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International experience, growth opportunities, and repatriate job satisfaction

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Abstract

Multinational Enterprises expect to retain repatriates (i.e., returning employees from international assignments) and to gain from the new knowledge and experience they bring back from international assignments. Drawing insights from social exchange theory and using the perspective of psychological contracts, our study findings demonstrate that repatriate perception of recognition of foreign experience influences their job satisfaction, and this influence is mediated by perceived growth opportunities in the organization. Further, this mediation is nuanced in that it is stronger when there is an organization repatriation plan in place. The study contributes to the theoretical underpinnings of the antecedents of repatriate job satisfaction. Moreover, it demonstrates the need to have a strong repatriation plan in place along with growth opportunities within the organization to heighten job satisfaction of these highly valued employees upon their return from an international assignment.

KEYWORDS

growth opportunities, international experience, job satisfaction, repatriates, repatriation plan

Résumé

Les entreprises multinationales (EMN) s'attendent à retenir les rapatriés (c.-à-d. les employés qui reviennent d'une affectation à l'étranger) et à tirer profit des nouvelles connaissances et de l'expérience qu'ils ramènent de leur affectation à l'étranger. S'inspirant de la théorie de l'échange social et utilisant la perspective des contrats psychologiques, les résultats de notre étude démontrent que la perception par les rapatriés de la reconnaissance de leur expérience à l'étranger influence leur satisfaction au travail, et que cette influence est médiatisée par les opportunités de croissance perçues au sein de l'organisation. En outre, cette médiation est nuancée en ce sens qu'elle est plus forte lorsqu'il existe un plan de rapatriement au sein de l'organisation. L'étude

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contribue aux fondements théoriques des antécédents de la satisfaction professionnelle des rapatriés. En outre, elle démontre la nécessité de mettre en place un plan de rapatriement solide ainsi que des opportunités de croissance au sein de l'organisation afin d'accroître la satisfaction professionnelle de ces employés très appréciés à leur retour d'une mission internationale.

MOTS-CLÉS

expérience internationale, opportunités de croissance, plan de rapatriement, Rapatriés, satisfaction professionnelle

JEL CLASSIFICATION

F23, M16, M51, M54

1 | INTRODUCTION

Repatriate adjustment is a key challenge for multinational enterprises (MNEs). The repatriation stage has been considered to be very challenging and also a very critical part of the international assignment cycle (Bonache et al., 2018; Bonache et al., 2010). International assignments for employees in MNEs play a crucial role in developing global competencies, knowledge seeking, and implementing international business strategies (Goerzen & Beamish, 2007; Knocke & Schuster, 2017). MNEs have seen an increase in the number of expatriates and their subsequent repatriation (Chiang et al., 2018). These expatriates, through their assignments in international locations, are able to enhance their managerial skills, develop knowledge on intercultural nuances and international business practices (e.g., Chen et al., 2010; Reiche, 2012; Stroh et al., 2004). They also develop new skills as part of their international experience (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Oddou et al., 2009) that equip them to be potential key boundary spanning managers (Schotter & Beamish, 2011). Thus, MNEs need to retain these repatriates and use their new knowledge and experience that they have gained to the strategic advantage of the firm (Farndale et al., 2010).

Extant research has focused on the strategic value of the expertise gained as a result of global assignments of repatriates (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). As a result, there is increased attention on retaining repatriates as an untapped factor of organizational capability (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). While different factors explain the high turnover of repatriates (Cave et al., 2023), one of the key determinants of their turnover is the adjustment problems they face with their jobs on their return (Black et al., 1992). Therefore, the satisfaction of repatriates with the task and positions that they are assigned after returning home is a key factor (Vidal et al., 2007). Further, while the position assigned to the repatriates on

their return and the congruency of the repatriates' expectations with reality can substantially affect their job satisfaction (Vidal et al., 2007), such effects may not be straightforward. Knowledge on the underlying processes that drive satisfactory job outcomes of repatriates upon return to the home country is limited (Oddou, et al., 2009). Therefore, there is call by scholars to explore potential mediating and moderating variables and thereby contribute to the understanding of the underlying processes in such effects (Chiang, et al., 2018). An important gap that needs further exploration is how the mechanisms employed by organizations to recognize repatriates' international experience influences their job satisfaction.

Our present study explores this gap. We use insights from social exchange theory and the understanding of psychological contracts to suggest that the effects of repatriate perceptions of how the firm recognizes their foreign experience influences their job satisfaction through the available growth opportunities within the firm. We further suggest that this effect is nuanced in that this influence is effective only when there is an organization repatriation plan in place for such repatriates. Using survey data from 224 repatriates from the U.S., our findings suggest that while perceived career growth opportunities mediate the influence of repatriate perceptions of organizational recognition of foreign experience on job satisfaction, this effect is stronger when there is an organizational repatriation plan in place.

The contributions of our study from theoretical and empirical standpoints are as follows. First, using insights from social exchange theory, we contribute to the theoretical foundation that in part explains the influence of repatriate perceptions on foreign knowledge recognition by the firm on job satisfaction. Second, we provide an understanding on the underlying mechanisms that drive repatriate job satisfaction, by specifically addressing the call by Chiang, et al. (2018) to examine mediating

mechanisms through which perceptions of job related factors affect repatriation outcomes. Further, our study also suggests that the effect of this mediating mechanism is nuanced through the role of an organization repatriation plan. Third, extant research has largely examined repatriation outcomes through qualitative studies (Bücker et al., 2016). We have added to the above scholarship through a quantitative study. Finally, small sample sizes have been observed to be a limitation in research on repatriates as access to repatriate samples is difficult. The majority of the extant research on repatriation processes have sample sizes <100 (Chiang, et al., 2018; Kraimer et al., 2009). Our study, with a sample size of 224, has addressed the above call for increased sample size in repatriate research.

