



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT AND MANAGEMENT

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## REPATRIATION PROGRAM AS A PROCESS FOR RETAINING REPATRIATES - ISSUES SURROUNDING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE

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### ABSTRACT

*The repatriation program is filled with adjustment problems for both the company and the repatriate. Majority of the repatriates often feel discouraged and angry with the repatriation program resulting in higher turnover rate among expatriates hence this study is undertaken to analyze satisfaction level with the repatriation program and to identify its impact on repatriate turnover. To fulfill this objective, first, the article reviews the literature on this topic. Then, an empirical quantitative study is developed with a sample of 60 Indian repatriates. Finally, we present our findings along with the theoretical and managerial implications of the study, its limitations and our recommendations for future research.*

### KEYWORDS

Repatriation program, Retaining repatriates.

### INTRODUCTION

As employees' international mobility has increased, implementing repatriation program has become a significant human resource (HR) issue. Academics and human resource practitioners are aware that the internationalization of businesses is creating new managerial challenges. Among them, those related with human resource management are considered to be very important. The challenge is to establish suitable personnel practices for last stage of expatriation. In general, the literature on expatriation focuses on identifying the factors that contribute to the success of an international mission while the worker is abroad. However, there are very few studies that analyse the final phase in the expatriation process, the repatriation, despite the fact that it is one of the most difficult phases in the process for both the workers and the company (Scullion 1994; Stroh, Gregersen and Black 1992; Bonache, Brewster and Suutari 2001; Linehan and Scullion 2002; Schuler et al. 2002; Suutari and Brewster 2003). The 2005 Global Relocation Trends survey found that the attrition rate is high, even though more than 80 per cent organisation holds repatriation discussion, half of them before departure. Yet 20 per cent of expat leave the company during, another 23 per cent within one year of their return, and 20 per cent between the first and second year. To minimize turnover, some companies have had good results by offering expats a choice of position on their return. Other Indian companies are introducing a condition in their employment contract that prevents employees from joining a client for a year after working on a project with that client. At the least, organizations should be aware of the challenges inherent in the repatriation and offer an effective repatriation process back home.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The issue of repatriate turnover continues to be a challenge for many multinational companies today. This paper describes several repatriate support practices offered by organizations prior to the departure, during the assignment abroad and upon return from international assignment and how effective they are at lowering repatriates' turnover intentions.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The repatriate's turnover is a matter of great concern if the assignment is used for development of high potential employees, meeting immediate project strategic needs, and/or meeting strategic needs by building a pool of employees for international assignments. Dwyer, of KPMG, stated that although companies are sending their best employees overseas, they do not manage the repatriation process well, "leaving many to never capitalize on the return on their investment" (Barbian, 2002, p. 42). It appears that many companies do not specify in advance how the international experience will fit into an employee's career progression thereby inadvertently making room for unfounded high expectations. The repatriation process is usually a difficult experience for both the individuals and the organizations (Scullion 1994). Some authors find that the repatriation process is even more traumatic than the expatriation experience (Adler 1981; Gómez-Mejía and Balkin 1983; Linehan and Scullion 2002). With few exceptions, repatriates express much disappointment when describing their return to home office this situation has lead researchers to talk about the reverse culture shock that employees suffer when coming from an international assignment. On the one hand, employees do not expect themselves to find difficulties when they return and, therefore, they are not prepared to face them (Bossard and Peterson 2005). On the other hand, in general, companies are hardly aware of the existence of repatriation difficulties, and they consequently do not usually manage or plan the return of their expatriates (Linehan and Scullion 2002; Paik, Segaud and Malinowski 2002). Black and Gregerson (1999) researched 750 U.S., European, and Japanese companies. Their survey results indicated that one-fourth of those who completed an assignment left their company, often to join a competitor, within one year after repatriation. The lack of previous experience of managing the repatriation process in new internationalized companies is also a problem detected by researchers (Harvey 1989). What is also alarming is the data provided by two empirical studies, conducted in the United Kingdom by Forster (1994) and in Finland by Suutari and Brewster (2004), according to which around half of repatriates consider the possibility of changing company, which means that without effective organisational support, the capacity of retaining the repatriates is reduced, and the possibility of their turnover increased. A study by Baruch et al (2002), based on interview with repatriates from a mid-sized company in the U.K., found a high rate of dissatisfaction with the repatriation process and a high rate of turnover within the first year upon return. Another survey in 2001 stated that some employers were reporting that 49 percent of the repatriates were leaving the company within two years (Employers, 2001). Black and Gregersen (1992) stated that "this high rate of turnover impacts negatively on corporate effectiveness and efficiency by costing organizations in terms of losing a manager with valuable overseas experiences". Unsuccessful repatriation process involves costs for both the organisation and the employee. The costs to the employees consist of disappointment with appreciation for international experience, disappointment with the job level in the home office upon return from an international assignment and failure to utilize newly acquired management skills and feelings of career displacement or stagnation. The costs to the company include lost investments because of the underutilization of employees and the cost of their replacement when they decide to leave the firm. (Yan, Zhu & Hall, 2002). Previous studies on repatriation have suggested that various factors affect whether expatriates remain with their company upon repatriation. Some of these

factors include: being placed in non challenging jobs, lack of promotion opportunities, loss of status and autonomy, lack of career planning and counseling , lack of support, and sluggish career advancement (Andreason, A.W., & Kinneer, K.D. 2005; Abueva, 2000; Black et al., 1992)

Of these many factors the repatriates' perception about the repatriation process (Feldman & Thompson, 1993). This suggest that if the repatriation process is addressed by the company, repatriate turnover will occur less often.

