

Repatriation Adjustment: Proactive Behavior, Perceived Organizational Support And Knowledge Sharing

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ABSTRACT

Ineffective management of repatriation of employees is a potential hurdle for better use of top talent and hampers the successful process of internationalization of the organization and can be costly for both repatriates and the organization. This study aims to provide a theoretical model of repatriation adjustment of employees explaining factors that facilitate repatriation adjustment and its consequences based on literature in different disciplines. This study proposed seven propositions and developed a model that was supported by theoretical and empirical evidences. This theoretical model suggests that repatriates' proactive behavior, perceived co-worker support and organizational support facilitates the repatriation adjustment process and repatriates' adjustment influences repatriate's knowledge sharing behavior at home organization. Further, it discusses the role of repatriates' personal and situational variables on adjustment. This study contributes to the literature in a way of providing a meaningful theoretical model explaining the factors that facilitate repatriation adjustment and its consequences, and relates socialization theories to repatriation adjustment. The key practical implications relate to enabling better adjustment of academic repatriates and better use of top talent at the organization.

Key words-Repatriation, Adjustment, Organization support, Proactive behavior

1. INTRODUCTION

Repatriation issues of different re-entry groups; for example corporate repatriates [1-17] students [18-20] corporate repatriates' spouse [21, 22] and missionaries [23, 24] have been discussed in the different field of study. These studies focused on adjustment and its consequences, and stressed that all re-entry groups experience re-adjustment difficulties.

In recent years, an increasing number of professionals view international assignments as an opportunity for career development and take steps to acquire such experience

with the belief that this will increase their career prospects in their institution as well as in the global job market [25]. For example, universities themselves view academics with international experience as a valuable asset [26, 27]. Providing an expatriate experience to academics is considered a long-term investment by the university. Many organizations invest large amounts of money to provide with international experience and to develop their talent pool. The international human resource management literature widely discusses the issues of repatriation of employees in multinational companies. This literature mainly focuses on job related variables in relation to repatriation adjustment of business employees at headquarters having completed their assignment at their subsidiary. However, these variables may not be more suitable to understand the repatriation process of other repatriates working in different type of organizations. Thus, this study focus on developing a model that explains causes and consequences of repatriation adjustment of all types of business employees based on existing relevant literature and theories in different field of study.

2. METHODOLOGY

Theories that explain the socialization process; Uncertainty reduction theory [28, 29], socialization tactics theory [30] and cognitive and sense making theory [31] explain how an individual adjusts to a new environment. Socialization tactics theory focuses on the organization's role and the set of tactics that help the newcomer to get to know the environment. Uncertainty reduction theory and cognitive and sense making theory focuses on the individual's needs for learning to adjust to the new environment. These two theories jointly explain that when individual enter a new environment, they feel surprise and uncertainty. To reduce uncertainty and make sense of the environment, they need to adjust themselves to the environment or adjust the environment to fit them. These two theories highlight both the role of social support and individual proactive behaviour in adjusting to the new environment. Further, the socialization tactics

theory clearly states that unsuccessful adjustment leads to newcomer intention to leave the organization. Repatriates' proactive behaviour, perceived social and organizational support influence on repatriation adjustment and repatriation adjustment influence on repatriates' turnover. The organization uses tactics to facilitate new members to understand the environment and become an acceptable member of the organization. Successful socialization leads to repatriate's intention to share knowledge.

Repatriates find the significant differences between their expectations and the reality they experience upon their repatriation. This situation makes them feel surprised and uncertain, similar to what newcomers tend to experience [32]. Socialization tactics can be used to ease the adjustment process when a repatriate returns to their home organization. Both individuals and organizations use tactics to reduce uncertainty and adjust to the new environment. When repatriates experience difficulties adjusting to the new environment it may result in an intention to leave the organization. Socialization Tactics Theory mainly suggests that attempts at the organizational level are needed for repatriates to socialize/adjust to the new environment and unsuccessful adjustment may result in the individual's intention to quit the organization. Uncertainty Theory, and Cognitive and Sense Making Theory explain why and how a repatriate adjusts to a new environment and how individual involvement and social support (co-worker and organization) facilitate this. Active individual involvement in the form of proactive behaviour, together with co-worker support and organizational support, reduces the uncertainty. Repatriates may be reluctant to share their knowledge if they are unable to make sense of their new environment and reduce uncertainty.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Repatriates' proactive behavior and adjustment

