate failure can also be costly to the individual, possibly causing a loss of self-esteem, self-confidence and prestige among others (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). This induces companies to find other ways of developing global skills or conducting global business.

Second, changes in the organizations' structures move away from the traditional MNC with headquarters in a Western home-country and subsidiaries overseas. Business structures such as joint ventures, strategic alliances, multi-domestic operations and shared services are becoming very common (Phatak, 1994). These significant changes in the nature of international operations result in, as Scullion & Brewster (1999:48) point, "a growth in expatriation which does not follow the traditional form".

Third, employees unwilling to move generate staff immobility, due to the increasing number of dual-career couples as more women seek equal opportunities to advance in their careers. As Harvey (1998:327) notes "to underestimate the importance of the career cycle of the trailing spouse may limit the number of potential expatriates interested in an international relocation and, at the same time, reduce the probability of success of the expatriate." Along with dual-career couples, other constraints, such as aged parents and single-parent families appear to be in the origin of the search for alternative forms of assignments that do not involve relocation at all.

Forth, improved technology in communications enables data and information to flow easily worldwide, having a tremendous impact on business reality. Castells (2001), in his reflections on the internet, business and society, analyses how the emergence of the internet affects organizations and how it has become the medium of the new network society. Technologies such as desktop videoconferencing have allowed companies to try different staffing arrangements and virtual assignments are an example of those arrangements. Still, Ghemawat (2001:11) argues that "technology may indeed be making the world a smaller place, but it is not eliminating the very real—and often very high—costs of distance". Welch et al. (2003) corroborate this idea and argue that, due to the importance of face-to-face communication, it is unlikely that technology will make traditional expatriate assignments redundant.

Fifth, air transport nowadays turns travelling into a faster, more convenient and accessible experience, broadening the options for organizations which do not wish to have the costs of long-term assignments (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). Thus, this factor allows MNCs to increasingly opt for much flexible assignments, especially frequent-flyers.

Sixth, international security issues prevent higher mobility, with the increasing global terrorism and the impact that events such as the September 11th attacks in New York City and the July 7th London bombings have on the immediate work experience of expatriate employees but also on the recruitment of future expatriate employees for roles in these countries (Scullion et al., 2007).

Seventh, alterations in the global economic arena, with the emergence of BRICS and especially Asian economies (Scullion et al., 2007) suggest that conventional expatriate assignment is not the most effective way to manage overseas subsidiaries in countries such as China, ranked number one as the country with the greatest number of difficulties for expatriates, presenting the highest rate of assignment failure (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2011).

Eighth, the emergence of the millennium generation displays new challenges, turning mobility opportunities in a key element in attracting, retaining, developing and engaging talent: 71 percent of millennials say they want and expect an overseas assignment during their career (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2012). But with a diverse workforce, covering three generations of workers, mobility strategies will need to be agile, adaptable and constantly evolving to meet the specific requirements of the business and different groups of employees (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012).

3. Challenges that arise for IHRM

3.1. HRM vs IHRM

There is not a consensual definition of IHRM. However, it is generally accepted that it comprehends the set of activities encompassed in HRM in an international context, namely: attracting, developing and maintaining the effective workforce necessary to achieve a multinational firm's objectives. These activities include recruiting and

selecting, providing training and development, appraising performance, providing compensation and benefits and, consequently, developing procedures and policies for accomplishing these tasks (Griffin & Pustay, 2007). However, within IHRM, managers face challenges beyond those confronting HR managers in domestic environments, since the international context adds extra complexity. The organization that manages people across different national contexts, including different institutional, legal and cultural circumstances, may be forced to tailor its hiring, training, firing and compensation policies, being aware of what is allowed in different regions of the world, but also what makes for cost-effective management practices (Brewster et al., 2011; Griffin & Pustay, 2007). Additionally, authors such as Dowling, Welch, & Schuler (1998) affirm that some HRM functions are necessary to accommodate four additional pressures when going international, namely: the need for greater operating unit diversity; more external stakeholder influence; higher levels of risk exposure; and more personal insight into employees' lives and family situations.

The field of International Human Resource Management – IHRM – research has grown over the last decades, initiating with an early focus on staffing decisions in MNC and how to manage expatriate managers. Indeed, managing expatriation is the most widely discussed aspect of IHRM activities – managing people on international assignments (Brewster et al., 2011).

