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Article

THE PROBLEM OF EXPATRIATION IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: APPLIED STUDIES OF SMEs IN CENTRAL AND NORTHERN PORTUGAL

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Abstract: The human resources management processes associated with initial or further internationalization of companies is increasingly present on the agendas of national companies, due to increasing need for internationalization of the portuguese economy. This article reviews the literature on the national and international human resource management from the perspective of internationalization, thus providing a theoretical contribution to this area of research, and presents the results of an empirical study, based on interviews and questionnaires to managers and employees, which resulted from the study of two portuguese companies, whose aim was to analyze the sensitivity of the process of expatriation and repatriation of its employees. It was found developments in both companies be effective in expatriation, as evidenced by the monitoring of employees and their families, but still continues to neglect the training and performance evaluation that sometimes does not reproduce the work done by expatriates. Given the repatriation companies also do not think in a structured way in charge of assigning the employee upon his return.

Keywords: Management; Human Resources; Internationalization; Expatriation; Careers

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Introduction

Research into the perspective of internationalisation and management of human resources presented in this article is a result not only of academic, but also of business motivations. It explores and compiles theoretical concepts that support the foundation of empirical study that was developed in two small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the centre and north of Portugal.

This article presents a theoretical framework on the types of international movement of business executives, expatriates, their motivations, cultural differences in destination countries, management and international careers.

Understanding and identifying the procedures followed by companies in the international management of its employees is crucial to evaluate the sensitivity of the companies to the phenomenon of internationalisation. Issues such as expatriation, social adjustment, training and adaptation of employees are therefore present in this investigation.

The theoretical analysis helped to confirm that internationalisation is seen by companies as a way out of the stagnation of national markets. Although, their expectations fall after entering into emerging markets, as well as their grand perspective for development. Because of this, internationalisation has been the watchword not only for multinationals but also for SMEs.

As mentioned by Martins et al. (2012), the relocation of businesses has now become an imperative result of the profound changes that globalisation has forced. Fifteen years ago, Lemaire (1997) had alerted him that internationalization appears as a preoccupation in company strategies as companies in increasingly greater numbers decide to leave the national and regional framework for an international dimension.

Due to globalisation, this new business environment is associated with the issue of internationalisation and global marketing posture (VIANA and HORTINHA, 2002), and has seen globalisation converge with the idea of a globalised economy in which companies have to confront global markets. It appears then that globalisation is a phenomenon in an evolutionary state, and is one of the drivers of development factors for companies that forces internationalisation. As Teixeira and Diz (2005) stipulate, the competitiveness of enterprises increases due to the integration of companies' competitive actions through the various countries that form the global market. As recently written by Hill (2012), globalisation refers precisely to the merging of historically distinct and separate national markets in a huge global market.

Concerned with the study reality and trends, this research focuses on two case studies of internationalised Portuguese SMEs, called Company A and Company B for confidentiality reasons, in order to compare their performed procedures in relation to a literature review based on the following key assumptions.

Company A is present in the domestic market as a wholesaler and importer of electrical equipment, but is also present in the PALOP, Spain and Turkey. Company B is dedicated to the installation of equipment and irrigation systems in the Angolan market.

The option of qualitative research was related to the fact that it allows one to better understand human resources and what they say and do. This is the essence of qualitative studies according to Myers (2013). After contacting the companies, we spoke directly with the administration of the companies A and B, as well as with the expatriate human resources to

understand their perspectives and expectations. The completion of the two case studies enabled a comparison between the measures adopted by the companies and the literature review's assumptions, in order to understand what modes of action were adopted by these companies and whether they were correct to ensure the success in their internationalisation.

With this research, we tried to broadly examine how SMEs manage their expatriate employees. Specifically, we sought to: (1) increase knowledge for the management of human resources in the perspective of internationalisation through a literature review; (2) understand the expatriation process of the investigated SMEs, and (3) identify likely procedures that would lead to improvements in the management of expatriate employees.

After **section 2** of this article we present a literature review, and in **section 3** we explain in greater detail the methodology used in this empirical study. **Section 4** analyses and discusses the achieved results.

Literature review

As stated in the introduction, this research is part of management, particularly in human resource management from the perspective of internationalisation. According to the followed methodology, a theoretical framework for the justification of this work and the development of two case studies is done.

