

Employees' Perceptions of Repatriation

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Abstract

This study explored the repatriation experience and adjustment strategies of employees returning to Canada. Two research questions were posed: 1) What has been your experience with repatriation? and, 2) What strategies have you used to cope with repatriation issues? Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather information, and interview data was analyzed through the use of qualitative interpretation. Three metathemes emerged from this analysis, including work adjustment, lifestyle adjustment, and psychological adjustment. These results are discussed, including the thematic descriptions, and exemplars are provided from participants. Recommendations and coping strategies for effective repatriation adjustment are also reviewed.

Employees' Perceptions of Repatriation

There is an abundance of literature surrounding the dynamics of adjustment to foreign cultures, however, there is little recognition of reentry difficulties faced by employees returning home (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992b). Repatriation is the least carefully considered phase of global assignments, both in research and in organizational practices. Findings indicate that repatriation adjustment is often more difficult than the stage of cross-cultural transition; and a majority of repatriated employees are dissatisfied with the repatriation process (Adler, 1981, 1991; Black & Gregersen, 1998, 1999b; Black et al., 1992b). Investigations of cross-cultural transition and the process of repatriation must keep pace with growing demands for an international workforce (Arthur, 2001).

This article summarizes a study that explored the repatriation experi-

ence and adjustment strategies of employees returning to Canada. The study posed two research questions: 1) What has been your experience with repatriation? and, 2) What strategies have you used to cope with repatriation issues? The article begins with a review of the literature, including the importance of effective repatriation practice and previous studies of repatriation. Second, methods are examined, including rationale for a qualitative approach, a description of the participants, and how the data was analyzed. Third, results are discussed, including the thematic descriptions, and exemplars are provided from participants. The discussion then turns to conclusions drawn from this research, recommendations of strategies for repatriates, strengths and limitations of the study, and ideas for future research.

The Importance of Effective Repatriation

Inadequate repatriation practice represents a significant human resource management problem and a potentially large obstacle to successful globalization. Poor repatriation practice is costly (Black et al., 1992b), restricts the effective utilization of employees (Adler, 1991), often leads to the loss of valued personnel (Black & Gregersen, 1991), and is likely the main reason for employee reluctance to work abroad (Harvey, 1982, 1989, Spring). Repatriation problems often send the message to employees that global assignments negatively affect one's career (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992a). A poor repatriation reputation makes it difficult to recruit high caliber employees for foreign postings, which in turn increases the likelihood of problems throughout the expatriation-repatriation cycle.

The lack of repatriation programs

and the insufficient value placed on international assignments (Black, 1991) leads to poor repatriation adjustment, dissatisfaction, and turnover (Black et al., 1992b). An average of one quarter of repatriates leave their company and join a competitor within one year of returning home, which is double that of managers who do not go abroad (Black & Gregersen, 1999a, 1999b). These turnover rates signify lost investment for corporations. Foreign assignments last an average of two to five years, and expatriate packages including benefits amount to expenditures ranging from \$300,000 to one million dollars U.S. annually (Black & Gregersen, 1999a). Firms with hundreds of international employees and without repatriation programs may be losing hundreds of millions of dollars each year (Black & Mendenhall, 1989). Repatriation failure means that companies lose a large development investment, a high potential employee (Allen, 1998), and considerable knowledge leaves with an individual who understands both corporate headquarters and the overseas subsidiaries (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998).

Multinational corporations are far more effective at preparing expatriates for entry into another country than they are at providing reentry assistance for repatriates coming home (Harvey, 1982, 1989, Spring). Windham International (1998) found that 70% of firms provide some form of cross-cultural preparation. Unfortunately little attention is given to the repatriation process, as less than 15% of North American repatriates receive any sort of repatriation training (Black & Gregersen, 1999b). Engen (1995) estimates 90% of corporations offer less than three hours of training for the return home, suggesting corporations have yet to understand the importance of effective repatriation

practice. A meta-analysis of cross-cultural training for expatriates found programs to be effective in helping expatriates adapt to their foreign postings (Deshpande, 1992), yet there appears to be little perceived need for repatriation programs. Human resource personnel often find it inconceivable that returning expatriates need to readjust to anything when coming home. In reality, the majority of expatriates find repatriation to be tumultuous, both personally and professionally (Black & Gregersen, 1999b).