However, as argued in section 2.2, alternative forms of global mobility such as short-term assignments, virtual assignments, commuters, business travellers, amongst others, are growing at least as fast as traditional expatriation. The following section will address the challenges arising from these non-traditional forms of global mobility, reviewing some of the latest research that has been made on the field.

3.2. Management of emerging types of assignments

In the IHRM literature, as previously discussed in section two, staff movements tend to refer to employees assigned to foreign operations for a long period of time. Research has focused mainly on the management of the expatriate assignments and, more recently, on impatriation (Bonache et al, 2001; Harvey et al, 1999). Long-term expatriate assignments have been the most traditional method of internationalizing managers and executives but, as it has been discussed throughout this dissertation, there are other alternatives which can complement or even be used instead of the traditional ones.

Unlike expatriation and impatriation where, as mentioned above, assignments typically last for a relatively long period of time, followed by a return to headquarters or home location, short-term assignments, involving frequent travel without relocation (flexible expatriation), are becoming more common. However, in the literature, research tends to focus on the importance of support for traditional assignments (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001), while very little attention has been given to the needs of those who travel for brief assignments. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, relatively recent studies from Mayerhofer et al. (2004) and Welch et al. (2007) reveal the lack of support from the HR departments regarding the new kinds of international assignments. While studying the management of non-standard international experience in a Finnish company, Suutari et al. (2013) also found that the recent increase in the popularity of short-term assignments has not been matched by the development of HRM policies for such assignments. Along this vein, Lirio (2014) notes that, despite the emergence of alternative forms of assignments, HR departments are not as involved in organizing and supporting them as

compared to longer international postings, and this was recently corroborated by Baker & Ciuk (2015) in what concerns frequent flyer and rotational assignments.

In fact, core areas such as selection, training, compensation, performance management, repatriation and family issues should be considered in the management of short-term assignments, yet research shows that the burden of managing these alternative types of assignments is largely left with employees and their families (Mayerhofer et al., 2004).

Authors such as Collings et al. (2007) highlight the importance of developing IHRM policies that take into account the differences between the various forms of alternative assignments. In the same way, Tahvanainen et al. (2005:670) suggest that, "while there may exist similarities in the management of assignments regardless of the length, adopting a 'one-size-fits-all', standardized approach can be counter-productive."

While reviewing the most recent studies that focus on non-traditional forms of assignments, one can notice a lack of clear definitions for each type of assignment. With few exceptions, such as Shaffer et al.'s (2012) attempt to define and differentiate the various types of alternative assignments, providing an important step in establishing a theoretical framework for understanding the particularities of each type of assignment, terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Another relevant example of the importance of isolate each type of assignment is the study of Baker & Ciuk (2015) which finds that the major factors affecting the work-family interface in frequent flyer and rotational assignments impact with considerable variation the experiences of those separate two groups.

On the other hand, studies such as Mayerhofer et al.'s (2004) combine in the same term – flexpatriate – experiences of commuter and business travel assignments. Although this is not incorrect (since, as we have stated in section two, flexpatriation encompasses a

range of manifold alternative assignments), an effort should be made in order to isolate and closely analyse the distinguished elements of each type of assignment, for the experiences of the assignees may be quite different.

Regarding staff selection, cultural qualifications seem to be as relevant as they are in the case of traditional long term expatriation. Yet, the findings from a recent Ernst & Young's global survey reveal that 42 percent of the respondents said that cultural fit was not usually considered in the assignee selection process (EY, 2016).

Besides the importance of cultural fit, Demel & Mayrhofer (2010) suggest that, when selecting employees for flexpatriate assignments, instead of recruiting solely on the basis of technical and cultural qualifications, HRM should consider requirements such as physical fitness, discipline, persistence, and resilience.

In what concerns the process of selection, Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) empirical study shows that in the case of short-term assignments the process is typically informal and, while that practice seems to be satisfactory in the short term, it might lead to serious problems in the longer run since a company that always relies on those employees who are known to the selectors (often line managers) runs the risk of over-looking suitable candidates, or not developing a future pool of international assignees. Once experienced employees retire, the company may face severe problems if it does not have competent workers to replace them. Additionally, the authors state that appropriate selection is important as often short-term assignments are converted into traditional expatriate assignments.

