

**FACTORS AFFECTING REPATRIATE JOB SATISFACTION
AND JOB ATTACHMENT FOR JAPANESE MANAGERS**

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ABSTRACT

With the well-established presence of the global marketplace, the need for managers who are globally competent and have knowledge about global business practices, cultures and networks is increasing. Researchers have shown that firms can acquire such knowledge through their human resources, particularly by building a cadre of repatriate managers who have been on international assignments. While it may seem obvious to assert that firms must retain these repatriates if they are to be an important internal resource for remaining globally competitive, prior studies have shown that most firms do not effectively reintegrate their repatriates, who then become dissatisfied and often leave, taking their human capital with them. Researchers have also suggested that such dissatisfaction often stems from both limited employee self-adjustment capabilities and inadequate HR practices that could otherwise help repatriates adjust and find a good fit with the firm when they return home. However, much of the research in this area has been anecdotal or based on simplistic empirical research. Consequently, this study strives to present a more rigorous look at the effect of a firm's HR practices and the repatriates' self-adjustment on their job satisfaction and job attachment. Results confirmed our hypotheses that both HR practices and the level of repatriate self-adjustment are positively associated with satisfaction and attachment.

Keywords: Repatriates, HR Repatriation Practices, Self-Adjustment, Job Satisfaction, Job Attachment

FACTORS AFFECTING REPATRIATE JOB SATISFACTION AND JOB ATTACHMENT FOR JAPANESE MANAGERS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a growing body of literature has been pointing to the conclusion that firms can acquire the knowledge needed to compete in the global economy by accessing the knowledge of managers who have had international assignment experiences (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001; Oddou, 2003; Osland, 2000). Oddou's (2003) review of the expatriate literature concluded that international assignees acquired valuable international management skills and key personal assets (such as greater cognitive complexity, greater openness, nonjudgmentalness, mindful communication, tolerance of ambiguity, self confidence, etc.) that can significantly contribute to their firms' successful international efforts. Additionally, Carpenter, Sanders and Gregersen (2001) found that top management teams with international assignment experience were able to lead their firms to better performance than similar teams without such experience. Researchers have also identified other benefits, such as increased global strategy implementation at the business unit level, that accrue to organizations as a consequence of employing managers who have had international assignment experiences (Roth, 1995; Roth, Schweiger & Morrison, 1991; Sambharya, 1996).

Surprisingly, the empirical research on international assignees, though relatively scant, uniformly indicates the strong tendency of firms to neglect repatriates upon their return from overseas assignments (Adler, 1981; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Tung, 1981). Such neglect leads to repatriate adjustment challenges, job dissatisfaction, and a lack of commitment, which, in turn, have generated relatively higher levels of repatriate attrition rates (Black, 1991; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Gregersen, 1992; Harvey, 1982).

This juxtaposition of the strategic business value of international assignments on the one hand, with the significant negative experienced outcomes of repatriation on the other, should focus our attention on the need to better understand how employee adjustment tendencies and employer human resource (HR) practices influence repatriates' affective reactions, such as job satisfaction and job attachment. We are particularly interested in factors contributing to successful repatriation and define successful repatriates as those employees who have readjusted satisfactorily, are satisfied with their work circumstances, and feel a sense of commitment to their work and employer following re-entry. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to extend our understanding of the variables affecting repatriate job satisfaction and job attachment and to explore how supportive HR practices and employee self-adjustment tendencies (discussed in detail below) may influence repatriates' levels of job satisfaction and job attachment.

In addition, most of what we currently know about repatriation is based on research that has placed historical emphasis on North American and European managers (Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001; Forster & Johnsen, 1996), while relatively little is known about Japanese repatriates, even though Japanese multinational corporations represent a sizeable world presence and tend to employ larger numbers of expats than their European and North American counterparts (Gregersen & Black, 1996). Therefore, this study also seeks to extend our knowledge of repatriation by focusing on the under-represented research segment of the Japanese repatriate manager population.

THE ROLE OF HR REPATRIATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

An important consideration in obtaining benefits from sending managers on international assignments is whether the benefits derived from those overseas assignments subsequently become integrated into the firm's storehouse of knowledge and capabilities. Employees with

valuable skills or knowledge relating to a firm's global markets and business operations must be retained if firms are to reap the full benefits of their international assignments. Integration of international experience-based knowledge and skill, therefore, would arguably depend in large measure on a firm's specific HR policies and practices relating to general knowledge management practices. When effective, such HR policies and practices should help to enhance repatriate satisfaction and attachment, resulting in higher rates of retention. Unfortunately, the empirical evidence demonstrates that firms struggle with reintegrating their international assignees following repatriation (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Brett & Stroh, 1992; Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 1998), thereby losing this valuable asset.