Types of movement

The first fundamental question that arises for SMEs associated with internationalisation relates to the temporal factor of movements of its human resources. This displacement may be a temporary shift with a short duration, namely a maximum of six months (CAMARA, 2008), or may result in the phenomenon of expatriation, where movement of human resources is longstanding. Dowling and Welch cited by Camara (2008) reported that there is a distinction between short-term movements that have a time dimension ranging from 3 months to 1 year, but in terms of objectives are completely identical. This type of shorter travel is generally adopted by companies when they intended to solve technical problems that the human resources of the subsidiary company do not have the capacity to deal with. It is also intended for project management to lead a team to project completion, as well as to establishment a temporary replacement due to an absence for a certain reason.

Long-term displacement forces companies into a larger organisation of its human resources. This type of movement presents greater risks than temporary movement, as it requires companies to hugely invest in the people they want to select for positions in a destination country. The tables below are selected by companies with expatriates.

Expatriates

Camara (2012) conceived the expatriation cycle in order to help companies structure successful expatriation. These six parts are part of a cycle: the expatriate's selection for the hosting subsidiary, monitoring throughout the year, performance evaluation, remuneration package and reintegration and career. Still Camara (2011) characterises the forms of expatriation as **Table 1**.

	Satisfaction of needs	Acquisition of knowledge
Long duration	Representation of the parent company	Development of skills
Short duration	Resolving problems	Career progression

Table 1: Purpose of Expatriation
Fonte: adapted from Camara (2011)

For Rego and Cunha (2009), expatriate management is of such relevance that it is sometimes regarded as synonymous with international human resource management.

The so-called management of expatriates by expatriation is considered by Tung (cited by Man and Tolfo (2008)) as a set of steps that address issues ranging from recruitment and selection of candidates to the integration of expatriates in a new business environment. Some companies have a specific department to monitor the expatriation, whilst others delegate this responsibility to the human resources department.

In the opinion of Aires (2007), an expatriate chosen by the company is (in large part) done by internal recruitment, because it is more economical, faster and allows a more effective evaluation, since the company is cognisant of their potential. The cited author highlights some disadvantages of internal recruitment: conflicts of interest between employees; the frustration of the excluded and the "peter effect"; i.e., the promotion of employees to positions they are not competent enough to hold. It is worth noting that Bilhim (2006) states that success in the domestic market cannot ensure success abroad.

Aires (2007) also studied the advantages and disadvantages of external recruitment. The author identified the entry of "new blood", the strengthening of candidates from databases and an increasing awareness of the company as advantages. On the other hand, disadvantages include the length of the recruitment process, the risk, currently unmotivated employees and the need for an adjustment period for those entering the company.

With regard to the profile of expatriates, Finuras (2007) highlighted the following talents and skills that must be obtained:

- Conflict management skills;
- Decision-making skills;
- Likes challenges;
- Language skills;
- Flexibility to adjust to critical situations.

Ivancevich (2008) notes that the expatriate manager is more likely to succeed if they have a strong desire to work in another country, and the probability of success decreases if there is uncertainty about working in another country.

The process of recruitment and selection is complex, but Rego and Cunha (2009) explain some key factors in a synthesised form that minimise risk (see table 2).

Specific skills for the office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical skills • Management skills • Skills "administrative" • To be familiar with the operations of the headquarter and the local unit
Personality characteristics and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance with ambiguity and uncertainty • Self-confidence • Goal orientated • Adaptability and behavioural flexibility • Intuition • Open minded • Empathy, emotional intelligence • Communication and interpersonal relationship skills • Open to experiences • cosmopolitan orientation • cooperative negotiation style • Language skills • Creativity
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in the mission • Mission congruence with the manager's career plan • Interest in cross-cultural experience • Interest in the destination country • Willingness to learn about new attitudes and behaviour patterns
Family situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spouse wants to have an experience abroad • Adaptive spouse or supporter • Stable marriage • Favourable children situation
Language skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the host country's language • Understanding of non-verbal language. (gestures, smiles, greetings)

Table 2: Relevant factors for the selection of expatriate managers
Source: Adapted from Rego and Cunha (2009)

Cultures

As stated by Finuras (2007), the development of business processes and management practices can be hindered or can benefit small differences in culture and behaviour. For example, language can immediately start to create systems of misunderstandings. The author states that expatriates should know codes of conduct, policies and taxation issues.

