

# REPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND TURNOVER: THE ROLE OF EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Pamela L. Cox, State University of New York at Oswego  
Raihan H. Khan, State University of New York at Oswego  
Kimberly A. Armani, State University of New York at Oswego

## ABSTRACT

*International placements, particularly of executives, have increased with the globalization of business. Although many global organizations have established procedures to help their employees adjust to their stays abroad, and some have established practices to provide support for returning employees, repatriate turnover continues to be a challenge for organizations. Organizations lose the skills and knowledge that repatriates gain through their foreign assignments when repatriated employees leave their jobs. With the substantial costs of training and salary for each employee sent abroad, repatriate turnover also represents a significant financial burden. This paper reviews current repatriate adjustment and turnover literature and presents a model incorporating the findings of recent research. The proposed model suggests repatriate adjustment and turnover intentions are related to the following key factors: employee expectations upon repatriation, employee perceptions of organizational repatriation support practices, and employee perceptions of the appropriateness of both job content upon return and the availability of external career opportunities based on the employee's new found expertise. Recommendations for future research are outlined as well as suggestions for improving organizational repatriation support practices.*

**JEL:** M12, M16

**KEYWORDS:** International Management, Repatriation, Turnover, International Human Resource Management, Reverse Culture Shock, Re-entry Culture Shock

## INTRODUCTION

International placements, particularly of executives, have increased with the globalization of business. The number of foreign assignments has grown at an exponential rate. Multi-national corporations send their managers abroad for a variety of reasons including the objective to develop their knowledge of international economic environments and increase their ability to manage in a global context (Tung, 1998). One way organizations build a pool of global knowledge and skills is to transfer their managers from country to country (Paik, Segaud, & Malinowski, 2003). The foreign assignments can provide first hand understanding of local markets, encourage cross-fertilization of ideas and practices, retain star performers in the organization by providing them with new challenges, and allow organizations to exercise control over their subsidiaries. An assumption is made that expatriate managers will return home with international expertise that will benefit the organization (O'Sullivan, 2002). Global assignments may create competitive advantage for both employees and for the companies that employ them (Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen, 2000). Not surprisingly, Stroh and Caligiuri (1998) found that effective management of people in the global arena positively affects the bottom line. According to Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001, pp. 389-390):

*Repatriates, who have completed a global assignment, can help establish and expand an MNC's international business because they possess first-hand knowledge of particular cultural contexts, including information about specific markets and customers. ... Repatriates have an irreplaceable role in organizational learning, given that they can accelerate the transfer of knowledge from host countries to headquarters, and vice versa.*

A foreign assignment can be thought of as consisting of three broad stages: 1) selection and pre-departure, 2) the foreign assignment, and 3) repatriation and career management (Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001). Repatriation is defined as the return to the home country after the completion of an international assignment (Dowling & Shuler, 1990). Researchers and practitioners alike have failed to adequately address the issue of repatriating or re-acclimatizing the employee returning from the foreign assignment. Although many global organizations have established procedures to help their employees adjust to their stays abroad, and some have established practices to support returning employees (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001), the final phase in the expatriation process, repatriation, continues to be a difficult phase for both employees and companies (Vidal, Valle, & Aragon, 2008). Repatriates experience a wide variety of issues including organizational change, career transitions, financial and family problems, and psychological stress (Chi & Chen, 2007; Harvey, 1989). In fact, repatriation can present a more difficult adjustment than expatriation (Forster, 2000; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Repatriation can be experienced as a shock (Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002; Paik, Seguad, & Malinowski, 2002) and it can take approximately a year to a year-and-a-half for repatriates to fully adjust (Adler, 1981; Harris & Moran, 2000).

If repatriates are unable to adjust, they may leave the organization. In some cases, repatriates leave their company within two years after their return from an international assignment (Black, 1991; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). When turnover occurs, organizations lose the employees' skills and knowledge including those gained through the foreign assignment (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). With the substantial cost of training and salary for each employee sent abroad, repatriate turnover also represents a substantial financial burden for the organization. According to the 2004 Global Relocation Trends Report, 44% of repatriates leave their companies within the first two years of returning home (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009, p. 28). Black et al. (1992) found that 42 percent of the American repatriates they studied seriously contemplated leaving their organizations upon returning home, and 74 percent did not expect to be working for the same company in one year. In addition, 79 percent felt they would be able to find another job with another company as the demand for their international skills was high. While international assignments create opportunities to develop international expertise, employees are sometimes placed in jobs upon their return that do not utilize the skills and knowledge developed abroad (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006). The resulting frustration may cause repatriates to seek opportunities that are more rewarding with other firms (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998). Repatriate turnover may also compromise a company's ability to recruit future expatriates if the turnover signifies to others that international assignments have a negative career impact (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001).

Repatriation is a critical phase in the expatriation process. Given the costs and potential negative impacts of employees' failures to adjust following their international placements, this phase requires more scrutiny. This paper reviews current repatriate adjustment and turnover literature and presents a model incorporating the findings of recent research. Recommendations for future research are outlined as well as suggestions for improving organizational repatriation support practices.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Turnover and Intent to Leave

Significant numbers of employees leave in the two years following repatriation. Previous research supports the position that intent to stay or leave the organization is consistently and strongly related to voluntary turnover (Griffeth & Hom, 1988; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), and has found intent to leave or stay as the strongest predictor of actual turnover (Hendrix et al., 1999; Mowday et al., 1982). Thus, in our proposed model, we use intent to leave or stay (turnover intentions) as a proxy for actual employee turnover.