Models That Guided This Research

Most empirical research on the subject of repatriation adjustment has lacked theoretical grounding (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, 1991). Researchers believe the key theoretical mechanism related to repatriation adjustment is uncertainty reduction: Factors that reduce uncertainty will assist adjustment, while factors creating uncertainty will impede adjustment (Black, 1994). In conducting this study the following four models of reentry and adjustment were considered.

First, Berry's (1997) model of acculturation highlights factors affecting repatriation adjustment and possible outcomes of returning home. This model suggests that reentry affects many life roles and that repatriates have tremendous control over their adjustment process. Second, Adler's (1981; 1991) model of coping with reentry focuses on adjustment to work and highlights the impact corporations have on repatriation adjustment. This model acknowledges the influence of both individual and corporate attitudes. Third, Black's (1988) model of work role adjustment illuminates repatriation as affecting all life roles. The degree of adjustment will depend on the amount of change involved when repatriating, and this transition can be highly individual. This model proposes adjustment and knowledge are interrelated, whereby the greater the knowledge of each area of the repatriation process, the greater the degree of adjustment. Fourth, Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall's theory of repatriation adjustment (1992b) emphasizes the need to treat repatriation as a complex process, involving distinct but interre-

lated variables. This model highlights communication, information and expectations as playing important roles in repatriation adjustment.

Although space is prohibitive for a comprehensive review of these models, four overriding principles become apparent: 1) Repatriation is a multifaceted phenomenon, affecting all life roles; 2) there are a multitude of variables that affect repatriation adjustment; 3) individuals and corporations have a synergistic effect on repatriation outcome; and, 4) communication, knowledge, expectations, and adjustment are interrelated during the process and outcomes of repatriation. These principles must be taken into consideration to direct the nature of inquiry into repatriation.

Empirical investigations of repatriation have predominantly sampled American executives and managers (Black, 1991, 1992; Hammer, Hart, & Rogan, 1998; Harvey, 1989), there have been a small number of studies of Finnish (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997) and Japanese repatriates (Black, 1994; Gregersen & Black, 1996), and one study sampling repatriates from 26 different countries (Feldman, Tompson, & Holly, 1993). This research has primarily highlighted repatriation problems, rather than repatriation solutions. Data has been gathered through the use of questionnaires, with the exception of two studies utilizing semistructured interviews (e.g. Adler, 1981; Briody & Baba, 1991). Questionnaires have generally been analyzed through regression and factor analyses to discover relationships between repatriation variables and adjustment, while interview methods have generally been supported by phenomenological approaches and searching for common patterns. Most research to-date has elaborated upon the demands encountered during repatriation but stops short of elaborating upon the strategies used by repatriates during the process of returning to their home environment.

Methodology

Although eclecticism has been criticized as being ad hoc, this ideology allows for choosing the most appropriate aspects of compatible methodology and analysis that fit our beliefs, the pur-

pose of the study, and the phenomenon of repatriation. This study was guided by methodology that would uncover critical processes as participants experienced repatriation demands and developed strategies for coping with the reentry transition. Ideas from hermeneutics and phenomenology informed the methodology. Hermeneutics has been referred to as the "art of understanding" (Gadamer, 1985, p.146). This study adopts the Heideggerian assumption that all knowledge is based on preunderstanding and interpretation. Rather than viewing prior knowledge about repatriation as a barrier, it is viewed as an integral part of gaining new understanding. When a researcher's assumptions about a topic are brought into the research, they are "at risk" (Gadamer, 1985) to be confirmed or disconfirmed. This research also utilizes a number of concepts from phenomenological psychology. Phenomenological studies examine detailed accounts of people's "lived experiences" (Klein & Westcott, 1994) and examine patterns and relationships of meaning.

An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect demographic information and to prompt participants to begin thinking about their repatriation experience. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather information, and interview data was analyzed through the use of qualitative interpretation.

Participants

Selection criteria for participants were employees who had worked overseas for a minimum of one year and who had repatriated to Canada for one year or less. This population was targeted because a minimum one year allows for a sufficient degree of immersion into the host culture, and the first year after repatriation appears to be the time frame when most readjustment occurs (Adler, 1981; Black & Gregersen, 1991, 1999b).

