

Great expectations? Female expatriates' perceptions of organisational performance and development reviews in supporting access to international assignments

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of organisational performance and development review policy and practice on women's access to international careers via long-term expatriate assignments in the oil and gas industry, with a specific focus on women's perceptions of procedural justice.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative cross-sectional case study research design is used to analyse performance and development review, and international assignment policies in two firms, together with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 Human Resource policy custodians and 21 female long-term current assignees.

Findings – Women assignees do not see performance and development reviews as effective mechanisms to access expatriate roles. Nonetheless, women use these procedures while also operating within senior male networks to signal their desire to expatriate.

Research limitations/implications – This study identifies differences between organisational policy objectives and policy implementation, and female assignees' experiences and expectations of accessing expatriate roles. Women's perceptions of organisational justice are not harmed because women place more emphasis on process and conversations than on policy. Research propositions are suggested extending organisational justice theory.

Practical implications – Clear articulation of performance and development review processes aids organisational succession planning. Formalised, transparent expatriate career management supports women's access to expatriation. The roles of key personnel in determining access to expatriate career paths require clarification.

Originality/value – This paper extends our knowledge of women's organisationally assigned expatriate careers and perceptions of procedural justice. Women use performance and development reviews to access expatriate opportunities. Employer action aligned to policy intent could help increase female expatriate participation.

Keywords Gender, Women, Careers, Expatriates, Organizational justice, Performance and development reviews

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Expatriation generates career capital (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018) and acts as a precursor to leadership (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011). Yet, women comprise only 25 per cent of organisationally assigned expatriates industry wide (Santa Fe Relocation, 2018). Thus, impediments in undertaking expatriation are concerning not only to women who wish to pursue leadership roles but also to employers given increased organisational interest in building, maintaining and retaining a more diverse expatriate talent pool (Pinto *et al.*, 2012) and given recognised shortages of international managers (Collings *et al.*, 2007).



Women gain career benefit from expatriation and they seek assignments with the highest potential for career contribution (Shortland, 2016). But there is a research gap (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011) – we know little about career management processes and how these affect women's access to expatriate careers. Examining organisational policies and processes, such as performance and development reviews, that ostensibly facilitate entry to expatriate roles is therefore an important avenue of enquiry in understanding actions that can help increase women's career growth. Yet, studying the mechanics of policy implementation may be insufficient. We need to understand whether women believe they can achieve expatriate career opportunities and how they make use of organisational procedures to gain the openings actually made available. Examining women assignees' perceptions of organisational action to implement policy as stated can assist us to identify whether they see justice as being enacted and whether they view the pursuit of expatriation as worthwhile.

This research examines one specific aspect of human resource policy that relates to access to expatriate roles, namely the management of performance and development reviews, set within the context of the oil and gas industry. Although oil and gas employs high and increasing volumes of organisationally assigned expatriates compared with other industries (Air Inc., 2017), women comprise just 7–10 per cent of its upstream exploration and production expatriate population (Shortland, 2014a). The choice of this sector as a research case might appear to be an extreme, not widely applicable, example given its geographically isolated locations and the relative slowness with which women's share of expatriate roles has changed. However, from a research perspective, the study of 'extreme' cases can prove ideal for theory building (Pratt, 2009) as such case contexts can enable contrasting patterns in the data to be more easily identified together with clear "recognition of the central constructs, relationships, and logic of the focal phenomenon" (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 27). From an organisational perspective, industries such as engineering and mining employ high expatriate volumes and also frequently operate in remote locations and emerging economies (Shortland, 2009). In addition, a wide range of other multinationals, including for example, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and financial services, are increasingly entering fast growing, newly emerging economies (Collings *et al.*, 2007; Holmes, 2013). With such relocations come the inherent challenges that these locations pose, including safety and security issues and the lack of traditional expatriate infrastructure (Cartus, 2018) and so all can potentially learn lessons from the oil and gas sector. In relation to expatriate gender diversity, industries with small proportions of female assignees such as mining (Richardson *et al.*, 2014) may learn from the experiences of the oil and gas industry as it endeavours to promote expatriate gender diversity.

This research sets out to identify differences between organisational intentions and female assignees' experiences and expectations of the performance and development reviews that feed into organisations' career path planning systems. Specifically, the research aims to address how these organisational processes, as applied by home and host country Human Resources (HR), line and senior management, act as perceived facilitators of access to expatriate careers for women. Set within the theoretical framework of organisational justice, with a particular focus on procedural justice, the following research questions are addressed:

- RQ1. What is the intention of organisational policy on performance and development reviews in facilitating access to expatriate career paths?
- RQ2. To what extent and how are female expatriates' expectations to access international careers met via organisational policy and practice on performance and development reviews and their input into career path planning?
- RQ3. How do organisational performance and development review and career path planning processes influence female expatriates' views of procedural justice?