Concern over the affective reactions of repatriates is not new and is consistent with recent research focusing on the broader links between HR practices and firm performance in general (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Delery & Doty, 1996). The growing evidence from the general organizational behavior and HR management research literature has shown an enduring, robust and persistent relationship between such affective employee constructs as job satisfaction and job attachment on the one hand, and tangible outcomes such as employee turnover and firm performance, on the other (Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995; Koys, 2001; Ostroff, 1992; Schneider, Hanges, Smith & Salvaggio, 2003). In one specific study, Cavanaugh and Noe (1999) found that HR practices designed to make employees feel as though they are being taken care of by the firm were directly related to employee job satisfaction and intent to remain with the firm. However, the Cavanaugh and Noe (1999) study considered only domestic employees, and we know of no other empirical research that has addressed the relationship between HR practices and *international assignee* job satisfaction and job attachment.

The absence of empirical research on international assignee job satisfaction and job attachment should not be surprising. In the case of repatriates, the relationship is perhaps more complex than in a simple domestic context because there are likely to be stronger implicit expectations that, in turn, lead to a greater probability of dissatisfaction and subsequent lowered attachment on the part of the returning employee. Repatriates tend to assume their firms understand the challenges they have faced and typically expect that their employers will easily acknowledge the personal and professional growth and development they experienced in their overseas assignment (Osland, 1995; 2000). But when repatriates find that these expectations go unmet, job satisfaction suffers and many employees leave (Black & Gregersen, 1999). One of the most common complaints of repatriates is that they are not appropriately placed in a position that fits their newly acquired competencies (Baughn, 1995; Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 1998). Conversely, Dean, Ferris and Konstans (1988) found that when the job expectations of repatriates were met, employees felt more committed to their work and to the firm. Thus, job-fit issues have been related in prior research to repatriates' affective reactions to work and are, of course, also a reflection of a firm's HR management practices.

In summary, although a sizable body of empirical research has examined the link between a firm's HR practices and the affective reactions of its domestic employees, this research has not been extended to consider the direct effects of a firm's HR policies and practices on repatriate job attachment and job satisfaction. To fill this gap, our study examines the relationship between these outcomes and the firm's HR policies and practices. Specifically, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Repatriates' perceptions of supportive company HR practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job attachment.

Hypothesis 1b: Repatriates' perceptions of supportive company HR practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job satisfaction.

HR practices and policies come in many varieties. For example, some are strategic while others are more general (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). HR policies that are strategic have been described as relating to the fit between HR practices and the firm's overall business strategy (Bird & Beechler, 1998), whereas those that are more general have been described as relating to practices that are systematic or comprehensive with regard to a specific function or set of functions in the firm (Ferris, Arthur, Berkson, Kaplan, Harrell-Cook & Frink, 1998). Thus, strategic HR repatriation policies would consist of, among other things, activities that address career-pathing types of issues, such as trying to place repatriates in the best position to maximize the positive impact on the firm as well as the subsequent growth and development of the repatriated employee. On the other hand, general HR repatriation policies would consist of procedures for job placement, reorientation programs, and other such mechanisms that aim to ease repatriates back into the firm and help them navigate the significant and widely recognized challenges in the re-entry process (Osland, 1995; 2000). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Repatriates' perceptions of strategic HR repatriation practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job attachment.

Hypothesis 2b: Repatriates' perceptions of general HR repatriation practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job attachment.

Hypothesis 3a: Repatriates' perceptions of strategic HR repatriation practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b: Repatriates' perceptions of general HR repatriation practices will be correlated positively with their levels of job satisfaction.

THE ROLE OF REPATRIATE SELF-ADJUSTMENT

In addition to the influence of HR policies and practices on repatriate job satisfaction and job attachment, a relationship between repatriate self-adjustment and those same outcome variables is also likely (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992). HR practices may indeed help create better job-fit situations (e.g., in the sense of helping improve career readjustment) where the capabilities of the repatriate are better matched to position responsibilities. Even more, if the repatriate perceives this as a purposeful attempt by the firm to be strategic with respect to the repatriate's new capabilities, then such an HR practice could well lead to increased satisfaction with, and a heightened attachment to, the firm. Nevertheless, those same HR policies might not necessarily lead to effective personal readjustment after re-entry.