All participants in this study are White Caucasians including seven men and one woman ranging in age from 35 to 48 years. The length of their foreign postings extended from 3 to 23 years, and six participants had completed multiple international assignments. The mean length of time working as expatriates is 8.9 years. The participants had

been repatriated between 4 months and 1 year, averaging 8 months back in Canada. The positions held by these individuals while working internationally include occupations in the areas of finance, management, oil and gas exploration, drafting, and education development. The participants lived and worked in many countries including Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, England, France, Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Venezuela, and the United States.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis was to obtain a valid and common understanding of the transcriptions (Kvale, 1996), and to find the invariant structures of the experience of repatriation (Dukes, 1984; van Manen, 1990). This may also be referred to as the "essence" of the experience, which is the nature of the phenomenon of repatriation. Data analysis proceeded through the use of thematic procedures to identify meaning structures. After the first interview, transcripts were reviewed for themes and meanings and were clustered and recorded. Each participant was given a copy of his/her transcript and a summary for verification and clarification during the second interview. Any new information resulting from the second interview was synthesized with the original data, and the meaning structures and themes were further refined. Each participant reviewed a final draft of themes and meanings to ensure the accuracy of interpretations.

The process of identification and interpretation of themes included two types of analyses. The first was a "within" person analysis which considered the themes and meaning clusters for each person, and this was followed by an "across" persons analysis, which looked for shared themes among the participants. The phenomena were intuitively grouped according to similarities for each person and for the group as a whole (Giorgi, 1985; Kvale, 1996). A spiralling technique was used to identify patterns of meaning to allow for both contrasting and comparison of these themes (Klein & Westcott, 1994). Two types of experiences are also identified. The first are those that appear

close to the surface, are consciously acknowledged by the repatriate, and easily identifiable. The second type is the prereflective experience, which is not readily noticeable, and is that which is experienced but not articulated (Osbourne, 1994). Reaching the prereflective experience involved a great deal of introspection, internal observation, and going beyond the surface characteristics of the text. The researchers' previous knowledge of repatriation and their psychological training supported this process of analysis. Simultaneously, bracketing (Dukes, 1984) was practiced in order to acknowledge and set aside personal assumptions and to focus on the experience of repatriation offered by participants.

Results

Three metathemes emerged from this analysis including work adjustment, lifestyle adjustment, and psychological adjustment. Table One provides a summary listing of the three major themes and related subthemes acquired from the data.

TABLE 1
Summary of Repatriation Adjustment Themes

Theme One: Work Adjustment
Job Responsibilities: Career Development - Professional Status Loss
Colleagues
Organization
Theme Two: Lifestyle Adjustment
A New Lifestyle
Activities
Relationships
Financial Adjustment
Freedom
Adjustment to Canadian Society and Culture
Theme Three: Psychological Adjustment
Choice
Expectations
Perception of Loss
Strategies
Positive Experiences, Learning Outcomes and Opportunities

Work Adjustment

Work adjustment was one of the salient metathemes, as six participants were embarking on a new job within their home country organizations and two were beginning new jobs with different companies. Work adjustment can be illustrated by the three themes: 1) job responsibilities, 2) colleagues, and, 3) the organization.

Job responsibilities. Repatriates who were most satisfied with their current job had returned to responsibilities similar to the job held internationally. Unfortunately, for most employees, this was not the case, as there was a tendency to return from a managerial position to be placed in a nonmanagerial job. The sense of dissatisfaction for most employees returning to Canada is described in the following exemplars.

"I had a staff of 15 over in Algiers. I have a staff of zero here....Right now where my career is, I couldn't sabotage it much more."

"I'm probably not going to stay here very long....if I can find something else tomorrow, I'd go."

"It was frustrating dealing with people making decisions about overseas operations when they had no such experience and were not willing to listen to those who did."

Work and colleagues. The main theme regarding colleagues was described as "my network has been completely destroyed" due to turnover rates, organizational changes, and losing contact with people. This left people feeling out of touch upon their return home.

"There was a fair amount of attrition at work, there was the takeover at work. I've been overseas twice, both people I reported to when I left were gone by the time I returned....This resulted in a lot of new individuals I did not know and an organization structure I was not familiar with."

Work and the organization. None of the companies associated with the repatriates in this study had a formal repatriation plan. Employees who were most satisfied with their jobs upon returning to Canada were also more satisfied with how the organization han-

dled their repatriation.

“The company didn’t do anything with repatriation to help us adjust back.”