Literature review

Organisationally assigned expatriation refers to positions in foreign subsidiaries offered to employees by their current employers (Andresen *et al.*, 2014). Commonly used to develop international competencies by employers building multi-national talent pools (Haslberger and Brewster, 2009), expatriation provides career development at managerial levels and leadership preparation (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011). As Suutari *et al.* (2018) note, while firms recruit to bring in international experience, they are more likely to assign expatriate positions internally. Hence, working in a multi-national institution may bring employee expectations of organisationally assigned international mobility. Given the career potential that is expected from undertaking an international assignment, expatriation should provide an attractive option for individuals to develop career capital (Dickmann *et al.*, 2018).

Yet the literature points out that, despite the positive press on the career benefits of expatriation, this career choice is not risk-free to individuals or organisations (Baruch *et al.*, 2016). At a personal level, willingness and ability to undertake expatriation are affected by a range of issues and some of these can present insurmountable barriers, particularly for women. For example, decisions to access expatriate assignments are affected by dual careers/incomes and marital status with the willingness of the spouse to move affecting employees' intentions to seek an assignment (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011). Perceptions of spousal job assistance affect willingness to go, especially for long-term assignments (Konopaske and Werner, 2005). Children's adjustment and schooling, as well as childcare availability, also influence assignment decisions (Hutchings *et al.*, 2010) especially in culturally dissimilar countries (Tharenou, 2009). Indeed, Tharenou (2009) reports women are less willing to move to developing than to developed countries; and this is clearly an issue for the oil and gas industry focus of this study.

In addition to spousal and family issues, women appear to face greater difficulties in accessing organisationally assigned expatriation than men. For example, apparent organisational unwillingness to send women on assignments results from bias in selection (Harris, 2002). The requirement to build supervisor-subordinate relationships (where the supervisor is typically male) and convince selectors of women's abilities to work across geographical borders also raises problems for women pursuing expatriate opportunities (Varma *et al.*, 2001). As entry to expatriate roles is reported as frequently resting on social capital, access to networks is particularly important but, overall, women have fewer networking opportunities than men (Shortland, 2014b). Given all the various hurdles that must be overcome, it would be expected that women aspiring to expatriate would seek reassurance that organisational career management policies and implementation practices will support attempts to access potential assignments, thereby making their efforts worthwhile. Yet, this aspect represents "a gap" in the literature (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). Thus, we need to understand how women who seek access to expatriation are affected by perceptions of the efficacy of their organisations' individual career review policies in facilitating their initial access and in gaining further expatriate opportunities to achieve their career goals. Understanding how expatriates interpret HR support, that is whether policy is received as intended, can help us to assess expatriates' "strength of feeling, sense of injustice, and the perceptions of gains and losses" (McNulty *et al.*, 2013, p. 211).

International experience is recognised by assignees as a "portable asset" (Haslberger and Brewster, 2009). Research by McNulty *et al.* (2013) suggests that organisationally assigned expatriates favour individual over company career ownership. This means rather than the organisation "owning" their next move, individuals may adopt a more "boundaryless career" approach (Stahl *et al.*, 2002), taking the deliberate step of changing jobs and employers while on assignment. This is important to organisations because they stand to lose current assignees with valuable international competencies to their competitors if these

individuals believe that their career expectations are not being fulfilled, for example, through negative perceptions of performance, development and/or career path on assignment processes.

Given women's under-representation as expatriates (Santa Fe Relocation, 2018) and organisations' desire to retain valuable international competencies (Collings *et al.*, 2007), a study that examines how women use organisational policy access mechanisms and the extent to which they see these as just is necessary. This requires us to consider the implementation of organisational policy within the theoretical framework of organisational justice (Greenberg, 1990) and to understand the components of career reviews, including performance, development and succession planning processes.

Organisational justice: beyond a matter of policy

Organisational justice writing dates back to Homans (1961) and Adams (1963): "equity theory" discusses the idea that workers compare their work inputs and outputs with others in relation to how these organisational contributions are recognised. Thus, as argued by Greenberg (1990), theoretical development of ideas about organisational justice was intended to enable systematic evaluation of perceived justice in social interaction between actors within organisations, not of organisations generally. Colquitt *et al.* (2001) delineate and specify the concept of organisational justice using two principal categories and two sub-categories. "Distributive justice" focuses on fairness of outcomes and "procedural justice" on fairness of the procedures followed in arriving at the outcomes (Bye and Sandal, 2016). In turn, unpacking the processual aspects, "interactional" or "interpersonal justice" looks at how the decisions made by the parties to the interaction that lead to organisational outcomes are implemented. "Informational justice" considers communication: why certain outcomes are arrived at and why certain procedures are followed. It includes scope for employee voice to be exercised in the course of these social interactions (Rowland and Hall, 2012).