As far as pre-departure training is concerned, assessment of training needs and preparation for the assignments seems to be as crucial for alternative forms as it is for traditional long-term expatriation. Yet, the findings from Ernst & Young's global

survey reveal that fewer than 35 percent of the respondents have cultural training before assignment (EY, 2016). Tahvanainen et al. (2005) even argue that provision of cultural awareness training can be more important for short-term assignees than for traditional expatriates, since the lack of integration with the local work-force and, sometimes, even a total lack of adaptation to local practices, were regarded as problems associated with short-term assignments. As the authors state, the very nature of short-term assignments does not enable a protracted acculturation process, since job performance requires that employees rapidly adjust in order to fulfil their tasks successfully. Further, the lack of a local support base and separation from the family may exacerbate the adjustment process.

Concerning the process of repatriation, as it was previously discussed, new forms of corporate international assignments have been considered as a solution to avoid recurrent repatriation problems associated with the longer traditional assignments. Probably for that same reason, repatriation in the context of alternative types of assignments has not received much research attention, with few exceptions such as Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) study, which found that repatriation in short-term assignments is relatively unproblematic. However, the authors advert that changing business situations can cause it to be highly challenging, especially in cases (e.g. international project operations are sold during a very short time period) where the assignee's previous position disappears. Again, the very nature of the international assignment appears to be relevant and, depending on it, repatriation issues can change. For instance, the authors stated that international project workers would move to the next project, so repatriation was not actually an issue for that group; others would return to their original position where possible. More recently, Starr's (2009) study, which is one of the first to focus specifically on repatriation in short-term assignments from the

employee's viewpoint, confirms the importance of studying repatriation within short-term assignments, since repatriation policies and practices are known to have a significant impact on individual motivations and willingness of talent to accept international postings (Meyskens et al., 2009). Starr's (2009) findings extend Brewster, Harris, & Petrovic' s (2001) in that short-term assignments may to a certain point avoid some of the problems associated with long-term expatriate assignments, but also create new issues. This is corroborated by Tahvanainen et al. (2005) statement that the need for keeping international assignees abreast with the home company's developments also while on a short-term foreign post reflects the general repatriation dilemma of any international 'tour of duty'.

Regarding family issues and employee well-being, little is known about the impact of alternative forms of assignments on employees´ lives, taking Collings et al., (2007:26) to suggest that "more research is needed to guide researchers and practitioners in devising HR policies to respond to and anticipate some of the little understood side-effects of alternative forms of international assignments."

As it was previously discussed, an attraction of the alternative international assignments was that it would not directly affect the family, namely the spouse's career or the children's education. However, short-term international assignments may have a negative impact on the family and the employees' work/life balance, and often cause stress and burnout to employees (Brewster et al., 2001). However, the long-term impact on the lives of these employees is still unclear.

Similar concerns were raised in Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) study where side effects such as marital divorce and alcoholism were mentioned as disadvantages associated with short-term assignments. In commuter assignments, for instance, although families do not generally move with the assignee, long project hours and social-family

separation tend to cause imbalances between work and personal life. (Meyskens et al., 2009).

Along the same vein, in a nation-wide study on the social implications of long-distance commuting on commuters and their spouses in Sweden, Sandow (2014:15) argues that "one might expect the social costs of long-distance commuting to reduce the quality of a relationship in many ways and thus increase the risk of separation". Another relevant contribution is Lirio's (2014) study, which provides one of the first examinations of work-life balance among younger global managers, highlighting experiences of those not on expatriate assignments, but performing global work through international travel and technology.

Frequent travel is a critical aspect of short-term, commuter and frequent flyer assignees' lives, differentiating them from the traditional expatriates, requiring an extra effort from the travellers to balance their personal and work lives (Baker & Ciuk, 2015). DeFrank et al. (2000) refers to these employees as "road warriors", reviewing the concept of travel stress among business executives. While, as argued in section 2.2, air transport has become much more accessible, one should also take into account the stress that such an experience can represent nowadays. As Ramsey, Leonel, Gomes, & Monteiro (2011) note, the longer queues, poor airport waiting rooms with uncomfortable seats for long waiting hours, the prices and quality of the food in those places, tighter security, more restrictive carry-on allotments, an increase in physical searches of person's luggage as well as clothing, and less trust of fellow passengers, among other factors, all add to the stress experienced by travelers. Key results from Demel & Mayrhofer's (2010) study on flexpatriates also suggest that thoughts on how to organize extra time for recovery from workload and travelling as well as regular physical and psychological checks to prevent burnout and illnesses are essential.