### Organizational Support Practices

The human resource practices of the repatriate's organization may influence the repatriate's adjustment upon return from an international assignment. The following HR practices have been found to facilitate repatriates' adjustment: having a fluent communication system, having a mentor in the domestic organization during the abroad assignment, providing training to employees prior to their return, the compensation package the company offers to repatriates, and how the organization manages repatriates' careers upon return. For example, research has found that an ongoing communication system between the home office and the expatriate reduces repatriate turnover rates (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Likewise, good communication during repatriation is critical. A qualitative study found that Spanish repatriates complained about the lack of information regarding the content of the job upon return home (Vidal et al., 2007a). There is some evidence that having a mentor during the international assignment may provide security to the expatriate and improve adjustment upon returning home (Harvey, 1982; Tung, 1988; Swaak, 1997; Hurn, 1999; Vermond, 2001). Conversely, Stroh (1995) found no support for having a mentor and repatriate adjustment. Research indicates that the timing of an HR practice may influence its outcome. Repatriates seem to value training prior to repatriation as a way to reduce uncertainty regarding the repatriation process and help to clarify the job the employee can expect upon repatriation (Black et al., 1999). Training *after* repatriation was found in one study to have no impact on repatriation satisfaction with the repatriation process (Vidal et al., 2008). Thus, it may be critical for training to take place prior to the expatriate's return home. Jassawella, Connolly, and Slojkowski (2004) found that firms that manage repatriation effectively do not simply intervene at the end of the employee's assignment but instead plan much of the repatriation activities before the employee is transferred.

Studies examining the relationship between compensation and turnover have yielded mixed results. On the one hand, Gomez-Mejia and Balkin (1983) found that increased compensation reduced repatriates' turnover intentions. Other studies found no relationship between compensation and repatriate adjustment (Gregersen & Black, 1996) or between compensation and repatriate satisfaction with the repatriation process (Vidal et al., 2007b).

The existence of a professional career plan or career management was found to reduce the turnover rate among repatriates (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh, 1995). Career management was also found to increase satisfaction with the repatriation process (Vidal et al., 2008).

Vidal et al. (2008) found that professional career management, clarity in repatriation politics and practices, and accurate working expectations were related to satisfaction with the repatriation process. Satisfaction with the repatriation process was found to be negatively related to intent to leave the organization. Other studies have supported the findings that professional career management (Hammer et al., 1998; Bossard & Peterson, 2005) and having accurate work expectations (Black et al., 1999; Pickard, 1999) are important to repatriates.

Results from studies examining the relationship between how well the repatriation process has been explained and clarified (repatriation practices clarity) and repatriate adjustment have been mixed. Research from the United States and Finland found no support for a relationship between clarity in repatriation practices and repatriate adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). On the other hand, for Japanese and Spanish workers clarity in repatriation practices was related to repatriation adjustment (Black, 1994). Vidal et al. (2008) proposed that cultural differences may moderate the relationship. U.S. and Finnish workers may tolerate uncertainty better than Spanish and Japanese workers may.

Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) examined organizational support practices and their effect on lowering repatriates' turnover intentions. Interestingly, they found that the key issue was not the support practices

in and of themselves, but rather the repatriates' perceptions of the support practices. They collected data on HR practices most often associated with successful repatriation programs including pre-departure briefings, career planning, agreement on the type of position upon repatriation, reorientation programs, repatriation training programs, financial counseling, lifestyle assistance and counseling, continuous communication with the home office, visible signs that the company values international experience, and communication about the repatriation process. Repatriation support practices were not found to be related to either organizational commitment or repatriates' intention to leave (or to stay with) their organizations. Repatriates' perceptions of their organization's overall support practices were not related to organizational commitment. However, perceptions of organizational support practices were significantly related to repatriates' turnover intentions. These results indicate that repatriates believe company-wide appreciation of global experience and career-planning sessions are the most important repatriation support practices. These findings further suggest that the most important factors to repatriates are that the organization cares about their adjustment upon return home and has an appreciation for the experience they have acquired. De facto, repatriates' perceptions may be more important than the support practices themselves. State Lazarova & Caligiuri (p. 389):

*We found that supportive repatriate practices offered by companies improved the repatriates' general perceptions about their companies. Repatriates who were offered more of these supportive practices, and believed that such programs were relevant and important for their successful repatriation, felt as though their company cared about their overall well-being—and ultimately, had a greater desire to remain with the company upon repatriation.*

In summary, the researchers found the following to be of particular importance to repatriates: (1) that the company articulated appreciation of global assignments and (2) offered career planning sessions. Not having these two elements seemed to result in unfavorable attitudes towards the company and increased repatriates' intentions to leave the organization. The following comments reflect these unfavorable attitudes (Lazarova & Caligiuri, p. 395):

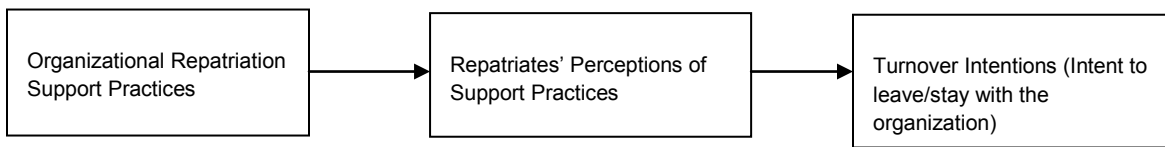
*“Repatriation was a big disappointment. One is forced to fit back as a cog in the wheel .... North American management does not know how to exploit the talent developed abroad. Having gained experience is a premium ... I suspect a lot of [the company's] repatriates will leave within 2 years.”*