Zwielewski (2009) emphasises that the way an expatriate observes cultural differences such as, time zone, punctuality differences and adaptation to work are factors that influence the expatriate's reaction to their new environment and the effectiveness of their integration.

Pereira et al. (2005) reiterate that no cultural adjustment by expatriates to the target countries results in high costs in terms of management performance, customer relations, productivity and operational efficiency.

It was for these reasons that theories of cultural adjustment of expatriate have been developed. Man and Tolfo (2008), citing Black et al. (1991), identify an adjustment model for expatriates based on two essential steps: the anticipated adjustment and the actual adjustment to the foreign country (see Table 3).

Early adjustment		Adjustment in the foreign country		
Related factors		Related factors		
Individual	Organisation	Work	Organisational culture	Context out of work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous International experience • Intercultural training-before departure to foreign country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanism and expatriate selection criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhibiting factors: the role of novelty and conflict role to play • facilitating factors: clarity of role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High novelty of organisational culture • Support the members of the organisation related to the degree of adjustment • logistical support to assist adjustment and interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The adjustment of the family in relation to the spouse's adjustment before the step of international adjustment

Table 3: Adjustment model for expatriates
Source: Adapted from Homem e Tolfo (2008)

Rego and Cunha (2009) presented a theory concerning a U-shaped sequential line, addressing the culture shock cycle an expatriate has in relation to sociocultural adjustment, as seen in Figure.

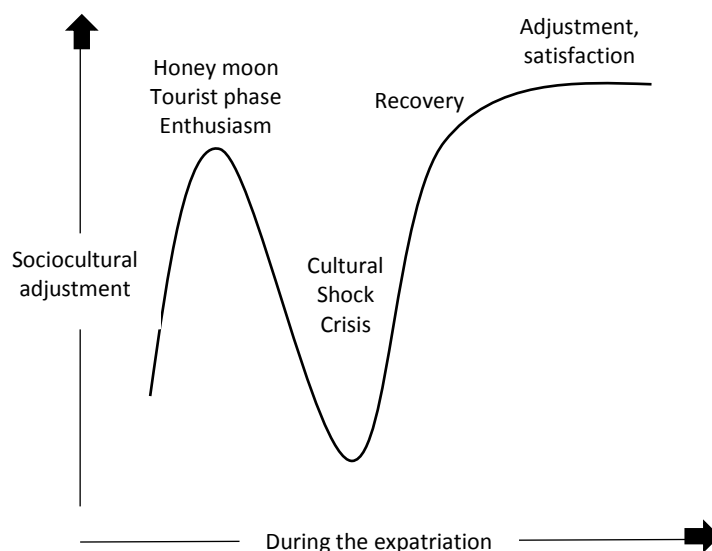


Figure 1: Culture shock cycle and sociocultural adjustment of expatriate
Source: Rego and Cunha (2009)

This theory has two U-shaped stages and a high depression, and is concerned with the adjustment of the expatriate over time.

The family is, of course, important to expatriation, which is why Zwielewski (2009) emphasises the role of family support. The author states that the family is also undergoing some challenges that must be reported, as spouses accompanying their partners have to abandon their careers and deal with issues related to loneliness. Children may suffer some issues and not adapt well to their new school context.

Pereira et al. (2005) emphasise that the family with the expatriate has a key role, not only in the adaptation, but also for the mission as a whole. These authors also stated that the transfer of family members to the host country may be initially beneficial, but when misapplied and not supported can cause major problems for the expatriate and thus for the company.

Pessoa and Rodrigues (2012) report that the fact companies have a department of resources that is also a facilitator, not only in the integration phase but in all others: recruitment and selection, training and care.

Although, Finuras (2011) points out some common reactions and feelings experienced by expatriates during the culture shock: disorientation; lack of control; depression; aggressiveness; resentment; insecurity; frustration; curiosity; anxiety; disappointment; missing others; annoyance and fear.

International management

With the development of the whole expatriation process, and by going through the decision of internationalising a company, the choice of expatriates and the various factors inherent in placing them in the host countries, comes is the ultimate question, which can be identified with the preparation and training of selected human resources. Camara (2008) and Rego and Cunha (2009) identified executive training activities that companies can explore,

namely: cross-cultural training; language training; in management, leadership, negotiation, international marketing and conducting meetings abroad.