Our article is organized as follows. We review relevant literature on repatriation, repatriate job satisfaction, and international experience. Then, we develop our hypotheses on the influence of recognition of foreign experience on job satisfaction, and the mediating role of perceived growth opportunities on repatriate job satisfaction. Thereafter, we develop our hypothesis on the moderating mediation effect of organization repatriation plan. We then discuss our methods, sample details, and operationalization of our variables. We finally present our results, discuss our findings, present managerial implications, suggest avenues for future research, and conclude.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Repatriate job satisfaction

Expatriates have challenges such as family concerns, expectations regarding salary and benefits, potential adjustment problems, and job and career expectations upon repatriation (McEvoy & Buller, 2013), all of which contribute to their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is considered as a positive emotional response to a work context resulting from achieving what employees want and value from the job (Olsen, 1993). Job satisfaction plays a key role in most theories of employee turnover (Trevor, 2001) and empirical research suggests that job satisfaction is a key predictor of employee turnover (Dickter et al., 1996; Saks et al., 1996). After living abroad for some time, repatriates, have high expectations from their organizations (Zikic et al., 2006) particularly concerning the job or position they will hold in their home organization upon their return (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). However, their experiences upon returning are often substantively different from their expectations of how they would be treated by their firm in terms of the

positions they would hold and tasks they would be assigned (O'Sullivan, 2002). Such differences may negatively affect their job satisfaction (Bonache, 2005), as the extent of an employees' job satisfaction is a reflection of the cumulative level of "met worker expectations" (Hwang & Kuo, 2006).

Repatriates may experience a reverse culture shock and other difficulties when they return (Black, et al., 1992) if their home organizations are not ready to give them the welcome they expected (Baruch et al., 2002). We expect that this negative experience is likely to trigger dissatisfaction in the jobs going forward. Job dissatisfaction has been suggested to be especially prevalent in repatriates (Vidal, et al., 2007). The prospect of advancements in their career is one of the key reasons that employees accept assignments abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Extant literature therefore considers it important that companies assign their repatriates positions that meet their career expectations and satisfies them. The extent of organizational support that such employees perceive that they receive in their repatriation process is positively related to outcomes such as job satisfaction and retention (Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Not doing so may lead such employees to look for more satisfactory work outside their companies (Vidal, et al., 2007).

2.2 | Repatriate international experience

International postings or missions abroad provide employees with market knowledge on international markets, which include foreign cultures, language skills, foreign products, customers, and market dynamics (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). When they work in foreign locations, these employees can also perceive the international image of the organization (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Employees with international experience face challenges in international contexts that enable them to undertake multiple tasks, assume higher responsibilities, and develop flexibility in their management styles as they have to adhere to local contexts and cultures that may not match with their home countries (Vidal, et al., 2007). Extant research suggests such international assignments as ways to develop global talent that are important for the success of international business (Brewster & Suutari, 2005; Calof & Beamish, 1994). However, as per extant literature, this knowledge that expatriates gain from their international experience is underutilized by MNEs (Shao et al., 2022; Vidal, et al., 2007). Knowledge and skills gained by repatriates need to be effectively used by the organization

(Dickmann & Doherty, 2010) in order to gain competitive advantage through expatriation and also provide necessary career progression opportunities to these individuals on repatriation. Effectiveness of such processes will depend on the compatibility between repatriates' knowledge and requirements and the properties of jobs offered to repatriates on their return (Reiche et al., 2011).

3 | DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

We use insights from social exchange theory to develop our hypotheses. As per social exchange theory, two entities enter into a relationship when one perceives that the other possesses something of value (Blau, 1964). This can be extended to the relationship between employees and the organization where employee perceptions of organizational support influence their sense of responsibility to contribute to organizational performance. Keeping with the principle of reciprocity, they believe that they have to repay the organization that has treated them well (Ye et al., 2017). Employee perceptions of organizational support relate to the extent to which the organization cares for employee well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Such support relates not only to material remuneration and benefits, but also to providing necessary information and appropriate working conditions for employees to succeed (McMillan, 1997).

Perceptions on organizational support enhances the relationship between the employee and the organization and increases an employee's sense of fit (Froese et al., 2021). This increase in fit contributes to the organization based on the principle of reciprocity (Maertz et al., 2007). We argue that this increases job satisfaction of such employees. Specifically, the perceptions of repatriates, during their adjustment period, on the work conditions is a driver of job satisfaction (Ye, et al., 2017). Such reciprocal behavior is based on the presumptions where "the psychological contract consists of individual beliefs regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization." (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). Psychological contracts are perceptual in nature (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016) and from research in this domain we can infer that fulfillment of work expectations can increase repatriate job satisfaction and reduce their turnover (Rousseau, 1995; Zhao et al., 2007).

In summary, as per insights from social exchange theory on the relationship between the repatriate and the organization during the repatriation process, "success in repatriation is determined not only by organizational arrangements made at the individual's reentry but also by the extent to which such arrangements are in accordance

with the individual's expectations" (Yan et al., 2002, p. 373). Such work-related expectations would include those related to recognition of repatriates' foreign experience, the extent to which such recognition aligns with perceived growth opportunities that exist in the organization, and the repatriation plan that the organization has in place for repatriates. Such practices would impact the perceptions of repatriates as to whether their psychological contracts have or have not been fulfilled upon their return. Our hypothesized model, shown in Figure 1, suggests that the influence of repatriate perceptions of recognition of foreign experience on job satisfaction is felt through perceived growth opportunities that exist in the organization and this relationship is strengthened when a repatriation plan is in place.