Self-adjustment has been presented in the literature as multivariate, and consists of the dimensions of work adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989). Work adjustment refers to the need for employees to adjust to changes specific to the workplace, such as the type of supervision, the amount of discretion to perform the work, the methods used to get work done, and so on. Interaction adjustment refers to the need for employees to adjust to changes in the social environment, such as a new communication style or language, or possibly new social customs that change the nature of the interpersonal dynamics (Gregersen & Black, 1996). General adjustment refers to the need for employees to adjust to the general living and cultural environment outside of work. Baughn (1995) also points out that self-adjustment is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the work environment, the socio-cultural environment and family factors. Further, researchers have found that for

expatriate assignments, self-adjustment to the new environment is related to expatriate satisfaction as well as improved task and relationship performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2004). Consequently, we expect employee self-adjustment to have a direct effect on the outcomes of repatriate job satisfaction and job attachment, and therefore propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: Repatriates' levels of self-adjustment upon repatriation will correlate positively with their levels of job attachment.

Hypothesis 4b: Repatriates' levels of self-adjustment upon repatriation will correlate positively with their levels of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5a: Overall company HR practices and self-adjustment upon repatriation will have incremental predictive effects on job attachment beyond what is predicted by either one alone.

Hypothesis 5b: Overall company HR practices and self-adjustment upon repatriation will have incremental predictive effects on job satisfaction beyond what is predicted by either one alone.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Subjects for this study consisted of 305 Japanese repatriate managers from five large Japanese multinational organizations. The subjects had all returned home after a one-to-two year first time overseas assignment. For all five organizations this was a typical assignment for employees at this particular career stage. Three of the organizations were in manufacturing (i.e., chemical, automobile, and automotive parts), one was in transportation and logistics, and the final was a services-oriented enterprise. Mean reported age was 32.1 years. All subjects reported

some college experience with 86% having completed a 4-year college degree and the remainder having completed “at least some college.” Middle management positions were held by 27% of subjects, 26% held entry-level managerial/supervisory positions, and 43% held non-supervisory/hourly position. The sample was almost entirely male, at 98.7%.

Measurement

Survey. The survey items used in the study were developed specifically for this research project (i.e., this was not part of any ongoing company employee evaluation process or other data collection activities). Items consisted of survey questions measuring demographics, company HR policies and practices, level of employee self-adjustment, and employee job satisfaction and job attachment. All questionnaire items were translated by a native Japanese speaker from the original English version and then back-translated by one of the authors who is fluent in Japanese. Subjects were asked to read each statement and then indicate a response on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree” (with a “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” response in the middle).

Administration. Between four months to two years after returning from their overseas assignment, subjects completed the survey, thus indicating perceptions of their experiences with their employer’s HR policies and practices, their level of self-adjustment, their psychological job attachment, and their level of job satisfaction. This period of time--four months to two years--since returning from the overseas assignment was deemed as acceptable since it is consistent with recommendations in the literature and since it also gave repatriates time to experience both the re-entry process and to develop a more balanced perspective and sense of affective reaction to that experience (Osland, 1995; 2000).

Outcome Variables

The outcome variables of job satisfaction and job attachment were computed by averaging across the relevant survey items. For job satisfaction, 15 items were used to capture employee satisfaction across the variety of job elements typically measured in general job satisfaction inventories (e.g., satisfaction with the work itself, with opportunities for growth and development, with recognition, and so on; Locke, 1976). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .90, and sample questions included such items as “I enjoy the tasks and duties I perform in my current job very much,” and “My chances to move into a better position in the company are quite good.” Job attachment was measured by nine items (coefficient alpha was .77). Sample attachment questions included such items as “I feel a strong desire to do my best possible work on my job” and “I always go beyond my basic duties and give my maximum effort to do my job as well as possible.”

Antecedent Variables

HR Repatriation Policies and Practices. Each firm’s HR repatriation policies and practices were measured using 11 items from the survey with a coefficient alpha of .86. Questions were designed so as to assess the degree to which subjects perceived the company as having in place supportive HR policies and practices that would serve to guide the management of their expatriate assignment and repatriation upon its conclusion. Of these 11 items, six were used to measure strategic HR practices (alpha = .83) and five were used to measure general HR practices (alpha = .75). Sample items for strategic HR practices included “The company showed visible signs that my international experience would be valuable for its future overseas business strategy,” while sample items for general HR practices included “The company provided a reorientation program for me on my new duties and responsibilities upon my return.”

