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Article abstract

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Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management

by

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With the increasing movement of employees across national boundaries comes a stronger focus on the needs of repatriates of multinational corporations. These workers have needs that are often unrecognized. In particular, they may suffer similar emotional dislocation to those working as expatriates. However, many companies fail to recognise or accommodate these concerns in their policies or practices. This paper proposes a model for developing an effective repatriation support process. It includes the four elements of policy development, construction of a repatriation agreement, the provision of repatriation programs, and the evaluation of the success of these strategies. The model is supported through the provision of a set of tools that may help guide those working in repatriation services.

1. Introduction

The importance of retaining quality personnel is reinforced throughout management literature. There is widespread understanding of the need for well thought-out policies and processes to support an organization's staff - from recruitment and on through an individual's various career phases (Brewster and Pickard, 1994; Suutari and Brewster, 2003; Tung, 1998). However, one area of career management has been little explored or recognized in human resource management; supporting repatriates upon their return from an overseas posting (Black, Gregersen et al. 1992; Lazarova, 2001; Swaak, 1997). Studies have highlighted the need for multinational companies to pay particular attention to enhancing expatriates' commitment to the parent firm, and to developing their commitment to the new local work unit during the repatriation process (Bonache, 2005; Gregersen and Black, 1996; Hansen, 1997). However, these concepts are neither well documented nor well developed in international human resource management. well documented nor well developed in international human resource management.

2. The Repatriation Issue

Repatriation occurs when an expatriate of a multinational corporation returns

to the country of his/her origin from an overseas assignment (Hodgetts and Luthans, 1997). While repatriation is perceived to be a non-issue for many companies, there is substantial literature on expatriation and the challenges that must be addressed when moving an employee and his/her family to a country with different cultural dimensions and significant social and economic contrasts (Dowling and Schuler, 1990; Klaff, 2002; O'Neil and Kramer, 1995; Tung, 1988). Thus, there is a strong recognition of the problems faced when moving to a foreign climate.

However, many companies assume that the move back to home territory will be relatively simple because the language is the repatriate's own, the culture is one with which the whole family should be familiar, and the home conditions are perceived to be the same as those left behind. From this perspective, it would appear that repatriates would slip smoothly into the old environment and not require significant support. Unfortunately, this simplistic view of the transition ignores many issues. Repatriation is a complex process, generating similar issues to those encountered when managing expatriation (Engen, 1995; Swaak, 1997). First, the repatriate is returning from a high-status position with high autonomy to a less highly profiled role in the parent company. Career opportunities may also diminish, rather than expand, as a result of working overseas. The challenges and satisfaction associated with greater responsibility may be exchanged for a feeling of boredom and under-utilization. In addition, the repatriate is no longer "special" or different from fellow workers. There is feeling of being 'let-down', which significantly affects work satisfaction. Additionally, the transition back home may be problematic for all family members (Hammer and Hart, 1998). A returning expatriate may experience reverse culture shock when he or she re-enters the home country (Hammer and Hart, 1998). Salary and fringe benefits provided while on foreign assignments are now lost, and the expatriate and family must adjust to a lower standard of living. The spouse and children are also confronted with practical readjustment problems, such as housing and schooling. It is understandable that companies may find their repatriates somewhat disillusioned and jaded on their return.

Repatriate retention is proving to be a major concern to those working in the international sector. Despite the substantial costs involved in developing the potential of high caliber employees to take and hold expatriate roles, these same people are often dissatisfied on their return to their homelands (Napier and Peterson, 1991; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002; Tung 1998). It has been reported that up to 25 percent of repatriates wish to leave the company after their return to a "normal post" (Abueva, 2000; Adler, 1991; Black and Gregersen, 1990). This turnover rate is significantly higher than for local incumbents (Black, Gregersen et al., 1992; Brewster 1997; Gregersen 1992; Harvey 1989; Kendall 1981; MacDonald and Arthur, 2005; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991; Oddou, 1991). It represents a significant loss - the cost of losing a single repatriated employee has been estimated to be as high as \$1.5 million (Abueva, 2000; Black, 1992; Peck, 1997).