Hodgetts cited by Chew (2004) states that these types of training seek to change some behaviours and attitudes of employees to increase the likelihood of them achieving the defined and proposed objectives of the company. And Balcells quoted by Rubio (1999) reiterates that training should be a tool for development of enterprises to facilitate the involvement, commitment and motivation of human resources.

Finally, we emphasise that a properly structured expatriation cycle implies that companies pay special attention to the repatriation process, which in most cases they do not. Vidal et al recently cited by Spohr (2011) state that repatriation is the return of the employee to the parent company after an assignment abroad. Zickic quoted by Spohr (2011) says that repatriation corresponds to a process that should begin a few months before the return of the expatriate, and extends during the first months of rehabilitation to the home country.

Bergstedt and Lundstrom (2003) report that during the repatriation process, the company should support the expatriate and his family when re-entering the country to adapt to these changes in the social and organisational environment. These two authors also stress that returnees sometimes have difficulties and feel frustration due to companies not creating opportunities for returnees, regarding the application of skills and knowledge acquired during international experiences.

However, Peretti (2007) points out that sound management of expatriates will be facilitated by the Global Compensation System (GCS) shown in Figure 2.

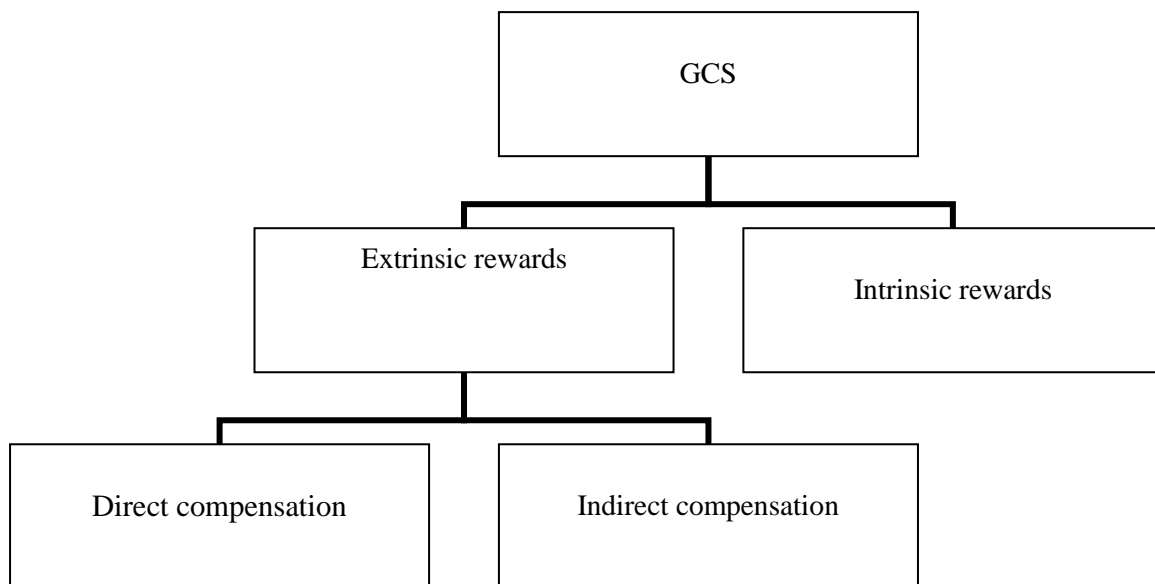


Figure 2: Global Compensation System
Source: Adapted from Peretti (2007)

Intrinsic rewards derive from the content (skills, tasks, autonomy and feedback obtained on the quality of work) and the work context (working conditions, relationships with colleagues and working hours).

Extrinsic rewards include direct compensation (basic salary and remuneration based on performance incentives and premiums) and indirect compensation (development programs, protection and payment for time not worked).

Therefore, the management of human resources in an international context has several implications. There is no doubt that the international context of the companies increases the complexity of its environment and management, not only human resources, but also, as stated Champoux (2011), countries vary in cultural orientation, types of labour laws, as well as in traditions and the economy.

