



# Workforce Misalignment:

Curbing Abusive Behaviour Of Expatriates.



As the world becomes increasingly globalised, it is not uncommon for local employees to work under a foreign boss; while this can bring many benefits, such as exposure to new cultures and perspectives, it can also present challenges.

The relationship between a foreign boss and local staff can sometimes be challenging, especially when the foreign boss is abusive towards their employees. Recently, the CEO of Seplat, one of Nigeria's leading indigenous energy companies, was in the eye of the storm. The Federal High Court ordered the CEO, Roger Brown, to go on suspension and step down temporarily pending the determination of the substantive suit brought by some aggrieved shareholders.

**What was the Brown offence?** He was accused of racism and maltreatment of Nigerian workers. The Federal Ministry of Interior chose not to sweep this under the carpet as there have been a series of an allegation of abuse of local workers by expatriates. The Ministry consequently revoked Brown's visa and work permit. The case was a significant blow to Seplat, which lost over NGN75 billion in market value due to the scandal.

Intelligent management of stakeholders is critical to the survival and performance of every organisation. Abusive behaviour takes many forms; in the age of globalisation, where workers become highly mobile, expatriate workers mustn't lord it over the local workers. Some of the common abusive behaviour founds among expatriate workers operating in Africa are as follows:



SEPLAT CEO, ROGER BROWN

### *Racism and Discrimination*

Racism can take many forms, including unequal pay, lack of advancement opportunities, and verbal or physical harassment. These issues can be particularly challenging for local employees who may feel isolated or unsupported.

### *Physical Abuse*

It has also been reported that some expatriates are fond of physically assaulting their local workers. There have been situations of some of them releasing dogs on the workers, slapping their workers or locking them up in an isolated place.

### *Favouritism*

Favouritism is another common issue that continues to cast expatriates in a bad light. Some are accused of only giving foreigners contracts or jobs at local employees' expense. In the Seplat case, the MD/CEO was charged with even giving cleaning jobs to foreign companies. Not only did this deprive local employees of employment, but it may also increase the cost of such services for the organisation. Beyond contract, the award also overlooks local employees for promotions or assignments in favour of foreign employees even when the local employees are more competent and qualified. This can lead to feelings of frustration and disillusionment, which can negatively impact morale and productivity.

### *Breach of Corporate Governance*

A breach of Corporate Governance can occur when a foreign employer does not adhere to local laws,

regulations, or ethical standard. This can have severe consequences for both the employer and the local employee. Local employees may be forced to participate in unethical or illegal activities, damaging their reputation and career prospects. This behaviour on the local staff can be severe, leading to a hostile work environment, lower productivity, high employee turnover, and decreased job satisfaction.

### *Curbing the Abuse*

Dealing with an abusive foreign boss can be a challenging and sensitive situation. Here are some steps you can take:

#### **1. Document the abuse:**



A case was reported of a Nigerian factory worker slapped by his Chinese supervisor in a factory in Ogun state. The reaction of this worker was to retaliate and beat his supervisor to a pulp. The situation almost degenerates into a racial war in the factory. Supervisors and subordinates working in a foreign-owned or expatriate-managed company should learn to document unethical behaviour and abuse rather than take laws into their hands. The Seplat experience may be the right way to straighten the system. Record any abusive behaviour your boss displays towards you or others. This documentation can be used as evidence if you need further action.

## 2. Talk to your boss:



If you feel safe doing so, try to talk with your boss about the behaviour that might appear abusive. Be specific about the incidents and how they made you feel. Sometimes, simply bringing the issue to their attention can improve the situation.

## 3. Seek support:



Dealing with an abusive boss can be emotionally draining. Don't hesitate to seek support from friends, family, or a therapist to help you cope with the stress.

## Role of Human Resource

HR departments are crucial in creating and implementing policies and procedures that protect employees from exploitation and abuse. A critical role in maintaining balance is ensuring that the expatriate is skilful in relating with local employees and that the locals are protected against possible abuses. While potential incapacitation for human resources is noticeable in some of the expatriate-managed companies, it is, however, instructive the Human Capital Department ensure that it leaves up to its responsibilities.

## Foreign or Local:

A mixture of foreign and local employees is supposed to confer on the organisation a unique advantage of harnessing local intelligence with foreign competence. Companies often have to decide between hiring locals or foreigners when hiring employees. While both options have advantages, hiring a local employee over a foreign employee has several benefits. Let us take an insight into some of the benefits of hiring a local employee in a company.

## Cultural Understanding:

One of the most significant benefits of hiring a local employee is their understanding of the local culture. Local employees are more familiar with the region's customs, traditions, and norms. Expatriates working well with local employees will benefit tremendously from the cultural intelligence of the locals. Thus, enabling them to navigate the complex social structures in their operating environment successfully. Poor alignment between the locals and foreign workers can bring about disharmony at the company's expense.

## Lower Costs:

Hiring a local employee can be more cost-effective than hiring a foreign employee. Local employees do not require work visas, meaning the company can save on the legal and administrative costs of hiring foreign workers. Additionally, local employees will likely be familiar with the local job market and will not require relocation costs or expensive housing allowances.

## Improved Productivity:

Local employees are likely to be more productive

than foreign employees, particularly in the early stages of employment. This is because they are already familiar with the local customs, regulations, and business practices. They may also be more motivated to succeed in their home country.

### **Legal and Compliance Considerations:**

Hiring a local employee can reduce the legal and compliance risks of hiring foreign workers. Local employees will already be familiar with local labour laws and regulations and will not require extensive training or orientation.

### **Conclusion**

Dealing with an abusive boss is never easy, especially when your boss is from a foreign culture. It's important to understand that cultural differences can affect how the boss communicates and behaves. However, this does not excuse abusive behaviour. Expatriates that hope to succeed in their country of assignment should learn to align well

with the local stakeholders. The local employees should be seen as an asset required to enable them to succeed in their mission rather than an invaluable asset to be trampled upon and suppressed. Organisation interest must rank higher than personal interest; when this reign supreme, both expat and local interests will align. For local employees working in a multinational company, the HR department should have policies and procedures to address abusive behaviour, regardless of where the boss is from. The government also has a significant role in ensuring that its citizen is not oppressed and suppressed while working for a foreign-owned firm or in an expat-managed company. Diversity and inclusion are an advantage to any organisation; having a mixture of foreign and local workers should give a competitive edge to an organisation and not cause unnecessary hemorrhagic disharmony that only bleeds the organisation's performance.



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