

Development of a virtual expatriate work effectiveness model based on international HR practices

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced organizations to rapidly change from the existing working model, used by most organizations, to a hybrid or fully virtual working model. The globally mobile workforce was also affected by this new development: many international assignees were evacuated and forced to work from their home country or from a third country. The need to handle the pandemic constraints together with a growing trend of more flexibility in global mobility programs has prompted companies to review their policies around international remote working and establish some new rules. Employees will still travel to host country, however, less frequently and for shorter duration. This **new model of work, called virtual expatriation**, is becoming an alternative to the traditional expatriation of foreign workers to an organization and **in the next years it will become a main topic of human resource management (HRM)**. In this research proposal, we attempt to examine **virtual expatriation as the most emerging form and** where virtual assignments are combined with other forms of international assignments (short-term assignments, business travels).

Despite the fact that organizations changed their working model during the COVID-19 pandemic, however still do not have a model of virtual expatriate' work effectiveness developed. In the case of virtual assignment, there will be many new and important HRM practices that will influence the effectiveness of virtual expatriate work. However, because the virtual assignee does not need to relocate to a different country on a long-term assignment, there are no separate human resource (HR) policies to manage their work. Previous research on international assignments revealed that HR professionals do not classify employees who work virtually with international teams as international assignees and, therefore, may not have been covered by institutional support. Therefore, it is necessary to involve HR departments and managers to be responsible for creating and implementing an effective HR policy, with appropriately aligned HR practices such as: planning virtual assignments, staff recruitment and selection, trainings and development on multiculturalism, compensation and benefits, performance appraisal, work arrangements, repatriation, and leadership. Hence, **the aim of the project is to examine the current HRM practices in different parts of the world to develop the new multivariant model of the effectiveness of virtual expatriates work based on international HR practices.**

The concept of virtual expatriation is new and offers logistical flexibility that a traditional expatriate assignment does not provide. A virtual expatriate is doing remotely the same job as a 'traditional' expatriate relocated to the host location. Virtual expatriates are employees who are part of a multinational virtual team. They are engaged in a joint global project or collaborate with contacts overseas. They manage foreign operations without being permanently located in that country. They use modern electronic media to communicate with their foreign colleagues, customers, or suppliers. They also travel to the work location periodically for short duration if this is business-critical to accomplish an organizational task. An effective virtual expatriate represents more than employees just bonded via IT. They must be empowered to make decisions to sustain the competitive advantage associated with positive characteristics of its operations/business. It seems also that the model of work effectiveness of virtual expatriates supported by HR practices will also be a complex model considering **additional characteristics of work**, such as self-motivation, work engagement, independence and confidence, comfort with solitude, strong communication and cooperation skills, trustworthiness and reliability, trust to managers and co-workers. All the above-mentioned work characteristics are very important in the context of building virtual expatriate work effectiveness.

In order to achieve project objective and to develop a contribution to the current state of knowledge in the field of management, the following tasks will be implemented.

T1: Identify international human resource practices and work characteristics in managing the work of virtual expatriates.

T2: Propose dimensions for qualifying an employee as virtual expatriate.

T3: Perform empirical research based on selected groups of organizations.

T4: Develop the new multivariant model of the effectiveness of virtual expatriate based on international human resource practices

T5: Develop a tool to measure the effectiveness of virtual expatriate.

Empirical research will be carried out using interviews, a survey collected from own sources and offered panels of respondents, selected according to the criteria set by the authors of the project, i.e. working as virtual assignee. Next, statistical analysis will be performed using multi-criteria regression analysis with mediators and moderators, and path model analysis (SEM).

From a utilitarian point of view, the project is particularly important as it allows for the **development of a work effectiveness model for virtual expatriates** and provides knowledge useful in helping organizations to internationalize. It seems that this issue is also particularly important at a time of crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing globalization, due to the limitations of stationary work and the need to use technology for daily work. **The research will contribute to a better understanding of how managers and HR departments can support virtual expatriates in carrying out their daily work.**