At a management level, Johnson and Turner (2010) and Noe et al. (2008) point out that when a company extends its geographical reach and penetrates market, it needs the support of human resource management to aid the financial situation, marketing management and operational decision-making. Therefore, generally the management of human resource activities in an international context include:

- Planning of human resources;
- Training and professional and personal development;
- pay and benefit policies;
- Management of the work environment and industrial relations.

After making a review of the current literature regarding the types of travel, expatriation cycle, the importance of different cultures and international human resource management, below we present the methodology applied in the context of case studies.

Research methodology

Smudge (2004) points out that the case study is an appropriate strategy to evaluate contemporary events, mainly when relevant behaviour cannot be manipulated. The author Yin, cited in Smudge (2004), reiterates that a case study requires a very thorough investigation in order to maximise the researcher's access to sources of evidence to eliminate distorted representations.

In this research, conducting case studies with SMEs was done qualitatively in order to understand the meanings and characteristics presented by the interviewees, and questionnaires were completed by expatriate professionals.

This qualitative approach, rather than a quantitative one, is due to the differences of its features, as qualitative study allows us to focus on factors such as recognition and analysis of different perspectives, allowing for a greater reflection on the study conducted by the researcher, and essentially provides a greater number of methods and perspectives for the conclusions of the studies.

As the author Flick (2005) points out, the qualitative research approaches are extremely comprehensive methods which can cope with the complexities of the case studies. The author also states that the choice of method must relate to the intention of the researcher to study and not quantify, and to be an exemplary approach that accounts for variables that have an integrated

complexity of the everyday environment. The author also emphasises that qualitative research provides an interaction between the researcher and the field of study and its participants that allows for the perception of impressions, irritations and feelings that are critical data for research.

Maxwell cited in Spohr (2011) states that qualitative approaches focus on people and some specific situations that present important characteristics, and place an emphasis on words and not numbers. The author presents some aspects of qualitative study that perfectly serve the needs of this research:

- Understand the **meaning** of the situations in which human resources are involved, and thus realising the meaning that participants attach to their expatriation process.
- Understand the particular **context** of the expatriation process, in order to realise the factors inherent to this process and tailor the study to a small number of professionals, thus enabling one to analyse in detail their perceptions and motivations.
- Understand the **process** in which actions occur; that is, to comprehend the entire expatriation process, from the selection of expatriates to their integration in the host country, and the support provided by the company to aid adaptation and expatriation.

With the definition of this option in terms of a methodology to be followed, it was determined that it would be essential to conclude a protocol for each case study (see Appendix) to formalise the relationship of researchers with SMEs in analysis.

These protocols were extremely important because they enabled us to identify the key issues of the subject matter, and also allowed the anticipation of problems in the relationship of researchers with companies, since the procedures and the analysis of information had been previously defined. The protocols also included an overview of the project that led to the definition of objectives, the main sources of necessary information, a calculation for the data collection time period and an indication of the case study's final product. After assigning the protocols, we proceed to the content analysis, according to the sources of information set out in **section 3.1**, which then forms the basis for a summary of the content analysis, followed by explanations. Finally, a formal structured content analysis, as suggested Flick (2009) cited by Mozzato and Grzybovski (2011), is used in this article.

Sources of Information

The data collection techniques used in this study were as follows:

- **Internal documents:** as Smudge stresses (2004), document analysis in research is a practice that has been used since the 1930s in many areas of science, particularly in management studies, organizational policy studies and organizational productivity.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** the option for this type of interview was due to the possibility of making a combination of open and closed questions that allowed respondents to answer pre-formulated questions. For the correct structuring of this technique, an interview guide was built in which the authors outline the issues to be addressed, a basic guide to lead the respondent to intervene in a meaningful way and to address issues that were not previously defined, which was also crucial to ensure treatment of all relevant topics previously defined. Note that these interviews were constructed and applied to the employees of two SMEs under study, so as to suit their characteristics, and thereby establish an appropriate type of conversation

in which the interviewer can decide the timing and systematisation of the interview. Also note that the interviews were previously scheduled and recorded to allow for subsequent transcriptions to collect all relevant data.

