



AN INVESTIGATION OF REPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AMONG THE ACADEMICS IN SRI LANKA

Dannangoda Gamage Menaka PrabhaniMadushani
School of Business, NSBM Green University, Sri Lanka
menakaprabani@ymail.com(core author)

RukgahamulaHeneGedaraWasantha Pradeep Kumara
Department of Business Administrations
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
Pradeepk@sjp.ac.lk(corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Repatriation adjustment is a common problem among the academics, where the academics find difficulties in adjusting back to the local context after the international academic assignments. Although this is a pertinent issue, in the extant body of literature investigations are lacking. This paper aims to investigate the factors affecting the repatriation adjustment among the academics in the Sri Lankan context. In addition, this paper investigates whether the proactive personality of academics moderate the impact of the factors affecting repatriation adjustment. For this purpose, 120 academic repatriates have been considered from the Sri Lankan universities. Structural equation modelling has been used to test the hypotheses through AMOS statistical package. Findings of the study suggests adjustment of the academic repatriates to the local context is affected by the individual factors, organizational factors and other factors. Further, personality moderates the impact of these factors on repatriation adjustment. This suggests that, presence of proactive personality facilitate academics to perceive the individual factors, organizational factors and other factors in a favorable manner which would smooth their adjustment process in the local context. The findings provide significant insights for the university administrators to facilitate smooth adjustment of academics to the local context after their foreign assignments. The originality of this paper is on its contribution to the literature by examining the repatriation model of Black et al. that has not been thoroughly analyzed before as a whole. Further, the extension introduced for the model through incorporating personality as a moderator provides a significant contribution to better explain repatriate adjustment phenomenon among the repatriate academics.

Keywords: Repatriation, adjustment, repatriated academics, university

1. Introduction

Repatriation can be considered as a transition from a host country to one's home country after living overseas for a significant period (Adler, 1981; Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall & Valk, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2002). In the process of repatriation adjustment, repatriates attempt to reduce uncertainty and achieve a degree of fit with the different aspects of the home or organization context (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall 1992; Judge, 1994). Managing this process is highly important as ineffective management can cause problems of adjustment which can reduce the performance, motivation and increase the turnover of the employees (Richardson, 2000).

Despite the importance of managing repatriation, it is identified that high percentage of repatriates who return from the foreign assignments find difficulties and remain with low motivation and low performance (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Upon repatriation, repatriates find the home context as unfamiliar (Adler, 1981; Lee & Liu, 2007). Literature points out that repatriates encounter certain difficulties when they return back to their home country (Peltonen, 1997). According to a survey, 42% of repatriates consider repatriation as a very difficult experience (Forster, 1994). Repatriation is even more traumatic than moving for a foreign country (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Some repatriates have stated that returning back to their home country is like going for a completely a strange country (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). When repatriates enter into the home country or organization, they find significant differences to what they expected (Adler, 1981; Cox, Khan & Armani, 2013). Thus, upon repatriation, they may feel they are in a new place, feel uncomfortable and experience uncertainty and low fit with the context (James, 2018). Therefore, it can be identified that the repatriation adjustment is a common problem among the repatriates.

Expatriation and Repatriation is a common phenomenon among the academics. Expatriate faculty can be found in many institutions throughout the world (Richardson, 2000). According to an international survey of the academic profession, carried out under the aegis of the Carnegie Foundation, over half of respondents in ten of the countries studied had made at least one trip abroad for the purposes of research or study. Further, more than half of those who had been overseas had been for one month or more (Boyer et al., 1994). Governments in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, Iran and China provide substantial financial support for the university academics to obtain the foreign exposure in teaching and research

(James, 2016; James, 2018). Academics are given opportunities to engage in foreign assignments based on teaching and research for a specific time period in overseas (James, 2016; James, 2018). They are given leave with pay during their stay overseas (James, 2016; James, 2018).

This is a common practice in the academia in Sri Lanka as well. In order to obtain higher world rankings for Sri Lankan universities, and to make the Sri Lanka the knowledge hub in Asia, Sri Lankan government invest more on the development of human capital in academia (HETC, 2013; Samaranayake, 2011). However, upon return to their home university, academics in Sri Lanka encounter adjustment issues (James, 2018). The survey of James (2018) involving 63 Sri Lankan academic repatriates revealed that repatriation adjustment is a significant issue among the academic repatriates in Sri Lanka. Academics upon return feel less fit to the university (James, 2018). During their foreign assignments' academics engage in teaching and research (Garson, 2005). Academic expatriates live and work in new cultural and organizational settings; they adopt new cultural and organizational values and norms to perform well (Richardson and McKenna, 2002; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). However, during the process of repatriation academic repatriates may establish unrealistic repatriation expectation and experience reverse cultural shock which creates academic repatriates to feel uncomfortable and mismatch with their home context (James, 2018).

