

The importance of repatriation



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For any corporation, retaining the qualified and productive personnel is important for its growth. But several studies have found that the majority of companies do not have effective repatriation process. (Black, 1992; Solomon, 1995).

According to Solomon (1995) the expatriate's process should consist of a circular process, which starts with (i) the selection of candidates, (ii) cross-cultural preparation, (iii) global career management, (iv) completion of the international assignment and (v) repatriation. The repatriation is part of the expatriate management process. Any MNEs should have these five phases to succeed in the international assignments. (Solomon, 1995) (See figure. 1 below)

Figure 1 Solomon's (1995) circular process illustration

“ If repatriates continue to leave their organizations at (such a high rate), organizations will fail to retain the international competencies that are the very objective of many international assignments.” (Leiba-O'Sullivan, 2002)

When repatriates leave, the company suffers the most. Failure to retain the repatriate leads to high costs for the international companies, not only is there the loss of key employees and their invaluable experiences when they leave the company but also the loss of credibility of the company to attract new candidates for expatriations. If there is a negative effect in the careers of the repatriates then the other employees will be reluctant to accept the foreign assignments.

“ one in which, upon return, the repatriate: gains access to a job which recognizes any newly acquired international competences, experiences minimal cross-culture readjustment difficulties; and reports low turnover intentions” (O’Sullivan, 2002 p. 597).

Jabil HR management should understand the importance of retaining its repatriates from Asian operation as these staffs should have gained knowledge in managing the locals for all these years. Even though Jabil decided to manage the Asian operations from Singapore, it needs senior management staffs in California to manage and guide the regional headquarter to successfully manage the Asian operations. For this role the repatriates from the Asian operations will be best suited. So, the HR of Jabil should develop a repatriation process to effectively manage the returning expatriates.

The Repatriation process

To overcome the issues in repatriation it is necessary for the organizations to preplan the managers’ return. If there is no planning for the repatriation, then there will be no job opportunities or not suitable position for the repatriates when they return. This will lead to frustrations for the repatriates. The companies often have an inadequate planning and many times it does not include the expatriate management. So, the returns of the expatriates are not planned until the very close of the expatriate actual return.

To make the repatriation more effective, Jassawalla et al. (2004) created a repatriation model. The model explains the action need to be taken prior to

departure, during the assignment and upon the return, which will reduce the problem in the repatriation. (See figure. 2 below)

Figure 2 A model of effective repatriation (Jassawalla, Connolly & Slojowski, 2004).

Prior to departure

Before departure, the following factors can help improve the process of repatriation. The factors are task clarity, career counseling and formal policies & guidelines for repatriation. When expatriates are clear about, what is expected from them and how their performance will be evaluated are those who satisfied with the repatriation process. (Klauff, 2002).

If the task is not clearly defined or the expatriate does not know what is expected from him, then it will lead to a repatriation failure. If there is a high level of task clarity, then it will increase the focus of the expatriates, it will be a motivation factor if the tasks are on track and it will ease the anxiety when they return to home country. To make the task clear, Performance expectation should be communicated and the performance consideration criteria should be explained clearly. These will be the first steps for an effective repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

For a positive repatriation, there must be good career counseling. The effective career counseling should consist of (1) how it is important of the expatriates' international assignment in achieving the goals of the company, (2) how the company will be benefited from expatriates' contribution in overseas, (3) how the international experiences and the knowledge which will be learned during the assignment will enhance the career of the

expatriates and (4) what kind of positions will be offered when the expatriate return from overseas assignment. The counseling will help the expatriates to understand how important is the overseas assignment to the company and for themselves (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

Another important factor for effective repatriation process is the quality of formal policies and guidelines for the foreign assignments (Linechan & Scullion, 2002). The management researchers recommend that the company need to have formal policies that will explain the pre-visits, visits and post visits expectations of expatriates. The visit before the actual move is ' pre-visit', ' visit' means the period during the actual assignment and ' post-visit' is refers to the repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

During their Stay

The expatriates may feel isolated if there is a lack of communication with the home company. These thoughts may arise problems. To reduce the sense of isolation and to increase the sense of connectivity the following two steps can be taken by a company. The steps are: perception of support while on assignment and nature and frequency of communication. During the assignment, work-related information exchanges and communications with the home company can facilitate realistic expectations and ease the return (Peter J. Dowling et al, 2008).

The communication between the expatriates and with the home company is important (Bonache et al., 2001). It is important that the communication should not only with one person in the company but with the company as a

whole. The frequent visit to the home company will make the expatriates feel connected Klaff (2002).

Also, the social network connection with the home company is also believed to be highly beneficial (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). The frequent communication not only reduces the feeling of isolation, but also: (1) Significantly improve the morals and motivates the expatriate, (b) Makes the expatriates that they are still a part of the company, and (c) all the changes are updated regularly to expatriates thus increasing the trust. The lack of communication will increase the leads to low motivation and increases the anxiety about returning to the home company (Allen & Alvarez., 1998).

After the return

For many expatriates, the move “ back home” is even more difficult than the original move overseas. And is a concern that is generally overlooked in the total expatriation process. Since repatriation is often so difficult, it is just as important to manage the repatriation process as it is to manage the expatriation process. (Lazarova, M., and Caligiuri, P. 2001)

The Expatriates who have been in the foreign assignment for a couple of years often when they return to the home company that has changes significantly in terms of structure, information systems and the processes (Foster, 2000).

Reverse cultural shock

The excitement of returning home after several years on an overseas assignment is sometimes frustrated by the unexpected nature of what awaits expatriates and their families: reverse culture shock. The real surprise

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is the difficulties in reintegrating with the person's native culture. Usually coming home should be easier than going abroad, but because of the changes in home country when the expatriates are away is no less relevant when they return. This process of repatriation and the experience of reverse culture shock apply equally to the return to the office and the factory as to the return to family and friends (Marx, E. (2001).

The two main factors which help to improve the returning of expatriates are the quality of interaction with supporters and the perception of organizational support. From the study conducted by Jassawalla et al.'s (2004) it is clear the expatriates are satisfied in the repatriation process when they have a sponsor in the home company.

“ a person who has more formal authority [...] who has a personal stake in the success of the foreign assignment, and who is vested in the career growth of the returning expatriate” (Jassawalla et al., 2004)

The many management authors stressed the importance of a mentor during the foreign assignments (Klauff, 2002). But, the authors do not agree that the mentors and a sponsor are the same.

A mentor is a person who gives the expatriate the information and the answers to the questions, but they are not responsible for success of the assignment and the returning expatriate (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). A sponsor serves as a confidante and supporter. They support the expatriates in finding the suitable position for them upon their return. They make sure that the skills of the returning employees are used by the company.

Conclusion

The companies can take many different actions for a successful repatriation process. When the repatriates are satisfied then it's an effective repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004). This will increase the company's effectiveness in retaining the successful employees and also more employees will be interested in accepting the foreign assignments.