“If I had been given some sort of debriefing counseling, it would have been easier to adjust.”

These examples suggest that the process of repatriation brings forward the relationship between employees and the organization. Most participants felt that their international experience was not beneficial to their career development. However, they rationalized that any disadvantages imposed upon their careers were offset by the personal gains of living and working internationally. The personal aspect of reentry adjustment was also addressed in this study and also appears to be a major component in the experience of repatriation. This next section reviews findings regarding lifestyle and related subthemes.

Lifestyle Adjustment

Each participant found that repatriation includes adjusting to a different lifestyle compared to the one they had become accustomed to during their international assignment. Although the foreign country lifestyle and the Canadian lifestyle varied for each participant, the common theme was that lifestyle had been altered. One repatriate described this as “my lifestyle changed dramatically, like night and day”. Lifestyle revolved around five common subthemes: 1) Activities, 2) relationships, 3) finances, 4) freedom, and 5) Canadian culture and society.

Activities. Many repatriates defined their lifestyle through activities, and almost all repatriates found many activities changed due to repatriation. Those who were involved in enjoyable activities during their international assignment experienced a sense of lifestyle loss, while for the people who have returned to activities they longed for while overseas, there was a perception of gain. Examples of changes in activities include the following

“We missed our (Canadian) lifestyle, and for us it’s the mountains and skiing.”

“We always did something that was oriented toward Russian society or culture everyday.....So

(repatriation) was giving up a really rich culture we were immersed in.”

Relationships. Activities also revolve around relationships. Returning to Canada meant the reestablishment of relationships with friends and family, starting new relationships, and the maintenance or relinquishing of relationships that were established during the international assignments.

“We were breaking longterm ties. We had tears at our going away party at work. There were friends that thought they’d never see us again.”

“Reestablishing relationships has not been easy. Social groups that had been in place had changed or ended. Some of our friends had changed, situations changed, hence it is not the same.”

Finances. Financial changes are part of the repatriation experience that affects lifestyle, as domestic pay is usually lower than international compensation packages, and is compounded by increased taxes. There are also many extraordinary costs incurred when returning to Canada, which often include the purchase of a home, vehicles, and clothing to better suit the environment.

“The financial adjustment has been difficult. You have to change your spending habits...It’s like taking a big cut in pay...it is hard to get used to paying the high taxes.”

“I guess the house was probably the largest outlay, and clothing for all the family members...we didn’t own ski jackets.”

Freedom. The term freedom surfaced in many interviews, as participants found they had greater freedom of choice regarding cultural, religious, and political affiliations, more occupational choice, greater diversity in activities, and more freedom with respect to health and safety.

“Freedom of choice. No one says I can’t wear shorts in public...I can feel safe with my wife on the streets...When our son goes to school, the freedom of being able to learn what he wants to learn and what the schools can teach.”

“There are no more language barriers, no more feeling somewhat uncomfortable in a strange socie-

ty...here the sky’s the limit.”

Canadian culture and society. As with freedom, adjustment to Canadian society and culture were often related to comparisons made to the countries of expatriation. There was a tendency to comment on the differences in technology and consumer lifestyle.

“The (staff) at the counter hands me this (banking) machine to punch in my number and I said, “What’s this for?” and she looked at me like I was from Mars. I didn’t have a clue.”

“...going into stores and being so overwhelmed by the colours and choices that walking out felt like the only option.”

“I am not as materialistic as I used to be.”

The consequence of losing enjoyable activities, especially an active social life and financial decreases seemed to create a sense of personal status loss for most repatriates. Losses relating to both work and lifestyle were the focal point of repatriation for these individuals. The next theme, psychological adjustment, is the area given the least amount of consideration by both repatriates and their corporations.

Psychological Adjustment

The interviews conducted with these participants presented repatriation as a process whereby aspects of psychological adjustment occur over time. This adjustment was influenced by the following themes: 1) Choice, 2) expectations, 3) perception of loss, 4) opportunities, and, 5) strategies. The following quotes describe these factors.

Choice and repatriation. Choice refers to the option of returning to Canada and the timing of that decision. Those participants who were in control of returning to Canada and the timing of their return seemed to adapt much easier, used more strategies, identified more opportunities, and were more flexible and positive in attitude.

“We actually arranged our return...there was no pressure, no plans on the company’s part to return us, but there was an opportunity in Canada...”