*“There was no assistance or concern about where I would return to. I think that our corporation can benefit from the experience I gained abroad, but no one asked me for any information. It is as if I never went.”*

There appears to be a disconnect between the reasons stated by companies for assigning international assignments (organizational learning, acquisition of global skills, and knowledge of cultural contexts) and the actual transfer of knowledge and utilization of newly acquired global expertise upon the expatriates return to the organization. Based on our review of the literature, we propose the following:

Proposition 1 – Repatriates' perceptions of organizational repatriation support practices are related to turnover intentions. Figure 1 illustrates the elements of proposition number 1.

Figure 1: Illustration of Proposition 1



*This figure illustrates the proposed relationships among support practices, perceptions of support practices, and turnover intentions.*

### Repatriate's Job Satisfaction after Returning Home

March and Simon (1958) proposed that employee turnover is related to the perceived desirability of the job and ease of movement. Hulin, Roznowski, & Hachiya (1985) list attractiveness of the current job and availability of alternatives as reasons for employee turnover. Mobley (1977) presented a popular model illustrating the employee turnover process. According to this model, the turnover process starts with an evaluation of the existing job. Next, employees search for, evaluate, and compare alternatives. The turnover process concludes with the employee making a decision to quit or stay. Repatriates appear to go through this process when evaluating the job assigned to them upon repatriation and determining whether to leave or stay with the organization. Repatriates most likely also assess the availability of opportunities outside the organization. In fact, repatriates may perceive the availability of external job opportunities to be quite high. In one study, 79 percent of repatriates felt they would be able to find another job with another company as the demand for their international skills was high (Black et al., 1992).

International assignments increase the external marketability of repatriates who may have acquired new skills, language proficiency, flexible management styles, and the formation of a global mindset while abroad (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). International employees tend to receive more external offers of employment from different organizations upon return from their assignment abroad (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). Furthermore, individuals today may no longer perceive their career as a progression of jobs within a single organization. Instead, they perceive their careers as boundary less, and move from one company to another to pursue the best career opportunities (Parker & Inkson, 1999). These individuals will also tend to be less committed to their organizations, increasing the likelihood that they will leave the organization if job expectations are not met.

The repatriation literature suggests that being assigned a job that utilizes the employee's abilities and knowledge) is related to both job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Unfortunately, companies often do not assign repatriates a job where there is a match between employees' abilities and knowledge and job content and tasks (Bossard & Petersen (2005). In one study, 50% of repatriates found the job they held upon returning home less satisfactory than the one they held while abroad (Hammer et al., 1998). In another study, approximately 60% of repatriates felt their company did not take into account their international skills and experiences when assigning them a job upon repatriation (Peltonen, 1997). Vidal et al. (2007b) found that suitable job content upon returning home was positively related to repatriate job satisfaction. Other studies have found that repatriates often feel that their jobs upon returning home are less satisfying and that their home organizations do not value their international experience (Bolino, 2007; Hammer, Hart, & Rogan, 1998; Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998).

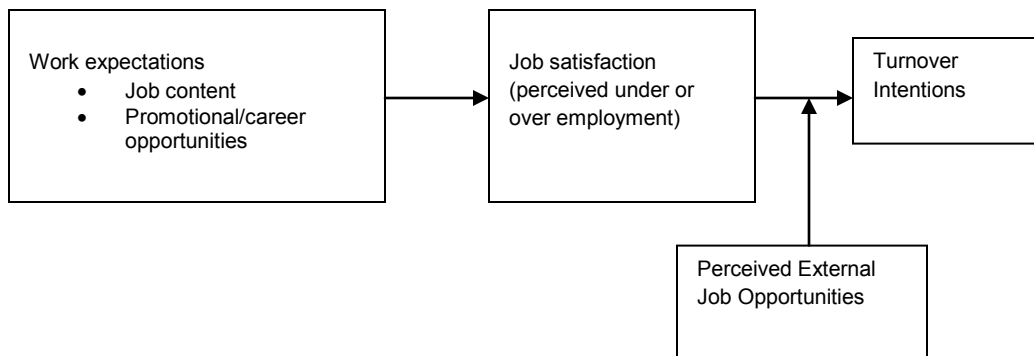
One reason that expatriates may accept an international assignment may have to do with expectations that the assignment will increase their career opportunities (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Research has shown that expatriates who see a strong connection between their international assignments and their long-term career paths are more likely to stay with their organizations upon repatriation (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh, 1995). Not receiving a promotion upon return from an international assignment may be perceived as a violation of the employee's psychological contract with the organization (Welch, 2003).

Lower career advancement opportunities within the company (relative to opportunities available outside the company) may be a predictor of turnover intentions (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009). Poor career planning may result in repatriates being placed in a holding pattern and assigned jobs that may or may not match their abilities and preferences (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006). Vidal et al (2007b) found that being promoted was positively related to repatriate job satisfaction and negatively related to intentions to leave the organization. Having professional career planning available for repatriates has also been found to be related to repatriate job satisfaction (Vidal et al., 2008) and repatriation turnover (Kraimer et al, 2009). Perceived underemployment may moderate the relationship between career advancement and turnover intentions (Kraimer et al., 2009). Repatriates who perceived a promotion following their return home were less likely to experience feelings of underemployment, which, in turn, made them less likely to think about leaving the organization.

