
“SUCCESSFUL REPATRIATION”

A Cross-Cultural Management MSc module essay (abridged)

Introduction

This paper is planned to address the issue of repatriation – how to make it successful. Generally most studies have focussed on how to train for successful expatriation; however, there are only a few studies that have focussed on successful repatriation. The further discussions will explain the need of addressing the issue of repatriation. A case study analysis in the later part of discussion will underline this fact. A theoretical framework is also presented in the later part of the paper to underline the theme of this paper.

Comment [AU1]: The essay is a critical piece of work from the beginning. The chosen topic questions the mainstream research and seeks to explore the gaps in our knowledge.

Need for the Study of Repatriation

Nancy and Peterson (1991), quote Dowling and Schuler (1990), defining repatriation process as “*the process of return to the home country at completion of (an international) assignment*” (pg; 173). Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) inform that while increased globalization has increased the attention academics and practitioners pay to an effective management of expatriate employees, only recently has there been a focus on the global expertise that could be accumulated by a successful repatriation. Hyder and Lovblad (2007), on the basis of research done by other researchers like Stroh et al 1998; Morgan et al, 2004 state that it could be more difficult to adjust with home country after the assignment compared to relocation in the host country. While the expatriation literature discusses the cultural shock, in case of repatriation there is a corresponding phenomenon called “reverse cultural shock” (Rodrigues, 1996; Baruch and Altman, 2002; Bossard and Peterson, 2005).

Comment [AU2]: The author of this essay did not identify the “critical” topic by herself, but drew it from the reading of academic literature. This is perfectly ok. However, the need for wider reading, going beyond basic textbooks and mainstream articles, is needed. Importantly, a number of different words are integrated here, making a strong case for the study of repatriation.

Hyder and Lovblad (2007) put forth the data from The Global Relocation Trends

2003/2004 Survey Report (GMAC, 2004) depicting 13% of repatriates resigning within a year after returning, and another 10% leaving in the subsequent year. They also present the data of Baruch *et al*, (2002) whose analysis depicted 50% resignations within few years of returning and also data of Vermond (2001) who reported that 49% repatriates leave companies within two years of repatriation. MacDonald and Arthur (2005), state that “...the repatriation process requires further attention as it pertains to people's career development.” They also emphasize on one of the most important aspects of returning home being career management process as stated by (Solomon 2001). Hence there seems to be a growing need to look upon this issue of repatriation.

Comment [AU3]: The author draws on the literature to provide practical evidence of why repatriation is an important issue. These examples support the arguments in the articles reviewed above.

Repatriation – An Organizational Effort

Nancy and Peterson (1991) inform that the repatriation in an organization is a three stage process: the initial stage of expatriate selection and training for the assignment, the overseas assignment, and the expatriate re-entry into the home country. Martin and Anthony (2006) find that the selection process is a major factor contributing to successful repatriation and retention. They give an example of Sun Microsystems who reduced their 62% repatriate turnover to 13% through careful screening of expatriate candidates. Klaff (2002) supports this by mentioning that the repatriation process begins before the employees move to a foreign post and also argues that the HR professionals normally get bogged down by the logistics of the assignment whilst they should be focussing on setting career expectations by defining assignment goals and clear specifications on how these goals would embed in employee's long term career plans. This discussion shows that organizational efforts play an important role in successful repatriation and that it is crucial to begin the repatriation process at the very beginning of the expatriation.

Comment [AU4]: Here the author starts defining the concept of repatriation in more detail by referring to academic theory. Such detailed definitions are crucial for a critical understanding of any topic.

Comment [AU5]: In this section, the author identifies the most crucial component of the repatriation process. . . . A critical review of the literature is in part about identifying what is most important for your topic.

Comment [AU6]: Here the author draws a conclusion out of the above discussion, showing a particular understanding of the literature.

Repatriation – An Individualistic Effort

Black *et al* (1992), state that the adjustments to repatriation and expatriation are similar. The degree of novelty in both host and home countries is the same in terms of both expatriate and repatriate adjustments. Black *et al* (1992) show that when expatriates relocate abroad there would be differences due to notions and expectations while when repatriates come back there would be repatriation adjustment problem due to differences "by experience". Expatriates may form more flexible expectations because they are aware of the lack of personal experience with the host country, while in the case of repatriates 100% of all repatriates have lived in the home country and so they might form more rigid expectations because of their prior personal experience on which they would base their expectations.

Comment [AU7]: In this section, the author explores another aspects of repatriation theory (again, with the help of literature). Note that in this section and the previous one the author identifies two directions in the theory – one pertaining to organisations and one pertaining to individuals. This shows a critical and analytical approach to theory, as opposed to a simple description of who wrote what.