Instead of separating organisational justice into a series of structural dimensions, individual organisational actors' perceptions of the overall "climate" within which organisationally just outcomes and processes may be observed. This enables us to capture perceptions of the different, yet related, types of justice experienced collectively; in other words, a sense of overall fairness in social interaction within organisational settings between managers and those they manage. This, in turn, drives behaviour. Thus, organisational justice is an embracing social concept, not simply a set of distinct facets (Lind, 2001). This helps us to take into account organisational actors' perceptions of whether the outcomes of social interaction are consistent with norms applicable to social institutions. This includes equal treatment, an issue of particular concern when it comes to fostering diversity (Rubino *et al.*, 2018). Hence, taking responsibility for equitable allocation decisions, such as access to career development opportunities, is crucial to serve distributive justice. The ability of employees to have a meaningful influence on those outcomes by having scope to engage freely in dialogue with decision-makers is necessary for procedural justice. In addition, consistent, ethical regulation of relevant procedures based on accurate information, free from unfair bias, is also critical to serve procedural justice. Explanations for decision-making outcomes and processes need to be candid and open so as to be credible, comprehensive, reasonable, timely and personalised in order that informational justice is served. Finally, dignity and respect must characterise how people are treated so that interpersonal justice can be served.

Implications for expatriates' performance and development reviews and career paths

The pool of expatriate talent is not large and, as more firms compete globally across an increasing range of destinations, the demand for competent and capable individuals rises (Collings *et al.*, 2007). This raises the issue of perceived equity to access expatriate

opportunities and the role of performance and development reviews and career path planning in facilitating this. Employees' perceptions of the fairness of the processes used to deliver an offer of an expatriate role are crucial given the implications of expatriate assignments for building career capital (Haslberger and Brewster, 2009). A healthy sense of procedural justice (Palaiologos *et al.*, 2011) is important because expatriates' dealings with those involved in performance and development review and career planning processes can generate the potential for expatriate failure (Perera *et al.*, 2017). Given the potential high contribution that expatriates make to organisational wealth creation (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011), if individual performance declines through perceptions of unjust procedures, levels of organisational performance might also be expected to fall. Open and honest communication is required and hence interactional justice is also important (Rubino *et al.*, 2018).

With respect to the mechanics of organisational policy in relation to performance, development and career path processes, organisations are reported to vary in their approaches. For example, the frequency of conducting performance reviews, the number of elements in the process and linking performance outcomes with pay may differ. Nonetheless, there are a number of commonalities. For example, performance and development reviews enable structured feedback, discussion and the opportunity to identify future developmental career moves, reflecting an inter-relationship between performance and development review policies and career path planning and talent review processes conducted within organisations. In addition, the trend of performance review processes becoming increasingly development-led has enabled individuals to realise their potential while improving organisational performance (Armstrong and Baron, 2000). However, it is still important to differentiate between management-led performance reviews and development reviews which tend to be employee-led to a greater extent. For example, the personal development plans, constructed by individuals under guidance from their managers which underpin development reviews, aim to promote learning, knowledge and transferable skills which facilitate career progression. For employees seeking access to expatriate roles, development reviews can present a potential opportunity to signal intentions to expatriate and set out development needs in order to achieve this.

When considering the effect of organisational outcomes of performance reviews, the focus needs to be on factors mediating and moderating the quality of the process involved. For example, if feedback contradicts employee expectations, this potentially counters expectations of interactional justice (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001), resulting in feelings of anger or disappointment. This can lead to negative effects on future performance. Thus, in relation to performance reviews potentially contributing towards access to expatriate roles, assignees need their performance objectives to be clearly specified. This is particularly necessary given the complexity of performance measures in different international contexts. For those on assignment who seek access to further expatriate opportunities once their current posting has ended, a dual home-host focus is necessary, taking into account local host country factors. For example, direct host country supervisory input together with contributions from managers in headquarters will be necessary (Kang and Shen, 2016). Employer practices relating to how expatriates are managed link to levels of organisational commitment (Pate and Scullion, 2010). This has particular resonance with performance reviews as these take place on an on-going basis throughout the period abroad (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011) and thereby influence expatriates' perceptions of access to future international assignments as part of their career aspirations.

Method

This research represents one strand of a major project on female organisationally assigned expatriation in the UK-based oil and gas industry. A case study approach was selected as

this is appropriate for broad research topics that draw upon multiple evidence sources set within complex contextual conditions. Case study research enables in-depth understanding of social phenomena and permits a range of different analysis techniques; it also enables a line of enquiry that can explore unclear boundaries between data subjects and their environment, such as expatriates and their real-life employment contexts, to gain a deeper understanding of contextual issues on individuals' experiences (Richardson, 2017).

To gain access, the research proposal was presented to the membership of the UK Oil and Gas Industry Peer Group. From the 18 global oil and gas firms represented, two international assignment managers (IAMs) volunteered their organisations to participate. To preserve anonymity, company names and countries of operation were withheld. Background data on Oil Co. and Rig Co. (pseudonyms) are presented in Table I. The firms operated in mainly similar host locations.

