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An Examination of Factors Influencing Repatriates' Loyalty

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ABSTRACT:
When research on repatriation has shown that repatriates quit within one year of return from a foreign assignment, this study attempts to find what makes some repatriates stay committed and loyal to their companies when their colleagues are quitting and joining their immediate competitors? The research further extends to explore - factors determining repatriates loyalty, repatriates' most desirable policy implemented in the repatriation program and finally to develop a model that measures repatriate's loyalty. Indian IT employees who had travelled to United States of America for business related assignments, stayed there for duration of six months to two years and returned back to India were contacted for the purpose of this study. An online questionnaire is used for data collection, and 52 responses were considered suitable for the study. Factor analysis is used to find out the factors determining repatriates loyalty and repatriates' most desirable benefits and organizational practices with respect to repatriation. Repatriates considered return support services, career planning services and communication services as the most desirable benefits in a repatriation assignment. Gratification after repatriation, and career advancement opportunities were the factors that influenced repatriates' loyalty. A model is developed to measure repatriates loyalty by using multiple regression and factor analysis.

Keywords: *Repatriation, Loyalty, Organizational support, Regression model, Benefits on repatriation*

INTRODUCTION

Career mobility of international assignees is of recent interest for academicians and practitioners alike. According to Mercer's 2008/2009 Benefits Survey for Expatriates and Globally Mobile Employees, the number of employees on international assignment rose by almost 90 percent over the preceding three years (Fox, 2010). 47 percent of companies surveyed said they had increased the deployment of traditional expatriates (employees on one-to five-year assignments), and 38 percent reported an increase in "global nomads" - employees that move continuously from country to country on multiple assignments (Fox, 2010).

In the area of international human resource management, research on repatriation has been comparatively given less importance. Given the fact that it is the final step in the expatriation process, managers should value repatriation equivalent to expatriation. 25 percent of repatriates leave the parent company within one year of coming home, and more than 50 percent of the executives in a survey of US corporations said they experienced social re-entry problems upon repatriation (Lee and Liu, 2006). Employers assume that repatriation would be easy because employees are returning to their own native land. Nevertheless, repatriates consider their home coming as more problematic because of reverse culture shock, underutilization of skills achieved overseas, lack of job security, peers moving up the career

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ladder more rapidly than repatriates with international experience and career disruption for accompanying spouse. These problems can be handled effectively by human resource professionals through a robust repatriation policy, and therefore retaining repatriates should not be very challenging for multinational organizations.

Though many researchers have attempted to explore the turnover intentions of returning expatriates (Chi & Chen, 2007; Lee& Liu, 2006; Lee & Liu, 2007) very few have studied the reasons which make a repatriate continue the service in the organization (Stroh et al., 2000; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2006; Bolino, 2007; Liu, 2009) after the completion of overseas assignment. In any organization, it is very difficult to withhold employees for the organization's interest. Similarly, it is challenging for today's employees to continue their employment by working up to the standards of the organization. Both employer and employee commitment can be witnessed only when they are psychologically bonded to each other. Although, research on repatriates suggests that a majority of them quit within one year of return (Shumsky and Noel, 1999; Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001), here the researcher is interested in studying that 'group' of employees who continue with the same organization after their assignment overseas. The researcher is interested to find those factors that determine a repatriate's loyalty. In other words, what makes the repatriates stay committed and loyal when their equals are quitting? The subsequent objectives which will be explored from the preliminary research question are (a) to find out the factors determining repatriates loyalty (b) to find out repatriates' most desirable policy implemented in the repatriation program and (c) to develop a model measuring repatriate's loyalty.

Literature Review

Repatriation

A repatriate is one who has returned back to his/her home country from an extended foreign assignment (Lee and Liu, 2006). Repatriation's focus is on re-entry into a familiar home country; therefore, repatriation process is often assumed to require much less HR attention than expatriation (Kulkarni et al., 2010). Many organizations do not even realize that returning home is even more challenging than expatriation (Murray and Alex, 1973). When an employee accepts a foreign offer, he understands very well that he is going to encounter a new culture and is therefore mentally prepared to face it. But, when repatriates are returning back, they do not even expect their home country will change and thereby feel like 'foreigners' in their native land. They fail to realize the changes happening in their own society, family, close friends, organization, and even amongst colleagues. On return, when repatriates' face the reality, they have to deal with issues like reverse culture shock, 'new' organizational culture, familial adjustments, non-challenging jobs, lack of promotion opportunities, loss of status and autonomy, lack of support from managers, career growth opportunities and even sometimes take up increased responsibilities (Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001). These post-repatriation problems can be handled effectively when the company has an effective repatriation policy in place (Lee, 1971). However, with the help of repatriation policies, repatriates can resolve only work-related issues, but the non-work related issues should be handled by the repatriate himself (Lee, 1971).