4. Conclusions

Representing only a drop in a vast ocean of knowledge, the modest contribution of the present dissertation is to reflect on the new trends in the international corporate mobility, giving an overview of the manifold issues related to international assignments and providing a contemporary perspective that suggests the need for a new approach that transcends the traditional view of overseas assignments in the IHRM field.

From a business practice point of view, the various non-traditional assignment forms provide MNCs with a new toolbox to address the challenges of a permanently changing business environment. Consequently, new forms of international assignments are attractive to companies since they help to avoid some of the issues most traditional expatriates face (including repatriation difficulties, among others), and are increasingly becoming a strategic instrument for MNCs to successfully compete internationally. However, each type of emerging non-traditional assignments faces specific problems of their own, which IHRM often is not ready to deal with successfully.

The key challenge for MNCs will then be to find appropriate ways to manage the assignments. However, in the literature, while the processes of traditional, long-term assignments have received considerable attention, limited research has been conducted on the management of the various forms of alternative assignments. Appropriate to their epoch, studies on the challenges and difficulties involved in the traditional long-term expatriate assignments need now further development in order to cover contemporary international business practices and contribute to the progress of IHRM theory.

Clearly, every research has its limitations and the present dissertation is no exception. For instance, the literature review was limited to several databases and the use of articles written in English.

As to future research, further empirical investigation would be very relevant. An empirical study could be done, for example, on the challenges faced by a MNC with intensive international activity.

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Appendixes

Appendix: Exploratory Interview

Realizada a 27 de Novembro de 2014 às 18h00

Local da entrevista: Sede Sonae Sierra, Lisboa

Nome do entrevistado: Pedro Soveral Rodrigues

Cargo: Director de Recursos Humanos

PERGUNTA: Pode descrever-nos em que medida a Sonae Sierra promove o equilíbrio trabalho-família dos seus colaboradores?

RESPOSTA: Quando nós fazemos o nosso inquérito de clima organizacional, fazemos a cada dois anos, esse ponto é um ponto que não vem muito bem classificado, agora está até um pouquinho melhor do que antes mas é sempre um ponto pior classificado. Isto tem um bocadinho a ver com a motivação das pessoas que trabalham na nossa empresa, que é uma empresa muito focada em resultado sem que as pessoas basicamente ás vezes superam se um bocado, acabam por viver demasiado a empresa e esquecerem-se um bocadinho da própria vida. Isto faz parte da cultura, aliás, a cultura Sonae é mesmo assim, uma cultura muito focada em resultados em que as pessoas se dedicam muito e isso é um pouco alienante e acabam por prejudicar um pouco a família. Eu quando fiz o MBA, fiz em full-time, e costuma acontecer que quem faz um MBA full-time dedica-se tanto que a família acaba por ficar um pouco para trás. No meu caso foi assim, aliás foi uma das razões do divórcio, não foi só isso mas foi uma das razões. Acontece que quando estava a acabar o MBA e fui entrevistado pela Sonae disseram-me: "Bem,

normalmente as pessoas que fazem assim o MBA na Nova em full-time acabam por ter algum fit nesta organização, porque esta organização é um bocado exigente e as pessoas acabam por manter os mesmos ritmos e por aí fora... Portanto, é um bocadinho a cultura. E então nós tentamos na Sonae Sierra contrariar um bocadinho isto – não e fácil porque não se consegue mudar a cultura de uma organização, nem por sombras, era preciso haver da parte da liderança um grande exemplo nesse ponto de vista e normalmente os nossos lideres são muito "*workaholics*" também embora tenham tido, acho eu, uma certa evolução positiva e sobretudo tem um respeito, pelo menos os de topo, os de topo tem um respeito grande pelas horas de trabalho e tentam não incomodar as pessoas fora das horas de trabalho e por aí fora.. Então o que é que nós fizemos? Há uns anos, em 2010, foram aprovadas algumas políticas de flexibilização para todos os colaboradores mas tem que cumprir com determinados requisitos. Por exemplo, há uma política que é trabalho a partir de casa: tem que ser uma situação que justifique, a pessoa tem que ter os meios para isso, uma pessoa cuja função obriga á presença física não pode, obviamente, trabalhar a partir de casa. Mas existem algumas funções que o permitem e, portanto, há algumas pessoas que recorreram a essa política, tem que ser aprovado por um membro do conselho de administração mas, regras geral, os casos que tem pedido e que tem condições para isso, as pessoa tem o *laptop* e tal e podem trabalhar a partir de casa, tem sido concedido. Este é um dos *flexible-working arrangements* que foi aprovada e que, enfim, algumas pessoas beneficiam, não digo que seja massivamente, claro, antes pelo contrário, não é muita gente que tem essa possibilidade e por outro lado nem toda a gente de facto deseja este tipo de situação mas quem beneficia valoriza imenso. Isto acontece em Portugal e nos outros países.

