Global work and organizational expatriations: Disjunctive situational frames for individual action.

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Study context.

- The present study is part of an on-going Phd research project, funded by FCT (ref. SFRH/BD/104255/2014) that conceives organizational expatriations as specific, temporary and organizationally bounded global work situations, typically involving international, cross-border, physical mobility (Kraimer et al., 2012), new learning opportunities and challenges to pre-existent individual notions of identity and belonging and existing management practices. Expatriates and expatriation management practices are considered to be mainly reactive and driven by compliance needs (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014), a HR management weakness (Kraimer et al., 2012). In what concerns their integration, expatriates can be positioned (by themselves or by others) as "inside-outsiders" (Borg & Soderlund, 2014), raising questions regarding existing organizational socialization practices and prevailing human resource management (HRM) tactics (Ashforth & Saks, 1996).

- It is suggested that organizational expatriation management practices compose a specific social context for individual action, one of liminal and disjunctive nature (Jones, 1986; Appadurai, 1990), a work situation that can be informed by an element of transience and impermanence (Garsten, 1999; Borg & Soderlund, 2014), and the absence of a clear "social template" (Jones, 1986) that supports and helps individuals to manage their situated social integration efforts.

Method.

- Secondary statistical data (Brookfield GRS, 2016) and repatriation management reference case studies as analytical support (Adler, 1981; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Kraimer et al., 2009; Szkudlarek, 2010; Kraimer et al., 2012).

- The expatriate “re-entry shock” (Joly, 1990 [1996]) is used as an empirical focal context to illustrate the liminal, disjunctive frame of action that can be composed by contemporary work and HR management practices such as organizational expatriations.

Data analysis.

- Repatriation literature present the "re-entry" experience as a “shock” (Joly, 1990 [1996]). Managing career (re)placement aspirations, dealing with the “repatriation blues” (Osland, 2000), present the "re-entry" moment as a critical HRM stress point. Osland (2000) relates the "re-entry shock" with an overall sense of differentiation that a returned "hero" expects to be (socially and organizationally) acknowledged.

- Secondary statistical data (Brookfield GRS, 2016) refer a 6% “early return” ratio, a high figure considering the (high) investment and critically typically implied in a long-term expatriation experiences. Turnover intentions typically double in expatriate populations (Adler, 1981).

- HR management practices appear to be driven, in terms of principles, “more by default than by design” (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). The recurrent use of managerial exceptions to established, formal international mobility policies and “templates” can be considered a empirical illustration of individualized management practices that are triggered to deal with rather specific, singular work experiences and situations.

Results novelty/relevance.

- Organizational expatriations can be described and understood as HR management practices that produce unpredicted (and unpredictable) differentiation (of individual experiences and life courses) within an organization, a (disjunctive) circumstance that pressures organizational capabilities to maintain a strong sense of social integration across the organization (Ashforth, 2001). Significant “early return” ratios and increased turnover intentions signal this managerial pressure. Due to this, existing HR practices focus and effectiveness may be questioned.

- Disjunctive situational frames for individual action, through a specific, temporary and organizationally bounded expatriation management practices compose a specific social context for individual action, one of liminal and disjunctive nature (Jones, 1986; Appadurai, 1990), a work situation that can be informed by an element of transience and impermanence (Garsten, 1999; Borg & Soderlund, 2014), and the absence of a clear "social template" (Jones, 1986) that supports and helps individuals to manage their situated social integration efforts.

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