Challenges faced by the organizations in managing the repatriation: A case from IT sector

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the challenges faced by organizations, particularly in the IT sector, regarding the repatriation of employees returning from international assignments. Using a case study approach focused on Zones, an IT reseller company based in Australia with global operations, the study explores factors influencing successful repatriation efforts. The analysis draws upon existing literature and the strategies employed by Zones, emphasizing the significance of addressing mental health, time spent on mission, reverse culture shock, interpersonal dynamics, and cultural adaptation during repatriation processes. Through a SWOT analysis, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to Zones' repatriation initiatives are identified. Furthermore, the research proposes interventions across pre-departure, on-assignment, and return phases to enhance employee support and facilitate smoother transitions. The findings underscore the importance of proactive measures in informing employees about the risks associated with international assignments, monitoring employee well-being during assignments, and providing debriefing and counseling services upon repatriation. In conclusion, the research highlights the critical role of organizations in fostering successful repatriation experiences to mitigate turnover rates, enhance productivity, and sustain employee well-being.

Keywords: repatriation, IT sector, Human resource, international assignments, international human resource.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations that invest heavily in international assignments but do little to prepare employees for repatriation are missing a critical opportunity (Kumar, 2022). Repatriated employees can make significant contributions to their organizations and serve as role models for others who may undertake international assignments in the future. However, as per Shah et al., (2022) many organizations do not put enough effort into repatriation, and as a result, repatriates often struggle to adapt back to their home country. This can lead to high rates of turnover and decreased productivity, which can damage the organization in the long run. The scope of this assignment is to address the concerns about the rate at which repatriates struggle to adapt back to Australia. The selected company is Zones which is an IT reseller company. The company is based in Sydney Australia, but they also have offices in USA and UK.

Background

Zones is an Australian company that specializes in providing IT services and solutions to businesses. The company was founded in 1992 and has since grown to become one of the leading IT service providers in Australia. Zones offers a wide range of IT services and solutions, including cloud computing, data storage, networking, and security. The company serves clients in a variety of industries, including healthcare, government, financial services, manufacturing, retail, and telecommunications. Zones has a strong commitment to providing quality IT services and solutions at an affordable price. Zones has office locations in Australia, USA and UK as well. Zones, Inc. is a global provider of information technology solutions. The company operates in three countries: Australia, USA and UK. It offers a range of services, including infrastructure, applications, and business process outsourcing.

When it comes to sending expatriates on international operations and assignments, Zones is committed to providing the best possible support for employees and their families. They understand that leaving home country can be a daunting experience, and their goal is to make the transition as smooth and stress-free as possible. Zones offer a comprehensive expatriate support program that includes pre-departure orientation, cross-cultural training, language support, and ongoing assistance throughout the assignment. They also provide financial assistance for relocation costs and housing as well. Zones believe that its expatriate employees are a key part of our success and are committed to ensuring that they have a positive experience while representing Zones on international assignments.

Problem of the research

Despite the growing trend of organizations investing in international assignments to leverage global talent and expand their market reach, the process of repatriation, particularly within the IT sector, remains fraught with challenges. Repatriated employees often struggle to reintegrate into their home country's

workforce, leading to decreased productivity, elevated turnover rates, and diminished organizational performance.

The problem at hand lies in the inadequacy of organizational strategies and interventions to effectively support repatriated employees during the transition back to their home country, as evidenced by the persistence of challenges such as mental health issues, reverse culture shock, and interpersonal dynamics. While organizations like Zones in the IT sector recognize the importance of providing comprehensive support to expatriates, there exists a gap between the theoretical understanding of repatriation challenges and the practical implementation of strategies to address them.

Moreover, the lack of empirical research focusing specifically on the repatriation experiences of employees within the IT sector, as exemplified by Zones, limits our understanding of the factors influencing successful repatriation efforts and impedes the development of evidence-based practices for managing international assignments in this industry context.

Therefore, the overarching problem addressed by this research is the need to comprehensively examine the challenges faced by repatriated employees within the IT sector, assess the effectiveness of organizational interventions in facilitating the repatriation process, and identify opportunities for enhancing organizational practices to support the successful reintegration of employees into the workforce upon their return. By addressing this gap in knowledge and practice, the study seeks to contribute to the development of strategies that promote employee well-being, organizational effectiveness, and global competitiveness in the dynamic landscape of the IT sector and beyond.

Research questions

RQ1 - What specific challenges do repatriated employees in the IT sector, particularly within Zones, encounter during the process of reintegrating into their home country, and how do these challenges impact organizational outcomes?