Organization Support to Repatriates

Sometimes, repatriation is more stressful than expatriation and therefore, an organization's support is vital to an employee during the last phase of an international assignment. Providing adequate and desired support to returning expatriates will help in reducing reverse culture shock and acculturation issues. In a study by Furuya et al. (2009), the researchers identified the linkages of organizational support, intercultural personality traits, self-adjustment and repatriation policies to the outcomes of learning and transfer; it was found that organizational support facilitated learning and transfer which in turn lead to higher job motivation and performance among the Japanese sample respondents. In another study by Lazarova and Caliguiri (2001) it was found that when repatriates received more organizational support, the perception was that the company cared about the overall well-being of the employees and led to reduce turnover intentions. Repatriates become more loyal and show greater interest in organization when they

see evidence of support during their overseas stay; on the contrary, when repatriates experience low organizational support, the resentment and anxiety level increases which in turn leads to dissatisfied expatriates (Jassawalla et al., 2004). It is important for organizations to continuously support and retain the employees who have gained foreign exposure due to the positive changes and improvements within the employee both professionally and personally. When employees are assigned projects overseas, they develop their intercultural, managerial and professional skills. They are predominantly "on their own" trying to solve critical problems themselves. The experience of being independent overseas gives them confidence to gain new and higher positions on return. Many companies use international assignments as a leadership development tool for expatriates (Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001). Repatriates possess first-hand information of specific cultures, businesses and markets and hence companies will rely on such returning employees for any expansion plans overseas (Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001; Santosh and Muthiah, 2012). On return repatriates become highly competitive and anticipate for better opportunities to utilize their skills in the company. When suitable job opportunities are unavailable in the company, repatriates are often better placed in the competitors companies.

Loyalty/Organizational Commitment

Social scientists have generally not investigated loyalty as a discrete construct per se, and therefore, the concept of loyalty pervades foundational literature on organizational commitment, which is closely related to loyalty (Hart and Thompson, 2007). Loyalty and commitment occupy much of the same conceptual space (Hart and Thompson, 2007). Loyalty is defined as "a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization," organizational commitment is closely akin to traditional conceptualizations of organizational loyalty, which revolve around one's level of devotion to the organization (Hart and Thompson, 2007). Organizational commitment is the degree to which an employee identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in the organization (Robbins and Timothy, 2007). It focuses on employees' perception of their alignment with or attachment to the entire organization (Buchanan, 1974; Lee and Liu, 2006). Lee (1971) defined a related concept, organizational identification, as "some degree of belongingness or loyalty". High job involvement means identifying with one's specific job, while high organizational commitment means identifying with one's employing organization (Robbins and Timothy, 2007). Methodologically, commitment consists of three parts (a) identification (b) involvement and (c) loyalty (Buchanan, 1974).

In a study by Steers (1977), personal characteristics (need for achievement, age, and education), job characteristics (autonomy, variety, feedback, optional interaction) and work environment (organizational dependability, met expectations, personal feedback, group attitude) were identified as antecedents for organizational commitment. Previous research on organizational commitment has shown that it is negatively related to employee turnover (Cohen, 1993). Nevertheless, there seems to be positive relationship to job satisfaction (Bateman and Stasser, 1984; Ford et al., 2003) and motivation (Mowday et al., 1979). In a study by Liu (2009), it was found that affective commitment towards the parent company is positively related to organizational-directed OCB. Expatriates with high affective commitment towards the parent company are more likely to perform organizational directed OCB than those with low affective commitment (Liu, 2009). Another research by Stroh et al. (2000) examines the relationship between repatriates work and non-work expectations and their commitment to their parent companies and new local work units. Results indicate that positive linear relationships exist between certain work and non-work expectations and commitment to the parent company and local work unit, while significant non-linear relationship exists between other expectations and commitments. Repatriates exhibit more commitment to their organizations when individuals and firms hold similar job performance expectations (Stroh et al., 2000).