Feldman and Tompson [33] has analyzed job changers' coping strategies such as seeking out information from others, looking for the positive side of the job, keeping feelings to themselves, refraining from telling their boss about their problems, changing work procedure, and working long hours. Most of these proactive strategies significantly influence the indices of job adjustment such as general satisfaction, intention to remain and satisfaction with growth opportunities. For example, looking for the positive side of the job positively influences general satisfaction and intention to remain; changing procedure and working long hours positively influences satisfaction with growth opportunity. Though this study supports the effectiveness of proactive behaviors for better adjustment, the generalizability of this finding to the repatriation

population is limited as the study included only 40 repatriates out of 459 respondents.

O'Sullivan's [14] theoretical work also focusses on the role of the individual and individual proactive behaviour in the process of repatriation adjustment, beyond the organizational responsibility. O'Sullivan [14] suggests repatriation behavior such as social networking and information seeking aimed at securing repatriation support is an alternative means to manage repatriation transition, and proactive behaviour is needed in both stages before and after the repatriation. The model suggests proactive personality characteristics that lead to proactive behaviors which are the predictors of successful repatriation outcomes. Further, this study emphasizes the role of proactive behaviour of repatriates on repatriation adjustment and proposes that repatriates who engage in proactive repatriation behaviour feel more successful in their repatriation transition than those who do not engage in the repatriation proactive behavior. Further, they highlight the importance of both pre-return and post-return proactive repatriation behaviour and propose that repatriates who engage in proactive repatriation behaviour both before and after their repatriation make better adjustments to themselves or the environment than those who engage in proactive behavior after the repatriation only. The literature discussed above clearly shows the role of individual proactive behaviour on repatriation adjustment.

Uncertainty reduction theory and cognitive and sense making theory explain that when individual enter a new environment, they feel surprise and uncertainty. To reduce uncertainty and make sense of the environment, they need to adjust themselves to the environment or adjust the environment to fit them. These two theories argues uncertainty upon repatriation motivates repatriates to engage in proactive behaviour and by engaging proactive behaviour repatriates learn the environment and better adjusted through uncertainty reduction and make sense of the environment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Proposition 1: Repatriates who highly engage in repatriation proactive behaviour will better adjust to their repatriation transition.

Organizational support and adjustment

The literature suggests both expatriates and repatriates suffer during their transition time and upon repatriation expatriates experience more difficulties than their experience on expatriation. Research on expatriation clearly explains that expatriates experience less stress

and uncertainty [34] and better adjustment [35] when they are provided with the necessary organizational assistance and support. A longitudinal study [36] on expatriation adjustment found that perceived organizational support was positively associated with both work and general adjustment. Providing appropriate organizational support during the foreign stay and upon repatriation positively influences the adjustment upon repatriation [6]. Howard [37] emphasizes the role of the organization in minimizing re-entry adjustment difficulties. However the empirical research on the influence of social organizational factors on repatriation adjustment is lacking. Though literature proposes organizational support facilitate repatriation adjustment empirical evidence on the direct link between organizational support and repatriation adjustment is lacking.

Proposition 2: Repatriates who perceive more organizational support will better adjust to their repatriation transition.

Co-workers' support and adjustment

Repatriates are perceived wrongly/negatively by their co-workers and treated by them accordingly. In Japan, repatriates are viewed as outside members and are given a new negative title "kokusaijin" ("an international person"), which infers that the overseas experience infects their original values [38]. Though this issue has not been widely empirically tested, an early study Gama & Pedersen [18] investigated this issue among Brazilian returnees who returned from their graduate studies in US and found that returnees (University professors) experienced peers' professional jealousy.

Repatriates returning to their home organization where they had been working previously need to undergo a socialization (re-socialization) process which includes learning the process and system, and re-adopting the organization's formal and informal norms and values [15]. Through the socialization process repatriates try to understand and acquire the behaviour and attitudes of the organizational members, and become an accepted member of the group. Repatriates take time to socialize to the norms, values and customs of their home country culture [39]. The literature suggests that this process is usually painful and that support from others can adjustment but not a general or interaction adjustment. Gregersen and Stroh [21] Suutari and Välimaa [45] reported length of time negatively influences on general adjustment but not work or interaction adjustment. However, Gregersen and Stroh [21] reported that the length of international assignment did not influence on general adjustment.

