

Repatriation adjustment process of business employees: evidence from Spanish workers.

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the key issues affecting the repatriation adjustment process of international workers and the impact of this process on repatriates' performance, satisfaction and turnover intentions when they have returned to their parent companies. 122 Spanish repatriates participated in the study. The findings confirm previous literature that some individual - characteristics such as self-efficacy - and other variables such as changes in autonomy at work, the creation of adequate working expectations and changes in social status can affect adjustment to work after the repatriation. However, the repatriation adjustment process is a dynamic phenomenon and its effects vary over time. We find that work adjustment after two months impacts positively on performance, whereas adjustment after nine months is correlated with higher satisfaction and an intention to stay with the firm. Hence, this research points out the importance of reducing the duration of the adjustment process of the business employees in order to improve some organizational outcomes. A new model of the repatriation process is proposed which includes the time variable.

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1. Introduction

The globalization of economies is fostering the cross-cultural mobility of individuals such as students, missionaries, migrants and employees (Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 2001 and 2002). In recent years, the internationalization of business operations has led to an increasing number of expatriations of business employees. This trend is likely to continue in the next few years (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Selmer, 2001). Normally, the individuals' time abroad will end with the return of the employees to their countries of origin, a process which is called repatriation (Sussman, 2001).

In the literature, there are a considerable number of studies stressing the difficulties and challenges associated with the adjustment of these foreign-assigned business employees to their host environment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005; Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall & Stroh, 1999; Farid & Buda, 1998; Ouarasse & Van de Vijver, 2005; Scullion, 2001). However, adjustment difficulties also occur when workers are repatriated to their home base (Baruch, Steele & Qunatrill, 2002; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Jasawalla, Connolly & Slojkowski, 2004). This topic is considered to be under-researched and further investigation is necessary (Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001; Schuler, Budhwar & Florwski, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

The aim of this research is to analyze the antecedent factors of repatriates' adjustment to work and its effect on performance, satisfaction and a desire to remain within the

organization. The paper reviews the literature on this topic and derives hypotheses from it. The methodology used to test those hypotheses on a sample of Spanish repatriates is explained and the findings presented and discussed. Based on our findings, the paper proposes a new model of the repatriation adjustment and ends with the limitations of, and conclusions obtained from, this research.

2. Literature review.

2.1. The concept of adjustment.

In the business world different definitions of adjustment have been used. It can be defined either as a process or a state. For example, Berry (1992) defines adjustment as a state whereby changes occur in the individual in a direction of increased fit and reduced conflict between environmental demands and the individual attitudinal and behavioral inclinations. Black and Gregersen (1991) conceptualize adjustment as the degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country. On the other hand, Brewster (1995) defines adjustment as the process of behavior modification by the expatriates so their behaviors are in accordance with the accepted behavior of the host culture. Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen (2003) in a recent review of research into adjustment, give a sense of the confusion reigning in the field. They argued that the term "adjustment" has been used in a general sense to indicate a number of things, including:

- feelings of acceptance and satisfaction (Brislin, 1981)
- acquisition of culturally acceptable skills and behaviors (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977)

- the lack of mental health problems such as stress or depression (Berry and Kim, 1988) and
- the psychological comfort that an individual feels in a new situation (Gregersen & Black, 1990).

We adopt this latter definition as being the most widely accepted and utilized in the business literature.

The importance of the adjustment process relies on the fact that employees suffer from adjustment difficulties when they transfer to a foreign destination. Hence, they suffer from “culture shock”. But adjustment problems do not just occur during the expatriation. When individuals return home they may also experience adjustment difficulties as a consequence of different circumstances, such as the reduction of their autonomy at work and of their compensation, loss of status and career direction or family readjustment problems among others (Peltonen, 1997; Pickard, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Tung, 1998). These problems have been labeled “reverse culture shock”. The extent and speed of (re-)adjustment is likely to have an influence on performance and satisfaction and can increase turnover rates at the company (Black et al., 1999; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Hammer, Hart & Rogan 1998; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh, 1995).

2.2. Repatriates: the key employees.

The relationship between the foreign assignment and the future human resource needs of the organization has become more important, with an increasing focus on the need to develop international/ global mindsets (Bonache et al., 2001; Harvey, Speier & Novicevic,

1999; Harzing, 2001), which may now be one of the predominant reasons for sending people on expatriation assignments (Bossard & Petterson, 2005). It has been argued that it is precisely the utilization of organizational capabilities worldwide that provides multinational corporations with an important source of competitive advantage (Nohria & Ghoshal, 1997). Strategic capability is dependent on the “cognitive processes” of international managers and the ability of the organization to create a “matrix in the minds of managers” or a global mindset (Harvey et al., 1999; Rhinesmith, 1996; Tung, 1998). International companies understand the value of the creation and absorption of knowledge inside the organization that can lead to a better competitive position in the international context (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2005) and to organizational development (Harzing, 2001). International employees can also foster the organizational flexibility to adjust to different environments (Autio, Spienza & Almeida, 2000). This international orientation depends, amongst other things, on the length and the quality of international experience (Murtha, Lenway & Bagozzi, 1998). Expatriates, as mechanisms of knowledge transfer, play an important part in this process (Bonache & Brewster, 2001; Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Cerdin, 2003; Peterson, Sargent, Napier & Shim, 1996). Embedding these international mindsets within the organization will not, of course, be developed if the international assignees leave as soon as they have completed their assignment. Hence, in comparison to employees without international experience, repatriates become strategic and key for the multinational companies.

