

## SESSION 4.2 – Jean-Christophe Sciberras

This is based mainly on my Solvay experience but also on the time I spent in Renault. Having been an expatriate myself, I have handled quite many expatriate or international assignment situations. So I'd like first to present the challenges we face. In the area of global mobility in global companies, there are five main objectives. It is key for mixing our management teams, and we believe very strongly that international mobility is part of the company's diversity policy. The second key is creating the pool for the company's future top executives, with a question I like to raise because it's linked to diversity issues, it's probably there in the glass ceiling for women because in practice international mobility is harder for women than it is for men. The third key point is that we need to prepare future local managers and executives: this international assignment mobility helps grow the local talents of the companies. The fourth key point is having been assigned internationally will help you in the future to manage distance, remote teams, working in different local or cultural contexts –. Lastly, it is key for attracting and retaining young talents. Young people nowadays want, when they are recruited, this kind of perspective in their own career ambition, and they expect some responses from the company.

A major question we face is, how long to send somebody? The first year is always an investment year so the length of the assignment is a key issue. Then in the career, do we practice going back or do we practice continuity of different international assignments. At Renault, we chose going back more. At Solvay, we choose the second policy more often, with people who are really experts on international assignment. What kind of employees do we pick for this assignment? We focus on seniors, for experience and for family reasons – it is easier to travel when children are grown up. However, it is important to prepare young people for future responsibility. So, it's a key tool for career management. It is key to prepare people to leave, to change their context. Cultural preparation is required. It is organized in most companies but it has to be done very properly. It is important to get ready to live in another culture. It's very important to manage in a different culture, because the main problem we can have is a manager who behaves exactly the same when arriving in a new country. In terms of management, this can create huge difficulties with local employees. Therefore, preparing management for a new context is key.

The third point I would like to mention is the question of the local language, because in fact we think it's very important even if it's not English. There are so many topics on that, which makes international mobility assignments a nightmare for some HR. That is why it is increasingly given to specialists inside a company, or also with a lot of support on this field from relocation companies, tax issue companies. But the HR communities have shared so many questions about that, the issue of the package, over the years. Do we have a standard package? Do we have a cafeteria package? Do we have a standard package and a low-cost package? It was really interesting in Rhodia before Solvay – developing different kinds of packages, more adjusted to the situation of the people. I would also like to mention the issue of what we call the permanent commuters, which is a new category that has already been mentioned today. It is a growing category that also leads to a specific terms and conditions situation. The family issue is very important: with or without. Can the company have some impact on the decision or is it a decision to be taken by the employee alone? It raises a lot of ethics issues, to be frank, and as HR, we think that we should not put this on the table. But to be

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honest, it's a cost question as well. Discussions about that are always quite difficult: the partner/spouse's job, the question of outplacement, the question of the compensation in terms of loss of job, the question of employment by the same company abroad, which has been developed trying to make deals with other global companies. Then it increases the partner's chance of finding a job during the assignment. It is all very important for the success of this assignment. When the family doesn't work well generally, sometimes the assignment will fail. Wage compensation. How do you compute compensation? According to which criteria? Distance, security, local situation, cost of living, the question of the variation of the currency... all these issues are sometimes quite technical. We receive support from external companies on that. Fortunately, in the Eurozone, we no longer have the question of the variation of currency. But we still do in many emerging country, the question of adaptation – and the quickness of adaptation – to local currency evaluation is important. School for children is another key topic. What do we provide? Do we guarantee continuity with homeland system? Do we push towards local schools? Or do we provide international programs? All these questions are very important and take a lot of time, but they are key for success, and even simply for acceptance of the assignment. Another issue is housing: do we pay? Do we have a contribution of the employees? What about retirement? There are so many questions, things to tackle about retirement... Maintaining retirement conditions, also when we're talking about low-cost package, the retirement issue always comes back on the table. Therefore, it's quite difficult to be really low-cost in this kind of situation. There is also the question of fiscal equalization that we have to provide our employees with, which leads to several very technical issues. Coming back is another key issue. The question is, how to return to what I call a normal life? How to prepare, because there is usually a difference of standard and this has to be prepared. Nobody likes shocks in their life, yet coming back is a shock. It has to be prepared. How to prepare it? The techniques of setting individual yearly specific interview with the home-based HR. Our manager is key to organize that so the coming back is prepared. Which job? How to secure it? How to prepare it? How to combine? Usually, failure arrives when return has not been prepared. Another question is: who "owns" the expatriate? Is someone responsible, when the employee is away, for this future? It's very important that somebody in the home company remains responsible for the future of the assignee. And then, how do we follow up the value created by this in the career? It's very important to check – especially in the career path comparison – to be sure that the employee who made the choice and sometimes sacrifice to leave their own country with their family, we have really to be sure that it has been a plus in their career, which is not always the case.

Finally, the issue of cost. How to minimize it? It's a key issue as well. You know the ratio varies between 1:2 and 1:3 in terms of cost for international assignments. So how can we minimize this? Local expat packages have been quite developed, for young people without family. I said yes but what about the compensation for retirement? And in fact it's quite difficult to be really low-cost in this situation. Do we promote the permanent commuter situation? It's easier than it was in the past because of the facility of communication over the world, especially Europe. Is it a good situation, especially to achieve good work-life balance? That's a very important question. What about Europe, in this case, is it considered as one country, or do we continue to create specific conditions in Europe? We do in Solvay. We are quite pragmatic that Europe is not one country and that we have to harmonize mobility within Europe. The question of the sharing of cost is an increasing issue as well. Sharing in the cost of the house, car policy and so on. So that's some issues I wanted to raise which are day to day questions that we have to solve in this kind of situation.