Although repatriation adjustment issue among the academics is significant, it has not yet been sufficiently discussed in the extant literature (Welch, 1997; Garson, 2005; James, 2018). Particularly, this lacuna exists in the Sri Lankan context (James, 2018). Vidal, Valle and Aragon (2010) emphasized that there is a higher need for enhancing the understanding of the repatriation issues. In order to understand this phenomenon extant literature identifies the factors affecting the repatriation adjustment process of employees (Vidal et al. 2010). In the extant body of literature on repatriation the most influential theoretical model is the one proposed by Black et al. (1999) (Vidal et al. 2010). However, this model has not been investigated sufficiently (Vidal et al. 2010). Further, predominantly this model was tested in US and UK which is not empirically tested in other countries (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Baruch et al., 2002; Paik et al., 1998; Bossard & Peterson, 2005 as cited in Vidal et al. 2010). Most of the previous investigations have analysed this model partially due to its wide scope (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Kaerinasai, 1994; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Vidal et al. 2010). Furthermore, in general, publications on the repatriation adjustment model are

less common and they obtain no homogeneous or consistent results (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Kaerinasai, 1994; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997 as cited in Vidal et al. 2010). Therefore, literature demands more empirical investigations in this regard (Vidal et al. 2010). Present study addresses this lacuna in the extant body of literature regarding the adjustment process and thereby contributes to the existing body of knowledge.

In response to the stated demand in the extant literature, the aim of the present study, is to investigate the repatriation process of academics. This study investigates the post-return adjustment phase which relates to the return of academics from a foreign assignment. As emphasized by James (2018), their study on academic repatriates provides empirical evidence to confirm that repatriation adjustment is a matter for academic repatriates. However, they highlighted the need of further investigation to understand what are the individual-level, group level and organization-level determinants of successful adjustment of academic repatriates. Thus, in response to this present study investigates the factors affecting the repatriation adjustment process among academic repatriates. In addition to these factors which are already present in the model proposed by Black et al. (1999), this study extends the model by incorporating repatriate's personality as a moderating factor which has an impact for individual's adjustment in the repatriation process. Such an investigation is demanded in the extant literature where James (2018) highlighting the unique findings of their study regarding adjustment of repatriate academic, demands that further studies need to be carried out to find how individual factors such as personality would influence the adjustment process of repatriates.

Since repatriation is a process related to adjusting to a new situation in the home country context or organization it is interesting to investigate how personality influence in repatriation adjustment. Although personality is investigated in other domains (e.g., adjustment to unfamiliar work and cultural environments; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007), as per the readings of the author investigations are lacking on the influence of personality differences for the repatriation of individuals. It is identified that the personal characteristics or the cognitive processes in which a person is engaging can influence the ease with which the individual adjusts to a new situation (Eby, 2015). 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. Cox et al. (2013), suggested in their literature review about repatriation literature that Individual

characteristics may moderate a repatriate's perceptions of repatriation support practices, work expectations, and job satisfaction and personality can be considered as one of these individual characteristics. However, personality has not been investigated as a moderator which influence the impact of individual, job, organizational and other factors on the repatriation adjustment. Therefore, present study contributes to the extant body of knowledge by extending the model of repatriation introduced by Black et al. (1999) incorporating personality as a moderating factor influencing the repatriation adjustment of academics.

2. Literature review

2.1 Academic repatriates

Expatriate academics are defined as professors and non-professorial staff who are part of the research and teaching profession' (Karpen, 1993). They have been employed in an educational institution outside of their country of origin for five years or less and intend to live in that country at least until the end of their working contract (Richardson, 2000). However, James (2018) identified academic repatriates as academics who had been attached to a foreign university or academic institution for more than one year, had been involved in academic activities and, at the survey date, had returned within the past two years.

