

Repatriation policy

Repatriation is a source of concern to expatriates and their families. It can affect productivity and adjustment while on assignment and on return.

Repatriation requires organisational support. Policy is needed which also covers the financial aspects of returning home.

EMPLOYEE ISSUES

Repatriation has long been identified as a major source of stress for international assignees. Employees are concerned about work and career opportunities after their international assignment. This can affect their productivity long before they are due to return home.

On return, assignees frequently report their employment as less satisfying. This may be due to an inappropriate role that does not make best use of their enhanced skill set and/or because they are suffering from re-entry/reverse culture shock.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Family members will have repatriation concerns too. Dual career partners need to find new employment and children have to settle back into schools. Partners may find it difficult to re-enter the employment market especially if they were not working abroad. Children may find it hard to readjust to state schools and make friends again if they previously were in an international school. These factors contribute to repatriation distress.

Family support such as career counselling for partners and transition support for children is helpful.

PREPARATION & TRAINING

A key repatriation problem concerns cultural and social readjustment on return. The international assignment policy should make provision for preparation and training for repatriation just as it does for going out on an assignment. This may involve reverse culture shock training and also cultural training that updates assignees and their families on changes that have taken place in their home countries while they were living abroad.

Recognising repatriation issues and addressing them through training can help to raise productivity and reduce repatriate turnover.

JOB ROLES

Gaining return on investment from the international assignment is crucial for employers. For example, employers are looking for knowledge transfer and the use of cultural capabilities gained on assignment. Employers also usually want repatriates to maintain links with overseas operations and use their international competencies to forge new international business links.

Yet, a high percentage of assignees

leave their employers upon returning home. This is frequently due to dissatisfaction with employment opportunities offered by their employers. It is critical that employers provide suitable career growth to repatriates from the roles offered once they come home. Policy that supports career path planning can help with this.

FINANCIAL ELEMENTS

Repatriation means the loss of any additional reward elements received under the international assignment policy. Under home-based policy approaches, employees and their families typically receive a number of benefits and allowances that, although deemed to be compensatory for the disturbance involved in mobility, are actually income-enhancing.

The loss of financial benefits can be de-motivational for returning assignees. A post-assignment mobility payment (such as a successful completion bonus) can help to mitigate this.

It might also be necessary to phase out some benefits rather than take them away immediately. Assistance with education fees until a critical educational stage has passed (for example, if children were in a boarding school) might be appropriate.



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