But if expatriation is considered a powerful developmental tool it is also an expensive one. According to Reynolds (1997) expatriates cost employers, on average, 2 to 5 times more than home country counterpart workers. As a consequence, expatriates are amongst the most expensive of an organization’s human resources and for that investment to “pay off” it is

necessary to retain the repatriates in the organization and to have them satisfied and performing well.

2.3. Repatriation failure.

Despite the cited reasons for retaining expatriates in the firm after their assignments, there is evidence of substantial turnover when they return. Surveys suggest that 10-25% of expatriates leave their company within one year of repatriation (Black, 1992; Black & Gregersen, 1999; Solomon, 1995), a figure which is notably higher than for equivalent non-expatriates (Black & Gregersen, 1999) and that between a quarter and a third of repatriates leave their firms within two years of returning (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). As nearly half the respondents in some of these surveys did not keep records of the career outcomes of repatriates, the true figure is likely to be higher. In a sample of Finnish expatriates, even amongst those who stayed with the same employer well over half had seriously considered leaving (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Harzing (1995) has pointed out that cited “failure rates” amongst expatriates may have unclear statistical bases, but these figures of repatriate loss seem to be more soundly based.

Repatriation losses imply high costs for the international companies: the loss of key employees and their unique experience if they leave the organization is exacerbated by the fact that people often do not change industries – they therefore are not just lost to the organization but, in practice, go to their competitors. Furthermore, the possibility of recruiting new candidates for expatriations is reduced, as other employees may be more reluctant to accept foreign assignments when they see the negative effects on career

advancement within the organization (Bossard & Petterson, 2005; Brewster & Scullion, 1997). This can also alter the international growth planning of the companies.

From the repatriate perspective, there are other problems associated with re-integrating into the home country and the organization. Among them we can find the loss of status, loss of autonomy, loss of career direction, and a feeling that international experience is undervalued by the company (Inkson, Pringle, Arthur & Barry, 1997). Alongside these, there is likely also to be a loss of income and life-style and there may be family readjustment problems. Most expatriates expect the return to enhance their career prospects and their return to be exciting and/ or challenging (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Tung, 1998). Often it is not.

Although adjustment distress could occur at different levels, the work environment is one of the most problematic. In this study we follow much of the research in this area that has focused on the identification of the main factors that affect repatriates' adjustment to the work and its consequences for the organization. Hence, this research will focus on the work dimension and the human resource practices that could be implemented at the company to foster the adaptation of its returned employees.

2.4. Repatriates' adjustment to work: hypothesis of research.

Typically, researchers report that repatriates' adjustment to work is affected by a variety of factors, in which some human resource practices are included.

First of all, the repatriation adjustment process can be affected by factors related to the international mission and the individuals' personality and behaviors. Particularly, literature

states that time abroad, the self-efficacy of the employee and the expectations they create during the assignment will have an influence on the repatriation adjustment process.

The time abroad or duration of the expatriation is the first of these factors. It has been argued that the longer the repatriates are in an international assignment, the higher the difficulties they will face when returning to their parent company (Harvey, 1982). It is assumed that the longer the time spent abroad, the more the individual will be used to the foreign country and organizational culture and the higher the degree of adjustment to the foreign country. The result will be increased difficulty adjusting back to the home country. This relation has received empirical support in the studies of Black and Gregersen (1991), Black (1994) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997). However, Cui and Awa (1992) found in their research that individuals with greater international experiences adjusted better upon their repatriation due to the familiarity they had gained in dealing with changes and differences. As the negative relationship has obtained most support in the literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: The longer the duration of the expatriation assignment the more difficult it will be for repatriates' to adjust to work after coming back to their home country.

Literature considers self-efficacy as an indicator of the individual's capacity to overcome specific situations (Garrido, 2000). In the repatriation literature, self-efficacy refers to the attitude that the employee brings to the process of attempting to triumph over the problems related to the repatriation process. It is likely that people with higher self-efficacy will find it easier to adjust to work after repatriation than individuals with lower levels of it (Black et al., 1999). Thus, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1b: The greater is the repatriates' self-efficacy, the easier it will be for them to adjust to the work after coming back to their home country.

The literature on repatriation has pointed out the importance of having accurate expectations regarding the work and the organization in order to improve repatriate adjustment. (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992; Black et al., 1999). The argument is that when uncertainty is reduced the individuals can anticipate the situation and be prepared for the changes at the home organization. In fact, empirically, Black (1991, 1992) found a positive relationship between the accuracy of work expectations and repatriates' work adjustment. For this reason we formulate hypothesis 1c.

Hypothesis 1c: The more accurate the expectations of the repatriates about the work before returning to their home country, the better they will adjust to the work after coming back to their home country.

On the other hand, the failure to adjust to work upon the return home is often linked with a corporate failure to utilize the international experience and develop the international manager. The literature stresses that, although repatriates represent very important assets for the company, many companies do not value their international experience when workers return to the parent company. For instance, according to Peltonen (1997), approximately 60% of repatriates consider that the experience they have acquired during the expatriation is undervalued. From the individuals' perspective this situation is clearly observable when they return to job with lower levels of autonomy to make decisions or when they are not promoted after the international mission.