3.1 | Recognition of international experience and job satisfaction

Extant research suggests that only a small percentage of repatriates receive an opportunity to use their acquired skills from their international assignments when they return (Shao, et al., 2022; Stroh et al., 1998). If the organization uses repatriates' skills or shows that their experience from international markets is valued, the repatriate is likely to respond positively (Martin & Anthony, 2006). Given the high level of expectations that repatriates have regarding their re-entry, the position, and tasks that they are assigned within the organization after they return home reflects how valued their overseas experience is to the organization. In other words, the sense of appropriate recognition and compensation for services or assignments within the organization is directly related to the expectations of repatriate employees. As such, when the expectations of repatriates are not met, their engagement levels tend to fall (Kahn, 1990) leading to dissatisfaction, which is consistent with our arguments around breach of psychological contracts (Aldossari & Robertson, 2018). Substantive relationship has been observed between job enrichment that stems from recognition and job engagement (Maslach et al., 2001). Further the nature of jobs performed and the challenges involved in the job after returning are significantly related to the overall job satisfaction of repatriates (Bonache, 2006). Lack of appreciation or recognition for repatriates' overseas experience can cause stress and burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001; Welch, 1994).

In summary, when repatriates perceive that their organizations recognize the value of their international experience, their job satisfaction will be higher. This makes sense because when repatriates believe that their overseas activities are valued within the organization,

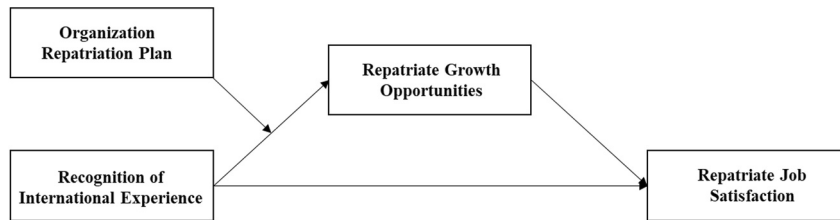


FIGURE 1 Conditional mediation model.

they will feel more satisfied in the context of their assignments they receive on their return. Hence, we posit as follows.

Hypothesis 1. Recognition of international experience is positively associated with repatriate job satisfaction.

3.2 | Mediating effect of perceived growth opportunities in the organization

The availability of growth opportunities for repatriates on their return to their home organization is a key factor for repatriation success. One of the main reasons for employees to accept international assignments is the perceived potential for career advancing opportunities after their return (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Extant research suggests that although international assignments are important for employees who seek to move up the career ladder quickly, former expatriates feel that their international assignments have rather harmed their careers (Bolino, 2007). Judge et al. (1995, p. 486) define career success as “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experiences,” and such success relates to objective aspects such as promotions, salaries, job nature, and subjective aspects such as job satisfaction. We argue that the career opportunity that exists in the organization in line with the repatriates’ international experience plays an important role in the job satisfaction of the repatriate.

In practice, however organizations frequently do not value the international experience of repatriates and hence do not assign jobs that are aligned with the substantial experience that was gained abroad (Farndale, et al., 2010; Johnston, 1991; Scullion, 1994; Welch et al., 2009). Hence, repatriates’ expectations for their career progression may not be fulfilled (Welch, 2003). For example, an organization that does not value overseas experience may assign repatriates jobs lower in the hierarchy than their positions in international locations. In addition, in many cases the repatriates peers who did not go on a foreign assignment have progressed further in their careers in the organization than the position assigned to the repatriate upon return (Vidal, et al., 2007). Repatriates may perceive such a

situation as a violation of their psychological contract (Welch, 2003), leading to job dissatisfaction and a reduction in organizational commitment. Extant research suggests that in order to avoid such situations, organizations should consider international assignments as criteria for employee’s professional development and recognition of repatriate’s overseas experience as means for promotion in the domestic organization (Vidal, et al., 2007) and repatriates therefore should be offered appropriate career progression opportunities in line with their experience. Further, career progression of repatriates within the organization upon return, while improving job satisfaction and commitment among them, will also motivate other employees to take up overseas assignments, as they will realize that the organization values overseas experience (Brewster & Scullion, 1997).

In summary, while valuing overseas experience is important for repatriates’ job satisfaction, the effect is felt through offering opportunities for career progression in the organization that is commensurate with their international experience. When repatriates perceive that their foreign experience is valued by the organization, they develop a sense that they are part of a firm that has growth opportunities for them. When an individual is valued and recognized, they get a sense that they can grow here. What we are arguing here is that it is the perceived growth opportunities that lead to job satisfaction. Thus, perceived growth opportunity is the underlying mechanism through which perceived recognition of international experience drives job satisfaction. Career progression opportunity would therefore be a proximal predictor of repatriate job satisfaction whereas valuing international experience would be a distal predictor. Hence, we posit as follows:

Hypothesis 2. The positive relationship between recognition of international experience and job satisfaction is mediated by perceived growth opportunities within the organization.

3.3 | Moderating role of organizational repatriation plan

Extant research suggests that the process of repatriation is a source of frustration for foreign assignees returning

home. There can be numerous professional and personal problems related to repatriates' reintegration to their home organization and home country (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2000; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2008). From a personal point of view, repatriates may experience a "reverse culture shock" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). This could be a result of expectations that nothing has changed in their home country and that they are the same people they were before they left their home countries on overseas assignments (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Sanchez, et al., 2000; Scullion & Brewster, 2001). Good integration of work life and family life has been found to be positively linked with successful repatriation adjustment experiences (Kierner & Suutari, 2018). Family members of repatriates, specifically, may also face readjustment problems on return to the home country (Harvey, 1982, 1989). Examples of some of the problems faced by repatriates include changes in lifestyle, drop in income, and loss of social status (Stroh, et al., 1998).