The examination of the repatriation overall satisfaction with repatriation process is important as this variable is an indicator of the repatriation success (Morgan, Nie and Young 2004). In the present research we suggest analysing this relation between the satisfaction with the repatriation process and its influence on repatriates' turnover.

From the available literature the factors identified for successful repatriation process are Predeparture briefings on what to expect during repatriation, Career planning sessions, Guarantee/agreement outlining the type of position expatriates will be placed in upon repatriation, Mentoring programs while on assignment, Reorientation program about the changes in the company, Repatriation training seminars on the emotional response following repatriation, Financial counseling and financial/tax assistance, Lifestyle assistance and counseling on changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return, Continuous communications with the home office, Visible signs that the company values international experience, Communications with the home office about the details of the repatriation process

## NEED OF THE STUDY

Research studies on retaining of repatriated employees are gaining importance in the global business scenario against the backdrop of the various challenges that are faced by global companies in general and Indian MNCs in particular. Hence this study is to research how to improve and facilitate the repatriation program to ensure higher retention rate among repatriates. The study is based on relevant theories and empirical information. Our aim is to try to analyze the repatriation situation in IT industry and from the analysis we intend to come up with conclusions on how to improve the repatriation program practiced which can help in minimizing the repatriation turnover.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of repatriation program offered by the organisation in retaining of repatriates.

The variables under study for repatriation program are categorized into three factors

(a) Prior to departure: The variables include:

Predeparture briefings on what to expect during repatriation, Career planning sessions, Guarantee/agreement outlining the type of position expatriates will be placed in upon repatriation.

(b) During the international assignment: The variables include:

Mentoring programs while on assignment, Reorientation program about the changes in the company, Repatriation training seminars on the emotional response following repatriation, Financial counseling and financial/tax assistance, Lifestyle assistance and counseling on changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return, Continuous communications with the home office,

(c) Upon return from international assignment: The variables include:

Visible signs that the company values international experience, Information about changes that have taken place in the home office.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to the survey of employees from Silicon Capital of India-Bangalore in India. The present research study is further restricted to only Information Technology Industry.

## HYPOTHESIS

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between repatriation program used by MNCs prior to departure and retaining repatriates.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between repatriation program used by MNCs during the assignment and retaining repatriates.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant relationship between repatriation program used by MNCs upon return and retaining repatriates.

## METHODOLOGY

This study tries to assess the impact of repatriation program offered by the company and retaining repatriates.

The data was collected from Bangalore region which houses a large number of multinational national companies, in IT sector. Questionnaire was designed to extract information from the repatriates on the extent of knowledge transfer. Five point likert scale questionnaire format of strongly agree to strongly disagree was used to measure the satisfaction level among repatriates about repatriation process. The questionnaire was distributed to the repatriates who had served on his/her foreign assignment for a minimum of one year and returned back to the home country. A total of 75 repatriates were contacted from IT industry in Bangalore out of which complete response was received from 60 repatriates which constituted the sample selected for this study. Snowball sampling was used for data collection. Due to busy schedule of the respondents most of the respondents requested some time for filling the questionnaire, so the questionnaire were left with them and they returned it at their convenience.

## ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The investigation of the collected data analyzed the extent to which the independent variable repatriation program has an influence on the retaining repatriates. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0 was used to analyze the data. Appropriate statistical analyses were performed to test the hypothesis of this study. The test results are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

TABLE 1: AVG. AVAILABILITY OF REPATRIATION PROGRAM

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Average availability (%)
Pre departure training	3.07	.841	38.40
Career planning sessions	3.12	.846	42.86
Position upon repat	3.05	.790	46.20
Mentoring	3.05	.769	27.36
Reorientation prog.	3.17	.806	32.45
Repatriation training seminars	3.17	.924	21.42
Financial counseling	3.22	.825	24.25
Life style changes likely to occur upon return	2.67	.914	27.23
Continuous communications	3.32	.701	35.33
Valuing international experience	2.85	.755	48.22
Communication about repat. process	2.87	.873	27.78

Note: Based on a scale from (5) very important (5) not important at all.

Table 1 presents the extent to which each practice was available within the participating companies and from the table its clear that repatriates perceived that availability of mentoring and repatriation training seminars was low.