The effect of the loss of work autonomy on employee's adjustment after returning to the home country has been a recurrent theme in the literature. Repatriates often move from a senior work in a foreign subsidiary, where they are "big fish in a small pond" to being once again a "cog in the wheel" back in the home country. From Cagney (1975) and Kendall (1981) to more recent literature (Black et al., 1999), studies show that individuals' adjustment to work and organization can be negatively influenced by a loss of autonomy after their repatriation. For this reason we suggest that:

Hypothesis 1d: The greater the autonomy of the repatriates' new work back in the home country, compared to the autonomy they had during the international assignment, the better they adjust to the work in their home country.

A linked factor argued as a contributor to successful repatriation is promotion on return (Harvey, 1982; Peltonen, 1997; Swaak, 1997). This is due to the fact that repatriates' motivation and adjustment are strongly influenced by the impact of their expatriation on their career advancement. Expatriation can lead to a loss of professional opportunities in the wider world of the organization ("out of sight/ out of mind"), with the international workers noting, when they return home, that colleagues who have stayed at the parent company have advanced their careers further (Harvey, 1982; Peltonen, 1997; Vermond, 2001). Other authors (Suutari & Brewster, 2003) have argued that expatriation substantially improves the external "marketability" of the individual. A promotion might be one way for the organization to retain the repatriate. Hence,

Hypothesis 1e: A promotion on return will improve the repatriates' adjustment to the work after return.

On the other hand, the literature acknowledges that organizational practices can foster the adjustment process of the individuals. In particular, academics have called attention to the desirability of having a mentor to support the employees during the international assignment, the importance of establishing a good communication system between the company and the expatriate whilst on assignment and the adequacy of giving training to the employees after the international mission to increase their adjustment to the organization.

The assignment of a mentor to the expatriate whilst he or she is working abroad is one human resource management practice often quoted in at least the prescriptive literature for its importance in enhancing the repatriates' work adjustment. The relevance of this human resource practice relies in the fact that the mentor is responsible for keeping the expatriate up-to-date with organizational changes and protecting their interests whilst they are on the assignment. Having a mentor provides confidence and reduces stress and also helps the individual to generate accurate work expectations (Harvey, 1982; Hurn, 1999; Swaak, 1997). Therefore, it is expected to improve the repatriates' adjustment to work (Black et al., 1992; Black et al., 1999). Vermond (2001) recommends keeping the mentor in place for at least six months after the expatriation has finished. Considering the theoretical and empirical literature we suggest hypothesis 1f.

Hypothesis 1f: Assigning a mentor to the employee during the expatriation will improve repatriates' adjustment to the work after coming back to their home country.

Still concerned with reducing the uncertainty associated with returning back to the organization and thereby enhancing the repatriates' work adjustment, Cagney (1975) and Harvey (1982) suggest that other forms of communication could also help. In recent research, Bossard and Petterson (2005) found that communication with the employees is one of the most effective organizational practices for improving the repatriation process. It seems logical that if the communication with the expatriates during their international assignment is more frequent, their adjustment after repatriation will be better. This argument leads to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1g: The greater is the frequency of communication between the home office and the employees whilst they are working overseas, the better they will adjust to work after coming back to their home country.

Some authors suggest that there should be a connection between training received after the repatriation and the employees' adjustment to work when they are back from an international assignment (Black, 1994; Black et al., 1999; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997) The assumption of this hypothesis relies on the usefulness of training to reduce uncertainty regarding the content and characteristics of the new work to which the individual is assigned and the confidence that such investment in the individual gives the repatriated employee.

Employees perceive training as an organizational support, increasing their motivation and their general satisfaction with the repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Training not only reduces uncertainty in itself but will increase the psychological comfort of the individuals with the new situation at their jobs and organizations. Hence,

Hypothesis 1h: Receiving training from the company after the repatriation will improve repatriates' adjustment to the work after coming back to their home country.

Finally, the literature states that the adjustment process of the individuals can be affected by other non-organizational factors such as changes in social status. According to Black et al. (1992), employees frequently experience changes in their status when they return. For instance, expatriates and their families often enjoy a higher social status abroad than in their home country (Dowling, Welch & Schuler, 1990). Returning to the home country often implies a downward shift in their social status and provokes disappointment, disillusion and work adjustment problems (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black et al., 1992; Black et al., 1999; Hurn, 1999; Kendall, 1981). It is also possible that expatriates and their families experience higher social status in their nations after coming back from a host location (Black et al., 1992). It seems likely that a decrease in the social status will decrease adjustment and an increase in the social status will foster adjustment.

This assumption is tested in hypothesis 1i:

Hypothesis 1i: The greater the increase in social status the employees experience after repatriation, the better they will adjust.

Whilst most of the research to date has offered simple measures of the factors affecting adjustment, clearly this variable will change over time. The time dimension has been previously used in the u-curve model of Oberg (1960) and applied to expatriates by Torbiorn (1982). According to this model, adjustment to a country occurs in four phases. The first phase, the honeymoon stage, happens during the first few weeks after arrival. At this time the new arrival is fascinated by the new culture and environment. However, in phase

two, workers experience the “culture shock”, that constitutes problems to adjust after the first phase. After the second phase, the individual adjusts gradually to the country (phase 3) until his/her total adaptation to the foreign culture (phase 4). Although the u-curve model does not offer antecedents or the effects of adjustment and it is not focused on the work and organizational dimension, it does indicate the need to conceptualize adjustment over time.

The time variable is explicitly included in the model of repatriate adjustment developed by Black et al. (1999). In this model, previous adjustment and post arrival adjustment establish two moments of time: before the repatriation, when the individual is creating expectations and once the individual has already returned home.