- **Questionnaires:** In addition to the interviews, this research also used questionnaires as a non-participant observation instrument. They followed a sequence of predefined questions that were answered by employees, which was intended to detail expatriates' opinions, motivations and information to be studied. The questionnaires were made available through the direct administration, and were answered by expatriate employees of the companies. The participants then sent the questionnaires by email for evaluation. The difference of obtaining data for the administration and employees is due to the fact that we were able to do conduct interviews with the administration since they were in the country. The option of using questionnaires is related the failure to personally contact employees in the host countries.

- **Direct observation:** This was another techniques used to conduct this research that consisted of being present in the companies. The purpose was to research documents, conduct interviews and try to observe the relationship between managers and employees to add additional information to the topics of study being performed.

Selection of companies and respondents

We also needed to do a preliminary selection of the companies for the case studies. This selection was made with specific criteria that are crucial to the correct and effective implementation of the study, namely:

- National SME;
- internationalised SME;
- Has expatriate employees;
- Experience with the process of internationalisation.

The selection of companies for the study was done through the network of personal contacts of researchers.

Gaskell in Spohr (2011) points out that there is no specific method for qualitative research to select interviewees / respondents. In these case studies respondents were from responsible companies, who proceeded to select respondents from the following criteria listed below:

- Belonging to the framework of a Portuguese company;
- Being an expatriate professional;
- Living abroad for a minimum period of one year.

We can say that after the selection and contact with companies present in this research, data was provided from selected employees with the correct requirements, and thus the achievement of these case studies.

Analysis and discussion of results

As explained in **Section 3**, this research proceeded to collect data in enterprises as a source of information. This data was analysed and filtered to select relevant data. The next step was to organise this data and obtain answers to fundamental questions of this investigation. Finally, we verified and interpreted the filtered data in order to enable researchers to properly coordinate the development of the case study and outline the assumptions to be addressed for its completion.

Results from Company A

The research was performed by conducting an interview with managers in order to understand the perspectives, procedures and expectations of how the company defines and implements the expatriation of its employees on international missions.

This study also prepared a questionnaire for five employees of the company who currently are expatriates.

These questionnaires were thoroughly prepared in order to focus on key variables and to receive information that expatriates had previously gained during their expatriation. This allowed us to understand the needs and perspectives of employees for achieving success in the tasks they had been performing.

This study aimed to interpret data provided by managers and five employees of Company A, which was later compared with the insight and awareness of the two parties involved. After comparing data from the two parties, a review of the literature was done, where we identified procedures that are necessary to follow in order to find an effective and profitable expatriation.

The conducted research focused on Company A's market, namely the Angolan market. It is an extremely important market to the company, and has inherent aspects relating to expatriation, such as cultural adjustment and family monitoring.

It was found that there were some aspects of this process which the company did correctly, and are comparable to the expatriation requirements stated by Camara (2011). It was also concluded that there were some key necessities that the company did not practice. The positive aspects practiced by the company includes:

- Previously set profiles of suitability to select expatriate employees, which stipulated the fundamental skills that an expatriate should have;
- Had regular communication between the employee and the company through the internet and telephone;
- Completed performance evaluation of its employees by analysing results of the parent company, and fundamentally, the evaluation was performed by the workers' superiors.
- The company noticed the importance of monitoring expatriate employees' families and fully supported the decision of being accompanied by their families to the host country.

- Regarding repatriation, the company claimed that the process is addressed in advance, which is very positive, and that after the repatriation is completed the company intends to provide training for employees' reintegration into the parent company. It is noteworthy that this topic was a future prospect as no companies' employees had been repatriated.

- Finally, we highlight the positive way in which the company had proceeded with their internationalisation, as well as their investment in expatriate employees, which helped lead the company to succeed in its international integration.

The noted negative aspects include:

- The company had provided training for only one of the five expatriate employees. This training should have been provided to all employees because it is essential for achieving the stated goals;

- Lack of training for family members accompanying expatriates, particularly in preparing them for the culture shock and supporting them in their integration in a new country;

- No communication by the company of the major changes that occurred in the parent company. These should have been communicated to the employee so that they feel integrated and part of the company's overall growth;

Finally, we highlight that the company should have considered the question of the employees' return, since they presume that they will be assigned the same position held before expatriation. This is a negative aspect, because the employee has acquired greater responsibility and competences and should therefore be reinstated in a position compatible with their new status.