Self-adjustment. A total of 14 survey items were written roughly equally across the three self-adjustment areas of interaction, general and work adjustment. The coefficient reliability alpha for the overall 14 item composite was .82. Sample questions included such items as “I find I can talk to my old friends and colleagues the same way I did before my overseas assignment” and “Since returning home, I’ve sometimes felt more stress related to my work demands and expectations [reverse coded].”

RESULTS

Results of the data analyses are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The pattern of relationships in Table 1 demonstrates strong support for all Hypotheses 1a through 4b, with correlations ranging from the lowest of $r = .34$ (for Hypothesis 2a) to the highest of $r = .71$ (for Hypothesis 1b). In addition to looking at simple correlations, we also performed hierarchical regression analyses and noted the incremental changes in R^2 (see Table 2). Specifically, when we modeled the explained variance for job attachment by entering general HR practices in step 1, and then added strategic HR practices in step 2, results showed that strategic HR explained only a minimal incremental change in R^2 of .01 (see Table 2, Model 1a, step 2). When we reversed the steps (that is, when strategic HR practices was entered in step 1 and general HR practices in step 2), we found that general HR practices explained job attachment variance by an incremental change in R^2 of .08 beyond strategic HR practices (see Table 2, Model 1b, step 2). This provided additional support for Hypotheses 2a and 2b, with especially strong support for the capacity of general HR practices to explain job attachment beyond strategic HR practices.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were also tested using the same regression approach as described above for Hypotheses 2a and 2b. That is, in addition to examining Table 1 for the zero-order correlations, we also modeled the explained variance for job satisfaction through hierarchical

regression analyses and noted the incremental changes in R^2 when both general and strategic HR practices were entered in alternating steps (see Table 2, Models 2a and 2b). In this case, general and strategic HR practices each provided strong incremental prediction of the variance in job satisfaction, with general HR practices adding an additional change in R^2 of .08 beyond strategic HR practices, and strategic HR practices adding an additional change in R^2 of 0.11 beyond general HR practices. We therefore conclude that strong support was found for Hypotheses 2a and 2b due to the incremental contributions of both general and strategic HR practices for predicting repatriate employee job satisfaction.

Hypotheses 5a and 5b were also tested using hierarchical regression analyses to model the effects of overall HR repatriation practices and employee self-adjustment on both job attachment and job satisfaction, in turn. When we predicted job attachment with repatriate employee self-adjustment entered first and overall HR practices entered second, we found that overall HR practices added only a modest change in R^2 of 0.02 (see Table 2, Model 3a, step 2), whereas when the order was reversed (i.e., self-adjustment was entered after overall HR practices), we found an incremental change in R^2 of 0.12 (see Table 2, Model 3b, step 2). On the other hand, when we predicted job satisfaction with repatriate employee self-adjustment entered first and overall HR practices entered second, we found that overall HR practices brought a very large incremental change in R^2 of 0.18 (see Table 2, Model 4a, step 2), and when the order was reversed (i.e., self-adjustment was entered after overall HR practices), we again found a large incremental change in R^2 of 0.13 (see Table 2, Model 4b, step 2). Thus, we found the relative incremental predictive effects to be quite high for both overall HR practices and repatriate employee self-adjustment on job satisfaction. We also found the relative incremental predictive effects to be high for repatriate employee self-adjustment on job attachment, but only minimally

so for overall HR practices when predicting job attachment beyond repatriate employee self-adjustment.

DISCUSSION

Beyond findings of statistical significance and support for our hypotheses, this study raises a number of points that warrant discussion. Of particular interest is the finding that repatriate employee self-adjustment played a more influential role in explaining job attachment than did overall HR practices. This finding directs our attention to the importance of recognizing the centrality of key employee traits in the repatriation event. Nonetheless, HR policies and practices did play a prominent role in explaining successful repatriation transition, because when we added it to our regression equations the result was significantly higher levels of repatriate job satisfaction. Still, we are quick to note that individual employee's self-adjustment capabilities were found to play a more central role in determining whether or not heightened job attachment was experienced.

Beyond our findings of theoretical interest, the results of this study also have practical implications for managers. For example, our data clearly showed that the development and implementation of supportive HR policies and practices did have an impact on how satisfied and attached the repatriates felt in our study. Moreover, in light of the well-established evidence of higher attrition rates among repatriates, our findings suggest that managers should carefully and proactively consider the mix of both general and strategic policies that they have in place if they wish to have a positive impact on retention of their repatriate employees.

