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Repatriation issues

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Abstract:

Multinational companies are growing in recent decades and this has led to increase in expatriate assignments. When an employee is sent to a foreign subsidiary of its company for an assignment they are called as an expatriate and when they return to their home country organization on the completion of their assignment it is called as repatriation. However, repatriation frameworks and policies have become a significant issue for the Human Resource. This research paper taps into the issues around repatriation.

Keywords- *Repatriation, Re-entry, Social factors, Career anxiety, Recruitment and selection*

I. Literature review:

(Mukta Kulkarni, Mark L. Lengenick-Hall and Reimara Valk 2010) did a study on Employee perceptions of Repatriation in an emerging economy: The Indian experience. Several employees were interviewed who had returned to Bangalore, India, from a United States-based assignment that lasted for more than nine months. The results showed that 100% of the employees agreed that there was a lack of formal repatriation assistance and 85% stated that there was no re-entry culture related training given. 26% employees stated that the performance management processes are similar in the host and the home country but it is more informal in India and same is the case with hiring processes (33%). The recommendations given by the employees included sensitivity training towards the cultural differences and make the HR function more structured, sensitive and strategic to facilitate successful repatriation.

Contextual Precursors like ability or motivation to transfer knowledge, social categorization, group composition, **Organizational characteristics** like HRM practices and policies, career opportunities, organizational structure, **Individual precursors** like coping strategies, re-adjustment, expectations, demographic characteristics and the **Repatriation outcomes** which include both individual and organizational play a significant role in the success or the failure of Repatriation in any organization. *(Flora Chiang, Thomas A Birtch, Emmy van Esch, Margaret Shaffer-2017)*

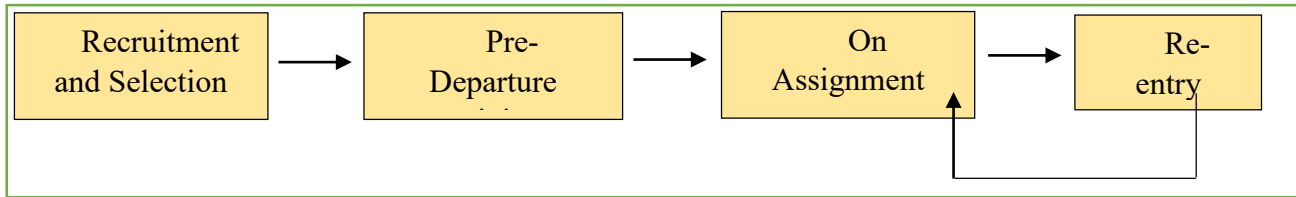
The problems which arise after the expatriate's return are due to the gap between expectations and the reality. Expectations of both that is the employees and the organization should be realistic. Expatriates should maintain contact with their colleagues in their home organization and should keep in mind that sometimes they might go one step backwards upon return. Organizations, especially the HR department should develop strategies to smoothen the process of repatriation. Organization-Individual fit is important for both that is the organization's expectations from the employee and the employee's expectations from the organization. (Gamze Arman, 2009)

II. Introduction:

A hefty amount is spent on employees who are sent as expats to other countries. Various assistance like travelling, accommodation, family assistance etc., is provided to employees when they go for foreign assignments. Hence, the company expects benefits from such assignments. Even, the employees going for such assignments invest in various ways to make these assignments successful. They also expect benefits when they are sent and when they return after the successful completion of the assignments. Effective HR practices and programs are essential for successful Repatriation of the employees. Often, repatriation process is assumed to have less attention as the employee is returning to his/her home country and the organization in which they have worked before. But the repatriate may have to cope with reverse culture shock, no promotion upon return, no opportunity to use the knowledge gained during their assignments or no recognition. This research paper focuses on different factors which influences repatriate adjustment.

III. Findings:

The process of expatriation ends with repatriation. Often, the employees accept international assignments on the success and the failure of the organization's repatriation process.



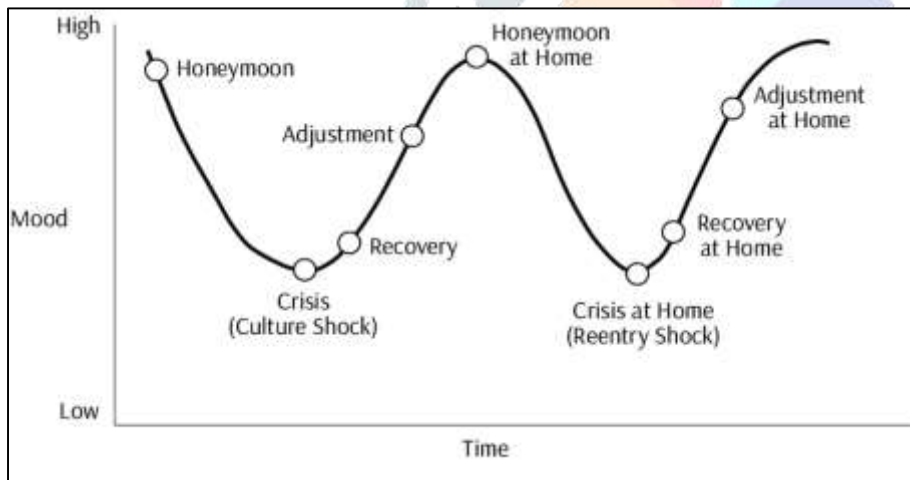
Issues related to re-patriation:

The re-entry shock:

When employees are sent to abroad as expats for an assignment, they go through various phases. These phases are depicted through the U-curve model.