Results from Company B

For this research to be comprehensive and effective we studied another company. This allowed us to compare the procedures and opinions on the subject of human resources management from the perspective of internationalisation.

A guide was prepared to conduct an interview with an official of the company. He performed the same interview used to study the first company, which had the same objectives, and an analysis of the official's answers were interpreted to find fundamental variables of the respective study.

As a complement to the study done, we proceeded to create a questionnaire for the company's expatriate employees.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to find the motivations and perspectives of the employees' expatriation processes in order to obtain a comparison with the other company's perspective. Please note that Company B had only one expatriate employee, with some employees moving to Angola because of the work needs presented by the company.

We highlight some of the variables used in the questionnaire:

- Age;

- Working time in the company;
- Position held before and during the expatriation;
- Family monitoring during expatriation;
- Importance of family monitoring;
- Motivation for expatriation;
- Types of training received by the employee and his family;
- Performance evaluation and mechanisms for the evaluation;
- Expectations regarding the return and integration in the company as well as post to be filled;
- Review of expatriation mission.

The questionnaire was sent by email to the expatriate employee in order to interpret their perspectives. With 45 years of age, the employee has been with the company for 13 years and held a position related to the commercial sector before the expatriation. During his position in the international market, he became responsible for the international expansion of the company.

As regards to family monitoring, the respondent replied that in his own case it was not done, giving as a reason the low social stability of the country. He also noted that family monitoring would have been an extra motivation to solidify the implementation of his mission.

When asked about the reasons for accepting the international challenge, the respondent replied that financial reasons were the main motive. When addressing the issue of training, the respondents stated that the company paid for some training, in particular, management skills.

As for performance evaluation, the answer was affirmative; the company undergoes a review which is done by head of the company, mainly when he travels to Angola. The respondent also noted that the performance evaluation is performed by the parent company, because it has to share the results from its international mission.

On the completion of the questionnaire, a question was raised about how the employee imagines his return to the company and the position he will return to. The employee said that currently the return happens every six months and that he had no plan to return definitively in the near future. Regarding the position to take, the employee mentioned that, with the new skills acquired and new responsibilities, he had the expectation of being allocated to a position corresponding to his current competence.

Finally to complete the questionnaire, we proceeded to the question of how to rate his international adventure on balance. The respondent replied that it was extremely positive, because he has new knowledge of a market that is completely different to Europe, acquired new management, business and leadership skills. The less positive aspects mentioned included the social state of the country and the longing for his close relatives.

This second case study also served to find what procedures were correctly applied by the company, as well as some problems of the implementation of employee management in the international mission.

In relation to positive aspects were:

- The definition of an employee profile for an international mission and description of some key competences for the employee's selection;
- Accompanying family with expatriate, or on their own;
- Training provided by the company, as it is an integral factor for achieving success. We noted the company's willingness to have training for expatriate families is also important for success.
- Excellent organisation of the company, its success with internationalisation and the investment made in the expatriate employee allows them to work more effectively.

The negative aspects, which coincide with Camara et al.'s (2013) observations of possible causes of expatriation failure are as follows:

- In the expatriate profile description, the company places too much emphasis on the importance of management skills. The appropriate profile of an international collaborator requires various skills, such as technical competencies, language skills and leadership.
- Regarding repatriation, the company had not thought about the type of position that the employee would be assigned to after his return, and would probably be placed back into the same position. This is not recommended because the employee had more powers and responsibilities, and should therefore be assigned to a position more compatible with this new reality.

Conclusions

The literature review and fieldwork conducted allow us to draw some conclusions on how SMEs manage their employees in an international context.

In preparing this research, we identified highly relevant issues to be addressed in research, including motivations, employee training, family monitoring, performance evaluation and repatriation.

With the culmination of the research, we concluded that the two companies under study are beginning to develop the expatriation processes effectively and to check what employees refer to as 'preferred financial issue factor' to embrace an international challenge. Following the study, it was also found that SMEs did not provide training for employees in the various aspects inherent to the process of internationalisation, but instead opted only for specific training in management. As Camara (2008) and Rego and Cunha (2009) suggest: cross-cultural training; language skills; leadership, negotiation, international marketing and conducting meetings abroad are integral for success.