In another study by Lazarova and Caliguiri (2001) where 58 expatriates from North American multinational organizations were

taken as sample respondents, it was found that supportive repatriate practices improved their intention to remain with the same organization. When repatriates received more organizational support, the perception was that the company cared about the overall well-being of the employees and led to reduce turnover intentions (Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001).

Research Gap Identification

Research on repatriation has been broadly focused on repatriation process (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Vidal et al., 2008), effective repatriation (Paik et al., 2002; Jasawalla et al., 2004; Furuya et al., 2009) repatriates' adjustment (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997; Larson, 2006; Vidal et al 2007; Osmani-Gani and Hyder, 2008), reverse culture shock (Murray, 1973; Harvey, 1982), career management of repatriates (Peltonen, 1997; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; Berman and Beutell, 2009), turnover intentions (Lazarova and Caliguiri, 2001; Lee and Liu, 2007; Van der Heijden et al., 2009) and repatriates' commitment (Stroh et al., 2000; Chi and Chen, 2007; Liu, 2009). When compared to other areas of research in repatriation, there is significantly less importance given to understand repatriates' loyalty.

RESEARCH METHOD

The sampling unit as per this study was Indian IT employees who had travelled to United States of America for business related assignments, stayed there for a duration of six months to two years and returned back to India. An online questionnaire was used for data collection. Emails were sent to 320 respondents. To elicit more responses reminder mails were sent to targeted respondents for 2 consecutive weeks. Out of all data received, 52 responses were considered suitable for the study. The questionnaire was divided into four parts; namely Intention to stay, Intention to Quit, Organization support to Repatriates and Demographic variables. The questions pertaining to Intention to stay and Intention to quit were drafted with the help of the literature review. The section on Organization support to repatriates was adapted from the study undertaken by Lazarova and Caliguiri (2001). The questionnaire was tested for its reliability which has given the following Cronbach's alpha results: Employee loyalty 0.890; Organization support to repatriates 0.885.

Factor analysis is used to find out the factors determining repatriates loyalty and repatriates' most desirable benefits and organizational practices with respect to repatriation. A model is developed to measure repatriates loyalty by using multiple regression and factor analysis.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Repatriates' Most Desirable Benefits Derived from Overseas Deployment

In this study, Principle Component analysis has been adopted. Variables with a factor loading of higher than 0.5 are grouped under a factor. A factor loading is the correlation between the original variable with the specified factor and is the key to understanding the nature of the particular factor. Here the factors are extracted in such a way that factor axes are maintained at 90 degrees, meaning that each factor is independent of all others. Varimax rotation is used in this study to simplify the factor structure. Only the factors having the Eigen values greater than unity are considered. The eleven important variables are identified based on literature review. These eleven variables comprise of preferred benefits and organizational policies with respect to repatriation. Variables with the highest factor loadings under the respective factors or components are derived from the rotated component matrix above and the variables are grouped under their major factors. There are three major factors extracted with 72.98% cumulative percentage of variance and named as 1) Return Support services, 2) Career Planning Services and 3) Communication services (table 1).

All variables have higher factor loading (>0.5) except two variables – i) Re-orientation program provided immediately upon return to brief expatriates on the changes in the company (0.489) and ii) Visible signs that the company values international experience to demonstrate within the organization that global experience is beneficial to one's career (0.499). These variables are also taken into consideration as factor loadings are closer to 0.5 (table 2).

KMO (Kaiser – Meyer – Olkin) measures explaining sampling adequacy is 0.787. This shows that sample size is adequate enough to draw conclusions (table 3).

Table 1: Most desirable benefits derived from overseas deployment

Factor 1	Return Support services ✓ Repatriation training seminars that prepare employees and their families on what to expect regarding the emotional response upon returning home. ✓ Financial counseling and financial / tax assistance to help expatriates adjust back to their lifestyle at home ✓ Lifestyle assistance and counseling to prepare expatriates for the changes that are likely to occur in their lifestyle upon return
Factor 2	Career Planning Services ✓ Pre-departure briefings on what to expect during the period of repatriation ✓ Career planning sessions to discuss concerns regarding repatriation ✓ A written guarantee or a repatriation agreement outlining the type of position expatriates will be placed in upon repatriation ✓ Mentoring programs while on assignment ✓ Re-orientation program provided immediately upon return to brief expatriates on the changes in the company
Factor 3	Communication services. ✓ Continuous communications with the home office ✓ Visible signs that the company values international experience to demonstrate within the organization that global experience is beneficial to one's career ✓ Communications with the home office about the details of the repatriation policies