Extensive direct costs are incurred when firms must replace departing executives who possess valuable international and corporate experience (Carpenter, Sanders and Gregersen, 2000; Harvey, 1989; Latta, 1999). Substantial

indirect costs also occur when repatriates withdraw crucial market knowledge, host-country client relationships, and international skills upon their departure to other employers - who are often gaining a competitive advantage from their new staff members (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991; Peck, 1997). Poor repatriation can also result in a loss of high-potential employees, employee under-utilization, and subsequent employee reluctance to accept overseas positions (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). Hence, organizations must plan for repatriation, and implement effective repatriation programs and practices to successfully retain people with global insight and experience (Adler, 1981; MacDonald and Arthur, 2005; Solomon, 1995; Swaak, 1997).

3. The Challenge of Repatriation

Traditionally, expatriates have been primarily managerial executives, with the role of controlling an overseas branch of the parent company. However, the increasing globalisation of business has led to an expansion in the range of personnel that is sent overseas to work and gain experience. Engineers, information technologists, and other specialists are increasingly moving into a globalised work arena (Chew, 2004; Latta, 1999). The resulting diversity of repatriated personnel generates two challenges. First, the processes and policies relating to repatriation must be more rigorously developed and documented in order to facilitate equitable and efficient management of the program. Second, there should be a greater awareness of the need to develop such programs in order to increase the retention rate of experienced expatriates (Birdseye and Hill, 1995; Morley, 2003; Punnett and Rick, 1997).

4. Repatriation Program Provision

Studies of repatriation have identified the limited nature of repatriation processes, even in large companies (e.g. Chew, 2004; Dowling and Schuler, 1990; Tung, 1988). They have revealed erratic and cost-focused practices that only marginally emphasized the needs of repatriates and their families. The results confirm other research that also notes a limited formalization of repatriation processes (e.g. Bonache, 2005; Black, 1992; Lazarova, 2001; Suutari and Brewster, 2003; Swaak, 1997). While organizations that are more globalised offer more structured repatriation practices, they do not necessarily demonstrate more formalised practices (Suutari and Valimaa, 2002; Chew, 2004). Instead, they have articulated their processes to streamline the processing of greater numbers of returned expatriates. Organizations with fewer expatriates tend to maintain an informal and negotiable process. This can lead to inequities, and a failure to provide core support strategies to returning repatriates.

A study of organisational repatriation policies and processes identified some significant issues relating to good practice (Chew, 2004). First, while it was understood that the family and spouse were important in achieving successful repatriation, there was little focus on these participants in the selection process, or in the subsequent policies and processes of preparation and debriefing. Cost was

cited as a major reason for this omission. Second, technical competence remains a significant criterion for success, although there is evidence of increasing recognition of personal and relational attributes as factors to consider. Respondents also noted the dilemma of dual career families. Despite the increasing scope of the repatriation programmes, and their recognition of possible strategies, there was little evidence of a cohesive or considered repatriation process - even in globalised companies with high levels of repatriate activity.

In interviews with fifteen respondents, it was evident that many managers were seeking guidance on developing better repatriation strategies. Participants requested copies of the structured interview questionnaire, and expressed a keen interest in gaining a better understanding of possible strategies for improved repatriate support. They recommended the development of tools and guidelines for use by International Human Resource Management professionals in order to enable better service to the organisation.

A model for successful repatriation is presented in this paper based on the aforementioned study, as well as on other models drawn from expatriation and repatriation literature. Although many existing models fail to address a broad scope of successfully managing repatriation and are based on American studies, in contrast, this paper presents an integrated model based on data from a study of current repatriation practices for Australian multinationals. This paper is also novel because in-depth studies on Australian multinationals are scarce (Brewster, 1997), and industry practitioners have admitted to a need to improve the retention of their international human resource (Chew, 2004).

5. The Importance of Developing a Repatriation Program

An international human resource management strategy often evolves slowly as the company increases its connections with overseas entities. The gradual evolution of practice can lead to an unplanned and unstructured array of services and support mechanisms.

