



The effects of mentoring functions on repatriate adjustment – Moderating role of core self-evaluations



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the benefits of mentoring functions to repatriate adjustment, and explores whether core self-evaluation (CSE) moderates the aforementioned relationships. Analytical results from 277 repatriates are summarized as follows: (1) the stronger the home country mentors' role modeling function is, the better the repatriates' interaction adjustment and work adjustment will be; (2) the stronger the home country mentors' career development function is, the better the repatriates' general adjustment will be; (3) repatriates' CSE positively moderates the relationship between home country mentors' role modeling function and repatriates' office interaction adjustment, home country mentors' role modeling function and repatriates' work adjustment.

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1. Introduction

Expatriate assignment is an effective mechanism for supervising and assessing the movements and behaviors of subsidiaries (Paik & Sohn, 2004; Tung, 1993). Expatriates also fulfill knowledge-learning and transfer functions (Bonache & Brewster, 2001; Wong, 2001). Due to the important relationship between the foreign assignment and the future human resource needs of the organization (Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz-Valle, Barba-Aragon, & Brewster, 2007), repatriates become important resource in international companies. Notably, Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz-Valle, and Barba-Aragon (2007) argued the repatriation process is the last phase of an international assignment and it should be considered in the whole expatriation design. However, companies have systematically ignored this phase (Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz-Valle, & Barba-Aragon, 2007).

When expatriates complete their overseas assignments, the major considerations of expatriates are seeking a suitable job in the headquarters, obtaining positions that do not lower their status, and applying the knowledge and skills learned overseas to the repatriate positions—this notion attracts scholars' attention (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). However, many repatriates discover that their careers derail (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Over 75% of managers complain that they have the symptom of “out of sight, out of mind” (Hauser, 1999), such as reversed culture shock (Adler, 1981) or some adjustment problems (Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz-Valle, & Barba-Aragon, 2007) when they complete their international assignments and repatriate back to headquarters.

Previous researches indicated assignment length, social status, age, and housing conditions (Feldman & Thomas, 1992), problem-focused coping strategy (Herman & Tetrick, 2009), satisfaction with repatriation process (Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz-Valle, & Barba-Aragon, 2008) will affect repatriation adjustment and others (Crocitto, Sullivan, & Carraher, 2005; Jassawalla, Asgary,

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& Sashittal, 2006; Meziar & Scandura, 2005; Zhuang, Wu, & Wen, 2013) argued mentors can help expatriates and repatriates cope with adjustment problems. Multinational companies (MNCs) can use home country mentors to help repatriates re-adjust to the home country after their overseas assignments. However, the specific role of mentors in the international context remains theoretically underdeveloped (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). Meziar and Scandura (2005) and Zhuang et al. (2013) called for more attention to the role of mentoring in expatriate development.

Moreover, Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater, and Klein (2003) indicated that some social network theorists have eschewed the importance of individual differences. Kilduff and Krackhardt (1994) encouraged researchers to “bring the individual back in” to the study of social networks or relationships. Mentorship is a special form of social network. Following this lead, Burt, Jannotta, and Mahoney’s study (1998) suggested that there may be meaningful links between an individual’s personality traits and the pattern of relationships being developed.

As mentioned above, previous studies argued mentoring functions can affect repatriate adjustment. However, even if repatriates receive the same support from mentors, they should have different adjustment outcomes due to different personalities. Core self-evaluation (CSE) has shown to be an important predictor of many workplace outcomes (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003; Harris, Harvey, & Kacmar, 2009; Judge & Bono, 2001; Piccolo, Judge, Takahashi, Watanabe, & Locke, 2005). However, no studies have explored the effect of repatriates’ CSE on their adjustment. Do repatriates with high CSE perceive high mentoring support when adjusting to the home country as well as those with high CSE perceive low mentoring support? On the other hand, do repatriates with low CSE perceive high mentoring support when adjusting to the home country as well as those with low CSE perceive low mentoring support? As such, the main contribution of this paper is analyzing the role of CSE on the relationship between mentoring functions and repatriates’ adjustment.

Accordingly, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) would home country mentoring functions be related to repatriate adjustments? (2) Would repatriate characteristics moderate the positive relationship between home country mentorship and repatriate adjustment?

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Repatriation adjustment

Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) develop an international adjustment model in order to further understand the challenges about environmental adjustment expatriates faced during their overseas assignment. Considering that previous models and theories assume that expatriate adjustment only has one dimension, this model is different from previous models and establishes the foundation of multi-dimension studies. Adjustment is divided into three dimensions within this framework: adjustment to work, adjustment to interaction with home nationals, and adjustment to the general environment and culture (Black & Gregersen, 1991). General adjustment is the degree of comfort concerning with non-work factors as living conditions, local food, transportation, entertainment, facilities, and health care services in the host country. Interaction adjustment involves the degree of comfort associated with interacting with host country nationals at work and outside. Work adjustment is the degree of comfort associated with the assigned job or task.

While expatriates accomplish mission successfully, they may repatriate to the home country and confront adjustment problems. Although repatriates usually have family and friends in the home country, these people may not have experience living in a foreign country, and thus are unable to provide readjustment advice (Meziar & Scandura, 2005). Home country mentor could be the expatriate’s primary sponsor by providing assistance throughout the assignment, especially during repatriation, by helping ensure that the assignment commensurate with increased experience (Meziar & Scandura, 2005). Thus, whether MNCs can effectively establish a comprehensive mentor-protégé plan is the key to the repatriation success.

2.2. Home country mentorship and repatriate adjustment

Although the purposes and objectives of previous studies are different, the definitions of mentoring by scholars numerous and confused, but they have the same meaning. That is traditionally, mentoring is presumed to be an interpersonal relationship that supervisor provides guidance of job skills and knowledge to his subordinate, and this relationship involves the exchange and sharing of work experiences between seniors (mentors) and juniors (protégés) in which mentors provide support, guidance and opinions of career planning and development to protégés (Kram, 1983, 1985). In other words, it is a interpersonal relationship that mentor provides coaching, counseling, psychological counseling, promotion etc., and this similar developmental network not only benefit both mentors and protégés, but also makes organization grow and develop (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Scandura (1992) indicated that a mentor provides protégé career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling functions. By definition, the career development function involves mentors offering assistance concerning career and work skills; the psychosocial support function involves mentors offering assistance concerning friendship, consultation, and care; and the role modeling function involves mentors offering role definitions and work behaviors to be imitated by protégés. Many studies had validated the above definition and classification of mentoring functions (e.g. Chun, Sosik, & Yun, 2012; Kwan, Liu, & Yim, 2011; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011).

Repatriates may experience uncertainty and culture shock (Adler, 1981; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Zeira & Banai, 1987), especially for those from long-distance assignments. Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Valk (2010) found that Indian repatriates

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