Literature suggests that personality characteristics

also influence repatriation adjustment. Black, Gregersen et al. [6, 47]. Vidal et al. [48] suggest self-efficacy positively influences on repatriation adjustment whereas O'Sullivan [14] suggests that "Big Five" personality characteristics: extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability, or agreeableness influence on repatriation transition outcomes through repatriates' protean behaviour. The optimistic repatriates adjust the environment and easily advance in their career [49]. Therefore, personality characteristics provide different level of energy to cope the repatriation adjustment. reduce this pain, but that the attitudes and behaviors of organizational members may also make this process very painful and difficult. Peers may fear the repatriates as they feel that these repatriates have bettered themselves and their presence may hinder their own progress or threaten their existing status. Thus they are not ready to accept them. This behavioral issue is common in the organizational setting generally, but repatriates perceive it as a severe problem as they experience various adjustment issues upon their repatriation [37] and in turn this may increase their difficulties in the process of adjustment. Adler [1] also found this type of organizational response in regard to accepting new talents and labeled it 'xenophobic' response'. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Proposition 3: Repatriates who perceive more co-worker support will better adjust to their repatriation transition.

Individual variables and adjustment

The influence of age on repatriation adjustment was not clear. Older employees are well aware of the home country context and able to understand [4, 40-44]. On the other hand, Suutari and Välimaa [45] reported that age negatively influence the general adjustment.

Length of time on overseas assignment influence the problems repatriates face upon their repatriation [46]. Black, Gregersen et al. [6] propose that long stay in foreign country influence on the formation of accurate expectation towards repatriation that influence on their repatriation adjustment. But the empirical evidence in this regard is inconsistency. While Black & Gregersen [4] reported length of the period on foreign assignment negatively influence on work

Proposition 4: individual variables such as age, length of overseas stay and personality, influence repatriation adjustment.

Organization support, commitment and knowledge sharing behaviour

The positive influence of perceived organizational support on commitment has been well documented in the literature [50]. The positive relationship between commitment and knowledge sharing has been also well documented in the literature. Given that, in the repatriation context, when repatriates feel they are supported during their repatriation transition they committed to their organization and intend to share their knowledge.

Proposition 5: Repatriates who perceive more organizational support will be more committed to their organization

Proposition 6: Repatriates who committed to their organization will intend to share their knowledge

Repatriation adjustment and knowledge sharing

“In the knowledge society, expatriates and repatriates become exporters importers and local traders of expertise and knowledge, the most precious resource of all” [49,p.355]. Repatriates are with a wealth of different kind of knowledge [40, 41] and are considered as ‘a source of long term competitive advantage’ [51, 52]. Therefore, knowledge sharing between expatriates repatriates and organizational members increases global performance of international organizations [53].

In practice, repatriates experience unsupportive environment upon their repatriation. Repatriates are returning to their home organization with the intention to share their knowledge and contribute to organizational development [11] but, unsupportive organizational environment makes them feel their knowledge and expertise are completely ignored [51] Adler [1] labelled this unsupportive environment as “xenophobic response” that prevents the organization from acquiring new knowledge from their repatriates. Also researchers suggest organizations fail to make use of repatriates knowledge and experience [54], and thus most companies get unfavourable results on their expat investments [47]

The organizational environment and support influence individuals to be motivated to share their knowledge [1, 11]. Misunderstanding and lack of trust between repatriates and organizational members, unsupportive organizational environment, negative attitudes of organizational members in relation to accepting and valuing repatriates’ knowledge negatively affect their knowledge sharing [15]. When repatriates are provided with an appropriate organizational environment that enables them to better adjust to the environment they are motivated to share their knowledge. Effective repatriation management leads to better utilization of repatriated knowledge [55, 56]. Also Newton, Hutchings et al. [56] suggest that the repatriation adjustment positively influence repatriates’ knowledge sharing behaviour.

