

# Dual careers

When an employee is offered an international assignment, the working partner must consider whether to go too or stay behind.

If the partner is employed, accepting an accompanied posting will probably mean relinquishing their job. However, they may be unable to gain new employment abroad, for example, if they cannot obtain an appropriate work visa.

## **WHY DUAL INCOMES/ CAREERS ARE AN ISSUE**

Couples may be financially dependent on two incomes and this can preclude the partner going with the assignee. The employee may opt to go solo, leaving the partner behind but this is known to be a major cause of stress and affects assignment productivity negatively.

In the case of dual career couples, each partner is highly qualified and pursues their own individual career goals. Money is not the only driver behind the assignment decision. Dual career partners are concerned about their career development and growth.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF DUAL EMPLOYMENT**

Periods of unemployment result in lost income, promotion and reduced pension provision. Working partners also want financial independence.

Being unable to work/pursue their career can lead to disappointment, loss of confidence, anger and bitterness. The lack of social support can also lead to isolation and unhappiness.

These factors damage the couple's relationship, resulting in employee

dissatisfaction at work. The assignment may fail as a result, evidenced by early return or resignation.

Couples can agree to pursue their individual careers across country borders and undertake international commuting. However, this is also known to be stressful, disruptive to relationships and tiring, and it damages employee productivity.

## **A MOBILITY BARRIER**

Research highlights that dual careers are a major barrier to employees accepting an international position. It also highlights that one of the major causes of assignment failure relates to dual career partnerships.

Dual careers have serious talent implications – employers may not be able to attract the best person for the job. Hence, there is a need for employers to consider how to provide dual career support.

## **DUAL CAREER SUPPORT**

Organisations must provide dual career support if assignments are to be accepted and successful.

Elements within international assignment policies can address aspects such as work permits/visas, identifying employment opportunities, and responding to cultural and language issues in the recruitment and selection process.

Employers can also become involved in lobbying foreign governments to improve legislation enabling dual career partners to work abroad. They can also link with other employers to offer job opportunities to working partners, and develop strategies to offer career co-ordination approaches in the context of international mobility.

## **COSTS VERSUS BENEFITS**

Although organisations are becoming increasingly cost conscious, the provision of partner support is fully justified. The monetary cost is low compared to the



potential expense of a failed assignment or the deployment of a less well-qualified/experienced candidate.

Partner support enhances the attractiveness of international positions, thereby widening the candidate pool. It encourages diversity within the resourcing process. It also promotes family mobility and wellbeing and improves employee motivation, productivity, and engagement. This leads to higher return on investment from the international assignment.

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