Table 2: Rotated component matrix for most desirable benefits derived from overseas deployment

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
Pre-departure briefings on what to expect during the period of repatriation	0.826	0.161	0.158
Career planning sessions to discuss concerns regarding repatriation	0.825	0.198	0.164
A written guarantee or a repatriation agreement outlining the type of position expatriates will be placed in upon repatriation	0.828		0.151
Mentoring programs while on assignment	0.598	0.485	0.239
Re-orientation program provided immediately upon return to brief expatriates on the changes in the company	0.489	0.435	0.442
Repatriation training seminars that prepare employees and their families on what to expect regarding the emotional response upon returning home.	0.234	0.780	0.274
Financial counseling and financial / tax assistance to help expatriates adjust back to their lifestyle at home	0.341	0.826	
Lifestyle assistance and counseling to prepare expatriates for the changes that are likely to occur in their lifestyle upon return		0.878	0.227
Continuous communications with the home office	0.143	0.260	0.827
Visible signs that the company values international experience to demonstrate within the organization that global experience is beneficial to one's career	0.230	0.478	0.499
Communications with the home office about the details of the repatriation policies	0.225		0.918
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a Rotation converged in 5 iterations.			

Factors Influencing Repatriates' Loyalty

Factor analysis is carried out to identify the influential factors for repatriate's loyalty. Literature review suggests the eleven variables which will have influence on repatriates' loyalty. The two important factors identified are - 1) Gratification after repatriation, and 2) Career advancement opportunities (table 4).

The percentage of variance indicates the total variance attributed to each factor. The cumulative variance in the above mentioned problem is 64.29%. KMO measures explaining sampling adequacy for this analysis 0.682. All eleven variables are found to be significant in influencing repatriates' loyalty since their factors loadings are above 0.5 (table 5).

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test for measuring sampling adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		**0.787**
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	326.641
	df	55
	Sig.	0.000

Table 4: Factors influencing repatriates' loyalty

Factor 1	Gratification after repatriation ✓ This organization greatly valued the foreign exposure ✓ I was motivated by the support given to me by the organization on return back to India. ✓ I was happy to be associated with the same organization after the international assignment ✓ The company utilized my newly acquired skills effectively ✓ My immediate superior was very supportive in helping me adapt to the new settings after the international assignment ✓ I was satisfied with my job after my international assignment ✓ The company implemented the repatriation policies effectively
Factor 2	Career advancement opportunities. ✓ I was given more preference for promotional opportunities as compared to others without foreign experience ✓ On return, I was offered the job profile as I had expected ✓ I had a competitive edge over my colleagues who do not have experience abroad ✓ On gaining foreign exposure, the organization offered a better compensation

Table 5: Rotated component matrix explaining the factors influencing repatriates' loyalty

VARIABLES	Component	
	1	2
This organization greatly valued the foreign exposure	0.787	
I was motivated by the support given to me by the organization on return back to India.	0.851	0.152
I was happy to be associated with the same organization after the international assignment	0.682	0.392
I was given more preference for promotional opportunities as compared to others without foreign experience	0.427	0.637
The company utilized my newly acquired skills effectively	0.819	0.194
On return, I was offered the job profile as I had expected	0.206	0.796
I had a competitive edge over my colleagues who do not have experience abroad	-0.147	0.815
My immediate superior was very supportive in helping me adapt to the new settings after the international assignment	0.679	0.572
On gaining foreign exposure, the organization offered a better compensation	0.515	0.586
I was satisfied with my job after my international assignment	0.784	0.150
The company implemented the repatriation policies effectively	0.560	0.280
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

Repatriate Loyalty Measurement Model

Regression model is developed to measure repatriates' loyalty. Repatriate loyalty is a multi-dimensional construct. The proposed model of repatriate loyalty consists of two constructs derived from factor analysis. Factor scores of two important factors influence repatriate loyalty is taken into consideration for this study. Employee loyalty is taken as a dependent variable and it is measured in a Likert scale.

Based on the above measures, the regression model can be developed by assuming linear relationship among these constructs.

$$Y\,i = b\,0 + b\,1\,x\,i\,1 + b\,2\,x\,i\,2 + \ldots\ldots\ldots + b\,m\,x\,im + e\,i$$

where, $b_1, b_2 \ldots b_m$ are partial regression coefficients.
$x_1, x_2 \ldots x_m$ are the variables influencing loyalty.