TABLE2: CORRELATION

	RR	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12
RR	1.00											
V2	.241*	1.00										
V3	.274*	.180	1.00									
V4	.225**	.275**	.397**	1.00								
V5	.082*	.178	.278*	.107	1.00							
V6	.423**	.233	.170	.492**	.315*	1.00						
V7	.369**	.291*	.300**	.406**	.322*	.420**	1.00					
V8	.086	.370**	.036	.243*	.143	.305**	.063	1.00				
V9	.285**	.365**	.007	.211	.072	.284*	.207	.367**	1.00			
V10	-.030*	.136	.121	.002	.065	.025*	.257*	.114	-.071	1.00		
V11	.403**	.149	.161	.496**	.130	.292*	.328*	.189*	-.074*	.219	1.00	
V12	.298*	.151	.113	.256*	.339**	.394**	.386**	.276*	.347**	-.068	.226	1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level ( 2-tailed)

TABLE3: ANNOVA FOR TESTING REGRESSION MODEL

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	14.218	11	1.293	3.473	.001 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	17.866	48	.372		
Total	32.083	59			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Commu. about repat. process, Continuous communications , Career planning sessions, pre departure training, valuing international experience, Mentoring, Financial counseling , reorientation prog., changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return, Repatriation training seminars , position upon repat.

b. Dependent Variable: Retaining repatriates.

TABLE4 : SUMMARY OF THE REGRESSION MODEL

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.666 <sup>a</sup>	.443	.316	.610	1.493

a. Predictors: (Constant), commu. about repat.process, Continuous communications , Career planning sessions, Pre departure training, valuing international experience, Mentoring, Financial counseling , reorientation prog., changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return, Repatriation training seminars , position upon repat.

b. Dependent Variable: Retaining repatriates.

TABLE 5: MULTI COLLINEARITY DIAGNOSTICS OF THE REGRESSION MODELS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.569	.651		2.410	.020
	Pre departure training	.113	.111	.129	1.019	.314
	Career planning sessions	.229	.111	.263	2.060	.045
	Position upon repatriation	-.334	.142	-.358	-2.351	.023
	Mentoring	-.197	.120	-.205	-1.638	.108
	Reorientation program.	.337	.128	.368	2.625	.012
	Repatriation training seminars	.105	.117	.131	.900	.372
	Financial counseling	-.115	.116	-.129	-.992	.326
	Changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return	.140	.104	.174	1.353	.182
	Continuous communications with home country	-.107	.130	-.102	-.826	.413
	Valuing international experience	.399	.127	.408	3.134	.003
	Communication about repatriation process	.076	.113	.090	.677	.501

a. Dependent Variable: Retaining repat

The Regression Equation Model (vide Table-5) is as follows:

Retaining repatriates = 1.569 + .113 pre departure training + .229 career planning session + (-.334 position upon repatriation) + (-.197 mentoring) + .337 reorientation prog. + .105 repatriation. Training seminars + (-.115 financial counseling) + .140 lifestyle changes + (-.107 continuous communication) + .399 valuing international exp. + .076 communication about repatriation process.

Since as per the ANOVA test (vide Table-3) significance is less than 0.05, null hypothesis is rejected, that is, at least one of the regression coefficients is non-zero.



From the 't' test, it is inferred that the career planning succession, position upon repatriation, valuing international experience & repatriation program has significant effect on retaining repatriates (since,  $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ) but pre-departure training, mentoring, repatriation training seminars, financial counseling, lifestyle changes, continuous communication and repatriation process has no significant effect on retaining repatriates ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ ) (vide Table-5).

Moreover career planning succession, position upon repatriation, valuing international experience & repatriation program has a high correlation of ( $R=0.666$ ) (vide table 4)

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Our results indicated that the surveyed repatriates believed that company wide appreciation of global experience and career planning sessions were the two most important elements in an MNC's repatriation system and that their lack thereof was likely to generate unfavorable attitudes towards the company, and ultimately, lead to turnover.

The findings of the study highlighted that there was a significant relationship between repatriation practices offered by the organisation and retaining repatriates. In particular, the availability of repatriation practices such as career planning succession, position upon return, reorientation program & valuing international experience have significantly facilitated retaining repatriates.

Another important finding of the study was that, as of now, in the firms where the respondents are employed, there was a lack of importance attached to the Pre-departure training, Mentoring program, Repatriation training seminars, Financial counseling, Changes likely to occur in expatriates' lifestyles upon return, Continuous communications with home country & Communication about repatriation process and this was likely to generate unfavorable attitudes towards the company, and ultimately lead to turnover. Hence factors which have not facilitated in retaining repatriates have to be enhanced to provide a more conducive, motivating, supporting environment for retaining repatriates.

## CONCLUSION

With the rise of globalization and the enormous scale of the global economy, the context of expatriation and repatriation is changing which creates new implications for HR professionals. Having international experience is becoming a critical asset for global organizations. To be able to capitalize on the repatriates' skills and knowledge, MNCs need to cultivate a global vision and corporate culture that supports repatriates and values international experience and its contribution to the strategic development of the company.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

The scope of this research study may be further enhanced by incorporating diverse range of industries of both manufacturing and service oriented separately. Comparative studies can also be made between the manufacturing and service oriented industries across the large number of cities from India. While this study is restricted to retaining repatriates through effective repatriation program, further research studies may also focus on the knowledge transfer aspects as well.

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