Beyond the personal adjustment problems, repatriates also face frustrations in their professional careers. As discussed earlier, a key concern for repatriates is that their firms tend to undervalue their international experience and discount their newly acquired knowledge and skill sets that was developed because of their international assignment. Repatriates may perceive that the assignments and positions given to them back in their home office lack the autonomy, authority, and significance that they had enjoyed in their overseas assignments (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). In particular, because international assignments often limit career advancement rather than provide more career opportunities within the firm, repatriates may feel excluded from the mainstream career progression in the home organization (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Further, beliefs that opportunities for career development are limited could also reduce job performance (De Clercq et al., 2020). This can lead to repatriates feeling completely disillusioned with the repatriation process and completely dissatisfied with the assignments they receive upon return (Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

The above challenges of repatriation have led researchers to infer that insufficient attention to repatriates' needs is to blame for disillusionment and low levels of job satisfaction (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Research has shown that this organizational support is a key factor for employees' sense of satisfaction (Jawahar & Stone, 2017; Wang & Sangalang, 2005). An important way ensuring this support and addressing these problems is for organizations to develop repatriation plans for expatriates in advance of their repatriation (Bolino, 2007). These repatriation plans are support programs to cater to the needs

of the repatriates (O'Sullivan, 2002). Such support programs demonstrate a high sensitivity to repatriate needs and a strong appreciation of the knowledge and skills gained during their international experience. Such support programs would also provide repatriates with the confidence required to engage in discussions with the organization about their role and career progression in the organization on their return (Froese, et al., 2021).

It is important to ensure that throughout the entire expatriate to repatriate process, employees believe that their contributions and unique knowledge will be valued by the organization (Froese, et al., 2021). Repatriation plans would therefore entail pre-departure briefings that would set expectations for the repatriation process, mentoring sessions, counseling sessions, and career planning sessions (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Such plans would also entail additional preparatory reintegration including providing information on the changes in the organization that occurred during the international assignment of the repatriate (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). For example, Monsanto encourages repatriates to participate in every opportunity where their international experience can be used, and in order to assist in this process planning for a repatriate's return begins between 6 and 18 months prior to the date of return to the home organization (Martin & Anthony, 2006). Repatriates will not see a violation in the psychological contract with the organization as such initiatives would serve as a signal that the organization through the various support programs cares for their well-being and career growth upon completion of their international assignment.

In summary, a well-organized repatriation plan needs to be put in place to reintegrate repatriates to the home organizations, so that they are able to harness career progression opportunities commensurate with their overseas experiences (Bolino, 2007). Doing so would improve repatriate job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Hence, we posit as follows:

Hypothesis 3. Repatriation plan moderates the indirect effect of the recognition of international experience on repatriate job satisfaction through perceived growth opportunities such that the indirect effect will be stronger under better repatriation plans.

4 | METHOD AND ANALYSIS

Our hypothesized model was tested using a survey of repatriate managers who currently work for the same organization that they did during their international assignment. Since our model predicts a conditional mediation effect (moderated mediation model), we have used

the multiple regression approach to testing conditional mediation established by Preacher and Hayes (2008) and operationalized in Hayes (2018). This method uses PROCESS and employs bootstrapping to generate confidence intervals (Hayes, 2018). We employ a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2005) in order to demonstrate model fitness (Chua, 2022; Wong, 2019). Our hypotheses have been tested using the PROCESS modeling package in SmartPLS 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2022). The PLS modeling approach is built on the bootstrapping methods of testing confidence intervals. Because the PROCESS modeling package in SmartPLS 4.0 is still in BETA development (Ringle, et al., 2022), we have checked our results using the using the SPSS Macro developed by Hayes (2018). The SmartPLS and SPSS macro results were not substantially different. The advantage of the SmartPLS approach is that it allows the conditional mediated model to be tested using reflective latent variables. Whereas the SPSS approach requires that the latent variables be collapsed into a single indicator variable. Thus, the SmartPLS 4.0 approach allows the entire model to be tested when one or more of the variables are latent constructs.

4.1 | Sample and data analysis

The participants in this study were repatriate managers from U.S. based organizations who had returned to their firms after completing a foreign assignment. Prior to developing the research instrument, we interviewed several repatriate managers and HR managers to explore factors that they believed to be relevant to the repatriation process. After analyzing their insights, we developed a survey instrument that was largely constructed by adapting previously validated survey instruments. In addition, specific questions related to expatriate and repatriate experiences were added. From there, a pilot survey was conducted with a small group of 30 repatriates in order to validate our measures, test for factor reliability, and determine if statistical implications existed. In order to ensure a non-biased sample and random selection of managers, we employed the professional services of the research firm Qualtrics. To ensure quality of responses, attention filters were added along with demographic questions to organize the results.

4.1.1 | Scale reliability

The questions on the survey were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly

agree). Table 1 presents the number of items for each latent variable and their respective loadings. Table 2 presents the reliability and validity analysis. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha (coefficient alpha) were used to evaluate scale reliability, and both were in excess of the recommend alpha value of 0.7 needed to ensure satisfactory internal consistency (DeVellis, 2003; Nunnally, 1978).

4.1.2 | Descriptive statistics

In total, 254 surveys were completed. The primary criterion for inclusion in the study was having expatriate experience while employed by a US-based firm. Each case was examined to identify unusual patterns such as straight lining, incorrect responses to attention questions, and obviously outlier responses. As we are examining current job satisfaction as a result of repatriation, all cases where the repatriate had already left the firm that they were employed during their foreign experience were also removed. In total, 224 responses were included in the model for hypotheses testing.

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of our focal variables. The gender ratio was 62% male to 38% female. The largest group was in the 25–34 age range representing 45% of the sample or 100 respondents. This second largest group, 35–44, represented 28% of the sample or 63 respondents. However, during initial analysis, we found that age did not correlate with either dependent variable and so it was left out of the final analysis. The vast majority of the participants worked in medium-sized or large organizations. In terms of company size, small firms (<100 employees) accounted for 19% ($n = 43$) of the sample, medium-sized ones (100–1000) for 50% ($n = 111$), and larger ones (>1000) for 31% ($n = 70$). The participants were from 19 different industries. The industries with the largest number of participants were manufacturing (13%), Technology, Internet & Electronics (12%), and finance and financial services (10%). A large majority of the participants, 64%, were management level employees (Team Leaders,

TABLE 1 Latent variables and indicator loadings.