2.2 Repatriation adjustment

Repatriation is considered as an intra-organizational transition (O'Sullivan, 2002) and the developments of conscious and unconscious anticipations about the new setting (Louis, 1980, p. 336). Repatriation adjustment is the experience of reintegrating their earlier accustomed environment having stayed in different surroundings for a considerable period (Adler, 1981; Kulkarni et al., 2010). Certain studies refer repatriation adjustment to the process of attitude and behavior modification in which the experience of the individual is adapted to match the accepted behavior of the host culture (Berry, 1992). Also, it is defined as the degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Work of adjustment theorists of relocation (Nicholson, 1984) and expatriation (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991) provides the theoretical underpinning for repatriation.

2.3 Factors affecting repatriation adjustment

There are four main factors which influence individual's repatriation adjustment process. Individual factors, job factors, organizational factors and other factors (Black et al., 1999 as cited in Vidal et al. 2010). In the repatriation adjustment process individual factors facilitate to understand the new situation. Characteristics relating to individuals and their foreign assignment comes under these individual factors. Particularly, factors such as self-efficacy, social capacity and perceptual capacity help individuals to understand and adjust according to the new situation (Vidal et al. 2010). Effect of job factors comes from four main factors. Mainly from the clarity of the tasks to be performed after repatriation, level of freedom or the autonomy in their job after repatriation, to what extent the organization values their international exposure after returning back to the home country and the expected promotions in the job after repatriation (Vidal et al. 2010, 2010; Harvey, 1989; Peltonen, 1997; Bossard & Peterson, 2005).

Organizational factors also determine the level of repatriation adjustment and the key factors under that are repatriation policy, compensation and the training provided upon repatriation (Vidal et al. 2010). Impact of these factors are empirically validated by several scholars (Black et al., 1999; Black & Kaerinasai, 1994; Bossard & Peterson, 2005). Apart from the individual, job and organizational factors there are some other important factors which would impact the adjustment in the repatriation process. Particularly, spouse adjustment, housing condition and the social status matter in fitting to the environment in the home country (Vidal et al. 2010).

2.3 Personality as a moderator of repatriation adjustment

Personality consists of traits, consistent and enduring characteristics or attributes that underlie many individual differences in cognition, emotion, and behavior (Costa & McCrae, 1986). 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 (Cox et al. 2013). Personality variables influence individuals' abilities to conduct emotional appraisals, motivationally prioritize, and utilize effective coping strategies. Extant literature identifies that several personal characteristics as correlates of adjustment quality. Personal characteristics or the cognitive processes in which a person is engaging can influence the ease with which the individual adjusts to a new situation (Eby, 2015). Personality has been

shown to influence quality of adjustment in other domains of life (e.g., adjustment to unfamiliar work and cultural environments; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007).

3. Hypotheses and model of the research

On the basis of theoretical and empirical studies which are discussed and presented in the literature review, the study draws the following hypotheses and conceptual framework for this research:

H1: Individual factors have a positive impact on repatriation adjustment of academic repatriates

H2: Job factors have a positive impact on repatriation adjustment of academic repatriates

H3: Organizational factors have a positive impact on repatriation adjustment of academic repatriates

H4: Other factors have a positive impact on repatriation adjustment of academic repatriates

H5: Personality of academics moderates the impact of individual factors for repatriation adjustment of academics

H6: Personality of academics moderates the impact of job factors for repatriation adjustment of academics

H7: Personality of academics moderates the impact of organizational factors for repatriation adjustment of academics.

H8: Personality of academics moderates the impact of other factors for repatriation adjustment of academics.