A successful repatriate will normally be highly qualified, and have a suite of valuable skills, knowledge, and attributes (Hodgetts and Luthans, 1997; Solomon, 1995). In addition, the expatriate experience will have created many opportunities to grow, both culturally and technically. The growth of the individual should be accommodated in adaptation processes undertaken on return to their home country. Employees with an outstanding track record prior to their expatriate assignment should be nurtured and well-positioned upon their return. This would not only provide a sense of career continuity, but would demonstrate the value the company places on expatriate assignments (Allen, 1998; Black, 1992; Mon et al., 2005; Swaak, 1997). While this can ensure the expatriation process is successful, it becomes even more critical that the return of these highly valued participants be managed smoothly and efficiently. As repatriates, their services need to be retained. They must feel that their interests have been served by the organisation. It is critically important that the repatriate perceives a well-constructed support program to be in place.

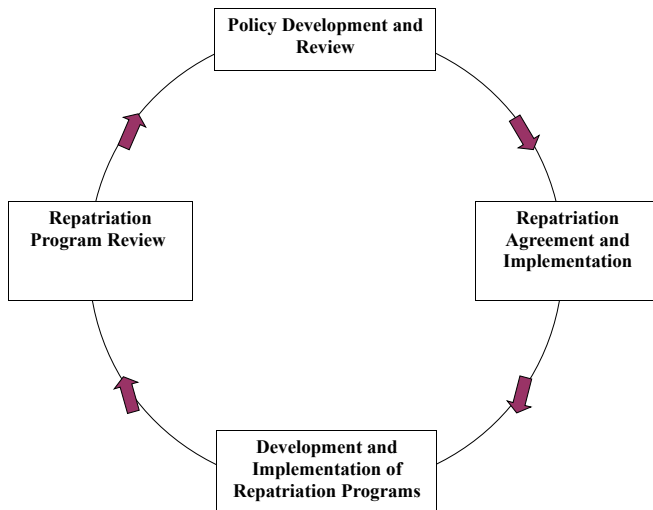
International firms can influence their employees' commitment by developing effective strategies for repatriation (Gregersen, 1992). Such policies and practices have significantly reduced high repatriation turnover in many U.S. multinationals (Harvey, 1989; Latta, 1999; Stroh, 1995). While these may be seen as the province of larger, globalised firms, they should be prominent components of HRM processes for organisations dealing with repatriates.

Most organisations recognise the need to support repatriates, particularly in the areas of financial and career counseling, and in the provision of family-orientated strategies (Black, 1992; Klaff, 2002; Swaak, 1997). While these general services are understood and provided in an ad-hoc manner by many international human resource managers, very few companies have established integrated programs to effectively manage repatriation (Black and Gregersen et al., 1992; Lazarova, 2001), possibly due to a lack of understanding of how to plan and prepare for the process. The absence of careful planning and implementation sends a negative message to expatriates, who may feel marginalized and concerned that they are being neglected whilst on assignment. The construction of an effective repatriation strategy is a key factor in retaining valued personnel.

6. A Model of Repatriation Practice

An effective repatriation strategy comprises four stages and is cyclical in nature. Figure 1 illustrates the four integrated components. First, the principles and philosophy of the repatriation strategy must be developed. Second, the repatriation strategy must be translated into a formal documented agreement. The strategy is then enacted in the third stage through supportive programs. Finally, a re-entry evaluation should be undertaken in order to identify areas that require further consideration by the IHRM division (Chew, 2004; Solomon, 1995; Varner and Palmer, 2002).

Figure 1: The Cyclic Process of Developing a Repatriation Strategy



Stage 1: Planning for Repatriation

Organizations should plan for repatriation well before employees arrive back from their overseas assignment, if they wish to cultivate long-term retention (Harvey, 1989; O'Neil & Kramar, 1995; Stroh, 1995). Forward-planning reduces some of the anxieties associated with repatriation, and provides expatriates with a sense of stability. There must be clarity as to the principles and philosophies which are to be followed when constructing a repatriation strategy (Bonache, 2005; Petersen & Sargent, 1996; Rahim, 1983; Solomon, 1995; Stevens, 1998). Policies should provide guidelines to ensure that all repatriates are fairly treated whilst working away from the company base. Sample policies are available in the literature (e.g. Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Forster, 2000; MacDonald and Arthur, 2005; Petersen and Sargent, 1996; Sievers, 1998; Solomon, 1995; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). They demonstrate the value of documenting the organisational commitment to repatriation.