Accuracy in work expectations may be related to both repatriate job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Expectations may frequently be more optimistic than the reality presented to repatriates upon return home (Pickard, 1999), and this gap may negatively affect job satisfaction (Bonache, 2005). Accurate work expectations have been found to be related to repatriate adjustment and performance (Black, 1991; Black et al, 1999). Accurate work expectations have been found to be related to repatriate job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Vidal et al., 2007b, 2008).

Proposition 2 – Repatriate’s work expectations are related to job satisfaction and turnover intentions. If the repatriate’s work expectations are not met (a violation of the perceived psychological contract), job satisfaction may decrease and intentions to leave the organization may increase. The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions is moderated by perceptions of external job opportunities. Figure 2 illustrates the elements of proposition 2.

Figure 2: Illustration of Proposition 2



*This figure illustrates the proposed relationships among work expectations, job satisfaction, perceived external job opportunities, and turnover intentions.*

### Moderating Variables – Individual Characteristics and Type of Global Assignment

Individual characteristics may moderate a repatriate’s adjustment upon repatriation, his/her perceptions of repatriation support practices, work expectations, and job satisfaction. These individual characteristics may include the following: age, gender, family status, culture, and personality.

Age, gender, and family status each have a bearing on the number of problems employees may encounter when they are transferred internationally (Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002). There is a consensus in the literature that younger expatriates, lacking family responsibilities and significant social commitments,

have an easier time adjusting to a new job assignment (although there is also some evidence that the relationship between age and adjustment may be curvilinear) (Feldman & Tompson, 1993). Employees with families have to worry about the readjustment of others beside themselves. Poor adjustment by spouse is a key reason why expatriates return home early from their assignments (Rushing & Kleiner, 2003). An important family concern involves the trailing spouse's job (Joinson, 1998).

Family members accompanying the repatriate on the assignment may also experience reentry culture shock. Furthermore, spouses' repatriation adjustment has a positive impact on employee repatriation adjustment at work (Black et al., 1999). The family may also experience considerable pressure from family members who remained in the home country. The extended family may have to learn to interact with family members they have not seen in years, and grieve over missed periods of growth and bonding (Zvara & Singh, 2004). Animosity and blame may be directed toward the repatriate who "put the family in this situation." One study of Taiwanese repatriates found that the family accompanying the expatriate during the overseas assignment was positively related to the repatriate's intent to leave the organizations upon return (Liu, 2005). Research has also shown gender can affect success in a foreign assignment, with women being more successful than men are (Halcrow, 1999). More research needs to be done to determine the influence of gender on repatriate adjustment and turnover.

Previous research has shown that repatriation adjustment problems and repatriate turnover may vary by country. Sixty percent of American expatriates, eighty percent of Japanese expatriates, and seventy-one percent of Finnish expatriates experience some degree of culture shock upon returning home from a foreign assignment (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1999). Participation in the local culture of the host country and a long length of stay may exacerbate problems upon return home. When employees live and immerse themselves in a foreign environment for an extended period, they are likely to adopt patterns of thinking and behaving that are characteristic of the foreign culture, creating stress and readjustment difficulties when they return home (Brislin & Van Buren, 1974). Similarly the greater the length of time a worker is away from home, the greater the chances that changes have occurred in the home country during the repatriate's absence.

The value of various repatriation support practices may vary with culture. For example, repatriates from Spain and Japan, cultures that have been found to not feel comfortable when uncertainty appears in comparison with workers from other countries (high uncertainty avoidance), valued "clarity in the repatriation policies and practices" of their firms more than U.S. and Finnish repatriates (from cultures ranked low in terms of uncertainty avoidance) (Vidal et al., 2008). Lee & Liu (2007, p. 127) suggest that Taiwanese expatriates may experience greater culture shock and reverse culture shock due to their collectivist culture. In a collectivist culture, individuals belong to only a few in-groups that are stable over time. These groups tend to be rigid and inflexible, making movement from group to group difficult. Therefore, in a Taiwanese culture, individuals may have difficulty adjusting to shifts in-group membership. Taiwanese repatriates may feel very isolated from their in-group colleagues during expatriation, making it difficult to re-establish these relationships after repatriation.

O'Sullivan (2002) proposed a model whereby certain proactive personality characteristics and behaviors may be related to the suitability of the post-return job, repatriate cultural adjustment, and turnover intentions. The proactive personality characteristics include extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, emotional stability, and agreeableness. The proactive behaviors include social networking and network seeking (both aimed at securing repatriation support and initiated both pre & post return). This model suggests that certain individual characteristics and behaviors may result in better repatriation adjustment and lower turnover regardless of other factors.