But, when they return they go through several challenges hence, this model is incomplete without the phases of repatriation. Gullahorn and Gullahorn developed a new model called as the W-curve which included both expatriation and repatriation phases.



When the expatriate returns to the home country, their reverse honeymoon period starts which consists of how they missed family and friends, sharing of experiences they had in the foreign country etc. but soon this phase ends and the reverse culture shock phase comes into light. Due to different cultures in the home and host country, different working styles in the home country organization and host country organization, changes in the policies or working culture of the home company, no recognition given etc. The employee may recover and adapt or may fail to recover and hence change the organization. This adjustment is governed by various factors which can be broadly classified as job related factors and social factors.

Job Related Factors:

✚ Career anxiety:

1. Missing career perspectives:

Often, when the employees going as expatriates sign the agreement, they declare that they have the right to return to the organization after the completion of the project. However, the position which they will be getting is not discussed. When they return after successful completion of the project, they have gained knowledge and skills according to which they expect a higher position or a promotion. But when the companies fail to offer attractive positions, this can lead to disappointment amongst the employees and they can feel demotivated and dissatisfaction. Problems which are encountered upon return, are mostly due to the perceived gap between the expectations and the reality. If the gap is more, it may lead to attrition of the employees who are of great importance for the company's growth. Sometimes it may happen such that repatriates who have positive experiences with their organization after their return may not leave the organization even if they experience reverse cultural shock.

2. Organizational changes:

Anxiety amongst the employees may increase if no proper communication is facilitated by the home organization to the expats about the changes that took place during their assignment in foreign country. The changes can vary from acquisitions to mergers or structural changes or even change in the policies. Unaware of such changes and no guaranteed job upon return can add to anxiety.

3. Career Advancement expectations:

The employees may sometimes accept the project overseas when repatriates were offered promotion, a salary hike etc. This may be perceived by the employees that so as to get a promotion, doing an international assignment is the key. But, if these employees are not promoted upon return or they are given a position lower than what they had during their international assignment, or if upon return they are working under their juniors, this may add to the career anxiety. To avoid such psychological contracts or perceived understanding, the company should be clear with the employees about how and what the career will look like upon return. The gap between expectations and opportunities or what can be met by the organization should be bridged to avoid dis-satisfaction amongst the employees. MNC's should guide the employees to keep their expectations more realistic.

Social Factors:

1. Family adjustment:

Many a times the family accompanies the expatriates when they go for international assignments. They also face various challenges like cultural shock, dual career issues etc. If the expatriate has school or college going children, the company also has to assist them in finding a school. If the partner of the expatriate is a working individual, their career prospective has to be taken into consideration as well. The employees and their family adjust to the new environment but when they have to return after the completion of the project, they also go through reverse cultural shock. They might expect that the life at home would be same as they left before. The experiences can be negative and positive as well. For example, they might feel that life in the foreign country was more exciting than the home country. On the other hand, they might find out that the home country is less expensive than the foreign country. These reactions can become complex if the income of the working members of the family members reduces after repatriation.

2. Effect on Partner's career:

The re-adjustment of the expatriate whether male or female is highly influenced by their partner's career concerns. Partners have difficulty re-entering the workforce, especially if the partner was unable to work outside the home prior to or during the foreign assignment but now wishes to do so as part of a re-entry coping strategy or owing to changed family circumstances. Negative job-search experiences may damage the partner's self-worth, complicating the readjustment process and potentially triggering relationship stress. Given the growing number of dual-career couples and the growing expectation among females for abroad postings, the problem of the partner's employment is anticipated to become a major determining factor in future staff availability for international missions.

IV. Recommendations:

First, before embarking on an international assignment, MNEs may appoint supervisors who would be responsible for keeping the expat informed about changes in the home country and the organization. Such sponsors having experience as an expatriate would be of great help. The communication between the expatriate and the sponsor can be formal or informal. The expatriate can also be in touch with his/her colleagues on a personal level to stay up to date on the major events happening in the home country and the home country organization.

Secondly, an orientation process before the re-entry of the expatriate can help in keeping the expectations realistic and hence ease in repatriation. Also, allowing expatriates and their families to return to their home country on a regular basis will allow them to reunite with organization colleagues, family, and friends, as well as follow up with changing corporate, economic, and political changes. Countless instances of expatriate families allowed to spend their vacations in other regions rather than going back to their home country have been provided by managers with international experience, resulting in a rather unattainable view of life in their home country, which led to difficulties when the truth of subsequent repatriation caused adjustment problems.

Organisations can be ineffective with their use of expats by being either really unclear and unfocused about repatriates, or by attempting to be too effective by wanting the repatriate to move back into the domestic assignment before the problems and procedures relating to return are resolved. Repatriates should be given orientation upon return so that they become familiar with the new working conditions. Proper assistance with respect to social, personal and professional life can be provided by the organization to retain the repatriates.

V. Conclusion:

International assignments are on increase and thus successive repatriation too. The organizations should focus on framing policies and procedures to ease the repatriation process for the employee and the organization too. This research paper assessed the gaps and factors revolving around re-entry issues. Compared to expatriation, repatriation is a less focused area. If proper focus and study is done in this area, successful repatriation will not only contribute to the employee's successful career but also help organizations build a international taskforce and retain their employees successfully.

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