Qualitative interviews were considered to be the most appropriate means of capturing points of view to gain insight as to what was seen as relevant and important by the organisational actors. Both IAMs agreed to be interviewed in depth and offered the facility to analyse their international assignment, and performance and development review policy documentation. They provided interview access to 12 other HR professionals (three in Oil Co.; nine in Rig Co.) who had designed/developed these policies and/or who had responsibility for their implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Table II). The IAMs supplied background demographic data on all their current female assignees together with their assignment types, locations, job grades and functions. They also contacted them to ask if they were willing to participate in the research and be interviewed.

Oil Co. employed 27 female expatriates (8 per cent of its expatriate population) and Rig Co. employed 66 female expatriates (11 per cent of its expatriate population). Of their current 93 female expatriates, 55 were willing to be interviewed (11 in Oil Co.; 44 in Rig Co.). The majority in both firms were engaged in long-term assignments, typically three to five years' duration. Job demands, time zones, travel and business schedules precluded all from being interviewed during the access period offered; thus stratified sampling was used to select an

	Oil Co.	Rig Co.
Countries of operation	20	30
Headquarters base	USA	UK
Employees worldwide	12,000	6,000
Expatriates as % of workforce	3	10
Number of women expatriates	27	66
Women as % of expatriate population	8	11

Table I.
Organisational background

Oil Co.	Rig Co.
International Assignments Manager (IAM)	International Assignments Manager (IAM)
Learning and Development (L&D)	Function Head (FH)
Resourcing (HR-R)	Graduate Scheme (GS)
HR East Asia (HR-EA)	Resourcing (HR-R)
	Development (HR-D)
	Recruitment (HR-Rec)
	Training (HR-T)
	Performance (HR-P)
	Learning and Development (L&D)
	Training and Development (T&D)

Table II.
HR manager interviewees' roles and responsibilities

appropriate sample ensuring representation of assignment locations, occupational function groups, seniority (grades), and marital, accompanied and family status. In total, 21 women on long-term assignments were selected for interview (seven in Oil Co.; 14 in Rig Co.). Although it was accepted that there can be significant variations within countries in a given region, locations were classified regionally and assignees were not named to preserve anonymity; grade descriptors (numeric/alphabetic) were anonymised through a three-fold classification: senior, middle and junior. Assignee profiles are summarised in Table III.

As Table III shows, 16 female assignees were married or partnered and, of these, 12 were accompanied on their assignment by their partner. Eight women had young children and one had grown-up children. All of the female expatriates with young children were accompanied by them on assignment. The majority of the female assignees were aged between early-30s and mid-40s and in the middle grades. There were only two senior-graded female assignees – one in each company. While Europe and North America featured as receiving locations, the majority of the host locations were considered remote (such as Australasia and Central and East Asia) or potentially insecure (such as North and West Africa, and the Caribbean). Given the locations of oil and gas exploration, worksites were typically distant from major cities and thus transport and infrastructure facilities were limited. Remote locations were classed as isolated, with long travel times between the host location and the home country where family members (parents/siblings) and friends resided, and where company headquarters or main regional offices were located. Potentially insecure locations had poor security and/or prevalent disease. Precautionary safety measures were necessary including requirements for guards, personal drivers and secure housing; limited healthcare provision was also a feature of some of the developing economies.

Documentation relating to the two organisations' annual performance and development review and international assignment policies was examined to identify any assurances or possibilities of expatriation leading to career development outcomes. If articulated, such written policy assurances could lead to women seeking access to expatriate roles to further their careers during their annual reviews. This organisational policy data, combined with pertinent aspects of the literature review, were used to formulate semi-structured interview questions for the IAM/HR policy custodians to establish how the policies operated in practice and their perceptions of women's desire to expatriate (Appendix 1).

The detail gleaned from the policy documentation (stating organisational intent) and the semi-structured IAM/HR interview research (providing confirmation of – or differences from – policy as implemented in practice) were used to draw up the semi-structured interview questions posed to the 21 current female assignees. It is important to note that all of the women in this study had already achieved expatriate positions and were currently on assignment – typically for three to five years – after which they would return to their home country or apply for a further expatriate position. The assignee interviews thus addressed women's actual experiences of performance and development reviews in supporting their access to their current expatriate assignment and their perceptions of these organisational processes in supporting access to further expatriate posts if desired (Appendix 2).

The assignees were interviewed separately from the IAM/HR managers and their candid responses were recorded confidentially. In this way, independent sources of information were obtained for analysis ensuring a triangulated research approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Interviews were carried out on company premises. Before each interview, participants were asked if the conversation could be recorded, subject to confidentiality; all agreed. All of the in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the UK by telephone (with privacy ensured) if the assignee/HR professional was abroad, or face-to-face in a private room in the UK. Each IAM/HR interview took 30–90 min and each assignee interview 60–90 min.