Despite this, the extant research does not usually include a time dimension. Only the study by Eschbach, Parker and Stoeberl (2001) asked their respondents about their adjustment at two moments of time, at two and at nine months after they had returned home. The argument is that over time the repatriates will gradually be learning to adjust to their new situation: the time that has passed since their return will affect the adjustment issues the repatriates face and, therefore, may also have an influence on their performance, satisfaction and turnover intentions. One would expect that the longer the elapsed time since they have returned home, the more information they would have acquired, the less uncertainty about their new situation and, therefore, the adjustment to work back in the home country will be better. Furthermore, one would expect that the better repatriates adjust in the short time, the better they will adjust in the long term. This relation is tested in hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2: The better repatriates are adjusted to work after two months, the better they will adjust to work after nine months.

Finally, the literature suggests that the overall adjustment of the repatriate to work will influence results such as performance, satisfaction with the repatriation and turnover intentions. These results will be tested in the third set of hypotheses.

In the international context it is said that the individuals' adjustment to work will affect their performance (Black et al., 1992; Selmer, 1998 and 2001; Webb, 1996). In the repatriation context, Stroh (1995) and Black et al. (1999) state that if repatriates stay in the company unadjusted to work, then their performance will diminish. This idea will be tested in hypothesis 3a:

Hypothesis 3a: The better the repatriates adjust to their new work in the home country, the better their performance will be.

Hammer et al. (1998) studied the factors that could affect repatriates' satisfaction with their repatriation process. They found that satisfaction may be influenced by the degree of repatriates' adjustment to the work.

Hypothesis 3b: The better the repatriates adjust to their new work in the home country, the better their satisfaction with the repatriation will be.

Similarly, it has been argued that work adjustment will directly affect turnover of repatriates (Black and Gregersen, 1999; Shaffer et al., 1999). So, when repatriates are back in their organizations and do not manage to adjust, they may well think of leaving the company. In fact, the literature points out a negative relation between adjustment and turnover intention

(Black et al., 1999). Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) found evidence of this relation. Therefore we propose the following hypothesis to be tested:

Hypothesis 3c: The better the repatriates adjust to their new work in the home country, the lower their turnover intentions.

Figure 1 summarizes the above mentioned hypotheses. The arrows in the figure show the direction of the expected influence of the independent variables on the dependent ones..

- Figure 1 about here-

3. Methodology.

3.1. Data collection and participants.

The objective of this study is to understand the repatriation process as perceived by the workers themselves. In doing so we hope not just to advance our understanding but to be able to draw conclusions of value to the repatriates and their organizations.

To do this, we designed a questionnaire piloted through interviews with repatriates who confirmed that the questions were correctly designed and understood by them. Information for this study was then collected by post between March and July 2004. The questionnaire was sent to international companies located in Spain. (Company information was obtained from the data base of Dun & Bradstreet). Human resource managers in these companies were contacted by phone and asked to forward the questionnaires to their Spanish repatriates. With the questionnaire, the repatriated received a letter explaining the objectives

of the research and a self-addressed stamped envelope to send their responses directly to the University. They were informed as well that their answers would be treated confidentially.

1000 questionnaires were sent and we received back 124, although 2 of them were discarded for being incomplete. We lack information regarding how many questionnaires actually reached returned sojourners in their companies, so we can only state that the response rate is *at least* 12,2%.

A sample of 122 repatriates is similar to or bigger than the sample of other research that has analyzed the repatriation topic (Baruch et al., 2002; Cox, 2004; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Sussman, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). In addition, the questionnaires came from at least 46 different international companies from different business sectors, which, in a less international economy like the Spanish one helps to guarantee the representativeness of the sample.

In general terms, the sample is comparable to most other studies of expatriates, being composed mostly of repatriated males (90% of the sample), and typically aged between 30 and 40, who have been working an average of 10 years for the company. Half of them were married when they were sent abroad and those who had children went to the foreign country with the whole family. The majority of them were executives (63%) and had been abroad for 2 to 4 years. Most of the assignments took place in Western Europe (35%), South and Central America (33.6%) and North America (25.4%). 92% of repatriates returned to Spain between 2000 and 2004 and 50% of them between January 2003 and June 2004. All the repatriates had been back in Spain at least 2 months and 98 of them have already been in Spain more than 9 months. They generally fulfilled a general management function (32.3%) or a

production function (29%) in the company's subsidiary firm. After the international assignments, the major changes they experienced were related to their hierarchical position, with a high drop in the number of workers with senior job titles.

3.2. Measures.

The dependent variables for the study were work adjustment, performance, satisfaction and turnover intentions of repatriate.

Work adjustment was measured using the scales developed by Black (1994). Using a 5-point scale respondents were asked about the degree to which they had adjusted to work when they were repatriated (1 = totally unadjusted, 5 = totally adjusted). They were asked for their adjustment to "tasks in the new post", "position and responsibility at work" and "autonomy at work". Alpha reliability for the scale was 0.90. As with the study by Enschede et al. (2001), repatriates were asked about the degree of adjustment they experienced after both two and nine months of coming back to Spain.

Performance was measured by asking repatriates about their performance when they came back to Spain regarding "achievement of the objectives", "quality of the work done", "finishing tasks on time", "working in group ability" and "general performance". These 5 items were drawn from the work of Black (1992). Response choices were based on a five-point scale (1= not satisfactory at all, 5 = totally satisfactory). Reliability was again acceptable: $\alpha = 0.85$.