The characteristics of the global assignment may also influence repatriation adjustment and turnover. There is some disagreement as to whether the length of the assignment makes a difference. On the one

hand, the shorter the period the expatriate is out of the firm's headquarters, the easier the transition to the home country may be (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Other scholars have suggested that extended assignments are desirable because they allow for better cross-cultural adjustment and improved effectiveness (Tung, 1987). Liu (2005) found no relationship between length of assignment and repatriate turnover intentions. He did find a significant relationship between number of repatriate overseas assignments; those repatriates who had had more overseas assignments and had gone through the repatriation process multiple times, adjusted better upon return. He also found that the longer the time return from the overseas assignment, the better the repatriates' adjustment and the lower the turnover intentions. Kraimer et al. (2009) found that the number of international assignments is negatively related to career advancement upon repatriation, but that this relationship flattens out as the number of assignments approaches four or more. State the authors (p. 40):

*Thus, in our study, repatriates were most likely to get ahead in their organization when they had been on only one assignment. Career advancement was lowest among those who had between two and four assignments, and only after four assignments did there appear to be a non-negative relationship between number of international assignments and career advancement. ... Multiple assignments may damage careers because they are tagged as "out of sight, out of mind" or become thought of as permanent expatriates.*

Other researchers arrived at similar conclusions (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Stroh et al., 1998). Stahl et al. (2009) examined the relationship of type of assignment to turnover intentions. They examined developmental assignments (learning-driven) and functional (demand-driven) assignments. Employees sent on developmental international assignments perceived their future career advancement opportunities to be better and were more inclined to leave their firms than employees sent on functional assignments. Kraimer et al. (2009) found developmental expatriate assignments to be positively related to career advancement.

Proposition 3 – Individual characteristics like age, gender, family status, culture, and personality may moderate repatriates' perceptions of organizational support practices. Individual characteristics may influence the repatriate's adjustment to home. Adjustment to home may in turn be related to turnover intentions.

Proposition 4 – Characteristics of the global assignment (length of assignment, number of assignments, and type of assignment) may influence repatriate adjustment, work expectations, and perceived external job opportunities. Figure 3 shows the proposed repatriate adjustment and turnover model.

## CONCLUSION

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

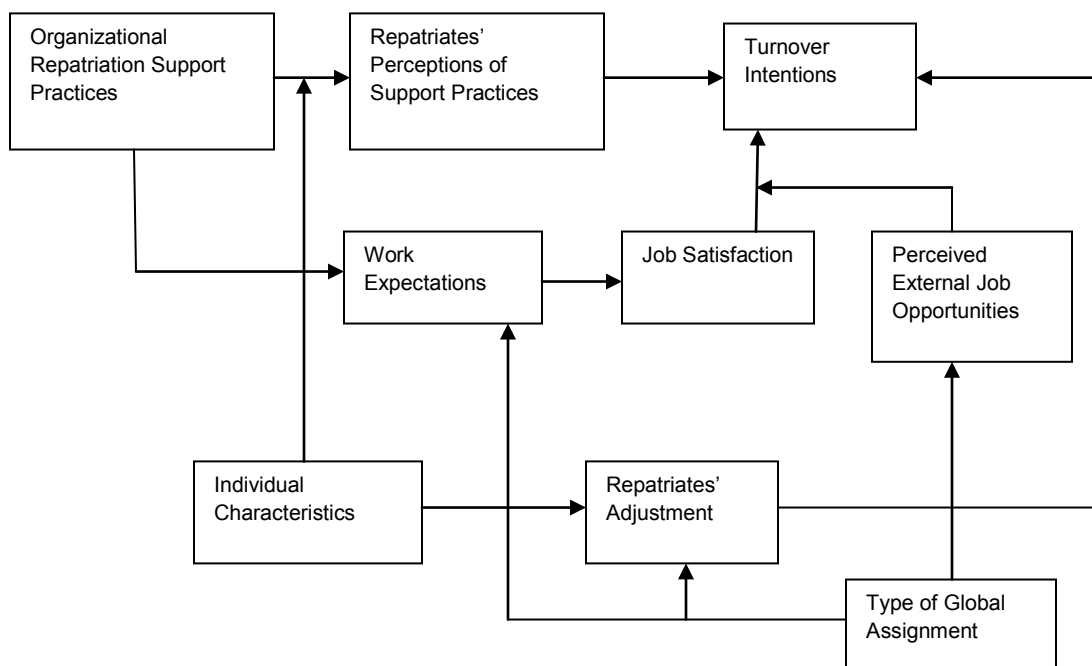
While this research contributes to the repatriation turnover literature by providing an in-depth literature review and proposing a model based on research findings, there are limitations to our research and the proposed model. The model relies on previous research findings that primarily surveyed repatriates who continued to work in the international companies that originally sent them abroad. Existing repatriation research uses the variable "intent to leave" as a surrogate for turnover, focusing on repatriates still employed by their companies and neglecting to survey repatriates who have already left their organizations. In addition, the model incorporates research where data collection occurred at one point in time. To overcome these limitations, we recommend that future research incorporate a longitudinal design surveying both repatriates who remain with their companies and those who have already left.



There may be bias in repatriates’ answers when asked about their desire to leave their firms. Asking employees about their intent to leave introduces an inherent level of uncertainty—employees may not be forthright in their responses. What was the intent to leave for the employee before the foreign assignment? Is it possible that some employees were not satisfied with their jobs and the firm even before they left for the assignment? Employees may use international assignments as a means of gaining experience in order to move to another job with another company upon return. Conversely, employees could also intend to leave their companies before the foreign assignment and decide to stay when they return. We recommend that future research incorporate a longitudinal design measuring intent to leave prior to the international assignment, and upon return from the international assignment.

The proposed model incorporates research that studied repatriates in a limited number of countries and tended to utilize small sample sizes. This limitation affects the generalizability of the model. Research upon which the model is based should be replicated in other countries and, if possible, increase the number of repatriates surveyed. Our review of the literature indicates that not all cultural factors seem to matter equally. Future research should better identify the relative importance of cultural factors. Other individual differences like personality characteristics of repatriates need to be studied to identify the most relevant factors.