A policy may incorporate a number of elements:

1. A statement recognising the possible stress repatriation may cause, and the support of the company during the time of transition.
2. An affirmation of the value of expatriates to the employer, and the importance of their skills upon his/her return.
3. A review of the rights of the employee during the repatriation process.
4. An outline of the degree to which the employer accepts responsibility for family settlement on return to the home country.
5. The identification of specialist support services which can provide assistance to the repatriate during the transition phase.

Like any policy, a discussion of issues and principles is ideally undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Interviews of repatriates, IHRM experts, a literature search, and a consideration of organisational culture and values can all assist in the development of the policy. The initial draft may benefit from review by those most likely to be affected, including those in finance, human resource management, and executives who deal with repatriate workers (Caliguiri and Lazarova, 2001; Solomon, 1995). Representatives of those same workers should be encouraged to contribute to the process.

Once constructed, the policy benefits from wide promotion, including prominent placement on the intranet, and to those identified as potential expatriates. The policy need not be extensive. However, it should be a clear statement of support for those planning to return to their previous work setting. A simple framework is provided as Attachment 1 to assist in the developmental process.

The construction and promotion of a repatriation policy assists in affirming the company's commitment to repatriates. It serves to assure those departing and those returning as to the social responsibility of the company. Yet, a policy is of little value if it is not allied with action.

Stage 2: The Repatriate Agreement

A company makes a significant investment in an employee who slated to work overseas. Thus, plans must be made in the early stages to determine how the employee's newly acquired skills will be utilized upon return (Klaff, 2002; Stroh, 1995). A repatriation agreement should be developed at the onset of each international assignment to manage the employee's goals and expectations. Included in such an agreement is a specification of the assignment period, details of the return, incentive payment, a guarantee of a job equal to or better than the one held before leaving, provision for re-entry training, and a repatriation program to support the repatriate and help the family readjust upon return to their home country. The specification of relocation support such as pre-repatriation house-hunting, school registration, and shipment of personal goods further strengthens the agreement (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Bonache, 2005; Cagney, 1975; Frazee, 1997; Hammer and Hart, 1998; Kramar, MacDonald and Arthur, 2005; McGraw et al., 1997). Table 1 summarises the core elements of a repatriation agreement that would demonstrate equitable and effective repatriation practices. This agreement should be signed prior to departure, providing the employee with an assurance of fair and equitable support on return. Developing such an agreement would greatly assist in retaining good repatriates.

Table 1: Components of an Effective Repatriation Agreement

Agreement Components	
1.	Specify the overseas posting period.
2.	Incorporate a return incentive payment to compensate for dislocation effects.
3.	Provide assurance that, on return, a job will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mutually acceptable • have greater responsibility than that held previously • is a promotion from that held previously
4.	Six to twelve months prior to returning, arrange networking visits for the expatriate and family to return home in order to increase visibility with line and HR managers.
5.	Develop repatriation programs to enable a smooth transition back into the work setting.
6.	Provide relocation benefits including pre-repatriation house hunting and school search.
7.	Shipment of personal goods should be expedited.

A repatriation agreement will greatly assist in clarifying the support a repatriate may reasonably expect from the employer. The commitment to providing career planning whilst an employee is away is particularly important to retaining good employees. If an expatriate's career stagnates upon return then the company

sends a strong message to future candidates that an overseas assignment is a poor career move. Hence, companies should visibly nurture the careers of those that are on overseas assignments (Howard, 1974; Molnar and Loewe, 1997; Morley, 2003).