Satisfaction was measured using items taken from the study by Gómez-Mejía and Balkin (1983). Respondents were asked how satisfied were we with “the work assigned after repatriation”, “time to be assigned a post”, “possibility of choosing a post”, “repatriation effect on career”, “information provided by the company about the post to be occupied after returning”, “information provided by the company about the repatriation process” and “general satisfaction with repatriation process”. Again, a five point scale were used to get their answers (1 =not satisfied at all; 5 = totally satisfied). Alpha reliability for the scale was 0.89.

Turnover intentions were measured using the items and scale developed by Wayne et al. (1997). Repatriates were asked about their agreement with the following items (1= totally disagree, 5 = totally agree): “you are actively looking for work outside the company”, “as soon as you find a better job you will leave the company”, “you are seriously thinking of leaving the company”, “you think you will be working for your company in 5 years” (reversed value) and “you feel little loyalty for your company”(α = 0.88).

Measures of the independent variables were also taken from literature. To measure the duration of the expatriation the repatriates were asked how many months they had been working in a foreign country (Hammer et al., 1998).

Self efficacy measures how capable an individual feels about overcoming specific problems. According to Garrido (2000), self efficacy need to be defined in terms of the specific difficulties or situations the person faces. As no study has been found that has measured self efficacy in repatriation, where problems are different and specific for this situation, some items have been designed, drawing on relevant literature (Bandura, 2002;

Garrido, 2000; Maurer & Pierce, 1998; Stadjkovic & Luthans, 1998). The items measure how confident the individual was about “adjusting to the new job in Spain”, “to the interaction with individuals” and “to the general environment” (1 = not sure, 5 = totally sure). Self efficacy also measures the repatriates’ persistence in adjusting to the new situations they encountered after coming back from the expatriation. This question is also formulated in the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.73$).

For measuring work autonomy, repatriates were asked to indicate the autonomy changes (1= lower autonomy, 5= higher autonomy) they have experienced at: “Performing tasks”, “Deciding the quantity of individual work to perform”, “Deciding the quantity of group work to perform”, “Involvement in organizational decisions compared with the autonomy they had abroad” ($\alpha = 0.80$). Items were taken from Steward (1982) and Gregersen and Black (1996).

Work expectations have been measured using a 5 point scale question (1 = not accurate, 5 = totally accurate) with the following items: “tasks in the job”, “position and responsibility” and “autonomy at work” ($\alpha = 0.89$). These items come from Suutari and Brewster (2003).

In the case of the variable communication, the repatriates were asked about the degree of information exchange with the organization of origin during the international assignment (1 = low, 5 = high), as suggested in Black et al. (1999).

For valuing the social status, respondents were asked about the changes experienced after coming back to Spain in the status (1 = much worse, 5 = much better). This measure is taken from Gregersen and Stroh (1997).

Finally, the rest of the independent variables were dichotomous variables such as having being promoted upon the repatriation, having a mentor or having received training or not. Regarding this last variable, due to the existence of different types of training, we asked repatriates to evaluate the convenience of the training they received to enhancing their adjustment to work (1 = not helpful at all, 5 = totally helpful). These measures have been previously used or suggested in the literature (Feldman & Thomson, 1993; Black et al., 1999).

3.3. Data analysis.

Although the measures were taken from the literature, special attention has been paid to the validity and reliability of the measures, given that this is one of only few studies that have taken place with non-Anglo-Saxon repatriates.

Table 1 provides information regarding the mean values, standard deviations of the variables and bivariate correlations. Prior to the comparison of the hypothesis of research, multicollinearity tests (tolerance and VIF) have been performed. It shows high scores for the self efficacy of the individuals, their nine months adjustment to work and their performance in their company. The table also shows high correlations between several independent variables. Despite this, multicollinearity tests confirm it is not present in the regression models of this research. Regression analysis (enter method) was used to test the hypotheses.

<Table 1. Mean values, St. deviation and bivariate correlations about here>

4. Results.

Table 2 shows the factors that influence the two months (Adjusted R^2 : 0.301) and nine months (Adjusted R^2 : 0.141) repatriate adjustment to work.

<Table 2. Factors influencing work adjustment about here>

In terms of our hypothesis, positive relationships were found between self-efficacy ($p < 0.01$), work expectations accuracy ($p < 0.1$), work autonomy ($p < 0.05$) and social status changes after repatriation ($p < 0.05$) and work adjustment after two months of their returning home. On the other hand, a slightly significant negative influence was shown between having a mentor ($p < 0.1$) and work adjustment. These results support hypothesis 1b, 1c, 1d and 1i, but are unexpected for hypothesis 1f.

Table 2 also shows that self-efficacy and accuracy of work expectations are positively related to the repatriates' adjustment 9 months after returning to the home organizations, supporting hypotheses 1b ($p < 0.05$) and 1c ($p < 0.05$). Contrary to our predictions, a negative relationship was found between the training received by repatriates after coming back to Spain ($p < 0.05$) and their adjustment to work. Additional analysis in tables 3 and 4 provide further analysis of this issue indicating, on a 5 point scale, the mean value of the training received in the opinion of the repatriates. Variance analysis shows that this value is significantly different depending on whether the workers have been promoted on return or not. We discuss these results in the next section.

<Table 3. Value of the training received by promoted and non promoted employees about here>

<Table 4. Variance analysis. Value of the training depending on promotion variable about here>

In terms of our hypothesis 2, as predicted, table 5 shows that nine months adjustment is strongly influenced by two months adjustment (adjusted R^2 : 0.432; $p < 0.01$). We have also performed additional analysis that show that after 9 months individuals are significantly more adjusted than after 2 months (table 6).