Figure 3: Proposed Repatriate Adjustment and Turnover Model



*This figure depicts the proposed model of the causes and effects of repatriate adjustment and turnover intentions.*

The model does not address the characteristics of the repatriate’s firm. For example, do employees of large firms enjoy greater mobility and, therefore, are able to move more easily. Do some companies have a more global mindset and are more apt to provide support services for repatriates? Future research should focus on multiple companies and separate industry leaders from smaller firms.

The antecedents of repatriation are worthy of exploring in more detail. In addition to our recommendations to address the limitations of current research and the proposed model, future research might address the following questions: 1.) Are repatriates' perceptions of their organizations' support practices more important than the actual support practices themselves? 2.) Which support practices are perceived by repatriates as being most critical to their adjustment upon return home? Do individual differences like age, marital and family status, culture, and gender moderate perceptions of support practices? 3.) How do cultural differences affect repatriate adjustment and perceptions of organizational support practices? Is employee movement between certain sets of countries more difficult than others are? For example, is it more difficult to go from a collectivist culture to an individualistic culture or vice versa? Do employees from collectivist cultures experience greater repatriation adjustment problems than employees from individualistic cultures? 4.) How does the personality of the employee affect repatriation adjustment? Further research is needed to determine the impact of proactive personality characteristics and behaviors on repatriation adjustment and turnover. 5.) How do organizational support practices impact repatriate work expectations prior to and after returning home? What support practices are critical in creating accurate repatriate work expectations? And 6.) In what way do the characteristics of the global assignment moderate repatriate adjustment, work expectations, job satisfaction, perceived external job opportunities, and turnover intentions?

Based on our review of the literature we recommend the following: First, presumably, companies send employees with the greatest potential on foreign assignments for development. These employees are, therefore, among the organizations most valuable employees. Thus, because the risk of repatriate turnover is high, the most fundamental decision companies need to make is whether to send employees for developmental assignments at all. One reason, companies might not be utilizing the repatriate's newly acquired talents may be because there is no need for the skills that employees acquire in foreign assignments. Companies need to understand "global acumen" and determine whether it is needed in a particular job; furthermore, they should decide whether employees could gain global acumen *without moving to another job or country*, avoiding the problems of repatriation altogether. Another possibility is that employees obtain the wrong skills in the foreign assignments. Employers need to let employees know what they are supposed to learn in their foreign assignments. Assignments should be chosen to provide employees with experiences and exposure that will allow them to gain the skills and knowledge desired by the organization. When employees return, organizations should ask employees what they learned so that their newly acquired skills are used appropriately.

Second, when companies decide to send employees on a foreign assignment, they need to provide adequate support during both the expatriation and repatriation processes. The following practices, in particular, seem to be critical to repatriate adjustment and satisfaction with the repatriation process: having a good communication system in place prior to, during, and after the international assignment; providing employee training prior to, during, and after the international assignment; and providing career planning. Use of update emails or newsletters may be a good way of keeping the lines of communication open and having the expatriate feel a part of the home office. Communications systems, employee training, and career planning sessions should focus on creating accurate work expectations. Companies should clearly articulate support practices provided to employees prior to, during, and after the international assignment. Managing employee perceptions of organizational support practices may be just as important as providing the support practices. Above all, companies need to make sure that they articulate appreciation for global assignments and the acquisition of international skills and experience.

Third, organizations should provide repatriates with jobs upon return home that have suitable content and make use of the skills and experience acquired by the employee during the international assignment. Providing adequate career planning prior to, during, and after the international assignment can help to ensure that the employee's work expectations are met upon return home and should decrease employee

intentions to pursue external job opportunities. It may be appropriate for organizations to develop systems that ensure expatriates have an idea of the position they will be returning to prior to being sent on the international assignment.

Fourth, periodic trips back to the home office to provide training and orientation to the home office staff about the practices of the foreign market could help facilitate knowledge transfer, and show appreciation for the new status and skills of the expatriate. These trips would also allow the expatriate to continue to be a part of the home office.

Fifth, organizations may want to consider varying support practices with the employee's marital and family status, gender, age, culture, and personality. Attention should be paid to not only supporting the repatriate, but also his/her spouse and family. Sixth, organizations may want to consider taking extra measures to ensure the retention of employees returning from developmental assignments as these employees may be more inclined to leave their firms than employees sent on functional assignments.

Seventh, when selecting employees to send on international assignments, companies may want to consider (and test for) proactive personality characteristics as part of the selection process. These characteristics include extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, emotional stability, and agreeableness. Eighth, employee training prior to, during, and after the international assignment should include encouraging the following proactive behaviors: social networking and network seeking.

Repatriate adjustment and turnover continue to be problematic for organizations despite a considerable body of research devoted to studying these problems. This paper contributes to the repatriate adjustment and turnover literature by reviewing the literature and presenting a model incorporating research findings. The proposed model suggests that repatriate adjustment and turnover intentions are related to the following key factors: employee expectations upon repatriation, employee perceptions of organizational repatriation support practices, and employee perceptions of the appropriateness of both job content upon return and the availability of external career opportunities based on the employee's new found expertise.