Loss of visibility is one of the most commonly expressed fears of employees at all levels as they contemplate the possibility of being assigned to an area far from headquarters. Modern technologies such as fax, phone, voice mail, and e-mail make it much easier to keep in touch with colleagues than in the past. The key is to maintain regular contact for the purpose of maintaining rapport, educating colleagues about work in the field, and remaining current with developments in the home country (Alvarez, 1998). The most effective visibility strategy is personal visits to headquarters, which also allows family members to stay in touch with changes at home.

Stage 3: Repatriation Programs

Many companies have excellent intentions. However, the implementation of repatriation programs often leaves much to be desired. Repatriation is similar to other human resource practices in that it can flounder badly if left on its own. The appointment of a repatriation manager is a major step for creating an effective repatriation process. The manager is then responsible for tracking individual repatriates, providing specialized support and re-entry programs, and assessing the adequacy of policies and their implementation. The appointment of a specific contact person ensures that someone is accountable for the success of the repatriation program.

There are a number of issues that must be addressed when the employee returns home. The key issues are the provision of a comparable or better position in the company, and assistance for the employee and family in re-assimilating into the home culture (Chew, 2004; O'Neil and Kramar, 1995). Companies must ensure that an overseas assignment benefits an individual's career, and that this commitment is visible to the work community. Repatriates should receive challenging assignments that utilise their newly acquired skills, and their international experience should be used to guide expansion of the home country's operations. Additionally, employers need to ensure that expatriate career trajectories compare favourably to those employees that did not go overseas. If a significant number of the company's senior managers have international experience the company sends an effective signal to its employees that international experience counts (Adler, 1981; Scullion and Brewster, 2001).

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to integrate repatriation management data into the human resource management system (Howard, 1974), and to ensure ongoing intra-company communication. In addition, a regular scan of career opportunities and movements - to be escalated into an intense program of preparation six months before the expatriate returns - should be managed on the employee's behalf. It is also important to make an organized and concerted

effort to reposition the expatriate in a position that will utilize his/her new skills and perspectives, as well as one that will call for further development. These core strategies are employed by successful international companies (Borstorff, 1997; Hansen, 1997; Oddou, 1991; Scullion and Starkey, 2000; Solomon, 1995; Varner and Palmer, 2002).

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).

Another repatriation strategy is the use of mentors. The mentor serves as an adviser and confidant, and helps to foster a connection between the expatriate and the home country operation. A formal mentor would support each expatriate while in the field, and assist in his/her successful return. They should be assigned before departure in order to allow sufficient time to establish a rapport between the two parties. Expatriates who feel connected with the home country may experience less conflict with home operations and develop a stronger sense of commitment upon return (Gregersen, 1992; Scullion and Brewster, 2003). The expatriate's mentor and the HR department are the most important vehicles for identifying suitable job opportunities in preparation for return. Mentors in companies with Internet or electronic job postings can make sure that expatriates are tied into those systems as well (Frazee, 1997). A screening and training program for mentors should be carried out to ensure consistency. Characteristics associated with successful mentors include personal international experience, sufficient influence to advocate for the expatriate (particularly during repatriation), and the dedication required to keep in contact with the expatriate (Swaak, 1997).

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).

Many international assignments come with a fixed end-date. In some cases, this is necessary to accommodate school schedules and assure employees that they will return to the home country in a timely fashion. The downside is that a fixed return date tends to limit job opportunities (Abueva, 2000; Cagney, 1975; Fieldman, 1992). A more open re-entry time frame of three months to one year will increase the likelihood that an appropriate position can be found for the expatriate. The expatriate will have the flexibility to explore and select job possibilities. While the certainty of a specific re-entry may be comforting, the flexibility to exercise greater choice over the return time and position he or she accepts may be welcomed by both employee and family.

Organisations can also increase repatriation options for employees by allowing for the possibility of cross-divisional moves. The sending division may feel temporarily unhappy by this approach since it would lose the services of a valued employee. However, the company as a whole would continue to benefit from the effective retention of a valued employee - who may at some point return to the original division (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Morley, 2003).

