

Assignee stress management

Research shows that international assignees can suffer from stress resulting from trying to cope with change linked to mobility. This affects their health, wellbeing and productivity.

Organisational interventions can assist with assignee stress management.

HOSTILE OR THREATENING ENVIRONMENTS

Working in dangerous, remote or challenging locations is one of the major causes of stress for international assignees. Stress is also reported by assignees from working in places which they perceive to be hostile such as major cities with high crime rates.

Organisations should ensure that they have appropriate safety and security measures in place. They should also provide assignees and accompanying family members with preparatory briefing and training to ensure that they are best able to avoid dangerous situations.

Rest and relaxation leave should be offered to facilitate stress breaks in difficult locations.

FAMILY SEPARATION

International assignments that result in lengthy periods of separation from spouses/partners and children are stressful for unaccompanied assignees. Organisations should consider how best to facilitate family reunification visits. They should also consider carefully the assignment type used, maintaining the family unit as far as is practicable.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Changing job roles is inevitable when relocating to a new position abroad. This is a cause of stress for assignees, especially when targets are stretching, the cost of the assignment is high and individuals are working in a new environment. Appropriate job-related skills training should be given alongside managerial and communications training as necessary.

HOUSING & SCHOOLING

Moving home is known to be one of life's most stressful events. For assignees this takes on a new dimension as it involves potentially renting out the old home if it is not being sold, finding a new one in a different country, and packing up goods for transport abroad while also packing for storage in the home country if repatriation is planned after the assignment. Temporary accommodation is also likely to be needed in the host country for initial periods.

Organisations can engage the services of destination services providers to help source temporary and permanent accommodation abroad. Agencies can also help to support assignees with renting out their home-based properties. Specialist removals firms can

be particularly helpful in advising on customs issues relating to transporting goods abroad.

New schools will be needed for children that are suitable for their needs. Specialist education consultants can provide valuable support.

UNFAMILIAR CULTURES

Working in an unfamiliar cultural environment and in a different language are also major sources of stress. These issues can affect assignees' ability to settle in, build strong work relationships, delegate work to local people and their work-life balance. Cross-cultural and language training are crucial to settling in successfully.

Organisations should remember that accompanying family members also suffer from adjustment difficulties if they are not familiar with the local culture and language. Training should be offered to the family as well.

REPATRIATION

Another well-documented cause of stress is repatriation. Assignees are frequently concerned about their career prospects on return at the end of the assignment. Organisations should keep in touch with assignees and ensure that career plans are in place. Mentors and sponsors can be helpful in this regard.

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