Our review of the literature suggests there is a gap between employee expectations and reality—in particular, the reality the repatriate experiences upon return home. On the one hand, organizations claim to value international assignments as a way to build a pool of global knowledge and increase the international skills of their employees. On the other hand, many organizations place repatriates in jobs upon their return home that do not utilize the global skills and knowledge acquired during the assignment. In addition, organizations may not have the support practices in place to help repatriates and their families adjust to returning home. There appears to be a disconnect between the reasons stated by companies for sending employees on international assignments (organizational learning and acquisition of global skills) and the actual transfer of knowledge and utilization of newly acquired global expertise upon the expatriate's return. Halcrow (1999, p. 42) suggests that expatriates may in fact be a "squandered" resource. In addition to proposing a model incorporating repatriation research and providing suggestions for future study, this paper offers recommendations to practitioners for closing the gap between expatriate expectations and reality, and better utilizing repatriates as a valuable organizational resource.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, N.J. (1981). Re-entry: Managing cross-cultural transitions. *Group and Organizational Studies*, 6, 341-356.
- Baruch, Y., Steele, D.J., & Quantrill, G.A. (2002). Management of expatriation and repatriation for novice global players. *International Journal of Manpower*, 23, 7, 659-671.

Black, J.S. (1991). Coming home: The relationship of expatriate expectations with repatriation adjustment and job performance. *The Academy of Management Proceedings*, 95-100.

Black, J.S., & Gregersen, H.B. (1991). When Yankee comes home: Factors related to expatriate and spouse repatriation adjustment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22, 4, 671-698.

Black, J.S., Gregersen, H.B., & Mendenhall, M.E. (1992). *Global assignments*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers.

Black, J.S., Gregersen, H.B., & Mendenhall, L.K. (1999). *Globalizing people through international assignment*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, Inc.

Bolino, M.C. (2007). Expatriate assignments and intra-organizational career success: Implications for individuals and organizations. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38, 819-835.

Bonache, J. (2005). Job satisfaction among expatriates, repatriates, and domestic employees. *Personnel Review*, 34, 1, 110-124.

Bonache, J., Brewster, C., & Suutari, V. (2001). Expatriation: A developing research agenda. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 43, 1, 45-168.

Bossard, A.B., & Peterson, R.B. (2005). The repatriate experience as seen by American expatriates. *Journal of World Business*, 40, 9-28.

Brislin, R.W., & Van Buren, H. (1974). Can they go home again? *International Education and Cultural Exchange*, 9, 19-24,

Carpenter, M.A., Sanders, W.G. & Gregersen, H.B. (2000). International assignment experience at the top can make a bottom-line difference. *Human Resource Management*, 39(2/3), 277-285.

Chi, S.S., & Chen, S. (2007). Perceived psychological contract fulfillment and job attitudes among repatriates. *International Journal of Manpower*, 28, 6, 474-488.

Dowling, P.J., & Shuler, R.S. (1990). *International dimensions of human resource management*. Boston: PWA/Kent.

Feldman, D.C., & Thomas, D.C. (1992). Career management issues facing expatriates. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 23, 271-294.

Feldman, D.C., & Thompson, H.B. (1993). Expatriation, repatriation, domestic geographical relocation: An empirical investigation of adjustment to new job assignments. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 24, 507-529.

Forster, N. (2000). The myth of the international manager. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11, 1, 126-142.

Gomez-Mejia, L. & Balkin, D.B. (1983). The determinants of managerial satisfaction with the expatriation and repatriation process. *Journal of Management Development*, 6, 1, 7-17.

- Gregersen, H.B., & Black, J.S. (1996). Multiple commitments upon repatriation: The Japanese experience. *Journal of Management*, 22, 2, 209-229.
- Gregersen, H.B., & Stroh, L.K. (1997). Coming home to the Arctic cold: Antecedents to Finish expatriate and spouse repatriation adjustment. *Personnel Psychology*, 50, 3, 635-655.
- Griffeth, R.W., & Hom, P.W. (1988). A comparison of different conceptualizations of perceived alternatives in turnover research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 9, 103-111.
- Halcrow, A. (1999). Expats: The squandered resource. *Workforce*, 78, 4, 42-48.
- Hammer, M., Hart, W., & Rogan, R. (1998). Can you go home again? An analysis of the repatriation of corporate managers and spouses. *Management International Review*, 38, 1, 67-86.
- Harris, P.R., & Moran, R.T. (2000). *Managing cultural differences: Leadership strategies for a new world of business*. Houston, TX: Gulf Professional Publishing.
- Harvey, M.G. (1982). The other side of foreign assignments: Dealing with the repatriation dilemma. *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 17, 1, 53-59.
- Harvey, M.G. (1989). Repatriation of corporate executives: An empirical study. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 20, 1, 131-145.
- Harvey, M.G., & Novicevic, M.M. (2006). The evolution from repatriation of managers in MNEs to patriation in global organizations. In G.K. Stahl & I. Bjorkman (Eds.), *Handbook of research in international human resource management* (pp. 323-343). London: Edward Elgar.
- Hendrix, W.H., Robbins, T., & Summers, T.P. (1999). Effects of procedural and distributive justice on factors predictive of turnover. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 13, 4, 611-632.
- Hulin, C.L., Roznowski, M. & Hachiya, D. (1985). Alternative opportunities and withdrawal decisions: Empirical and theoretical discrepancies and an integration. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97, 233-250.
- Hurn, B.J. (1999). Repatriation: The toughest assignment of all. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 31, 6, 224-228.
- Jasswella, A., Connolly, T., & Slojkowski, L. (2004). Issues of effective repatriation: A model and managerial implications. *SAM Advanced Managerial Journal*, 69, 2, 38-46.
- Joinson, C. (1998). Why HR managers need to think globally. *HR Magazine*, April, 2-7.
- Kraimer, M.L., Shaffer, M.A., & Bolino, M.C. (2009). The influence of expatriate and repatriate experiences on career advancement and repatriate retention. *Human Resource Management*, 48, 1, 27-47.
- Lazarova, M., & Caligiuri, P. (2001). Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices. *Journal of World Business*, 36, 4, 389-402.
- Lazarova, M. & Tarique, I. (2005). Knowledge transfer upon repatriation. *Journal of World Business*, 40, 4, 361-373.