The R^2 was used to assess the model's overall predictive fit. The derived Adjusted R^2 is .0657 which validates the regression model. The Model is statistically significant and the significance value for ANOVA Test is 0.011(<0.05). The model can be expressed in table 6.

$$Y\,i = b_0 + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2$$

Y= employee loyalty
x_1= Gratification after repatriation
x_2 = Career advancement opportunities
where b_1, b_2 are partial regression coefficients.

$$Y = 1.649 + 0.296x_1 + 0.347x_2$$

The hypothesized relationships were tested by t values of both independent factors. Career advancement opportunities (b = 0.347,t-value = 2.434, p < 0.05) and Gratification after repatriation (b= 0.296, t -value = 2.072, p < 0.05) have significant influence on loyalty (table 7).

Career advancement opportunities have relatively strong influence on Repatriate loyalty compared to gratification after repatriation.

Table 6: ANOVA results for loyalty measurement regression model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.494	2	3.747	5.109	0.011(a)
	Residual	24.938	34	0.733		
	Total	32.432	36			

a Predictors: (Constant), REGR factor score 2 for analysis 1, REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1
b Dependent Variable: I am loyal to the company for which I work

Table 7: Multiple regression analysis results for loyalty measurement

Coefficients (a)						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	1.649	0.141		11.709	0.000
	REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1	0.296	0.143	0.312	2.072	0.046
	REGR factor score 2 for analysis 1	0.347	0.143	0.366	2.434	0.020

a Dependent Variable: I am loyal to the company for which I work

DISCUSSION

Research on expatriation (Lazarova and Caliguiri., 2001) has shown that employees quit their organization within one or two years of their return from a foreign assignment. Contrarily, the findings in this study show that repatriates are loyal to the organization that sent them on assignment. It indicates that the gratification experienced on reentry and the ample career advancement opportunities within the organization are the major reasons for employees to continue their service with the same organization. The sample respondents in this study claimed that the organization valued the foreign exposure and utilized the newly gained skills of the individual appropriately. Their immediate superiors were very supportive and facilitated in adapting to the new settings after returning from the assignment. These attributes motivated the employee to remain loyal to the organization. Career advancement opportunities like giving preference for international employees during promotion, offering repatriates' suitable job profiles as expected, individuals possessing better competitive edge over other locally trained employees and ability to get a much better financial compensation are some of the other few reasons which motivates respondents to remain with the same organization.

International employees expect support and assistance from the organization both before and after an expatriation assignment (Aycan, 1997). However, most organizations overemphasize their assistance only during expatriation and almost neglect their support when an employee repatriates, because the organization perceives that the repatriate is only coming back to the home country and no assistance is required (Larson, 2006). An organizational support devised in the form of a rigorous repatriation program is extremely essential for any company that is sending employees on overseas assignment. From this study, it has been found that factors such as return support services, career planning services and communication services (Aycan, 1997) are most important for any repatriate. Respondents of this study

preferred repatriation trainings and seminars, financial counseling and lifestyle assistance as return support services.

Similarly, respondents wanted more support from the organization for building and creating a strong career. Simple and effective activities like a pre-departure briefing, mentoring, job guarantee on return and an effective repatriation program would facilitate an employee to channelize the career path accordingly. Respondents of this study also gave due emphasis to communication services that should be maintained between both the parent organization and the client/host organization. There should be visible signs that the organization really values the international experience of all employees. This shows that employees will remain loyal with the organization when it extends the required support and assistance to repatriates returning home.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to explore the major factors that enable an expatriate to continue the services of the organization even after completing the overseas assignment. By using multiple regression analysis and factor analysis, the researcher has identified those factors that motivate a repatriate to remain loyal with the organization. Accordingly, the study showed that when organizations formulate and implement effective support programs which mainly focus on career support, communication services and repatriate support services, the loyalty and commitment of international employees increases. Therefore, organizations should devise and implement robust repatriation programs for the benefit of international employees. This in turn will help the organization to reap the investments made on the employee during the overseas assignment.

This study focused only on employees travelling to United States of America for assignments. However, future researchers can focus on other countries of interest, and/or make a comparison between two or more countries' repatriation practices.

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