“We weren’t ready to come back, so coming back has been a significant adjustment...I probably carry a bit of resentment because of

that, and that probably might come out through the course of the interview.”

Expectations and adjustment.

Expectations had an enormous impact on repatriation satisfaction. When expectations were met or exceeded, adjustment was a smooth transition. Expectations that were not met or were undermet (especially in the area of work) caused repatriation difficulty.

“We didn’t expect a tough adjustment....And we knew there would be a lot of changes in everything here when we came back....We talked to people who had come back, so we sort of knew what to expect.”

“I guess from a job point of view I came back here hoping I’d be comfortable with the way things were. But that hasn’t turned out. I didn’t expect that. I didn’t think I’d come back here and want to quit. I expected to come back and be comfortable.”

Perception about loss. Losses mentioned by the participants included less travel opportunities, loss of cultural experiences, loss of relationships, decreased personal and professional prestige, reduction in finances, and lifestyle loss. It became evident the greater the perception of loss, the more difficult repatriation issues became.

“(Repatriating) is a loss or sorrow that you get over in time.”

“I can’t come up with anything positive....I would say zero positive aspects from repatriating. Professionally....no, absolutely zero positives professionally. Zero.”

Strategies and adjustment. This study demonstrated an association between strategies and adjustment, as it seemed that the more strategies used, the greater the adjustment. One of the most effective strategies seemed to be goal setting, accompanied by a plan of action, as goals allowed the process of repatriation to be a more purposeful endeavor.

“Planning minimizes the surprises when you come back, so there aren’t the shocks. As long as you have a plan, you’re maximizing the aspects you have control over.”

A useful strategy for some was to

regard the move back to Canada as another foreign assignment. This is sound advice, as all repatriates have experience adapting to another country, and adjustment strategies used as expatriates could also be useful for their repatriation adaptation. Flexibility, a positive attitude, and patience were also frequently noted as important for adjustment.

“I think you have to treat (repatriation) as a foreign assignment. After being away 23 years and moving as much as I’ve moved, I consider my move back to Canada no different than any other foreign move.”

“I think the key is to always have realistic expectations and to be able to roll with the punches.”

“Patience....it’s going to take some time to accomplish it all.”

While journaling can be an effective of dealing with change, only one repatriate talked about taking the time to reflect through writing. This individual was also the only person who had the opportunity to attend a one-day repatriation seminar at the time of our interview.

“It makes a big difference being able to put it on paper or on a computer. It’s like talking to somebody....It’s helped me to go back and read it. Maybe because it helps you see how much you’ve changed and how much you’ve been through, and how that makes you a different person today.”

“It made a big difference, it really did. It brought a lot of things together....It gives you that perspective so you can see how you’ve changed, what areas you’ve changed a lot in, what difference that will make in your life. I found it quite beneficial.”

Some repatriates believed that finding a job with a new corporation would be beneficial upon returning to Canada. Others believed repatriation was only a temporary or part-time solution.

“I’d say this is only ever going to be a part-time solution unless in the next two to three years we get further settled in....we can chuck everything and go elsewhere....there’s nothing holding us back.”

Opportunities and repatriation. The ability to identify opportunities,

positive experiences and learning outcomes is also noted to be a helpful strategy for repatriation adjustment. When opportunities could be associated with repatriation, there seemed to be more positive repatriation adjustment.

“Repatriation allowed us to come back to the outdoor lifestyle we really enjoy. It has allowed us to appreciate driving our own vehicle, a restricted privilege overseas. Repatriation, because we each needed support, brought my wife and I closer together. My wife finds that it is the repatriation itself which makes us appreciate the experiences of having worked and lived overseas.”

“Things are a lot more organized here. And things happen more easily, it’s more efficient (here), and things are in the stores.”

“This is a very child friendly society.”

Inquiries aimed at the experience of psychological adjustment were more difficult for these repatriates to answer directly, compared to questions regarding work and lifestyle. However, adjustment is not simply determined by the work and lifestyle repatriates return to in Canada. Woven into the discussion were clear examples that repatriation adjustment is also dependent upon choice, expectations, perception, strategies, and identified opportunities. This suggests that the meaning of repatriation involves understanding the factors related to psychological adjustment. The conclusions drawn from this study, involving work, lifestyle, and psychological adjustment are discussed next.