<Table 5. The link between adjustment and results about here>

<Table 6. T-test analysis for the variable adjustment after 2 and 9 months of the repatriation >

Hypothesis 3a, which links adjustment to work and performance, finds partial support in this research because a significant relation is only obtained when the independent variable is two months adjustment ($p < 0.05$). When the independent variable is nine months adjustment to work no significant relationship is found.

As table 5 shows, satisfaction is linked to nine months work adjustment ($p < 0.1$) but is not influenced by how workers are adjusted two months after their return, partially supporting the hypothesis.

Finally, table 5 also shows that adjustment to work ($p < 0.05$) can reduce repatriates' turnover intentions at nine months after their return but not at two months after the repatriation. So, again, we only find partial support for hypothesis 3c.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to examine the under-researched repatriation adjustment process of international workers. Our findings provide evidence that the adjustment to work of repatriates is a key factor in improving their performance and satisfaction with the repatriation and in increasing their retention in the organization.

The study shows that repatriate adjustment goes through different stages over the time following the worker's return: it provides evidence of the need to include the time factor in analyzing the repatriation process. We considered two moments in the adjustment to work of international employees after being repatriated, after two months and nine months. Our results show that determinants and results of the adjustment to work of repatriates depend on time.

As predicted, work autonomy and social status changes affect work adjustment two months after the employee comes back home. An unexpected result was obtained regarding having a mentor during the assignment and work adjustment two months after the return. The negative relationship between them might be explained by the quality of the mentoring program, and whether the mentoring continued or not after the expatriation assignment has finished. If it ceased, the worker could feel less supported by the firm, experiencing more problems of adjustment. We do not have information on whether the mentoring continued or not after the repatriation of the worker, but Vermond (2001) pointed out the importance of mentoring the repatriates at least during six months after their return to their home organization. Clearly, this issue needs further research.

Another surprising finding was the negative relationship between training and adjustment. A possible explanation for this result is that non-promoted employees (75% of the sample) consider the fact that the organization has decided to train them on return as additional evidence that companies are not valuing the international experience they have acquired during the expatriation mission and, as a consequence, adjustment diminishes. Moreover, empirical research conducted by Paik et al. (2002) provides an argument to support our findings. Based on the qualitative information obtained by interviewing expatriates and their human resource managers, the authors found that while practitioners might consider some organizational practices as valuable for enhancing the repatriation process, the reality is that it does not match with the employees' expectations and desires. For instance, according to their results, expatriates do not view a mentor as a necessary support to accomplish their objectives, contrary to what the human resource managers believe. It is also stated that expatriates do value their autonomy and discretion during the expatriation, with little control from headquarters. Paradoxically, therefore, organizational practices such as having a mentor and receiving training during the international missions can create dissatisfaction among employees and prejudice their adjustment after the repatriation. Hence, the existence of different views between employees and employers in determining the organizational factors that can ease their adjustment might explain the results obtained in this study.

Finally, as far as adjustment after two months is concerned, self efficacy, as an indicator of the individual's capacity to overcome problems when they come back after an international assignment, is significant. This finding is in accordance with literature (Black et al., 1999). This factor is also linked to nine months adjustment.

Accuracy in work expectation is shown to be a key factor in increasing work adjustment. This finding supports the importance of the uncertainty reduction established in the literature to help individuals to adjust, as they are better prepared to face the new environment and conditions. Moreover, it is frequently the case that the expectations the employees create regarding the repatriation process are quite optimistic (Tung, 1998). Consequently, when their expectations are met upon the repatriation they adjust better.

In relation to the results of the repatriation process, two months adjustment influences employees' performance, whereas nine months adjustment has a significant impact on the increase of repatriates' satisfaction and the decrease of their turnover intentions. These results mean that the adjustment process varies in time. In the short term, when individuals are less adjusted, it only affects repatriates' performance. But if individuals are not adjusted after 9 months of repatriation workers will feel unsatisfied with the repatriation process and will try to leave their organization.

Time also has an impact on the determinants of the degree of adjustment to work of the repatriates. As might be expected, the data shows that workers are less adjusted two months after being repatriated than after nine months (see table 6) and also that different variables facilitate the adjustment at these stages.

6. Limitations and contributions of the paper

As in all research, our results should be interpreted carefully. For example, some bias could appear, first, because all the repatriates in the sample continued working for their

companies. We have no data from those who have already left their organizations. Moreover, we are aware that, although the first intention of the HR Managers was to collaborate with the research, some of them did not forward the questionnaire to their repatriates and this might alter the final results if the reasons for their final rejection to collaborate were something other than lack of time or interest. We also note that the final decision to answer the questionnaire resides with the repatriates themselves, and the characteristics of their mission and the results of their repatriation experience can alter as well their ultimate determination to participate in the study. All the repatriates in this study are of Spanish nationality and, whilst this provides new data on a less-studied group, it may also affect the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation of this research is derived from the data collection methodology. Respondents were asked to remember their degree of adjustment after two and after nine months of their returning to Spain and this can always lead to distortion. Hence, the problems associated with memory recall may be relevant to this research. In relation to this limitation, a longitudinal study would have provided appropriate temporal data that would have given us further insight into the repatriation adjustment process and the deeper knowledge on the effect of the time variable on the adjustment phenomenon. Furthermore, as this research has analyzed the employees' adjustment process by asking the repatriates directly, we lack data from the organizational side. The measures used to evaluate the training after the repatriation process and the mentoring assistance could be also considered a limitation of this study. Although we have information about the value that repatriates give to the training received by the organization we lack details about the duration and the content of this training. Similarly, we did not collect information regarding the main features of the mentoring program.