Theoretical Studies of Repatriation Adjustment

Black *et al* (1992) argue that the reason why employees report that re-entry into the home country is more difficult than their initial move overseas (Adler 1981) is the fact repatriates often have little or no chance to examine the interplay between his/her personal changes and the environmental changes back home. MacDonald and Arthur (2005) clarify that there is a degree of adjustment needed to manage transition of repatriation and this adjustment is distinct due to the number and types of changes that they encounter when returning home. They categorise these adjustments into two domains: anticipatory adjustments that occur before returning home country and in-country adjustments that take place after repatriation. They portray repatriation adjustment to be a multifaceted phenomenon that would include adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with home nationals, and adjustment towards environment and culture. They further elaborate that these repatriation adjustments are affected by four variables: individual variables that include a persons' attitudes, values, needs or characteristics; job variables referring to the tasks and characteristics of the individuals jobs; organizational variables - characteristics of home country organizations; and non work variables involving repatriates' friends family and general environment.

Comment [AU8]: In this section, the author continues the detailed exploration of why repatriation is a problematic process. A number of studies are referred to again. This exploration shows that the author does not simply accept at face value that repatriation is a problem, but tries to establish why it may be the case. Detailed understanding is a crucial part of the critical approach to theory.

Another perspective on repatriation is the Protean Approach (O'Sullivan, 2002) that focuses on the individual level of analysis. Basically as mentioned in the above discussions, even though organisations provide repatriates with more suitable post-return jobs (recognizing and rewarding their internationally developed competencies) and improved formal post-return training (minimizing the reverse cultural shock for expatriates), these approaches are basically top-down interventions consisting of a mix of information provision, financial perks and career planning, and the organisations, even after implementing these strategies, have high repatriate turnover rates. So O'Sullivan (2002) points out a need to consider the transitions of repatriation to be improved by focussing on individual level analysis. O'Sullivan (2002) emphasizes that *"the protean approach reflects the presumption that career trajectories can and often must, be actively influenced by an individual if the career is to advance to both the individuals and the organisations satisfaction."* (2002; pg 602).

Comment [AU9]: Here the author cites a paper that provides a critique of the previously discussed theory. This shows that you do not have to be alone while criticising academic theory – draw on other theories to do so!

Overall, both organizational and individual efforts are required to reduce the repatriation turnover. Future literature may develop new frameworks that include the nuances of both, reducing repatriation turnover, enabling companies to reduce losses from repatriate turnover and enabling repatriates to successfully further their career.

Comment [AU10]: A summary statement to indicate what the most important conclusions from the above discussion are.

Case Study Example – Process of Repatriation during Expatriation

Klaff (2002) gives an example of the repatriation process in AT&T – an American telecommunication giant. In the first part, called a "safety net" and conducted before the overseas assignment, the employees and their families are counselled by a psychologist specially trained in repatriation issues. These professionals guide the expatriate family on a spectrum of issues that might arise – for example the problems with expatriate spouses finding jobs and children adapting to the new environment. Moreover the expatriate and his/her family are entitled to call up this professional any time during the overseas

assignment. During the length of the assignment AT&T offers a mentor programme which helps the expats stay connected with their colleagues and with home country/organization developments. Moreover the company organizes expats to periodically visit home office for meetings, to hang around and be seen. About six months before the end of overseas assignment the expats go through the “journeying home” program where the psychologist and a human resource representative visit expat family and prepare them for the return by helping to update the expatriate’s resume, planning further career move and arranging the logistics for moving household goods, and arranging for schools and housing. A month after the expatriate’s return a “welcome home” seminar is held. In addition to this AT&T provides bonuses for repatriates who stay for six months with the company after returning home. Klaff (2002) reported that in companies that have such repatriation programmes only 5% of repatriates resign within a year compared to 22% in companies that do not. This case shows the importance of concurrence in the repatriation and expatriation process.

Comment [AU11]: Here the author provides a case study of a successful repatriation process. Practical evidence is crucial for both deeply understanding and critically supporting the theory.

Conclusion

The above discussions summarized the need for a study in repatriation by addressing various aspects of repatriation. Organizational efforts play a vital role in repatriation process which needs to be addressed in concurrence with the expatriation process. Individual efforts also play a big role in the successful repatriation. Hence there must be a combination, an appropriate mix of both – an organizational and individual efforts for a successful repatriation which would benefit both – the organization by reducing its losses (both financial and knowledge) due to turnover and individuals by enabling them to have a lucid and comprehensible career path ahead. It could be concluded that repatriation turnover rate could be reduced by treating repatriation as a process from the beginning of expatriation, and with proactive organizational and individualistic efforts.

Comment [AU12]: A conclusion is made summarising the key points. Determining what the key points in the arguments are is a crucial part of a critical analysis of literature.

References

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