Variable	# of items	Indicator loadings			
		1	2	3	4
Recognition	3	0.85	0.86	0.85	
Growth opportunities	4	0.80	0.83	0.86	0.79
Job satisfaction	2	0.86	0.86	0.91	
Repatriation plan	1	1.00			

TABLE 2 Reliability and validity analysis.

	CR	AVE	α	MSV	1	2	3	4
1. Recognition	0.81	0.72	0.81	0.42	0.85			
2. Growth opportunities	0.84	0.71	0.83	0.39	0.60	0.82		
3. Job satisfaction	0.85	0.77	0.85	0.39	0.65	0.63	0.88	
4. Repatriation plan	-	-	-	0.16	0.41	0.29	0.37	1.00

Note: Bold numbers denote square root of AVE for Fornell and Larcker test (1981) AVE test.

Abbreviations: AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability; MSV, maximum shared variance; α , Cronbach's alpha.

TABLE 3 Correlation matrix.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Recognition	4.16	0.66			
2. Growth opportunities	3.93	0.69	0.600**		
3. Job satisfaction	4.06	0.72	0.651**	0.627**	
4. Repatriation plan	3.40	1.31	0.405**	0.286**	0.374**

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Managers, Senior Managers, and Regional Managers). Twenty percent were senior executives (Vice Presidents, C-Level Managers, Partners, and Owners). Participants had foreign assignments throughout the world. The foreign countries with the largest representation are United Kingdom 19% (43 respondents), China 16% (38) and Japan 13% (30).

4.1.3 | Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is established in several ways in a PLS approach. First, average variance extracted (AVE) between a latent variable and its indicators should be larger than 0.50 (see: Fornell & Larcker, 1981, p. 46). Second, the square root of AVE must be considerably larger than the correlations of the latent variable with any other latent variables (see: Hulland, 1999, p. 200). Both of these conditions were met in the model as shown in Table 2. Third, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) test is used to show that the square root of the AVE, shown on the diagonal of Table 2, for each latent variable exceeds the absolute correlations with any other latent variables (Lux et al., 2019). Lastly, it is necessary to establish that the maximum shared variance for each latent variable is less than AVE (e.g., Almén et al., 2018). As all of these conditions have been met, we conclude that discriminant validity has been established.

4.1.4 | Common method bias

We used one instrument to ask participants to evaluate their perceptions for the independent, mediating, moderating, and dependent variables. As such, there is a risk that the data can suffer from common method bias, and this must be assessed. We therefore followed the widely used Harman's single-factor test technique of addressing common method bias recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003, p. 889). All variables in our dataset, not just those used in this current paper, that elicited a subjective response from the participants were used to test common method bias. An unrotated principal components factor analysis revealed three factors with eigenvalues in excess of 1.0, rather than a single factor. The three factors together accounted for 54% of the total variance; with the first factor not accounting for a majority of the total variance (40.4%). Common method bias is considered an issue if either of the following conditions are met: the factor analysis reveals a single, or any one factor accounts for the majority of the covariance among the measures (Podsakoff, et al., 2003). As neither of these concerns were present in our dataset, we concluded that common methods bias was not an issue.

4.1.5 | Measurement model fit

Our model is comprised of three latent independent variables and one single indicator variable. In a PLS approach, indicators should have a loading on the construct >0.707 to be considered reliable (Chua, 2022). This rule demonstrates that the variance explained within the latent variable is greater than the error variance (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; Hulland, 1999). Table 1 shows that all indicators are well above the 0.707 threshold for our multi-indicator variables. When we combined all 11 indicators into one latent variable, more than two thirds fell below the 0.707 threshold. This is important as it demonstrates that we have four latent constructs.

4.1.6 | Non-response bias

Non-response bias was examined by conducting a *t*-test for significant differences between the first 25% of participants to respond and the final 25% of respondents. We tested this across numerous variables in our full dataset. We found no significant differences. In addition, we coded “days to respond” and included it in a multiple regression analysis (Lindner et al., 2001) and found no significant relationship. Thus, we were able to conclude that non-response bias is not an issue for our dataset.

4.1.7 | Multicollinearity

SmartPLS 4.0 provides collinearity statistics for both the inner model (latent variables) and outer model (indicators) in the form of variance inflation factors (VIFs). These VIFs can be used to assess potential multicollinearity issues. The VIFs for all indicators and variables in the outer and inner model ranged between 1.66 and 2.53. VIF scores must not exceed 10 in order to ensure stability of the parameter (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, we concluded that multicollinearity is not an issue in our model.

4.2 | Dependent and mediating variables

4.2.1 | Perceived growth opportunities

The mediating variable is perceived growth opportunities. Providing opportunities that allows the repatriate to advance within the organizations after they return is an important dimension of assisting with the entire repatriation process (Stoermer et al., 2021). The four items for this variable were adapted from Kraimer et al. (2011). The items are: “My organization offers many advancement opportunities for me,” “My organization uses personal achievements and various experiences as the basis for advancement,” “My organization provides many training programs to enhance personal development,” and “My organization provides career management services for employees.”

The Cronbach's alpha for this latent variable was 0.83.

4.2.2 | Returnee job satisfaction

The dependent variable used in this study is job satisfaction, which consists of a 3-item scale adapted from Valentine et al. (2010). Job satisfaction is often used as a

measure to predict an employee's general outlook of the organization as well as a propensity for discretionary effort. The items used are: “All in all, I am satisfied with my job,” “This job measures up to my expectations,” and “I would recommend this job to a friend.” The reliability estimate using Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.85.

4.3 | Independent and moderating variables

4.3.1 | Perceived recognition of international experience

The main independent latent variable is repatriate's perception of how colleagues and managers value their international experience after they returned to the organization following their foreign assignment. The 3-item scale adapted from Amenumey and Lockwood (2008) are: “My superiors value my international skill-set and experience,” “My coworkers value my international skill-set and experience,” and “My international experience is valued, and I am able to enact change in my organization” The reliability estimate using Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.81.

