

# Examining Antecedents of Repatriates' Job Engagement and Its Influence on Turnover Intention

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**EXAMINING ANTECEDENTS OF REPATRIATES' JOB ENGAGEMENT AND ITS  
INFLUENCE ON TURNOVER INTENTION**

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# **EXAMINING ANTECEDENTS OF REPATRIATES' JOB ENGAGEMENT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TURNOVER INTENTION**

## **ABSTRACT**

Repatriate turnover is a key challenge for Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). While MNEs expect to retain returning employees (i.e., repatriates) and to benefit from new knowledge and experience they bring back from international assignments, a number of studies identify high rates of repatriate turnover intentions. This paper draws insights from social exchange theory and psychological contracts. By using survey data from 221 repatriates from the U.S., the paper presents an empirical study of the antecedents of repatriate turnover. Our findings demonstrate that repatriate perceptions of recognition of foreign experience, involvement, team orientation, and application of knowledge, had a significant impact on turnover intention and this impact was felt through repatriate job engagement i.e., repatriate job engagement significantly mediated the influence of recognition of foreign experience, involvement, team orientation, and application of knowledge on turnover intention. While the study findings contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of the antecedents of repatriate turnover it also informs how MNEs can apply new strategies and initiatives that heighten repatriate retention rates and prevent knowledge slippage and the loss of highly valued people soon after they return from international assignments.

## **KEYWORDS**

Repatriates; Turnover Intentions, Job Engagement; Multinational Enterprises (MNEs); Expatriation

## **WORD COUNT**

13,378

## INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, the relevance of international assignments has increased (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015). Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) have recognized that international assignments play a critical role in developing global competencies, implementing successful international business strategies, and developing competitive advantages (Knocke & Schuster, 2017, Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). The increasing numbers of MNEs has seen a corresponding rise in the number of expatriates to international locations and their subsequent repatriation (Chiang, van Esch, Birtch, & Shaffer, 2018). When MNEs send their home country managers, executives and specialists to coordinate and control foreign subsidiaries, these employees are able to hone management skills, develop intercultural understanding, increase the knowledge base of the MNE, and cultivate knowledge of international business (e.g. Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010, Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, Reiche, 2012, Stroh, Black, Mendenhall, & Gregersen, 2004). The expectation is that MNEs retain returning employees (i.e. repatriates) and benefit from the new knowledge and experience they have gained from international assignments (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010, Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Repatriates are a valuable strategic resource for the MNE due to their knowledge of foreign operations (Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, & Mendenhall, 2009, Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Additionally, repatriates may have firsthand knowledge about other cultures, possess a greater understanding of international issues, and hold specific detailed information about the market within which they were assigned.

Despite the strategic and financial importance of repatriates, evidence suggests that MNEs often fail to realize the potential of repatriates because many leave the company after the assignment is completed. For example, the Brookfield Global Relocation Trends Report showed that 38% of repatriates left their organization within the first year of returning to their home

country (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016). Thus, for MNEs that wish to capitalize on the international experience and knowledge acquired by their expatriates, repatriation success remains a very serious concern (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012). Expatriate retention or turnover is key to repatriation success for MNEs.

While there has been considerable progress in understanding of the expatriation phase of international assignments, scholarly inquiry on repatriation is limited and incomplete (Chiang, et al., 2018). In particular, when compared to research on expatriation, that on repatriation is limited and lacks sufficient theoretical foundations (Knocke & Schuster, 2017). Of important concern in the repatriation process is the repatriates' turnover intentions, where turnover intentions of repatriates involve voluntarily leaving the home organization (Lee & Liu, 2007). High turnover of repatriates could lead to loss of knowledge and skills acquired to competitors and dissatisfaction of repatriates may discourage other employees from accepting foreign assignments in the future (Santos & Martins, 2019). Understanding the reasons why repatriates leave the home organization is a key step for MNEs to develop good retention strategies (Reiche, 2009). In other words, there is a clear need for scholarship on the internal employability of repatriates and hence lower turnover intentions (Bücker, Poutsma, & Monster, 2016). Further, the limited studies that have examined the direct effects of contextual or individual factors on repatriate turnover intentions, suggest that these effects are less straightforward and that future research needs to examine potential mediating variables for these effects (Chiang, et al., 2018). In particular repatriate perceptions of organizational repatriate practices have been found to induce commitment to the organization (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). We address the above gaps to shed light on how repatriate's perceptions of job related factors influence turnover

intentions (McEvoy & Buller, 2013) and therefore provide a basis for new perspectives on repatriation policies of MNEs (Buecker, Poutsma, & Monster, 2016).

