

THE ROLE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

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ABSTRACT

International HRM has focused its attention on identifying the factors that can lead the organization to retain the individuals upon return from international assignments. International assignment failures occur due to number of factors such as culture shock, career development, adjustment failures which has led to pre-mature returns, high financial costs and at last employee turnover. This leads to the question of how employees in MNC's can be retained after international assignments. Therefore, this paper explores the role of career development among repatriates in the context of international assignments. It is assumed that career development would affect the repatriate's turnover intention. This paper presents the results of a study based on the response of 500 Indian Repatriates. The purpose of this paper is to explore the perception of repatriates towards their career and whether this is considered to be a problem. Independent T-test reveals there is a positive trend linking the perception of international assignments as a career qualification to lower turnover rate of repatriates. A lower level of organizational career support resulted in greater turnover intentions.

KEYWORDS: *Career Development, Repatriates, Retention, International Assignment.*

I INTRODUCTION

To assist International HR managers in the successful movement of employees around the globe, academic researchers have elucidated many of the personal, organizational, job and environmental factors that contribute to effective international assignments. Previous research studies have shown little importance on how expatriate assignment experience affect employee's career upon repatriation. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the influence of career advancement on repatriates' turnover intention.

II Review of Literature

Many researchers have studied the field of expatriation, however only a limited group of researchers such as Black, Brewster, Gregersen, Mendenhall, Oddou, Stroh and Suutari focus on the employees who are *coming back* from international assignments to the home country; a process known as repatriation. Companies and repatriates returning to parent companies, often seem to underestimate the issue of going home, as the repatriates are “just” going home. According to research conducted by (Stroh et al., 1998) repatriates may experience a reversed culture shock when coming home, if not prepared, as many things are likely to have changed during their expatriation. In North America, 25 % of returnees leave parent companies within one year of coming home (Black, 2002). This is a problem for companies that have invested a lot of money in the repatriate (Black, 1998).

Repatriates who perceived that the company they are working for as positive toward international assignments, are more likely to be happy with their situation and stay with the company. Harris mentions a survey where only 4% of the companies asked said that an overseas assignment had a positive effect on ones career (Harris, 2002). Stroh states that the connection between career development variables and the repatriation adjustment as well as the retention rate of employees has been thoroughly investigated in a domestic (i.e. USA) context (Stroh,1995). Usually the “domestic” employees are able to climb the professional “ladder” leaving behind the repatriates that have been abroad (Arlinghaus, 2005). Therefore, this question was formulated in order to check the attitudes of the companies when it comes to international assignments as a career qualification in India, as the repatriates are likely to pick up on the companies’ feelings in this respect. The use of a structured career development plan can assist employees in considering various options and their implications on current and future opportunities (Field and Thomas, 1992; MacDonald and Arthur, 2005). Long before proposing an international assignment, the general HR planning system can encourage high potential employees to build firsthand international experience into their long term career plans. This would enable employees to look ahead to the experience, give them a chance to gain cross-cultural and language skills, and prepare their family for overseas relocation before it happens. This approach can reinforce the importance of international experience as a career building block and reduce the shock of such an assignment when it occurs (Allen, 1998; Fieldman, 1992; Ruisala and Suutari, 2000). When an international assignment is offered, the expatriate can be given a preview of the types of jobs guaranteed on their return (Kramar. 1997; Morley, 2003). The jobs offered should be comparable to, and not lower in level than, the one held before the overseas assignment. This commitment to the expatriate will lead to two outcomes. First, the employee is more likely to accept the overseas position, and experience less uncertainty and stress about his or her return to the home country. Second, having issued a guarantee the company will be more likely to take the necessary steps to provide for the smooth repatriation of the employee (Allen. 1998; Black. 1992; Lazarova. 2001). Since most international assignments are temporary, it is likely that an expatriate's next job move will be back in their home country's organization. Unless the expatriate is retained in the HR planning system, he or she will be entirely excluded from job screenings, while the domestic employee will be included. Appearance in job screenings, even before a planned return, will increase the visibility that many expatriates fear losing while in the field. (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Klaff, 2002; Mendenhall. 1987).