4.3.2 | Plan for repatriation

The participants were asked to judge on a five-point scale how much they agreed that their organization had an appropriate plan in place for their return from their international assignment. The question was: “My organization had a plan in place for my return from my international assignment.”

4.4 | Control variables

In order to control for variables that may influence our focal variables, we included covariates for factors that may influence potential growth opportunities and job satisfaction. (1) We controlled for gender as this has been shown to influence repatriate experience (Lee et al., 2017). (2) We included length of assignment as longer assignments can make the repatriation process more complex for repatriates (De Cieri et al., 2009). (3) We used region of foreign assignment, coded as dummy variables, to capture effects of living in culturally distant countries (Shin et al., 2017). (4) We have controlled for the number of years that the repatriates have been with the company (Bal et al., 2013; Ren et al., 2013; Stahl et al., 2009). (5) We also controlled for the size of the

organizations, as the readjustment process can be quite different in a very large MNE compared to a medium or smaller company (Hamori & Koyuncu, 2011).

5 | RESULTS

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses using the Hayes (2018) PROCESS macro via SmartPLS 4.0 (Ringle, et al., 2022). Table 4 (Model 1) presents mediation effects of perceived growth opportunities on the positive relationship between perceived recognition of international experience and job satisfaction. As such, Model 1 is used to test hypotheses H1 and H2. Model 2 adds the moderation effects of an organizational plan for repatriation. Thus, Model 2, shown in Table 5, tests the conditional effects of an organizational plan for

repatriation for the indirect effects of perceived growth opportunities on the positive relationship between perceived recognition of international experience and job satisfaction. Thus, Model 2 is used to test H3.

The overall variance explained by the models is substantial for both the mediating variable (perceived growth opportunities) adjusted $R^2 = 41.1\%$ in Model 2, which is a significant change of 3.2% from Model 1, and the dependent variable (job satisfaction) adjusted $R^2 = 52.1$. While entirely based on a bootstrapping method to test significance, SmartPLS produces T and p values from which statistical inference can be made for the direct effects. The bootstrapping method in SmartPLS then generates an empirical representation of the sample distribution of the indirect effects in accordance with the Hayes (2018) method. As suggested by Hayes (2018) we used a 95% confidence interval with a 5000 bootstrapping sample,

TABLE 4 Model 1—direct effects & mediation analyses results using process.

		Normal theory tests		
Variable	Path	Coefficient	SE	T (with p)
Control variables and non-hypothesized effects				
Gender	Growth opp	0.01	0.08	0.96
	Job sat	0.02	0.07	−0.25
Assignment length	Growth opp	0.02	0.03	0.05
	Job sat	−0.01	0.02	−0.48
Tenure in organization	Growth opp	−0.05	0.03	−1.96
	Job sat	0.04	0.03	1.54
Organization size	Growth opp	0.02	0.03	−1.96
	Job sat	0.18	0.02	1.05
Plan	Growth opp	0.03	0.03	0.98
Recognition	Job sat	0.46	0.07	7.09***
Recognition	Growth opp	0.64	0.06	11.17***
Growth opp	Job sat	0.39	0.06	6.34***
Direct effects of perceived recognition of international experience on job satisfaction (H1)				
Recognition	Job sat	0.46	0.07	7.09***
Indirect effect of recognition of international experience on job satisfaction via growth opportunities (H2)		Bootstrapping results for indirect effects (95% CI)		
		Point estimate	Lower	Higher
		0.25	0.15	0.36
Outcome variable		R ²	F	
Growth opp		37.5%	26.2	
Job sat		52.1%	39.3	

Note: Dummy variables for region & job description are included as factors in the models, but not reported in the table. Standardized regression coefficients are reported $N = 224$.

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 5 Model 2—conditional mediation analyses results using process.

		Normal theory tests		
Variable	Path	Coefficient	SE	T (with p)
Control variables & non-hypothesized effects				
Gender	Growth opp	−0.01	0.08	−0.08
	Job sat	0.02	0.07	−0.25
Assignment length	Growth opp	0.03	0.03	1.12
	Job sat	−0.01	0.02	−0.48
Tenure in organization	Growth opp	−0.06	0.03	−2.29
	Job sat	0.04	0.03	1.54
Organization size	Growth opp	0.03	0.02	1.44
	Job sat	0.18	0.02	1.05
Recognition	Growth opp	0.25	0.12	2.07
	Job sat	0.46	0.07	7.09***
Plan for repatriation	Growth opp	−0.49	0.16	−3.16***
PlanXRec	Growth opp	0.13	0.04	3.43***
Growth opp	Job sat	0.39	0.06	6.34***
Conditional indirect effect of perceived recognition of international experience on job satisfaction via perceived growth opportunities at low, middle, and high values of a plan for repatriation (H3)				
		Bootstrapping results for indirect effects (95% CI)		
Step 1: Index of moderated mediation		Index	Lower	Higher
		0.05	0.01	0.09
Step 2: Conditional indirect effects				
Variable	Path	Point estimate	Lower	Higher
Plan—Low	Indirect	0.15	0.33	0.27
Plan—Mid	Indirect	0.24	0.14	0.36
Plan—High	Indirect	0.34	0.21	0.50
Outcome variable	R ²	F	R ² change from Model 1	
Growth opp	41.1%	21.4	3.2%***	
Job sat	52.1%	39.3		

Note: Dummy variables for region & job description are included as factors in the models, but not reported in the table. Standardized regression coefficients are reported $N = 224$.

[†] $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

which is also the default setting in SmartPLS 4.0. The indirect effect is significant if zero falls outside of the confidence interval.