We draw on insights from social exchange theory and the understanding of psychological contracts to suggest that the effects of repatriate perceptions of the organization recognizing their foreign experience and perceptions of organizational practices that permit their high involvement, better communication, team orientation, and application of their knowledge on turnover intentions are felt through job engagement. Using survey data from 221 repatriates from the U.S. our findings suggest that repatriate job engagement mediates the influences of repatriate perceptions of organizational recognition of foreign experience and perceptions of organizational practices that permit their involvement, team orientation, and application of their knowledge on turnover intention.

Our key contributions from theoretical and empirical standpoints are as follows. First, using perspectives from social exchange theory, we contribute to the theoretical foundation that in part explains the influence of repatriate job perceptions on turnover intentions. Second, we provide a deeper understanding on the underlying mechanisms that drive repatriate turnover intention, by specifically addressing the call by (Chiang, et al., 2018) to examine ‘employee engagement’ as an important mediating mechanism through which perceptions of job related factors could affect repatriation outcomes. Third, extant research has largely examined repatriate turnover intentions through qualitative studies (Buecker, et al., 2016). We have added to the above scholarship through a quantitative study. Finally, small sample sizes is a limitation in repatriate research since access to repatriate samples is difficult and majority of the studies on repatriation processes have sample sizes less than 100 (Chiang, et al., 2018, Kraimer, et al.,

2009). With our sample size of 221, we have addressed the above call for increased sample sizes in repatriate research.

The paper is organized as follows. We review relevant literature on repatriation, repatriate turnover, and job engagement. Thereafter, we develop our hypotheses on the influence of antecedents (i.e., recognition of foreign experience, involvement, team orientation, communication, and application of knowledge) on job engagement, and the mediating role of job engagement on the influence of these antecedents on turnover intention of repatriates. We thereafter discuss our methods, details of our sample data, and operationalization of our variables. We finally present our results, discuss our findings, present managerial implications, suggest avenues for future research, and conclude.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **REPATRIATION**

Repatriation concerns the last phase of an international assignment, when the expatriate returns to the home organization in the home country (Chiang, et al., 2018, Kraimer, et al., 2009). Scholarly attention to the concept of repatriation can be attributed in part to the work by Black and Gregersen (1999), who highlighted the difficulties firms face in retaining their corporate expatriates upon completion of international assignments. Corporate expatriates are employees who are temporarily relocated by their organization to another country, usually for several years, to complete a specific task or accomplish an organizational goal (Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004). When these managers return back to their home offices, they are repatriates (Oddou, Szkudlarek, Osland, Deller, Blakeney, & Furuya, 2013). This differs from international returnees who through self (or family) selection, rather than as international

assignees, have gone abroad to study, live, and/or work, then return to their home country (Lee & Roberts, 2015, Roberts & Beamish, 2017).

Many MNEs do not have a strategic approach to repatriation and adopt less effective ad hoc measures (Scullion & Brewster, 2001). Developing a more strategic approach to repatriation can help MNEs retain high-value talent and to encourage managers to accept international assignments (Evans, Pucik, & Barsoux, 2002). In fact, since repatriation can often be more difficult on the employee than the initial stage of the expatriate assignment (Adler & Ghadar, 1989) a strategic approach is crucial.

Repatriates display low levels of satisfaction upon return due to the fact that newly acquired skills, or the enhancement of their skills in general, are often not recognized or utilized after reintegration with the home company. Collings, Scullion, and Dowling (2009) suggest that many firms do not use the repatriation process to build on the employee's knowledge gained from the assignment, and often international assignments do not result in positive career progression. It was found that about 70% of repatriates believe the international assignment had a negative impact on their careers (Black and Gregersen, 1999). Further lack of communication on the repatriation process prior to return was also found to negatively affect repatriate adjustment (Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009).

## **REPATRIATE TURNOVER**

One important concern of MNEs in regard to the repatriation processes is repatriates' turnover (Santos & Martins, 2019). Since it is difficult to measure actual repatriate turnover, most studies relating to repatriates' turnover use "*turnover intention*" as proxy (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009, Chi & Chen, 2007, Lee & Liu, 2007). Turnover intention has been defined in literature as the likelihood of an employee voluntarily leaving the firm in which he/she is

working (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012). The key factors that influenced turnover for repatriates were: 1) whether the organization valued international assignments; 2) whether career planning was available; and 3) whether there was upheaval or significant changes within the organization Stroh (1995). Hurn (1999) identified negative feelings and low satisfaction levels among repatriates who expressed high levels of disappointment in their treatment upon return, whether it was lack of promotions, being ‘warehoused’, or not having a set position for them to assume upon return.