All recordings were transcribed. The qualitative data analysis was first carried out using colour coding in Microsoft Word to identify and code main themes. Given the large volume

Assignee	Home region	Host region	Current occupational function	Current Grade	Age range	Marital status	Children	Accompanied status
<i>Oil Co.</i>								
A	Western Europe	East Asia	Engineering	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by partner and child
B	North America	Central Asia	Engineering	Senior	50+	Divorced/widowed	0	No
D	Western Europe	East Asia	Exploration	Middle	30-34	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by partner and child
E	East Asia	Western Europe	Human Resources	Middle	35-39	Single	0	No
F	North America	East Asia	Exploration	Middle	35-39	Married/partnered	0	Yes, by partner
G	East Asia	North America	Engineering	Junior	30-34	Single	0	No
H	North America	Western Europe	Information Technology	Middle	50+	Divorced/widowed	2	No, children were adults
<i>Rig Co.</i>								
I	Western Europe	Caribbean	Exploration	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	3	Yes, by partner and children
K	Australasia	West Africa	Commercial	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	0	Yes, by partner
L	Western Europe	Australasia	Commercial	Middle	30-34	Married/partnered	0	No
M	Western Europe	Central Asia	Commercial	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	0	Yes, by partner
N	Western Europe	Middle East	Engineering	Middle	35-39	Married/partnered	0	No
O	Western Europe	Australasia	Information Technology	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	0	Yes, by partner
P	Western Europe	Western Europe	Commercial	Middle	25-29	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by partner and child
R	Western Europe	Australasia	Corporate Social Responsibility	Middle	30-34	Married/partnered	0	Yes, by partner
S	Western Europe	North Africa	Commercial	Senior	35-39	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by partner and child
U	Western Europe	North Africa	Legal	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by partner and child
V	Caribbean	North America	Legal	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	1	Yes, by child
W	Western Europe	East Asia	Exploration	Middle	35-39	Married/partnered	2	Yes, by partner and children
X	Caribbean	West Africa	Commercial	Middle	40-44	Single	0	No
Y	Western Europe	Central Asia	Commercial	Middle	40-44	Married/partnered	0	No

Table III.
Expatriate
interviewee profile

of data, the decision was taken subsequently to use NVivo with coding carried out afresh to help eliminate coding drift to aid its reliability. A template analysis was undertaken (King, 2004). Coding trees were interrogated to group linked themes together. Data analysis highlighted agreement and disagreement between policy and practice, the views of the IAM/HR representatives, and the assignees, with rival explanations helping to support the internal validity of the research (Yin, 2009).

Findings

The policy documentation perspective

Rig Co.'s long-term international assignment policy states: "All employees may be considered for international assignments in line with the Company's normal procedures, including the annual performance review/annual development review process". In contrast, Oil Co. makes no mention of procedures to access to expatriation in its long-term international assignment policy. Both firms' annual performance review (APR) policies address similar issues (setting objectives, rating performance and undertaking formal reviews). In both, the APR is mandatory. Outcomes are clearly linked to bonuses/pay. APR policy includes the identification of individual skills development necessary to aid career advancement objectives. Both organisations have policies on, and operate, three-stage annual development review (ADR) processes to identify and address development needs. Individuals prepare their development plans, discuss and set objectives with line managers and agree implementation actions and timing. Although both firms highlight employee, line manager and organisational roles and responsibilities, the ADR is not mandatory.

The HR managers' perspective

Although Oil Co.'s policy documentation does not link access to international assignments with its APR and ADR processes, the HR professionals interviewed highlight accessing expatriate assignments as an important route to career enhancement. To initiate the process of gaining expatriate positions, Oil Co.'s HR acknowledge that the APR and ADR do play an important role; outcomes are used to identify "emerging talent, high potential and our critical professionals" (L & D, Oil Co.). These data are used in succession planning and talent reviews and to ascertain individuals suitable for expatriate roles. Oil Co. has no long-term structured career paths. For employees, career uncertainty is the norm, but its HR representatives believe this is advantageous:

[...] if you are working in (the oil and gas majors) your career plan is mapped out for 10 years hence [...] whereas (here) [...] you do not know where you're going to be in five years' time [...] there are lots of opportunities and change. (L & D, Oil Co.)

Despite no written policy, Oil Co. operates a talent review process annually, through which succession planning and career path decisions are made. The executive vice presidents, vice presidents and function heads comprise an exploration and production leadership team which, with HR input, reviews the performance and development of all current assignees, maps their positions and discusses their performance and development. Existing expatriates' access to further assignment opportunities is discussed by this team:

We have a formal talent process whereby [...] we identify talent [...] emerging talent and high potential talent, and we keep a list. The talent process is very transparent, with all the data on line. (HR-EA, Oil Co.)