It was also found that the SMEs showed a high willingness for families of expatriate employees to accompany them, as emphasised by Zwielewski in the literature (2009), which in the foreseeable future can result in increased motivation of the employee and therefore increased productivity. Other relevant issues relate to the performance evaluation that is done, an aspect Camara (2011) refers to as one of the important phases of the expatriation cycle. Although, it does not give the best representation to the parent company based, as it sometimes does not show the full work effort developed by the employee.

Finally, we highlight that repatriation was a relevant factor for SMEs, as Bergstedt and Lundstrom (2003) report. However, it was identified that the repatriation process should be better prepared by SMEs, particularly with regard to the reception of employees and the allocation of positions during the post-repatriation period.

After concluding the analysis, we found that employees' satisfaction was due to the support provided by companies for their international careers. In the analysis of responses to questionnaires, we found that the expatriation on balance was positive, which is indicative of some success in the human resource management process of the SMEs in the study.

We can say that despite the process of managing international employees of companies A and B has some shortcomings, it was implemented effectively as employees were motivated and the performance of the businesses were positive.

Finally, the performed study was based on a small sample of internationalised Portuguese SMEs and their employees. It was established that Portuguese SMEs are beginning to show concern for international human resource management, because they realise that the success of companies is based on the selection of employees with essential skills to achieve desired objectives.

This research tried to increase knowledge on human resource management from the perspective of internationalisation and understand the expatriation process in SMEs. This research allowed us to achieve a relevant comprehension, and consequently, a contribution to researchers, the investigated SMEs, other companies and managers, who wish to further develop international business with a better understanding of international human resource management.

Research limitations

Some limitations of the respective research exist, particularly related to the relatively small number of employees on international assignment, including Company B, which currently only has one expatriate employee. If a larger number of employees' response could have been analysed the study would have had a greater comparison ratio of different perspectives.

Another factor that may be considered a limitation was sending questionnaires via e-mail. If it were possible to do an interview with each expatriate employee, it would have allowed us to perceive some elements that are only personal views. As well, visual contact would have allowed us to detect the emotions felt throughout responses.

We can also consider as a limitation of the study that expatriates were exclusively in the Angolan market. This means that their perspectives of expatriation could have been influenced by the market in which expatriates were present.

Suggestions for future research

As for future investigation, we can highlight some areas for study of expatriate employees from various countries. Suggestions include exploring how different cultures influence the motivations and perspectives of expatriates.

Conducting studies of the expatriation process for employees who work in developed country markets, and comparing them to other employees who work in developing country markets could be interesting, in terms of investigating the cultural adjustment and adaptation of the employee and family to the different host countries.

Finally, an investigation could be carried out to check what kind of preparation leaders from SMEs have to develop and apply during the process of internationalisation, as well as the management of expatriate employees.

The continuity of empirical studies and literature reviews on the problems of expatriation in international human resource management is necessary and essential.

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A PROBLEMÁTICA DA EXPATRIAÇÃO NA GESTÃO INTERNACIONAL DE RECURSOS HUMANOS: ESTUDOS APLICADOS EM PME DO CENTRO E NORTE DE PORTUGAL

Resumo: a gestão de recursos humanos, associada a processos iniciais ou de aprofundamento de internacionalização de empresas, está cada vez mais presente nas agendas das empresas nacionais, em virtude da necessidade crescente de internacionalização da economia portuguesa. Este artigo revê a literatura nacional e internacional sobre a gestão de recursos humanos na perspectiva da internacionalização, constituindo assim um contributo teórico para esta área de investigação. Além disso, apresenta os resultados de um trabalho empírico, baseado em entrevistas e questionários a chefias e colaboradores, que resultaram do estudo de duas empresas portuguesas, cujo objetivo foi analisar a sensibilidade destas para o processo de expatriação e repatriação dos seus colaboradores. Constatou-se nas duas empresas haver desenvolvimentos eficazes na expatriação, evidenciados pelo acompanhamento dos colaboradores e familiares, mas ainda se continua a descuidar da formação e a avaliação de desempenho que, por vezes, não reproduz o trabalho desenvolvido pelos expatriados. Perante a repatriação, as empresas também não pensam de forma estruturada no cargo a atribuir ao colaborador após seu retorno.

Palavras-Chave: Gestão; Recursos Humanos; Internacionalização; Expatriação; Carreiras

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