The adjustment process for repatriates is therefore often identified as a primary cause for a lower sense of commitment and higher rates of turnover. Hurn (1999) suggests the process often creates negative feelings towards the company as repatriates feel undervalued, underused, and not provided with adequate assistance in adapting back to the home country and work. Many repatriates have also stated that their expectations upon return were much higher than the actual reality and this disconnect is mentioned as a reason for leaving the current employer (Kraimer, et al., 2012, Lee & Liu, 2007).

Previous studies have identified a variety of initiatives that can be employed by organizations to achieve higher retention rates (Birur & Muthiah, 2013, Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992, Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). Some initiatives include mentor programs, career path planning including the international assignment, planning ahead in determining appropriate job content and level upon repatriation, applying new skills acquired by the repatriate abroad, enhanced communication, and assisting with the entire process of repatriation. This includes effective HR policies and systems to make the best use of human resources on a global basis (Reiche, 2012). While supportive practices (through HR policies and systems) may be objective, extant research suggests that it is the perception of these practices by repatriates that

drive turnover intentions. Repatriate perceptions about the value and utility of these practices are subjective, and it has been shown that it is these subjective perception that influences turnover intentions of repatriates (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001).

## **JOB ENGAGEMENT**

Engagement as defined by Kahn is “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s ‘preferred self’ in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional) and active, full performances” (1990: p.700). Further, extant literature on engagement theory (Ulrich, 2007) suggests that employees who are more engaged with their work and organization are likely to exhibit greater job satisfaction, a positive opinion of their employer, and high levels of performance, while also being less likely to voluntarily leave (Lockwood, 2007). Employee engagement is therefore not only identified as a factor influencing employee retention but also as a factor affecting organizational performance. Gibbons (2006) suggests that employee engagement relates to an increased emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has to their employer, supervisor, and coworkers that result in an increased output of effort. The extra costs and underperformance resulting from poor employee engagement negatively affects organizations and, over the long term, decreases profitability and, as a result, sustainability (Rampersad, 2008).

Extant literature has also established a significant relationship between employee engagement and their performance on the job (Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2018). Organizational efforts in areas of engagement can in turn lead to increases in performance thus creating an overall benefit for the firm. Further to this, research by Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot (2017) suggests that the employee-organization relationship goes beyond psychological empowerment and psychological contract and suggests a level of employee activation beyond the

aforementioned two concepts. Performance of employees critically impact competitiveness, innovation and the overall success of the organization (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

The perceptions of individuals play a key role in job engagement. As mentioned earlier individuals who are completely engaged are considered to be psychologically present and focused on their job roles (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Their perceptions of their work conditions influence the psychological conditions which provide the necessary context in which they engage in their job roles (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) further found that there were three psychological conditions associated with engagement or disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. In the only study to empirically test Kahn's (1990) model, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found that job enrichment and role fit were positive predictors of meaningfulness; rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor relations were positive predictors of safety while adherence to co-worker norms and self-consciousness were negative predictors; and resources available was a positive predictor of psychological availability while participation in outside activities was a negative predictor.

### **HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that two entities (individuals, groups, or organizations) enter into a relationship where one entity perceives that the other possesses something of value. Extending this to the employee- organization relationship, employee perceptions of organizational support trigger their sense of responsibility to support organizational performance, and due to the principle of reciprocity, they believe that they have to repay the entity that has done them good (Ye, Li, & Tan, 2017). These perceptions relate to the extent to which the organization cares for the employees and their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). They relate to

not only material benefits but also to instrumental support such as providing sufficient information and necessary working conditions to perform (McMillan, 1997). These perceptions generate goodwill towards the organization and strengthens the relationship between the employee and organization and based on the principles of reciprocity enhances their inkling to repay the organization (Maertz Jr, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007). Such employees are more likely to show strong job engagement and remain in the organization (Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewe, & Johnson, 2003, Winter & Monroe, 1996). The above insights can be applied to understanding the social exchange of repatriates during their adjustment period.