RQ2 - To what extent do the strategies and interventions implemented by Zones to support repatriated employees align with the identified factors influencing successful repatriation efforts, and what are the implications for organizational practices in managing international assignments?

Significance of the research

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the often-overlooked phase of repatriation within the context of international assignments, particularly in the IT sector represented by Zones. As globalization continues to shape the landscape of businesses, the strategic deployment of human resources across borders has become increasingly prevalent. However, the success of international assignments cannot be measured solely by the performance of expatriates during their tenure abroad; rather, it extends to the effectiveness of their reintegration upon return to their home country.

Firstly, this study contributes to existing literature by shedding light on the unique challenges faced by repatriated employees in the IT sector, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. By

identifying factors such as mental health issues, time spent on mission, reverse culture shock, interpersonal dynamics, and cultural adaptation, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of repatriation challenges within this specific industry context.

Secondly, the research offers practical insights for organizations, particularly those operating in the IT sector, by examining the strategies and interventions implemented by Zones to facilitate the repatriation process. By evaluating the alignment between these organizational initiatives and the identified factors influencing successful repatriation efforts, the study informs best practices for managing international assignments and optimizing the reintegration of employees into the workforce upon their return.

Furthermore, the findings of this research have broader implications for organizational policies and practices related to talent management, employee well-being, and organizational performance. By addressing the challenges associated with repatriation, organizations can mitigate turnover rates, enhance employee satisfaction and retention, and foster a culture of support and inclusion for all employees, regardless of their international assignment status.

Ultimately, by advancing our understanding of the complexities inherent in the repatriation process within the IT sector and providing actionable recommendations for organizational practice, this study seeks to contribute to the enhancement of employee experiences, organizational effectiveness, and global competitiveness in an increasingly interconnected world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section has two parts. Part one present and discuss five factors that can influence repatriation efforts. This discussion is based on inter/intrapersonal, organizational, institutional, cultural and time-related factors. Part two discuss the strategy based on past and present information of Zones. This also includes SWOT analysis and requisite interventions.

Zavala-Barajas et al., (2022) found five factors which can impact on successful repatriation. These five factors selected for firm's repatriation efforts are:

Mental health of repatriates
The mental health of repatriates can impact successful repatriation in a number of ways. First, repatriates who are struggling with mental health issues may find it difficult to readjust to life in their home country (Peltokorpi, 2022). This can lead to social isolation, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, repatriates who are struggling with mental health issues may have a harder time finding a job, maintaining relationships, and adjusting to a new culture. Finally, repatriates who are struggling with mental health issues may be more likely to experience homesickness, culture shock, and reverse culture shock. If repatriates are not mentally healthy, it can influence the firm's repatriation efforts in a number of ways. For example, repatriates may be less likely to be able to adjust to their new environment, which can lead

to difficulty reintegrating into the firm. Additionally, repatriates who are not mentally healthy may be more likely to experience culture shock or homesickness, which can impact their productivity and motivation. Additionally, mental health issues can also lead to communication problems and conflict within the repatriation team.

Zones understand that the mental health of its employees is crucial to its success as an organization. In order to support the mental health of its employees, Zones has implemented a number of policies and programs. One example is the company's "Zones of Care" program, which provides support and resources to employees who are dealing with mental health issues.

Time spent on mission

The time spent on the mission of repatriates can influence the firm's repatriation efforts in a number of ways. For example, if repatriates spend a significant amount of time on the mission, they may be more likely to develop a strong attachment to the host country and be less willing to return to their home country. Additionally, Aljofan (2022) argued that if the mission is lengthy and challenging, repatriates may be more likely to experience culture shock and difficulty readjusting to their home country, which can make repatriation more difficult. Finally, if repatriates are away from their home country for an extended period of time, they may have difficulty re-establishing social and professional networks, which can also make repatriation more difficult.

Reverse culture shock

Reverse culture shock can influence the firm's repatriation efforts in a number of ways. For example, repatriates may feel isolated and disconnected from their home country and may have difficulty readjusting to the pace of life. Additionally, they may struggle to re-establish social and professional networks. As a result, the firm may need to provide additional support to help repatriates adjust to life back home. Additionally, the firm may need to be mindful of the potential for reverse culture shock when developing repatriation plans and policies (Suutari, 2021).

Zones is aware of the challenges that repatriates face when they return to their home countries. To help them adjust, the company offers a number of services, including counseling, mentoring, and cultural orientation. Additionally, Zones provides repatriates with access to a network of other returnees who can offer support and advice.