There is implicit inference chain in the derivation of some hypotheses that has not been analyzed in this study. Particularly, we have not examined the process of reducing uncertainty that takes place when repatriates are provided with information (e.g. through mentoring or training) at the organization that leads to better adjustment after the repatriation.

Finally, we have not considered the effect of the cultural identity of the employees on their adjustment process, as suggested in the model developed by Sussman (2002). Clearly, future research should address these issues.

Despite these and taking into account that theory is still scarce and in process of developing, this research makes relevant academic and practitioner contributions.

First of all, as the literature centered on the repatriation of employees who have worked in other countries has been predominantly Anglo-Saxon in nature (Baruch et al., 2002; Bossard & Petterson, 2005; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Paik et al., 2002;), it may not be generalizable to other countries. Hence, a first contribution of this research, based on Spain, is to provide new data to the limited literature that analyses the repatriation adjustment of business employees.

Generally, this research supports the existing (mainly Anglo-Saxon) literature. in the sense that it shows the importance that human resource management practices have for the adjustment process of the repatriates. It involves, however, some differences. For instance, personality of the individuals (e.g. self efficacy) comes out to be an important antecedent of adjustment.

For practitioners, one important result of this research is that some human resource practices directly influence repatriates' adjustment to work when they come back home and, therefore, can improve their performance and satisfaction and reduce their turnover intentions and the loss to the company of all the experience and abilities acquired abroad. This fact reinforces the idea of the strategic role that international human resource management has in the international firms. International transfers are frequently used as a way to create global mindsets and foster organizational development, but this can only occur if the organization retains these individuals after they have returned. This is directly influenced by the organizational practices that can aid adjustment.

Based on the analysis of the information collected, recommendations for improving repatriation management in international companies can be suggested. For instance, companies should provide more autonomy to the workers when they come back; should avoid creating a feeling of a downward shift in social status after repatriation and should help them to generate accurate work expectations. This will lead to better adjustment, more satisfaction and better retention rates for the organization. This can also increase the willingness of other employees to accept expatriate assignments.

Theoretically, this study makes innovative contributions to the literature showing the dynamic aspect of the adjustment process and the effects over the time. The study shows clearly the importance of taking into account the time variable in trying to understand the repatriates' adjustment process. For human resource practitioners it is important to be aware that the longer the repatriates' adjustment process takes, the higher is the possibility that the repatriates will be unsatisfied and leave their organizations, with all the accompanying loss of

development and knowledge. So, organizational interests will be served by helping the repatriates to shorten their adjustment process.

7. Conclusions

We summarize our findings in a new model (figure 2) that can be tested in future research. This model includes the antecedents that can lead to better repatriate adjustment to work and retention and emphasizes the idea of the strategic role that IHRM has in the international firms. It might be a first step for developing a framework of the repatriation process from the organizational perspective. As in any new model, empirical research is needed to replicate and further develop this proposal. Therefore, further studies based on this model are highly recommended, especially those developed in countries other than Spain that will permit to make cross-cultural comparison between the findings.

<Figure 2. New repatriate adjustment model about here>

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Table 1. Mean values, st. deviations and bivariate correlations.

	Mean	St. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Time abroad	36	29.8	1												
2. Self efficacy	4	0.7	-.056	1											
3. Autonomy	3	0.9	-.150	.34**	1										
4. Promotion.	0.2	0.4	.075	.26**	.36**	1									
5. Work expectatations	3.2	1.1	-.026	.32**	.47**	.32**	1								
6. Mentor	0.4	0.5	-.153	.168	.24**	.142	.33**	1							
7. Communit.	3.6	1.1	-.033	.171	.17*	.180*	.29**	.219*	1						
8. Training	0.2	0.4	-.037	.116	.070	.219*	.111	.162	.029	1					
9. Status	2.8	0.9	-.099	.25**	.49**	.29**	.30**	.226*	.196*	.056	1				
10. 2 months adjustment	3.4	1.1	-.108	.41**	.41**	.111	.34**	.046	.220*	-.092	.37**	1			
11. 9 months adjustment	4.2	0.8	-.048	.30**	.184	.106	.32**	.142	.210*	-.152	.182	.62**	1		
12. Performance.	4	0.6	-.040	.35**	.33**	.043	.24**	.053	.177	.033	.095	.44**	.35**	1	
13. Satisfaction .	2.9	1	.011	.34**	.41**	.46**	.66**	.36**	.35**	.123	.28**	.35**	.30**	.160	1
14. Turnover Intentions	2.3	1.1	-.074	-.32**	-.27**	-.207*	-.33**	-.32**	-.29**	-.114	-.24**	-.174	-.254*	-.048	-.48**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral); * Correlation is significant at 0.05 (bilateral)

Table 2. Factors influencing two and nine months adjustment.