This formal process has operated for several years and, as Oil Co.'s L & D representative notes, it raises "awareness of who we have in the business". When new assignment opportunities are identified, access to these may be offered to individuals identified via the succession planning and talent review process with career benefits highlighted.

Oil Co.'s L & D representative points out that employees are receptive to being able to access expatriate posts as a means of formalising their career development because this is "something that you control". With respect to women's access to expatriation, the HR professionals are unanimous in proclaiming that women are equally able to access expatriate opportunities as men but they are not given special consideration.

In Rig Co., the HR personnel acknowledge the importance of accessing expatriate roles for career growth. However, they face a contradiction in terms of implementing potentially inconsistent policies in this respect: the firm's APR and ADR policies make no mention of expatriation, contrasting with the explicit reference to the contribution of the APR and ADR processes in the long-term international assignment policy. Rig Co.'s HR representatives appear to side-step this by referring to line and functional managers' contribution to enabling employees to access expatriation, remaining silent on their own HR input. Rig Co.'s HR managers thus report that line and functional managers are critical to expatriate career access because line managers carry out the APR and ADR and function heads manage any succession planning and talent management reviews:

[...] a good manager who has got good understanding of (Rig Co.) and has got a reasonably good handle of what sort of experience blocks you need to get, (they'll say) [...] 'you really need to get out to an asset, John, and so let's see what roles are out there for you'. (HR-D, Rig Co.)

We have a very powerful (functional) manager structure. So (in) each skill set or function [...] they are ultimately responsible for the career development of all the people [...] by definition. (IAM, Rig Co.)

Interestingly though, while recognising line managers' role in the APR and how this review can be used to access expatriation, Rig Co.'s HR managers say that this is not really the appropriate forum to state mobility aspirations and discuss access to expatriate opportunities. Instead they highlight the APR's main function as being to "look at their performance within the year, and their short-term development needs" (HR-R, Rig Co.). The focus is strongly on current performance, not future roles:

We (have) a performance contract culture [...] people [...] have [...] very clear-cut business-related objectives in terms of "deliver this report", "make this much profit", "hit this milestone by this date". (HR-P, Rig Co.)

As soon as you start talking about new roles, next jobs and things like that, that is then more the development review discussion. (HR-Rec, Rig Co.)

That said, there is HR recognition that the APR can play a role in accessing expatriate opportunities: "Sometimes these things cross over, you know it might just be the opportune moment" (HR-Rec, Rig Co.).

The ADR is reported by Rig Co.'s HR personnel as the main forum to explore access to expatriation. However, as the ADR is "not mandatory" (HR-T, Rig Co.) it is described as "questionable [...] not taken seriously" (L&D, Rig Co.). Rig Co.'s career ladders aim to provide transparent and structured routes to career opportunities but its HR managers say that adherence to the ADR process timelines is inconsistent across regions and functions. This leads to gaps in employee data and results in unstructured (and criticised) implementation of succession planning and talent management processes:

We haven't got particularly structured talent management systems [...] because [...] the senior people [...] say 'well sod the process, I just want to take so-and-so because I trust him' [...] we might occasionally put the veneer of the process on top of it but the bottom line is, it is still done this way. (HR-D, Rig Co.)

This has particularly negative implications for women trying to access expatriate posts: "The women [...] find it harder to build up the same level of [...] sponsorship" (HR-D, Rig Co.).

The female assignees' perspective: access to current expatriate posts

In both firms, the women interviewed had already gained access to expatriate assignments. Looking back over the steps taken to gain entry to their current postings, the women reported using the APR process in a manner closely aligned to policy intention. Written objectives and good quality conversations with line/functional managers helped the women to formulate their career thinking, state development objectives and alert others to these. In addition, they took advantage of the opportunity of this mandatory review to raise their desire to expatriate, speaking of how they signalled their interest in expatriate opportunities and pressed their bosses to gain access to their current posts.

With respect to the ADR, the assignees in both firms reported that this helped to crystallise their career intentions and that they had used it to state their desire to access their current expatriate roles. It was also cited as an opportunity to highlight their future availability for international mobility:

I put in my application, that in my ADR I said I want to move into (this post) [...] I told everybody that I said I was interested in it in my ADR so they (didn't) just think it's some random application [...] So I am using it for myself in that way. (Y)

However, the female assignees in both firms said they did not know what happened to their ADR paperwork once it was completed:

I don't know who looks at these things. Your manager signs it off, and then it hits a dead zone somewhere. (K)

Yet not knowing what happened to the paperwork was not seen as a particular concern; the women said that the opportunity to gain access to expatriation rested on the quality of the APR/ADR conversations.