Occasional placement problems can occur even after employing advanced career planning methods and building more flexibility in the placement process. Under these circumstances, the creation of a temporary holding job (either in the home or host country) may provide a bridge for an expatriate until a suitable position is found. For instance, repatriates can be temporarily placed in consulting capacities within the company or assigned to a special project. This option should be implemented with care or the holding position could become indefinite, causing the eventual departure of the employee from the firm. This issue can be addressed through the establishment of a strict time frame and a clear set of objectives associated with the assignment. The assignment should involve a substantial, value-added contribution to the company that will offer an opportunity for the employee to maintain visibility and credibility within the organisation (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Forster, 2000; Scullion and Brewster, 2003).

Expatriates often report that their international experience is ignored or ostracized because they encounter a hostile reception upon their return. While a more receptive environment cannot be dictated by senior management, several approaches can help the organisation better value and utilise expatriate background. These include arranging an event to welcome and recognise the employee and family, and incorporating a post-assignment interview with the expatriate and spouse to review their experiences and identify any repatriation issues that the firm should address (Fieldman, 1992; Ruisala and Suutari, 2000).

A repatriate directory and network can be established in order to facilitate ongoing follow-up with former expatriates as the repatriation process continues. A database can also help track other important information on international assignments, such as average length of stay, percentage of completed assignments, locations and reasons for early terminations, length of stay with the organisation after return, and career movement of repatriates (Chowanec and Newstrom, 1991; Scullion and Valimaa, 2002). The database can also help the company utilise former expatriates for assignments that require their unique expertise.

Training and preparation of new expatriates is an important function that repatriates and their families can be called upon to perform. Repatriates can offer firsthand experience and advice to prospective international assignees, their families, and newly returned repatriates. Several expatriates noted that it was important to screen the repatriates and their families before assigning them to this preparation role since excessive negativity could scare away prospective expatriates, or set up expectations that tainted the field experience from the outset. Ideally, expatriates should be chosen for their ability to convey a realistic, but enthusiastic, account of the experience in the field (Carpenter et al., 2000; Frazee, 1997; Gregersen, 1996).

Table 2 summarizes the key features of an effective repatriation program discussed so far.

Table 2: The Features of an Effective Repatriation Program

Repatriation Program Features
1. Mentor program comprising the pairing of an expatriate with a home office senior management colleague who will ensure effective contact is maintained between the home office and the expatriate.
2. The provision of a support structure to facilitate family reintegration into the home country.
3. A separate organisational unit and repatriation manager that accepts primary responsibility for the specific needs of all expatriates, and plans for their return in the future.
4. Provision of flexible career placement process, career tracking and pathing systems that recognise and reward returning employees.
5. The conducting of a post assignment interview with the expatriate and spouse to review their views of the assignment and address any repatriation issues.
6. A company managed social event to welcome and recognise the employee and family.
7. The provision of repatriation counseling or workshops to ease adjustment (include family).
8. The provision of repatriate directory network to establish contact with other repatriates.
9. The maintenance of the individual's personnel files, and efficient transfer of these any new work location.
10. The use of repatriates as trainers for future expatriates.

Black et al. (1992a) describe the 'spillover' effect, which occurs when a family resettles comfortably, leading to increased expatriate effectiveness. Given the difficulties of re-entry, expatriates and their families need help to reestablish

their lives. Re-entry training should focus primarily on helping the repatriate and spouse align their expectations with the actual situation that will be encountered, both within the organisational context and, more broadly, within the social milieu (Bonache, 2005; Hammer and Hart, 1998). The political nature of the work necessitates a re-acculturation process; power blocs, alliances, strategic priorities, and directions all shift over time. A break from the local environment for this length of time requires re-engagement with the local setting. Corporate communication and re-entry training activities increase the alignment of expectations with reality, and raise re-entry satisfaction while diminishing re-entry difficulties. Companies that prepare expatriates and their families for coming home after global assignments are increasing the odds of retaining these valuable employees, and of helping them make the challenging adjustment to being home. In short, companies must work to close the gap between expectations and reality for returning expatriates (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2001; Sievers, 1998).