Starting in Model 1, the relationship between perceived recognition of international experience and job satisfaction is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.46$; $SE = 0.07$; $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1 is supported. The initial mediating hypothesis, H2, is that the positive relationship between perceived recognition of international experience and job satisfaction is mediated by perceived growth

opportunities. The bootstrapping results show significant indirect effects (Est $\beta = 0.25$; 95% confidence—not zero). Thus, H2 is supported.

Turning to Model 2, the interaction effect of an organizational plan on the positive relationship between perceived recognition of international experience and perceived growth opportunities is positive and significant. However, in a conditional effects model in PROCESS (see Chapter 7: Hayes, 2018) it is recommended to report the interaction at low, middle, and high points along of the

moderating variable to demonstrate the type of conditional effect (positive or negative) and where they are significant. SmartPLS 4.0 uses one standard deviation above and below as high and low points with the mean as the mid-point. This is done using the bootstrapping method.

The test of the moderating effects of a plan on the indirect positive effect of perceived recognition of international experience on job satisfaction via perceived growth opportunities—the conditional indirect effects (moderated mediation effects)—are tested in a two-step process (see Chapter 11: Hayes, 2018). The first step is to examine the index of the moderated mediation. This result shows that the moderator has a significant effect on the indirect effects high (Index = 0.05; 95% confidence—not zero), though it does not say anything about the effects. Because the index is significantly different than zero at the 95% confidence level, the conditional direct effects can be examined in Step 2. In our model, a plan for repatriation positively and significantly moderates the indirect positive effect of perceived recognition of international experience on job satisfaction via perceived growth opportunities within the organization at all levels. Thus, plan-low (Est $\beta = 0.15$; 95% confidence—not zero); plan-mid (Est $\beta = 0.24$; 95% confidence—not zero); and plan-high (Est $\beta = 0.34$; 95% confidence—not zero) are all significant. Thus, a plan for repatriation positively and significantly moderates the relationship at all levels. In addition, the graph (as shown in Figure 2) demonstrates that the moderating effect of a plan for repatriation gets stronger as perceived recognition increases. Thus, H3 is supported.

6 | DISCUSSION

Repatriation adjustment or adaptation has been considered to be one of the key themes in expatriate management that has attracted the attention of both academics

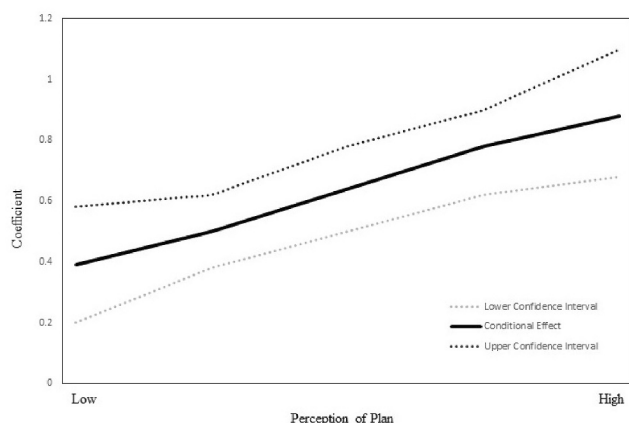


FIGURE 2 Graph of conditional effects.

and practitioners (Dang & Rammal, 2020). Our article contributes to repatriation research by specifically examining the employee perceptual antecedents of repatriates to study organizational outcomes such as repatriate job satisfaction. Extant research on repatriation, compared to expatriation, is limited in its scope, and lacks a theoretical foundation (Knocke & Schuster, 2017). We contribute to the theoretical foundations that in part explains the influence of repatriate perceptions on the recognition of international experience by the organization on job satisfaction. Our primary theoretical contribution is the use of social exchange theory and the understanding of psychological contracts to show theoretically and empirically the condition and underlying mechanism that drive the perception of the extent to which the organization values overseas experience influences repatriate job satisfaction. Scholars argue that job satisfaction drives repatriate retention (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007), which is essential to an MNE's success as they act as boundary spanners (see: Schotter et al., 2017) between home and host country operations.

In responding to the calls by scholars to understand the underlying processes and nuances that drive repatriate outcomes such job satisfaction of repatriates (Chiang, et al., 2018), our results suggest that perceived career growth opportunities is a significant mechanism through which repatriates perceptions of recognition of their foreign experience by the organization influences their job satisfaction. While perceptual antecedents of recognition of foreign experience of repatriates is a distal predictor of repatriate job satisfaction, growth opportunity in the organization is a more proximal predictor of repatriate job satisfaction that is, the effect of recognition of international experience by the organization is felt through availability of career growth opportunities for repatriates in the organization (Kraimer et al., 2016). Further, this relationship is strengthened when there is an organizational repatriation plan for repatriates. While empirically establishing the role of perceived growth opportunities as a mediating factor affirms its role in explaining the underlying process which drive repatriate job satisfaction, the finding that this relationship is nuanced in that it is stronger when there exists an organization repatriation plan is a key contribution, which builds on a proposition in Bolino (2007).

Our finding that recognition of foreign experience of repatriates is linked with repatriate job satisfaction aligns with extant research that one of the key problems in the repatriation process is that organizations do not recognize repatriates international experience and assign them to jobs that do not match their newly gained overseas experiences (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). The recognition of foreign experience and

providing career opportunities for repatriates that are supported by an organization repatriation plan is therefore important to increase repatriate job satisfaction.

Researchers have suggested that future scholarship should have a greater balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the repatriate research (Chiang, et al., 2018; Yan, et al., 2002). Further, it has been suggested that future repatriate research should help improve the understanding of the mechanisms that underlie repatriates' outcomes and subsequent decisions to quit the organization following repatriation (Kraimer, et al., 2009; Kraimer et al., 2012). We have added to extant repatriate research through a quantitative study in understanding how perceptions on valuing international experience influence repatriate job satisfaction. We have also addressed the call for larger sample sizes in repatriate research with a sample size of 224. The majority of studies in this research area have sample sizes <100 (Chiang, et al., 2018; Kraimer, et al., 2009).