Discussion

One of the main predictors of repatriation success for the employee is job placement upon reentry (Black & Gregersen, 1998; Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999), as overall satisfaction is strongly related to the impact of the foreign assignment on career goals. The influence of job placement on repatriation satisfaction was evident in this study. Employees who returned to positions that were similar to foreign postings, and those who could use their internationally acquired knowledge and skills, were more satisfied with the repatriation

process. Other work issues identified in the literature which were echoed by participants include loss of autonomy and authority, loss of career direction, and loss of recognition domestically (Adler, 1981). What came across strongly in this study were the feelings of frustration with the job, the organization, and the handling/mishandling of the repatriation process.

This research underscores a number of lifestyle adjustments when returning from abroad. Various losses cited by participants include loss of cultural and travel opportunities, loss of friendships, and financial losses. Due to Canada's high levels of taxation, it appears that financial losses are greater for Canadians than repatriates from other developed countries, e.g., United States. There are many similarities found in both the literature and the current study regarding lifestyle. Challenges adjusting to the general living environment including food, climate, transportation, and schools (Black et al., 1992a), a feeling of being left out and left behind (Piet-Pelon & Hornby, 1992), a feeling of alienation upon returning (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1987), and forgetting how to deal with the country's pace (Thompson, 1992). As well, difficulties reestablishing relationships with friends and family were noted, as the bonds of common experience that once existed often have disintegrated (Engen, 1995). Although the focus of repatriation is often on the negative aspects of returning home, participants emphasized many lifestyle gains. These include greater freedoms, educational, and extracurricular opportunities for children, a return to activities not possible in foreign countries, and living in closer proximity to family members.

Adjustment includes psychological adaptation, which is the internal outcomes of personal achievement and satisfaction (Berry, 1997) of returning to life in Canada. The experience of participants in this study illustrates that psychological adjustment is at the core of repatriation. Psychological adjustment is affected by choice, expectations, perception of loss, strategies employed, and opportunities identified.

Choice and repatriation. Berry (1997) refers to choice as the degree of

voluntariness, or whether the individual chooses to move as compared to the move being compulsory. Individuals with the ability to choose the timing of repatriation clearly expressed greater adjustment. This study adds to our understanding of voluntariness by demonstrating that those people who freely chose to repatriate and the timing of their return adapted much easier, used more strategies, identified more opportunities, and were more flexible and positive in attitude.

Expectations and adjustment. Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall's (1992b) work found expectations play an important role in effective repatriation adjustment, and this was certainly confirmed by all participants in the current study. Repatriates who experienced disconfirmed expectations, or negative differences between expectations and realities (Arthur, 2000), acknowledged adjustment difficulties. Studies recommend that reducing uncertainty will help develop accurate expectations, which leads to better repatriation adjustment (Black et al., 1992a; Black, Gregersen, & Oddou, 1991). This appears as an important direction for repatriation, as the repatriates with more accurate expectations had a more effortless adjustment experience.

Strategies and adjustment. Literature on transitions has determined that effective coping means being flexible and utilizing a number of different coping strategies (Schlossberg, 1984). This finding was reflected in the findings of this study, as participants who reported they were adjusting positively were those who also reported using the most diverse strategies. There were also two strategies that emerged from the interviews that have not been previously cited in the literature. The first is goal setting and establishing a plan of action upon return. The second is finding a new job in another organization that corresponds with career aspirations. Participants' reports about the effectiveness of these strategies suggest the importance of career planning as part of the repatriation process. Planning and decision-making prior to re-entry and during the first year of repatriation appear as key directions to support international workers.

Perceptions about loss. The results

of this study also emphasize the impact of perceived loss. As a general rule, it appeared that the greater the perception of loss, the greater the repatriation difficulties. It is interesting to note too, that those who seemed to have gained so much during their expatriation experience had the greatest perception of loss. While existing research addresses loss, it does not directly address the issue of perception of loss, which varied greatly for participants. The key to comprehending issues of loss is directly related to understanding the personal meaning associated with the perceived losses. This was accomplished in the interviews through listening to the repatriates' changes in worldview and expanded cultural awareness (Arthur, 1998), which may lead to difficulties when reintegrating back into Canadian culture.