The female assignees' perspective: access to future expatriate posts

With respect to looking forward to accessing future expatriate roles, the women report that the formal career management channels (APR/ADR) do not necessarily provide the means to alert the succession planning decision-makers to their expectations. Although the female assignees in both firms believe that career-enhancing international assignments can flow from succession planning, their expectations of being able to access such future opportunities are reduced by what they believe to be unclear links between the APR/ADR and the management conversations within the succession planning/talent review processes:

The quality of that conversation really depends on your manager [...]. Some managers are very engaged in the process, and some really don't care. (D)

Oil Co.'s women expatriates express greater awareness of succession planning than those in Rig Co., reflecting Oil Co.'s more formal, centralised and time-scaled talent review scheme. Nonetheless, Oil Co.'s assignees are by no means more confident of process transparency and links with the APR/ADR than those women in Rig Co. Women also report their dissatisfaction with international career path uncertainty in both firms, preferring a far more systematic approach:

I have stopped, and I don't want to say being interested, because I am very much interested in my career, I just have stopped guessing and I have stopped asking. (F)

What I am missing is [...] you are going to go to this assignment and we are going to expect you to develop in this way and we have got this vision for you. (N)

In an attempt to combat the lack of expatriate career path certainty, the women assignees in both firms say that they extend their conversations about willingness to expatriate beyond the APR/ADR processes to improve their likelihood of getting access to future international

positions: “I am always going to have to drive my career [...] if I need certain opportunities I’ve got to ask” (K). They highlight their reliance on their line managers for information and how they maintain conversations with them so as to advance their future expatriate careers: “He will know when we want to move. He won’t need the ADR or the APR to tell him that” (I). Yet, reorganisations and changes in line management responsibilities are reported as detrimental to this strategy. As a result, formal line manager reviews alone are considered insufficient. Women assignees confirm the need to build strong relationships with their “boss’s boss [...] He knows what jobs are coming up” (W). The importance of ensuring that host country managers know of their capabilities and desire to expatriate is also viewed as critical: “You’ve got to have a face on it” (M). Thus, to supplement the role of the APR/ADR in contributing to the succession planning process (which the women see as opening up future access to expatriation opportunities), they report taking direct action via networking with higher ranking male contacts.

Discussion

The findings from this research indicate that Oil Co.’s written international assignment and APR/ADR policies do not directly highlight access to expatriate opportunities and thus do not intend to set up automatic employee expectations of international mobility as a means of gaining career growth. Rig Co.’s written international assignment policy suggests access to expatriate opportunities via the APR/ADR processes but the review policies themselves make no mention of expatriate career opportunities. Despite the literature highlighting career benefits from undertaking organisationally initiated expatriation (Suutari *et al.*, 2018), organisational performance and development review policy in the case study firms presents a surprisingly neutral picture. This might suggest the firms are cognisant of uncertainties linked to long-term international mobility and repatriation career problems (De Cieri *et al.*, 2009) or, more simply, that expatriation does not provide a publicly acknowledged route to career development.

However, Oil Co.’s HR professionals do imply career growth will flow from expatriation under their firm’s succession planning process, which has input from the APR/ADR processes. This suggests implications for procedural and interactional justice. A neutral effect should result from policy documentation by itself but potentially women have expectations of access to expatriation from the implementation of the succession planning/talent review process. Rig Co.’s HR professionals are explicit – access to expatriate career opportunities is unlikely to flow from its APR/ADR and talent management and succession planning actions and women face particular difficulties in navigating obstacles to gain any available opportunities. This suggests negative procedural justice implications in Rig Co.; women’s expectations of access to expatriation emanating from the implementation of formal organisational policy are unlikely to be fulfilled.

In practice, the picture that emerges in both firms is one of women’s determination to make the best use of their organisations’ annual review opportunities to access expatriation and to raise their profiles such that they can be considered for any future international mobility via the succession planning/talent management processes. Women assignees understand that the APR is primarily concerned with performance in their current role, but they are also cognisant that APR policy includes reference to career advancement and development opportunities, even if not explicitly around expatriation. As such the women pursue these career aspects of the APR process in a resolute fashion. Although not mandatory, the ADR presents a further opportunity to engage in conversations with their line managers to state their expatriate ambitions, highlight interest in specific positions, and press to gain access to them. Women therefore use the ADR in conjunction with the APR. While the two firms make no specific promises of career advancement, women are concerned about what their firms actually deliver (Montes and Zweig, 2009). While not

seeking company-ownership of their careers (McNulty *et al.*, 2013), they are nonetheless dissatisfied with the lack of structured career paths and so take additional action beyond the annual APR/ADR reviews via networking in senior male circles to further highlight their expatriate ambitions.