Inequity perception of repatriates may influence their knowledge sharing behaviour. Adams [57] found that employees compare their input output ratios with their co-workers and when they feel inequity they try to reach an equity position by reducing their input or increasing their output. Employees may reduce their input in the way of not employing all the resources they have and reducing their performance level to reach the equity position when they feel inequity. As repatriates enter into the home organization with a feeling that they have international experience, their knowledge, skill and attitudes are valuable and unique than that of their co-workers they expect their experience and knowledge should be valued in the form of respect, career advancement opportunities and work autonomy upon their repatriation. In other words they expect more output to equalize their increased input. However, upon their repatriation, repatriates have not been respected or accepted by organizational members [1] and their knowledge and experience are undermined and they are not provided with any special career development opportunities [58]. This kind of situation makes them feel uncomfortable and distress and find difficulties to adjust to the situation. Therefore, repatriates may feel that though they have more input than others they are not provided with more output than others (inequity) and may reduce their input in the possible and easiest way of not sharing their unique and valuable knowledge with others in the organization in order to maintain equity.

Proposition 7: Better repatriation adjustment will result in repatriates’ better knowledge sharing

The following model (figure 1) shows the variables that influence repatriation adjustment and the consequence of it.

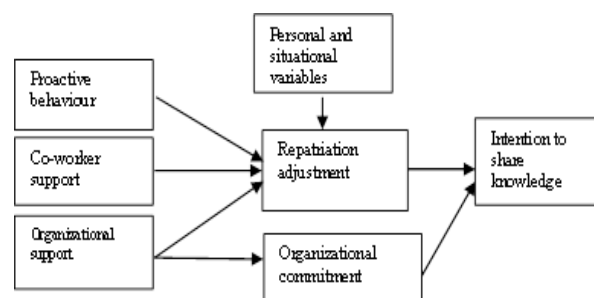


Fig 1: Repatriation adjustment model

This study proposes propositions and provides a theoretical model that explains how individual, group and organizational level variables influence on repatriate’s knowledge sharing behaviour based on both theoretical and empirical evidences. According to this model when repatriates actively engage in proactive behaviour and they perceive co-workers and the organization extending their full support during their adjustment they better

adjust to their repatriation transition. In addition to this, individual variables such as age, gender, personality and length of overseas stay also influence repatriation adjustment and unsuccessful adjustment leads to decreased repatriates' intention to share knowledge. When repatriates feel that they are supported by their organization they are committed to their organization and intend to share their knowledge.

5. CONCLUSION

Most of the organizations including universities have been increasingly internationalized; therefore, organizations need to attract, maintain and develop talented employees. Ineffective management of repatriation is a potential hurdle for repatriates' intention to share their knowledge and hampers the successful process of internationalization of organizations and can be costly for both repatriates and the organization. This study proposes multilevel effort (individual level, group level and organizational level) that facilitates repatriation adjustment and its consequences. According to uncertainty reduction theory cognitive and sense making theory and organizational socialization theory repatriates' proactive behaviour, co-worker support and organizational support facilitate repatriation adjustment and successful adjustment increase repatriates' intention to share their knowledge.

The existing repatriation adjustment models proposed number of variables which were closely related to one group of repatriates; repatriates in multinational companies. These variables may not be more suitable to understand the repatriation process of other repatriates returned to the organization other than multinational companies because the organizational environment and purpose of expatriation and repatriation might be different. The model proposed in this study includes the variables that suitable for all repatriates returned to any types of organizations. These variables were drawn from the literature focuses on newcomer adjustment, expatriation and repatriation adjustment of business employees. The proposed relationships among the selected variables were supported by well-developed theories in the field of communication (uncertainty reduction theory) and organizational psychology (organizational socialization and cognitive and sense making theory). Further this model includes the key organizational success variable (knowledge sharing) as an outcome of successful repatriation adjustment. This paper proposed a simple model that provides a foundation for further theoretical and empirical research on this area.

The proposed model suggests that individuals do need to take the necessary steps to overcome the adjustment difficulties. This study provides insights into how repatriates can overcome their repatriation challenges by taking their own steps rather than blaming or depending on the organization. In addition to the individual level effort this study stresses group level and organizational level efforts for better repatriation management. In order to use the best talent organization should provide the necessary support and needs to encourage existing members to support repatriates to enable them to better adjust their work and non-work environment. This study provides ideas to the organization for creating an appropriate organizational climate to facilitate repatriation adjustment and provides insights for developing appropriate training programs and adjustment support systems that ease the inevitable adjustments during the repatriation transition period. Introduction is the starting part of your paper and is also important. However, your introduction part should not exceed one page. The first paragraph should start with a broad statement and then narrow down to the research topic on the rest of the paragraphs.

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