PERGUNTA: Os colaboradores sentem "à vontade" para beneficiar dessas políticas?

RESPOSTA: Depende do departamento, depende do tipo de função que fazem. Depende também do grau de receptividade do líder. Quando a pessoa se propõe a ter um horário flexível seja trabalhar a partir de casa, seja chegar mais tarde, há todo um conjunto de funções que tem que ser reajustadas. Imagina, aqui na Sonae Sierra nós trabalhamos com vários países, se em por exemplo chego mais tarde, e se eu trabalho com geografias como a Roménia ou a Grécia, etc., tudo isso terá de ser reajustado. Depois há lideres que são mais abertos, o que significa que os colaboradores vão ter mais á vontade para se propor e há outros que nem por isso. Enquanto recursos humanos, nós garantimos que a política é aplicável globalmente a todos os colaboradores e damos suporte a qualquer colaborador que venha falar connosco, sendo que a decisão do líder é soberana.

Além dessa política temos a política de flexibilidade de horários, em que a pessoa desde que cumpra determinado numero de horas por semana, tem horas mais flexíveis de entrada e saída, se bem que, mais uma vez, de uma forma geral nós temos tolerância e flexibilidade nos horários mas há funções que mais uma vez obrigam a que as pessoas estejam á horinha certinha e por ai fora. Dou um exemplo, nós temos determinadas funções centralizadas aqui, contabilidade, cobranças, e outro tipo de coisas que tem que trabalhar com fusos horários diferentes, e se há uma pessoa que está a trabalhar com a Grécia ou com a Turquia e que pede para chegar as dez da manhã depois não dá porque na Grécia e Turquia são duas horas mais tarde e não é possível, já se perde muito tempo. Se pedir para chegar mais cedo talvez fosse melhor! Estás a perceber? Por vezes há constrangimentos deste tipo. Mais uma vez, não são muitas pessoas que recorrem a isto até porque, tirando estas funções mais rígidas, normalmente não há uma grande rigidez no horário, a pessoa chegou um pouco mais tarde, também

não é por ai… normalmente a cultura da nossa empresa não é muito de medir horas de trabalho é mais de medir produtividade, resultados.

A terceira politica é a politica do *part-time*, temos a outra que era a anterior, das licenças sem vencimento, é muito raro, aconteceu para determinadas pessoas, uma pessoa na Alemanha há muitos anos que quis fazer um projecto de voluntariado e foi trabalhar 6 meses ou 1 ano não sei para onde, em que pediu licença sem vencimento, ou uma outra pessoa que acompanhou o marido para a Ásia, e como não sabiam se aquilo iriam funcionar bem, em vez de se despedir ficou um ano com licença sem vencimento, teria a hipótese de voltar, a empresa também lhe interessava isso, não queria perder essa pessoa e depois enfim a pessoa acabou por ficar.

PERGUNTA: Como se podem utilizar este tipo de políticas por forma a fomentar a reter pessoas?