Interpersonal factors

There are a number of interpersonal factors that can influence the firm's repatriation efforts. First, the repatriates' relationship with their home country can affect their willingness to return. If they have strong ties to their home country, they may be more likely to want to return (James, 2021). Second, the

repatriates' relationship with their host country can also affect their willingness to return. If they have strong ties to their host country, they may be less likely to want to return. Third, the repatriates' relationship with their family can also influence their decision to return. If they have strong ties to their family, they may be more likely to want to return. Finally, the repatriates' relationship with their work can also affect their decision to return. If they are unhappy with their work, they may be less likely to want to return.

Cultural factors

Cultural factors can influence the firm's repatriation efforts in a number of ways. First, the host country's culture may be unfamiliar to the repatriates, making it difficult for them to adjust. Additionally, Harjana et al., (2021) argued that the repatriates may be used to a different work ethic and may find it difficult to conform to the expectations of the firm. Additionally, the repatriates may be unaware of the company's policies and procedures and may not be able to comply with them (Ilyas, 2023). Finally, the repatriates may not be able to communicate effectively with their colleagues due to language barriers.

Zones is addressing these cultural factors by providing repatriates with orientation and training programs that familiarize them with the company's policies and procedures. Additionally, Zones is providing language training to help repatriates communicate effectively with their colleagues. Finally, Zones is encouraging repatriates to maintain ties with their home countries and to participate in cultural activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

-The company has been in business for over 25 years and has a strong reputation in the industry.

-Zones has a large global footprint with over 60 locations in 3 countries. They have sent hundreds of employees as expatriates on international assignments. They have a Zones care program for repatriates to bring them back to the country once their international assignment is finished.

-The company has a strong focus on employee development and offers a wide variety of training and development opportunities.

-Zones offers a competitive salary and benefits package. Especially to the employees on international assignments and to repatriates. Since they have sacrificed a lot, so Zones care program is designed for repatriates.

Weaknesses:

-The company has a high turnover rate, with over 10% of employees leaving each year.

-Zones has a reputation for being a difficult place to work, with long hours and high stress levels.

-The company has been through a number of restructures in recent years, which has led to some employees feeling insecure in their jobs.

-The global economic downturn has led to a decrease in demand for Zones' services. They downsized during COVID as well.

Opportunities:

-There is a growing trend for companies to outsource their IT needs, which could lead to increased demand for Zones' services.

-The company is well-positioned to take advantage of the growing market for cloud computing services.

-Zones could expand its business into new markets, such as healthcare and education.

Threats:

-The company faces competition from a number of large IT service providers.

-The global economic downturn could lead to further decreases in demand for Zones' services.

-The company's dependence on a small number of large clients could lead to difficulties if one of these clients decides to switch to a competitor.

Following interventions needs to be considered:

Before employees leave on assignment
Before employees leave on assignment, it is important to ensure that they are aware of the risks associated with international travel and assignments (Froese, 2021). Additionally, orientation and training on the culture, customs, and laws of the host country is essential. Finally, maintaining regular communication with family and friends back home is crucial.

-Ensure that employees are aware of the risks associated with international travel and assignments.

-Provide employees with comprehensive orientation and training on the culture, customs, and laws of the host country.

-Encourage employees to maintain regular communication with their families and friends back home.

On assignment

On assignment, employee wellbeing must be monitored and supported as needed. Additionally, employees should be encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to take advantage of available healthcare resources (Breitenmoser, 2021). Finally, staying connected to family and friends back home is important.

-Monitor employee wellbeing and provide support as needed.

-Encourage employees to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to take advantage of available healthcare resources.

-Help employees stay connected to their families and friends back home.

Return

Providing debriefing and counseling services to help employees readjust to life back home is essential. Additionally, employees should be encouraged to stay in touch with their colleagues and friends from their international assignment (Ho et al., 2021). Finally, employee wellbeing should be monitored and supported as needed.

-Provide employees with debriefing and counseling services to help them readjust to life back home.

-Encourage employees to stay in touch with their colleagues and friends from their international assignment.

-Monitor employee wellbeing and provide support as needed.

CONCLUSION

To conclude companies should emphasize on five significant factors to be successful in bringing back repatriates. These factors are taking care of mental health of employees, time spent on mission, reverse culture shock, interpersonal factors and cultural factors. Moreover, this assignment also concludes that companies should inform about risks of going on international assignments to employees. It is also the responsibility of Zones that employee well-being must be monitored and supported when they are on international assignments. Similarly, this assignment concludes that upon return on repatriates, companies should provide counselling services to help employees readjust to life back home as this is essential.

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