

Work-life balance

Maintaining a good balance between work and family life is important for health and wellbeing. International assignees often find themselves having a poorer work-life balance than before accepting their posting. Interventions are needed to mitigate this problem.

POOR CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

International assignees' work-life balance can be affected by the inability to adjust and adapt to the new culture. If they find themselves unable to cope culturally, they may be unable to trust their subordinates and delegate work to them. This can lead to taking on far more duties themselves, leading to long hours of work and greater pressure. This

can lead to stress because assignees are trying to reach targets in an environment they are finding difficult to operate in. In time, this can lead to burnout.

LIMITED LEISURE TIME

Conference calls that take place outside normal working hours due to time zone differences, scheduled for the convenience of operations in other parts of the world, can lengthen the assignees' working day.

Assignees often find themselves unable to take their full leave allowances. This is usually because they are undertaking a more demanding job but the problem is exacerbated if they have not been able to forge good working relationships with subordinates due to cultural differences.

LOSS OF SOCIAL CONTACTS

International assignees typically experience a loss of social contacts. They leave extended family and friends behind. Those undertaking single status assignments, in particular, can suffer from loneliness. Solos who have not made new friends can find themselves with little else to do but work, creating poor work-life balance.

WORK & FAMILY LIFE SPILL-OVER

Assignees typically experience greater spill-over between work and family life and vice versa than employees working in a domestic context. This is because the assignee and family often live close to the work site and have a local social life that revolves around work contacts. Spouses/partners who are unable to work and children who are trying to adapt to new schools can put pressure on assignees and affect their ability to focus well in the workplace.

What goes on in the workplace gets

carried back to the family and what happens in family life is transferred across into the assignees' work life. This spill-over blurs the boundary between home and work life, creating poor work-life balance.

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

Cross-cultural and language training are critical to help assignees manage local staff more effectively. Assignees must be encouraged to take up training offered although, ideally, it should be mandatory. By delegating where possible, assignees' working time can be reduced, facilitating take-up of necessary leisure time. Mentoring can assist assignees to operate more effectively.

Organisations should ensure that conference calls/meetings are scheduled such that assignees are not expected to work outside of normal local working hours due to time zone differences between meeting participants. Local rest days and public holidays should be respected.

Assignees should be encouraged to take their full leave allowances and any rest and relaxation leave offered in policy.

Networking and buddy systems can help build social relationships for assignees, spouses/partners and children.



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