RESPOSTA: É, de facto nós sabemos que, para reter pessoas, há muitas formas e factores e variáveis que contribuem para que a pessoas se vá embora ou pelo contrário que fique. A remuneração e uma delas, mas se calhar nem é a mais importante, A carreira se calhar será até mais importante. E depois tens o *work-relations*, o ambiente de trabalho e a relação com a chefia. A relação com a chefia é uma das causas maiores, pelo menos de acordo com a literatura a que tenho acesso, senão mesmo a causa maior pela qual as pessoas se vão embora. Agora estava aqui a tentar fazer um cálculo na cabeça para tentar perceber quantas pessoas saíram da empresa por desequilíbrio trabalho-família, mas nós não temos esses números. Isto seria importante para perceber o impacto na retenção. Nós fazemos entrevistas de saída e de facto, eu não tenho conhecimento sequer de uma, o que não significa que não haja e que as pessoas não sintam o desequilíbrio. Não é um factor chave na decisão fico ou saio, Talvez já tenha havido no passado, não sei, talvez quando ainda não fazíamos as entrevistas, antes de

ser eu, não sei. Mas de facto as pessoas queixam-se que tem uma vida profissional muito intensa aqui, é verdade, mas também temos uma outra coisa – é que naturalmente as pessoas acabam por… as pessoas que se identificam com a nossa cultura são pessoas que naturalmente já vivem tanto a empresa que acaba por ser escolha delas, não significa que isto seja positivo, atenção, mais uma vez, sendo escolha ou não sendo escolha é sabido e, vamos ser pragmáticos, é sabidos que as pessoas a partir de um determinado número de trabalho ou se não equilibram a sua vida profissional com a suas vida pessoal começam a ter problemas de produtividade, problemas até do foro psicológico, as vezes no limite, *burnouts*, podem chegar a esse ponto. Portanto nós sabemos e estamos conscientes que temos de lutar e fazer alguma coisa para promover o equilíbrio. Que é que nós estamos a fazer? por exemplo, agora, estamos a lançar um projecto a que chamamos "*Be Well*", o ano passado fizemos um estudo com o ISCTE, um estudo sobre o bem estar no trabalho, foi estendido a todos os países onde estamos na Europa, concluímos que havia alguns factores de preocupação, e em alguns pontos nomeadamente a ansiedade, factor de preocupação em relação aos níveis de stress em determinadas alturas e sobretudo em determinadas geografias, isto tem a ver também com a cultura que prevalece em determinadas localizações, e depois o que nos fizemos foi identificar algumas medidas que podíamos criar, um plano de acções para mitigar este problema muito também baseado no feedback que fomos obtendo através de entrevistas que foram feitas as pessoas num inquérito em que foi feito em que muitas pessoas responderam e deram sugestões. Temos então um conjunto de 12 medidas, sendo que agora acabou de sair mais uma, então vamos ter desde uma formação de gestão do tempo, o *healthy month* em que promovemos atividades fora do escritório para os colaboradores, pode ser ir andar de bicicleta a hora de almoço, ou comer fruta fresca. Estamos a organizar uma formação em resiliência sendo que vamos ter formação

para algumas pessoas dentro da empresa, nomeadamente dentro dos recursos humanos, são psicólogas, e depois essas pessoas vão multiplicar a formação, vão ser elas a fazer a formação em diversos escritórios nos vários países. Enfim, vamos ter campanhas de comunicação, respeito pelo descanso, mas isto é tudo programado, ainda não foi feito. Campanhas de respeito pela vida pessoal e outra que vai trabalhar um bocadinho a liderança, para trabalhar *soft skills*.

PERGUNTA: Então, existe alguma preocupação em melhorar o equilíbrio entre trabalho e vida pessoal?

RESPOSTA: Deixa-me explicar-te uma coisa, a nossa empresa, como internacional que é, nós temos muitas pessoas que estão sempre em viagens, então agora nesta fase em que estamos a entrar em novos mercados, entrámos na Rússia, temos, enfim, um mercado emergente, temos algumas pessoas que tem uma vida difícil, sempre a viajar, com fusos horários complicados e a semana é muito cansativa para estas pessoas. O que é que acontece, estas pessoas acabam por ser tentadas, ou cair um bocadinho naquela rasteira de começar a pedir coisas aos seus colaboradores seja qual fora a hora porque eles próprios tem uma vida um bocadinho sacrificada, portanto podem mandar um mail e querer ter resposta logo, manda *SMSs*, *Skypes*, por aí fora, e eu acho que temos de trabalhar essa dimensão porque de facto esse tipo de solicitação provoca muito desgaste. Vamos ver, temos de facto um caminho a fazer, temos consciência que o temos de fazer. Agora, não somos o melhor exemplo de uma empresa que tenha um equilíbrio perfeito mas, mais uma vez, normalmente as pessoas que trabalham nesta empresa identificam-se com esta cultura portanto acabam por misturar a sua vida pessoal com a vida da empresa. Nós acabamos por fazer uma parte da nossa vida aqui e depois há pessoas, como é o meu caso, que são casadas aqui dentro e portanto acabamos por misturar um bocadinho a nossa vida na empresa com a nossa vida fora da empresa.