Several concerns for this study should be noted. One limitation is that our sample was drawn exclusively from a single country, Japan. While this is laudable from the point of view that it moves away from our traditional reliance on North American and Western European

subjects, it is nonetheless possible that our subjects are not similar to repatriates of other nationalities. If additional research studies could control for repatriate nationality or firm nationality by matching samples in other countries, this would help strengthen our findings and is clearly an important direction for future research.

A second limitation of our study is that the variables examined in this research were considered only from the repatriates' subjective perspective. In one sense, this was very appropriate because job satisfaction and job attachment are personal affective constructs. That is, the rationale for our self-report data collection approach is straightforward: it reflects the phenomenon that individuals affectively perceive their firm's impact on their re-entry and how that perceived impact then influences perceptions of job satisfaction and job attachment. At the same time, however, having the same person assess both independent and dependent variables in the same study can result in an upward bias of the observed effect sizes due to common method variance. For example, a dissatisfied repatriate might be disposed to assign lower ratings to his employer's HR policies and practices simply because he is dissatisfied. Ideally, it would be more desirable to have an objective evaluation of a firm's HR policies and practices, as well as a possibly more objective measure of repatriate self-adjustment. However, obtaining such objective assessments is an extraordinarily difficult challenge for international management research, and the additional expenditure of time and effort may not yield significantly better results. For example, after reviewing more than 20 years of accumulated research Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2004) concluded that single-source and multiple-source data gathering methods obtained very similar results. In fact, they concluded that results from multiple-source data gathering methods in some cases showed even more pronounced effects in the same direction as single-source methods, suggesting that common method variance bias could actually tend toward

more conservative conclusions in some situations. In any case, this is another potential area of future research.

A final limitation of this study relates to the larger issue of theoretical conceptualization. The larger theoretical model on which this study is based argues for a set of relationships extending from HR practices and self-adjustment to job satisfaction and job attachment, and from there to the presumption of heightened individual and firm performance. Our findings clearly indicated a strong relationship between the former set of relationships. The latter set of relationships--between job satisfaction/job attachment and individual/firm performance--were not addressed in this study. Given our finding that self-adjustment played a more prominent role than overall HR practices in repatriate job attachment, future research should seek to further delineate the relationship between repatriate satisfaction and attachment as well as their impact on both expat and firm performance. Clearly, this is a critical question for future research to address.

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for All Variables

Study Variables	Mean	SD	Intercorrelations				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall HR Repatriation Practices	2.83	0.66					
2. Strategic HR Repatriation Practices	2.79	0.71	.92				
3. General HR Repatriation Practices	2.89	0.75	.89	.63			
4. Employee Self-Adjustment	3.31	0.47	.51	.46	.46		
5. Repatriates' Job Satisfaction	3.16	0.55	.71	.65	.63	.67	
6. Repatriates' Job Attachment	3.10	0.60	.42	.34	.42	.52	.63

Note: $n = 305$. All correlations are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 2. Regression Analyses for Predicting Affective Outcomes via HR Practices and Employee Self-Adjustment

	R^2	ΔR^2	β^a
Model 1a: Job Attachment			
Step 1. General HR Practices	0.18		0.35**
Step 2. Strategic HR Practices	0.19	0.01	0.12*
Model 1b: Job Attachment			
Step 1. Strategic HR Practices	0.11		0.12*
Step 2. General HR Practices	0.19	0.08	0.35**
Model 2a: Job Satisfaction			
Step 1. General HR Practices	0.39		0.36**
Step 2. Strategic HR Practices	0.50	0.11	0.42**
Model 2b: Job Satisfaction			
Step 1. Strategic HR Practices	0.42		0.42**
Step 2. General HR Practices	0.50	0.08	0.36**
Model 3a: Job Attachment			
Step 1. Employee Self-adjustment	0.28		0.42**
Step 2. Overall HR Practices	0.30	0.02	0.21**
Model 3b: Job Attachment			
Step 1. Overall HR Practices	0.18		0.21**
Step 2. Employee Self-adjustment	0.30	0.12	0.42**
Model 4a: Job Satisfaction			
Step 1. Employee Self-adjustment	0.45		0.42**
Step 2. Overall HR Practices	0.63	0.18	0.49**
Model 4b: Job Satisfaction			
Step 1. Overall HR Practices	0.50		0.49**
Step 2. Employee Self-adjustment	0.63	0.13	0.42**

Note: $n = 305$. R^2 = variance explained at the given step. ΔR^2 = incremental change in R^2 when variable is entered at the given step. β^a = standardized regression coefficient for final equation.

** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$.