The creation of a comprehensive repatriation program ensures that the policies and agreements that were initially presented to an employee is fully honoured. The need for regulated repatriation processes becomes more critical as the number of employees that experience expatriation increases. Repatriates have a right to be appropriately treated on their return, and should be supported through the initial process of re-acculturation.

Stage 4: Evaluation of the Repatriation Strategy

All facets of human resource management should be evaluated on a regular basis, and this is particularly important for repatriation strategies. However, there is little evidence of an extensive evaluation of repatriation strategy outcomes. Reviews of strategy impact have predominantly focused on turnover (e.g. Black and Gregersen, 1998; Chew, 2004; Stroh, 1995; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002). Yet, the impact of repatriation extends much more widely, and can impact the individual's work commitment, job satisfaction, work values, and the wider perception of the expatriation process. The commercial viability of the expatriation strategy relies on its positive image amongst potential participants. Thus, it is essential that the repatriation programme be regularly monitored.

The evaluation process can focus on four aspects: the impact of the programs on repatriate retention, satisfaction and job commitment (outcome measures); the participant's assessment of the effectiveness of different strategies (process evaluation); the identification of gaps in support that should be remedied (deficit audit); and continuous benchmarking of the overall strategy against other similar businesses (quality assessment). These results may be important indicators of repatriation success. Black (1992), in his study of 174 multinational repatriates, found a number of strong indicators in the responses. In particular, repatriation and job adjustment were strongly related to satisfaction with living and housing conditions.

Data collection can be undertaken at a re-entry review, which ideally occurs

at approximately two months after the repatriate's return. This could be in the form of a debriefing interview with the repatriation manager, or a standardized survey if there are large numbers of repatriates. The evaluation should also be extended to include the repatriate's spouse, so as to identify additional issues. Napier and Peterson (1991) have provided one model for exploring expatriate views. Their survey of employees and managers across twenty-one US corporations identified three major expatriate concerns: cultural re-entry, financial implications, and the nature of job re-assignments. Research on expatriation impacts demonstrates the insights that can be gleaned by questioning expatriates (e.g. Black, 1992; Forster, 2000; Morley, 2003; Napier and Peterson, 1991; Solomon, 1995).

The results of the expatriate review can offer important guidance on desirable programs and policy changes. The results of such reviews should be widely disseminated. Sharing feedback promotes open communication on issues that need to be addressed, and leads to a healthy work environment where repatriation is acknowledged as an important company concern. The actual process of debriefing also reassures the repatriate and their family members that the company is concerned about their well-being. This message is an important one to have during the resettlement process.

7. Conclusion

Companies with returning expatriates need to recognise their vulnerabilities and their potentialities. Expatriates can be significantly protected from re-entry culture shock through the provision of effective policies, anticipatory agreements, and supportive programs. In addition, their extended knowledge of corporate business should be nurtured and fully utilized in the business setting. Companies can send a clear signal to their repatriates that they are valued and appreciated by singling out these employees for activities that call upon their international experience. Repatriation should also involve both the expatriate and the family in order to facilitate adjustment to work and life. The repatriation program needs to be constantly reviewed to ensure it effectively anticipates repatriation concerns. If repatriates are taken for granted or ignored, it is at the company's peril, for an effective repatriation strategy can lead to a significant competitive advantage in the global market.

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Attachment 1:

POSSIBLE INCLUSIONS IN THE REPATRIATION POLICY

The repatriation policy should describe:

1. The value of expatriates while overseas and on returning.
2. The company commitment to maintaining expatriate satisfaction while overseas and on return.
3. The rights and expectations of expatriates while away.
4. The rights and expectations of repatriates on return.
5. The provision of supportive services to enable these transitions.
6. The planning of supportive services in advance to enable appropriate management of the transitions.
7. The inclusion of expatriates in career planning programs.
8. The use of repatriates as mentors and guides to new expatriates.
9. Recognition of possible re-entry shock for the repatriate and family.
10. Recognition of family and spouse needs in the programs provided.
11. The provision of flexible and interactive programs for the spouse and family.