PERGUNTA: Fale-me um pouco sobre a importância do equilíbrio entre trabalho e vida pessoal para o sucesso dos casos de colaboradores expatriados da Sonae Sierra.

RESPOSTA: Eu vou ser sincero Rute, eu fui expatriado, como sabes. Acho que os expatriados têm algo que é… não sei se até não é positivo porque quando estão expatriados acabam por ter uma vida que, tem uma mudança muito dramática claro, e daí o expatriado levar a família, levam a mulher, os filhos, temos um caso em que até levou a sogra, é verdade! O fundamental é que o expatriado veja nos primeiros 6 meses a 1 ano, ver se se consegue realmente adaptar e ultrapassar aquele desafio, aquela barreira. Um dos principais desafios é o conjugue. Se as mulheres não conseguirem adaptar-se… não têm o que fazer, não se adaptam e é isso que pode fazer com que uma expatriação possa falhar.

PERGUNTA: Têm algum programa formal de acompanhamento aos expatriados, que inclua medidas de apoio trabalho-família?

RESPOSTA: Fazemos um programa de preparação, fazemos formação tanto ao próprio como ao conjugue sobre a cultura do pais para onde vão, línguas, e temos depois ajuda de *set-up* local, para procurar casa, escola, indicar onde são os médicos, temos um apoio local, normalmente contratamos empresas que existem de *relocation*, tem *networks*, nós trabalhamos com uma portuguesa que tem *networks* na Itália, aqui e ali. Agora uma coisa que eu diria é: as pessoas que estão expatriadas tem aquele primeiro stress que é porem as coisas à sua maneira quando chegam e isso pode demorar um pouco, mas depois até tem uma vida mais regrada, porque estão um bocado mais longe da efervescência toda do nosso país. Acabam por ser eles mesmos a sentir que tem que dar apoio a família, e criam uma determinada rotina que até dá mais atenção a família do que se fosse aqui. Ao passo que se estivesse no país de origem até podiam chegar mais tarde a casa, não havia problema nenhum, a mulher já está a espera disso… Outra

questão é que a maioria dos nossos expatriados tem funções locais, enquanto aqui em Portugal muitos de nós temos funções transversais o que significa, de facto, que muitos de nós andamos em ponte aérea e estamos sempre a voltar á origem: isto tem muito mais impacto na vida familiar do que a pessoa que está na Argélia com a família e que só tem - só tem, quer dizer, já tem muito trabalho – mas, de facto, tudo o que são reuniões é por vídeo-conferência e as pessoas viajam muito menos. Por outro lado, apesar de haver a percepção no norte da Europa de que em Portugal trabalha-se pouco, pelo contrário, em Portugal trabalha-se e muito, sobretudo em número de horas – a produtividade é que não corresponde. Na Alemanha as pessoas saem à horinha, quando eu vou á Alemanha, para a semana vou lá estar, e normalmente sou enxotado pela senhora da limpeza porque fico no escritório até mais tarde. E depois vão dizer: - atenção que o alarme vai tocar a partir de determinada hora portanto tem de ser ir embora. Portanto, eu não diria que os expatriados tenham o problema de equilíbrio trabalho família, quer dizer tem obviamente o problema de tentar vencer a tal barreira, em que a família que os acompanha tem de se adaptar, e aí o acompanhamento por parte da empresa é fulcral. Os miúdos não têm qualquer tipo de problema, o problema normalmente é a mulher. Mas os expatriados acabam por ser quase como os nossos filhos mimados, que recebem todas as ajudas e atenções. Tu sabes, tens um filho e sabes que quanto mais atenção e miminhos lhes damos, mais eles pedem. Preocupam-me mais os colaboradores que, como te disse, estão em permanente ponte aérea. Os expatriados… bem, chegámos ao ponto de nos pedirem que, a partir de cá, lhes marcássemos lá a consulta médica para a mulher, ou as aulas de ballet para a filha.