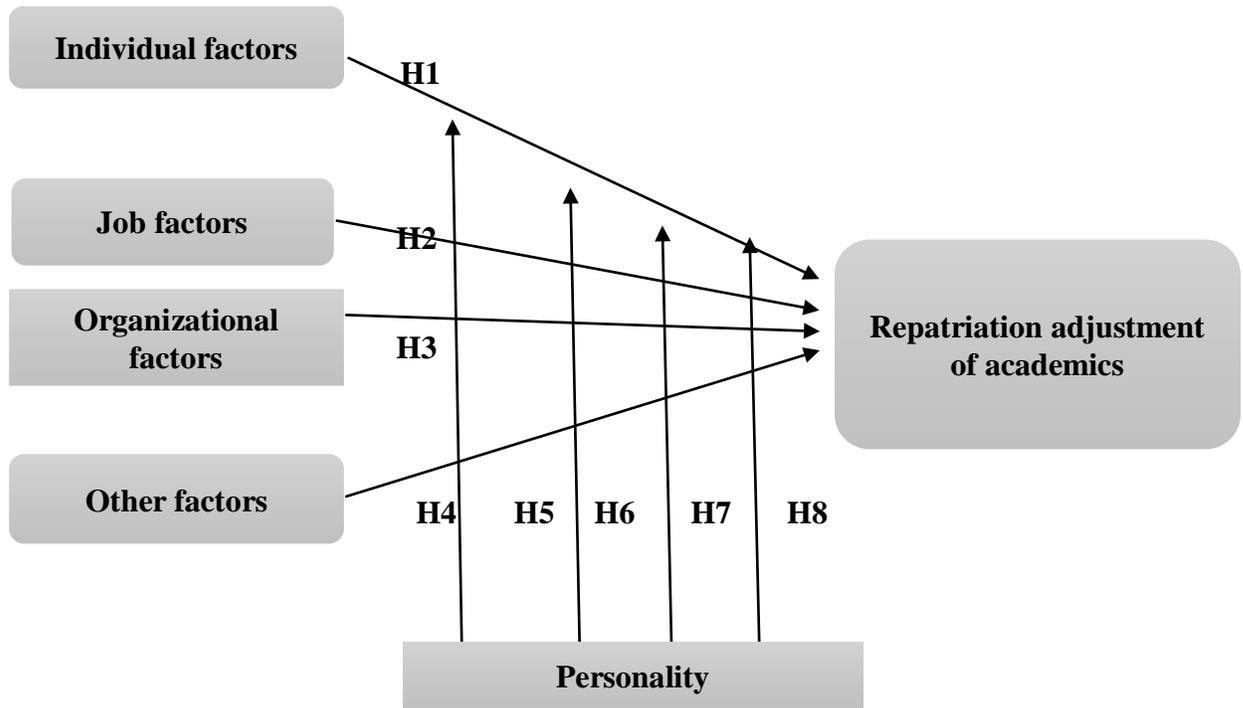


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for factors affecting the repatriation adjustment of academics

4. Methodology

Present study is governed by the positivistic research philosophy and follows quantitative method which is suggested by several scholars (Bryman, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Quantitative approach was selected as it allows the researcher to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the study, employ sophisticated statistical tools to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the findings and allows to generalize the findings (Chang, Witteloostuijn & Eden, 2010; Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2003; Spector, 2006; James, 2018). This is a cross sectional study with self-reported data. It is stated that self-reported data are much suitable in investigating perceived experiences in the process of employee socialization and adjustment (James, 2018). As the present study investigates the repatriation adjustment process of academics, self-reported data is much appropriate.

Factors affecting repatriation adjustment of academics was investigated to proceed towards a conclusion by adapting the survey strategy. Complying with the rule of thumb of Roscoe's a sample size larger than 30 and fewer than 500 was considered appropriate in the present study. Therefore, 120 was determined as the sample size. The only survey which can be

found regarding academic's repatriation in Sri Lanka has taken 63 Sri Lankan academic repatriates (James, 2018). Thus, a sample of 120 academics is reasonable. The survey was conducted with Sri Lankan academic repatriates who had been attached to a foreign university or academic institution for more than 1 year, had been involved in academic and research activities and, at the survey date, had returned within the past 5 years. The unit of analysis selected in the present study is the individual academic.

120 questionnaires were distributed to academic repatriates by the researcher directly and through personal and professional contacts. 91 responses from academic repatriates were received. The response rate was 75.8 % which is greater than the average rate of 52.5% in organizational research (Baruch & Holton 2008; James, 2018). The measurement instrument for this study is divided into two sections. First section measuring demographic factors and second section measuring other variables. Questionnaire consisted items with a five-point Likert scale (1= not at all adjusted, 5 =totally adjusted). All scales are examined in details at below in Table 1

Table 1: Sources of Measures

Variables	Items	Source
Repatriate adjustment	5	(Black and Kaerinasai, 1994); Suutari and Brewster (2003); Vidal, Valle and Aragon, 2010).
Individual factors	6	(Vidal, Valle and Aragon, 2010).
Job factors	11	(Vidal, Valle and Aragon, 2010).
Organizational factors	3	(Vidal, Valle and Aragon, 2010).
Other factors	3	(Vidal, Valle and Aragon, 2010).
Personality	5	(Ryu, et al., 2003).