	2 MONTHS ADJUSTMENT TO WORK		9 MONTHS ADJUSTMENT TO WORK	
	Beta	t	Beta	t
Time abroad	-.053	-.668	-.045	-.465
Self efficacy	.296	3.525***	.226	2.191**
Work expectations accuracy	.160	1.701*	.255	2.233**
Autonomy	.202	2.038**	-.027	-.225
Promotion	-.115	-1.323	.007	.069
Mentor	-.143	-1.707*	.001	.012
Communication	.102	1.257	.116	1.179
Training in Spain	-.126	1.594	-.219	-2.239**
Social Status	.191	2.132**	.068	.625
	F: 6.781 ***		F: 2.762 ***	
	Adjusted R ² : 0.301		Adjusted R ² : 0.141	

*** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1

Table 3. Value of the training received by promoted and non promoted employees.

	Mean	Standard deviation	Number	Percentage
Promoted	3.83	0.937	12	38.7%
Non promoted	2.95	1.129	19	61.3%

Table 4. Variance analysis. Value of the training depending on promotion of the employees.

	Sum f squares	fd	Sq mean	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	5.773	1	5.773	5.133	0.031
Intra-groups	32.614	29	1.125		
Total	38.387	30			

Table 5. Effects of work adjustment.

	9 MONTHS		PERFORMANCE		SATISFACTION		TURNOVER	
	ADJUSTMENT						INTENTIONS	
	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t	Beta	t
2 months work adjustment	.662	8.782***	.356	3.036**	.105	.846	.022	.170
9 months work adjustment	-	-	.129	1.101	.244	1.965*	-.267	-2.109**
	F: 77.124***		F: 11.900***		F: 5.419 ***		F: 3.288***	
	Adjusted R ² : 0.432		Adjusted R ² : 0.183		Adjusted R ² : 0.084		Adjusted R ² : 0.145	

*** p< 0.01, ** p< 0.05, * p< 0.1

Table 6. T-test for differences in the mean value of adjustment after 2 and after 9 months.

	Relational differences			t	gl	Sig (bilateral)
	Mean	St. dev	Mean St			
2 months work adjustment mean value – 9 months work adjustment mean value	-0.81	0.79	0.079	-10.255	100	0.000

*** p< 0.01, ** p< 0.05, * p< 0.1

Figure 1. Repatriate adjustment model.

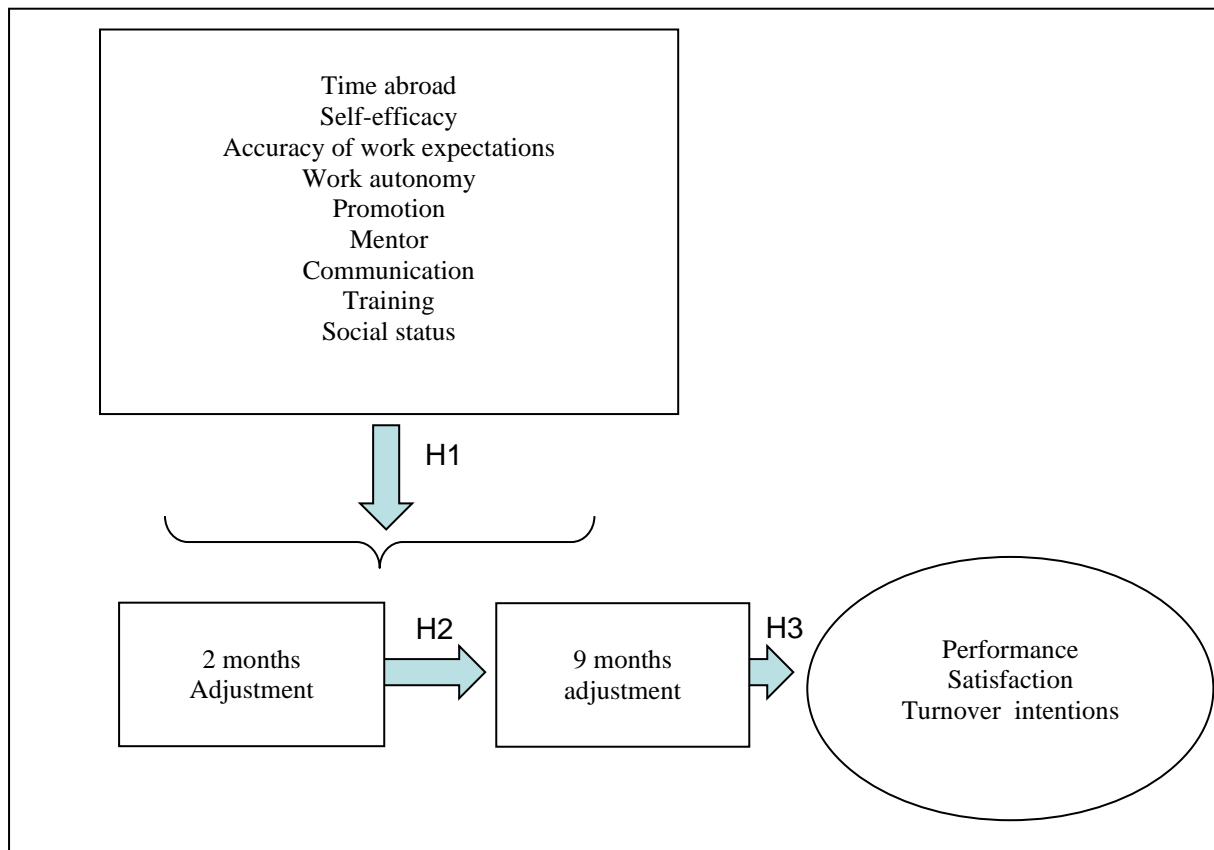


Figure 2. New repatriate adjustment model