- Lee, H., & Liu, C. (2007). An examination of factors affecting repatriates' turnover intentions. *International Journal of Manpower*, 28, 2, 122-134.
- Liu, C. (2005). The effects of repatriates' overseas assignment experiences on turnover intentions. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, 7, 1, 124-129.
- March, J., & Simon, H. (1958). *Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Mathieu, J., & Zajac, D. (1990). A review and meta-analysis of the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of organizational commitment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 171-194.
- Mobley, W.H. (1977). Intermediate linkages in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 62, 237-240.
- Mowday, R.T., Porter, L.W., & Steers, R.M. (1982). *Employee-organization linkage: The psychology of commitment, absenteeism, and turnover*. New York: Academic Press.
- O'Sullivan, S.L. (2002). The protean approach to managing repatriation transitions. *International Journal of Manpower*, 23, 7, 635-648.
- Paik, Y., Segaud, B., & Malinowski, C. (2002). How to improve repatriation management. *International Journal of Manpower*, 23, 7, 635-648.
- Paik, Y., Segaud, B., & Malinowski, C. (2003). How to improve repatriation management. *International Journal of Manpower*. 23, 7, 635-675.
- Parker, P., & Inkson, K. (1999). New forms of career: The challenge to human resource management. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 37, 1, 76-85.
- Peltonen, T. (1997). Facing rankings from the past: A tournament perspective on repatriate career mobility. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8, 1, 107-123.
- Pickard, J. (1999). Repatriation: An expectation-based approach. Unpublished PhD thesis, Cranfield University, Cranfield, UK.
- Rushing, K., & Kleiner, B.H. (2003). New developments in executive relocation practices in multinational corporations. *Management Research News*, 26, 2-4.
- Stahl, G.T., Chua, C.H., Caligiuri, P., Cerdin, J., & Taniguchi, M. (2009). Predictors of turnover intentions in learning-driven and demand-driven international assignments: The role of repatriation concerns, satisfaction with company support, and perceived career advancement opportunities. *Human Resource Management*, 48, 1, 89-109.
- Stroh, L.K. (1995). Predicting turnover among repatriates: Can organizations affect retention rates? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6, 443-456.
- Stroh, L.K., & Caligiuri, P.M. (1998). Increasing global competitiveness through effective people management. *Journal of World Business*, 33, 1, 1-16.

Stroh, L.K., Gregersen, H., & Black, S. (1998). Closing the gap: Expectations versus reality among repatriates. *Journal of World Business*, Summer, 111-124.

Suutari, V., & Brewster, C. (2003). Repatriation: Empirical evidence from a longitudinal study of careers and expectations among Finnish expatriates. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14, 7, 1132-1151.

Swaak, R. (1997). Repatriation: A weak link in global HR. *HR Focus*, 74, 4, 29-31.

Tung, R.L. (1987). Expatriate assignments: Enhancing success and minimizing failure. *Academy of Management Executive*, 1, 2, 117-126.

Tung, R.L. (1998). A contingency framework of selection and training of expatriates revisited. *Human Resource Management Review*, 8, 1, 23-38.

Vermond, K. (2001). Expatriates come home. *Management*, 75, 7, 30-34.

Vidal, E.S., Valle, R.S., & Aragon, I.B. (2007a). The adjustment process of Spanish repatriates: A case study. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 8, 1396-1417.

Vidal, E.S., Valle, R.S., & Aragon, I.B. (2007b). Antecedents of repatriates' job satisfaction and its influence on turnover intentions: Evidence from Spanish repatriated managers. *Journal of Business Research*, 60, 1272-1281.

Vidal, E.S., Valle, R.S., & Aragon, I.B. (2008). International workers' satisfaction with the repatriation process. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19, 9, 1683-1702.

Welch, D.E. (2003). Globalization of staff movements: Beyond cultural adjustment. *Management International Review*, 43, 2, 149-169.

Zvara, P., & Singh, G. (2004). Home sweet home: Dealing with return to a home country after an assignment abroad. *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management*, 4, 2, 215-222.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The authors acknowledge the helpful comments of two anonymous reviewers.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Pamela L. Cox is a Professor of Management at SUNY-Oswego. She can be contacted at 257 Rich Hall, SUNY-Oswego, Oswego, N.Y., 13126, [pamela.cox@oswego.edu](mailto:pamela.cox@oswego.edu), 315-312-2532.

Raihan H. Khan is an Associate Professor of Management at SUNY-Oswego. He can be contacted at 250 Rich Hall, SUNY-Oswego, Oswego, N.Y., 13126, [raihan.khan@oswego.edu](mailto:raihan.khan@oswego.edu), 315-312-2527.

Kimberly A. Armani is the Director of the SUNY-Oswego Metro Center. She can be contacted at 2 Clinton Square, Suite 15, Syracuse, N.Y., 13202, [Kimberly.armani@oswego.edu](mailto:Kimberly.armani@oswego.edu), 315-399-4100.