III Methodology

A questionnaire falls under the category of a deductive research approach. The choice of research tool is an internet questionnaire because it easily reaches many respondents at different companies, in a short span of time. The questionnaire was put online and sent to the respondents via a link in an e-mail. This procedure was chosen in order to facilitate the filling in and sending back for the respondents, whilst incurring the least costs and the lowest time consumption, in comparison to sending by post. The total number of questionnaire distributed through link was 700 and 500 repatriates responded. Thus, the response rate is 71.4%. The respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale towards the statements. The questionnaires were analysed in the statistical program SPSS. Afterwards the hypotheses were tested, in order to see if the data from the survey supported or rejected the hypothesis.

a. Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to achieve the following purposes:

1. To explore the perception of repatriates towards career development.
2. To know whether repatriates had discussion about their possible job upon return from overseas assignment.
3. To examine whether company looked favorably on those employees and managers who had international experience.

b. Sample characteristics

The sample is composed of 72 % of repatriated men with 71% of respondents aged between 25-35 years who have working on an average of 4- 6 yrs for the companied. 62% were married and was not accompanied by family during international assignments. Majority 61% of the repatriates belong to middle level executives and had been abroad for 6 months to 1 year. Most of the international assignments deputed were in U.S.

c. Data Analysis

Collected data was sorted and then analyzed using SPSS. Independent T-Test was done to know whether career development plays vital role in repatriate's retention.

Any literature supports that the critical success factors are influenced by the independent variables. Many repatriates face several problems when they return to their home office. Several international and national literature study support the existence of various problems of repatriates when they return to their home office. The frequency distribution revealed the prevailing problems among repatriates when they return to their home office.

TABLE 1: PROBLEMS FACED BY REPATRIATES AFTER INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	109	21.8	21.8	21.8
No	391	78.2	78.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

It is important to analyze variable wise significant elements for the derived difference among the repatriation. Since, the repatriates with problems & without problems differ in their opinion in Career development at pre-assignment level, independent t-test is applied on the variable career development.

TABLE 2: T-TEST INDICATING THE PROBLEM IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Problem	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Sig. value
Career Development						
Yes	109	2.7110	.84518	.08095	2.556	0.011
No	391	2.5077	.70069	.03544		

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

TABLE 3: T-TEST FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Problem	Option	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Sig. value
Before I left for overseas, company officials discussed possible job assignments for me upon my return from the overseas assignment.	Yes	109	2.6514	.95623	.09159	2.583	0.010
	No	391	2.4041	.86254	.04362		
Company officials discussed how my overseas assignment fit into my overall career with the company.	Yes	109	2.6972	.86607	.08295	2.452	0.015
	No	391	2.4757	.82512	.04173		
I saw the overseas assignment as benefiting my career in the company.	Yes	109	2.5505	1.08428	.10386	1.098	0.273
	No	391	2.4348	.93929	.04750		
I perceived that the company looked favorably on those employees and managers who had held an overseas job assignment.	Yes	109	2.7706	1.03309	.09895	1.598	0.111
	No	391	2.6113	.88710	.04486		

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

IV Findings

The researcher verified the significant difference between the perception of problems in the various elements of pre, during and after foreign assignment. The independent t test is applied on all the elements of pre, during and post foreign assignment with reference to the dichotomous question of problem existence in career development context.

- It is statistically proved that discussion on job assignments upon return from the overseas assignment plays a vital role in retaining repatriates. Since p value is 0.010 which is less than 0.05, ($t=2.583$) it is statistically significant. If companies treat international assignments as a career investment, they should make sure that the repatriate knows what position he/she will have upon return as early on as possible.
- Since p value is 0.015 which is less than 0.05, ($t= 2.452$) discussing the overseas assignment fitness into the overall career with the company have significant factor towards repatriates adjustment after overseas assignment. Companies which treat international assignments as a career investment more often have a lower turnover rate than the companies which do not. A positive attitude of the company can be crucial in order to maintain the attractiveness as an employer.
- Statistically it is proved that that the company looked favorably on those employees and managers who had an overseas job assignment as p value is 0.111 ($t=1.598$) which is less than 0.05 has a positive influence on repatriates.

V Conclusion

In general, this study underscores the importance of career development of repatriates. By providing repatriates with accurate expectations about the job demands, constraints, and discretion in their new jobs, repatriates will not only more likely stay with their company upon return but also will be more committed to both their local work units and parent companies. The findings further indicate that repatriates who experience positive surprise concerning their career exhibit greater commitment. In sum, these results seem to indicate that the nature or content of the repatriates' career can influence their retention. Companies that prepare their managers for coming home by providing them with "career development plans" are helping to increase in retaining these valuable employees but of helping them to make the often challenging adjustment to being home. In short, companies must work to enhance the role of repatriate's career after international assignment.

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