Opportunities and repatriation. Adler's (1991) study determined repatriates who adjust well are those who recognize positive and negative changes in themselves, their organization, and their community. Participants in this study often found it difficult to identify positive aspects of repatriation, and tended to focus on losses. While all participants welcomed the chance to look for repatriation opportunities, the literature does not refer to opportunities or positive experiences of repatriating. This research identified opportunities of returning to life in Canada, which for some includes returning to a less polluted and less crowded environment, lower cost-of-living, better health care and education, a more efficient society, and better systems of transportation, to name a few examples.

Recommendations For Repatriates

The following recommendations are based upon the insights of participants shared during this study. Participants found these ideas to be useful from their personal experiences of repatriation and focuses on what helped them in their adjustment process.

Work adjustment. Existing literature recommends repatriates make active attempts to change the work environment and to seek out information (Adler, 1981, 1991). The advice repeated by participants in this study echo the need for workers to be self-

directed and take charge of their career development (Bridges, 1994).

Participants offered the following suggestions:

1. Take the initiative regarding job placement and begin this process well in advance of returning. Update resumes prior to returning so managers understand the experience gained internationally.
2. Become informed by asking questions to develop an accurate understanding of what to expect professionally upon return. This includes becoming apprised of the firm's repatriation policies.
3. Recognize that returning may mean temporarily taking a step backward in one's career. To help alleviate this issue, keep current with technical skills, as managerial positions or jobs at a similar level or higher may not be available upon return.
4. While on assignment, maintain contact with colleagues or managers to remain familiar with organizational changes.

Lifestyle adjustment. Prepare for the return by gathering as much information as possible in the same way one would when going overseas. This concept was elaborated upon by participants with the following suggestions:

1. Develop goals and a plan of action.
2. Ask questions, and prepare for the return in advance of repatriating.
3. Formulate a financial plan to ease the fiscal shock and to prepare for the many extraordinary expenses of returning. Decisions such as retaining real estate in your home country during expatriation should be discussed with professional advisors such as lawyers, financial advisors, or accountants.
4. Become involved in the community and partake in pleasurable activities.
5. Socialize with other repatriates.

Psychological adjustment. The predominant theme in the literature regarding psychological adjustment is developing accurate expectations (Black & Gregersen, 1998; Black et al., 1992b), while psychological reappraisal or viewing the more positive side of a sit-

uation is also indicated. Participants gave the following recommendations:

1. View repatriation as a process that takes time to adjust.
2. Develop realistic expectations. Expectations can be modified through talking to other repatriates, reading, and gathering information about work and lifestyle issues.
3. Recognize you are a changed individual due to your expatriation experience.
4. Develop the attitudes of patience and flexibility.

One recommendation that covers all facets of adjustment is to supplement the strategies with a clear commitment to take charge of the repatriation process. The common thread that runs through these recommendations involves taking the initiative to determine the course of repatriation. It is empowering for individuals to make the transition of reentry a purposeful and meaningful endeavor by creating the future and determining one's destiny.

Conclusion

Repatriation is a profound cross-cultural transition that affects people across their life roles. This discussion has elaborated upon three core areas of repatriation adjustment, including work, lifestyle and psychological adjustment. While this research has helped clarify employees' perceptions of repatriation, there are several limitations that require acknowledgement. First, all participants except one worked for corporations that were related to the natural resources sector of our economy. One cannot help but wonder if a greater diversity of industries would have demonstrated any substantial differences in findings. Second, much of the data presented by the participants represents a retrospective account of the experience of repatriation. As well, all participants had been repatriated for varying amounts of time, ranging from four months to just over one year. This raises speculation that differing conclusions may have resulted if interviews of each participant had occurred throughout the process of repatriation. Third, due to the limited space of this article, the recommendations and implications for

repatriation programming within organizations have not been discussed.

Although the focus of this article has been on the experience of individual employees, the roles and responsibilities of organizations to support their employees must also be examined.

Future research is needed that considers repatriation as an evolving process that deserves longitudinal investigations. Qualitative studies utilizing semi-structured interviews over the span of repatriation adjustment may provide an even greater perspective of the personal meaning of repatriation. Research is also lacking on the repatriation experience of family members. Results of this type of study may also add to the knowledge of repatriation and the repatriated employee, as the reciprocal effects of adjustment between family members may contribute to our understanding of this complex process. It appears the number of employees working internationally will continue to grow, and so must our understanding of the repatriation experience, and ways to support employees during their transition home.

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