7 | MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The repatriation process is a strategic human resource activity that could assist in significantly improving an organization's ability to compete in a global context. The skills and experience retained by the repatriates through this process can play a key role in ensuring the future success of the MNEs that properly use it. Organization repatriation plan that contains significant policies, procedures, and related actions that need to be taken, to have a successful repatriation process has been emphasized to be key for repatriate job satisfaction.

Our findings suggest that the extent to which an MNE values the international experience of the repatriate is a critical factor that drives repatriate job satisfaction. Various studies have highlighted the positive role strategic human resources practices can play in integrating knowledge gained through the international experiences of repatriates (Malik et al., 2020; Shao, et al., 2022). Effective valuation of such skills entails providing growth opportunities in the organization where repatriates can apply their newfound knowledge and skills which in turn improves repatriate job satisfaction. However, to facilitate this process well the organization needs to have a well-developed repatriation plan that the repatriate is included in well before return to the home country. This is particularly important considering the time, investment, effort, and knowledge put into and uncovered by repatriates during their entire international assignment. Expatriates, who have been uprooted by relocation to a different country need to be reintegrated and embedded well on their return to their home bases (Cuyppers et al., 2020; Reiche,

et al., 2011) through effective repatriation processes to facilitate their seamless career progression. The re-engagement or re-employment of repatriates to their satisfaction after their return is extremely important if MNEs are to potentially leverage organizational competitive advantages (Oddou et al., 2013) and improve the absorptive capacity (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005) of their organizations in their pursuit to develop global talent. International managerial experience plays a crucial role in shaping the interaction between the existing stock of knowledge within organizations and new knowledge from overseas to fuel learning processes (Agustí et al., 2022) and thereby indirectly contribute to literature on successful acquisition of knowledge from overseas by multinationals (Park & Choi, 2014).

8 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the findings from our empirical study inform MNEs about improving ways to manage their repatriates' expectations to better facilitate the repatriation process and improve job satisfaction, areas of future research are as follows. First, it is important for future studies to use a broader set of data for the various constructs that will allow to understand deeper the relationship between these perceptual antecedents and job satisfaction repatriates (Ye, et al., 2017). Besides, our understanding is limited insofar as the career success motives of repatriates are concerned or how their careers evolve (Knocke & Schuster, 2017). Understanding the importance of international assignments to the repatriates' career success may help understand job satisfaction in the short and longer terms. We suggest that future researchers should also develop studies using longitudinal designs to explore the above.

In our study, we utilized perceptual data to operationalize our variables. Future research should consider employing objective measures to address potential concerns about respondent consistency. Specifically, our measurement of the repatriation plan was based on a single question asking participants to rate their organization's plan for their repatriation. Future studies could benefit from a more detailed examination of these plans, including whether they were part of a general corporate policy or tailored on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, investigating the timing of these plans—whether they were established before the expatriate assignment or at a later stage—would provide valuable insights.

Scholars also suggest exploring other potential moderating variables that could influence our suggested model. Some of the firm level moderators include human

resources management practices such as mentorship, compensation, systems and career management systems (Vidal, et al., 2007); career and repatriation support (Reiche, 2012); perceived job deprivation (Kraimer, et al., 2012); and rewards (Babakus et al., 2017). Some individual level moderators could be re-adjustment of expatriates, coping strategies, and expectations of repatriates (Chiang, et al., 2018).

Further, repatriates could be of different types (Chiang, et al., 2018). In addition to those individuals who have returned from firm sponsored overseas assignments, we could include returnee managers, that is, those individuals who have returned from self-initiated overseas assignments; students, volunteers, missionaries (Roberts & Beamish, 2017); and repatriates moving to other destinations. Our article included only those repatriates who are firm sponsored. Future research may extend our model to other types of repatriates referred to above.

Our sample contains U.S. based corporate expatriates who were sent to other countries. Further research may investigate the experiences of expatriates from other regions such as Asia, Africa, Europe etc. Future research may also examine the role of societal or country level factors both those of the host country and those of the home country in managing the repatriation process. How do similarities and dissimilarities of the societal cultures of the home and host countries influence the repatriation process and specifically how they can act as moderators in our moderated mediating model to predict repatriate job satisfaction? For example, re-entry of repatriates from collectivistic societies, where social support is strong, may be easier than those from individualistic cultures (Vidal, et al., 2007). Similarly, economic and social conditions of home and host countries on the repatriate re-entry process may also need to be considered. For example, differences in living standards and availability of resources (Chiang, et al., 2018), available career opportunities outside the home organization on return (Doherty et al., 2013), developed country contexts (vs. developing country contexts) (Kulkarni et al., 2010) are some of the country level moderators that can be factored in our model to understand the conditions that can influence repatriate job satisfaction. In summary, such a line of inquiry could, for example, investigate the roles of national level factors such as culture, language, geographic, and time zone differences and how these relate to the underlying processes that drive repatriate satisfaction (Stoermer, et al., 2021).

Finally, we recognize that the dataset that we used for this study may limit the generalizability of our findings. In order to include as many dimensions as possible

without overwhelming our participants, we had extracted scale items from existing measures instead of using the entire validated instrument. While this may affect the validation of those items, going forward future research may increase the number of items from each previously validated scale used in the study. We trust that the findings from our empirical study and our above observations will motivate future research.

9 | CONCLUSION

Our study findings suggest that growth opportunity is a significant mechanism through which repatriates' perceptions of recognition of their foreign experience influence repatriate job satisfaction. While this recognition of foreign experience is a distal predictor of repatriate job satisfaction, career growth opportunity is a proximal predictor that is, the effect of recognition of foreign experience on repatriate job satisfaction is felt through the career opportunities that exist in the organization after their return. Moreover, this effect is more pronounced when the organization has a repatriation plan in place of repatriates.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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