The relative perceptions between the parties of the ‘effectiveness’ of performance and development reviews in multi-national organisations are important considerations. Line managers and their subordinates may view the effectiveness of organisational policy and the quality of performance and development review conversations differently (Bye and Sandal, 2016). Effectiveness is therefore only a relative term when considering the processes applied to – and outcomes received by – women wishing to access expatriation. By implementing relevant organisational policy and related procedural guidelines devised by the HR function, line managers should expect an “effective outcome”, namely positioning the subordinate employee as a resource that will achieve corporately mandated (or strategic) priorities. At face value this is an administrative issue for line managers who coordinate human potential to perform in their current role and to be developed against organisational criteria to perform further in accordance with future corporate priorities. However, this implies the willing cooperation of subordinates. Yet each individual subordinate’s perceptions of an ‘effective outcome’ are unknown, and each has the power to decide on the extent to which they wish to cooperate and to feel satisfied with the basis of that cooperation. While performance and development review requirements, in principle, are subject to the terms of an employment contract, in practice, it is unlikely such a contract will specify the details of the degree of cooperation and its sustainability (Marsden, 1999). Hence, the organisational justice “climate” (Rubino *et al.*, 2018) provides a lens through which to describe and interpret individuals’ justice experiences in this regard.

At one level, “effectiveness” as a basis for an employee to assess a just outcome may be viewed in terms of the relative distribution of positive outcomes (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). Does the female subordinate in this study, when comparing herself against peers, consider that the distribution of performance assessment and career development opportunities arising from her own and her (predominantly male) peers’ interactions with her (male) line manager is justified? This leads to the following research proposition:

- P1.* Organisational performance and development review and career path planning processes influence women expatriates’ views of procedural justice measured in terms of assessing whether their line manager interactions enable access to one or additional expatriate assignments in comparison with their (male) peers.

It may also be theorised that, to evaluate the justness of “effective” outcomes from performance and career development interactions for access to expatriate careers, female employees will pay attention to factors beyond distributional results. In addition to “what” occurs, attention may be directed to the character of “how” outcomes are arrived at. Thus, women will consider the interplay between the effective application of performance and development review policies through the procedures mandated by the organisation, and ethical and fairness considerations (Rowland and Hall, 2012). This leads to the following research proposition:

- P2.* The assessment made by aspiring or continuing women expatriates as to whether organisational performance and development review and career path planning process are procedurally just, will be informed by their sense of having scope to engage freely in dialogue with decision-makers based on accurate information, free from unfair bias and being treated with the same level of dignity applicable to male counterparts.

Beyond such formalised processes, the perceived quality of the interpersonal interaction itself is also an important consideration. In effect, this may vary depending on how the line

manager concerned chooses to interpret procedural requirements (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998). This variation, depending upon how women wishing to access expatriation perceive it, may influence the extent to which they regard the entire interaction and its outcomes as effective and just. This leads to the following research proposition:

- P3. Aspiring or continuing women expatriates' views of procedural justice associated with organisational performance and development review and career path planning processes will be informed by their perceptions as to whether interactions with decision-makers reside within a framework of consistent, ethical regulation of relevant procedures.

Implications for practice

Women assignees welcome formalised, transparent expatriate career management and need to be confident in their managers to act justly in relation to their performance and development reviews in ways that create and sustain conditions for their success. The roles of key personnel in determining expatriate career paths require clarification and clear articulation of how APR/ADR processes link into organisational succession planning are required. The facilitation of networking initiatives that embrace women to further their access to international career opportunities should also be considered.

Concluding remarks

Women report a lack of understanding of how annual performance and development review processes are used by top management within organisational succession planning and talent reviews. Nonetheless, women recognise the value of review conversations and use these to ensure their future expatriate ambitions are known. Thus, women's perceptions of organisational justice remain intact while they maintain belief in the efficacy of the procedures used to implement review policies to access expatriation. Notwithstanding this, women are cognisant that annual reviews may be insufficient by themselves to gain access to expatriate positions. Hence, they cultivate other means of raising awareness of their expatriate goals, including informal networking with senior management. Such interpersonal conversations support women's sense of interactional justice in their pursuit of international careers.

Limitations and directions for further research

Women who were unable to access expatriate roles were not contacted. Further research might usefully explore what prevents women from gaining expatriate career opportunities. Access was not granted to line, functional and senior management. Further research would benefit from cross-checking their interpretations against those of HR. As more firms enter emerging economies, it would be valuable to research whether organisations are less likely to send women as the "first expatriates". A comparative study is needed to assess any gender differences regarding perceptions of performance and development reviews in promoting expatriate career access, gaining career development, and advancement and leadership opportunities.

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Appendix 1. HR interview schedule

- (1) How is available internal talent matched to roles?
- (2) What career development policies/initiatives do you have? How are expatriates' careers planned/ managed/tracked? Outcomes for gender diversity?
- (3) How do expatriate APR/ADR processes work? How are senior grades reviewed? What happens to paperwork/discussions?

Appendix 2. Female assignees' interview schedule

- (1) To what extent do you believe that an International Assignment (IA) is crucial to your development/career progression?
- (2) How did you make it known that you wanted an IA/would like another IA?
- (3) In getting your current IA (and your next IA), how instrumental were/are: APR/ADR? Talent management/succession planning processes? How do these support/hinder career progression?

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