The perceptions of repatriates, during their adjustment period, on the work related conditions are important drivers of their job engagement and turnover intentions (Ye, et al., 2017). This is based on the assumptions of psychological contracts where according to Rousseau (1995: p. 9), “the psychological contract consists of individual beliefs regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization.” Unlike formal contracts psychological contracts are perceptual in nature (Aldossari & Robertson, 2016). Research on psychological contracts suggests that organization fulfilment of work related expectations will make repatriates more engaged and less likely to leave (Rousseau, 1995, Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007). In understanding this social exchange relationship between the repatriate and the organization during the repatriation process it is suggested that “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, Zhu, & Hall, 2002: p. 373). Such work related expectations we suggest would include that related to recognition of repatriates’ foreign experience and practices that permit their deep involvement, team orientation, and opportunities to apply their new knowledge.

Organizational policies around these expectations would impact the perceptions of repatriates of whether their psychological contracts have been fulfilled or not fulfilled upon their return (Aldossari & Robertson, 2018), and this in turn would drive repatriate engagement and turnover intentions.

In line with the principles of psychological contracts drawn from social exchange theory we therefore argue that when repatriates perceive that the organization fulfils its obligations in line with their expectations, they respond with higher job engagement and consequent lower turnover intentions. We specifically hypothesize the influence of perceptions of the recognition of repatriates' foreign experience and perceptions on practices that permit their deep involvement, team orientation, communication, and opportunities to apply their new knowledge on job engagement and turnover intentions in the following sections. Our hypothesized model, shown in Figure 1, suggests that repatriate perceptions of recognition of foreign experience, involvement, organizational communication, team orientation, and application of knowledge influence expatriate job engagement, which in turn influences turnover intention.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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## **RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN EXPERIENCE**

Repatriates often cite the lack of recognition for work done abroad as a significant factor leading to lower job satisfaction (Hurn, 1999, Zhao & Zhou, 2008). In fact, expatriate experience is often discounted by colleagues because of foreignness of such practices (Roberts & Beamish, 2017). The sense of appropriate recognition or compensation for services or duties performed relates directly to expectations of employees. When expectations are not met, engagement levels tend to fall (Kahn, 1990) and this is also in line with our arguments around breach of

psychological contracts (Aldossari & Robertson, 2018). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) also found a significant relationship between job enrichment that stems from recognition and job engagement, while Bonache (2006) found significance between tasks performed, challenge, and significance with the overall job satisfaction of repatriates. Lack of rewards and recognition can lead to burnout and that the appropriateness of rewards and recognition is an important facet of job engagement of repatriates (Maslach, et al., 2001). This leads to the first hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived recognition of repatriate experience will be positively associated with job engagement.*

## **INVOLVEMENT**

The concept of individual involvement with an organization is a further example of the psychological connection an employee has with their job and organization. Having opportunities to become more involved in different facets, along with the opportunity to share valued skills and experience, generates a greater level of job engagement and sense of belonging (Bonache, 2006). Autonomy, flexibility, and decision-making constitute important considerations for an employee's psychological connection (Yalabik, Popaitoon, Chowne, & Rayton, 2013). For repatriates, this becomes an even more important factor leading to job engagement, as generally higher levels of autonomy and flexibility allowed during international assignment were welcomed. Upon return, however, controls are often tightened and a loss of autonomy generates an overall higher level of dissatisfaction (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Developing connections to an organization can generate a favorable outlook towards the organization and in turn creates a sense of well-being for the employee (Poon, 2013). Affectively committed employees show a greater level of commitment to their organization, thus displaying higher levels of job engagement. This, in turn, leads to a greater willingness to invest time and effort into their duties (Daniels, 2011).

Further, some studies have also suggested that employees who believe they have the ability to enact change in company policies and directives display a higher level of job engagement. The greater the perceived involvement of an employee, the more likely they are to show higher levels of job engagement, and in turn potentially higher performance levels. Thus, this leads to our second hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2: Perceived involvement will be positively associated with repatriates' job engagement.*

## **TEAM ORIENTATION**

Developing and retaining meaningful relationships with the work team or group in the home organization is an important factor for repatriate success (Benson & Pattie, 2008, Mezas & Scandura, 2005). It is sometimes difficult for home office employees and expatriates to establish and maintain relationships, and this lack of interaction may lead to lower performance and retention problems (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Working in different time zones, loss of personal contacts and divergent goals can all lead to weakened connectivity. Home managers may feel less responsible for expatriates' success than home office employees' success. Therefore, they may place less effort in utilizing repatriates' international skills (Gregersen & Black, 1995). Benson and Pattie (2009) suggest that having someone looking out for the interest of the repatriate plays an important role in their success. This may include mentors and re-entry sponsors and assisting in the reintegration and development of relationships with the work team. Such practices would help closely to align with the expectations of repatriates to build adequate relationship with the home organization employees.

Relationships with co-workers can strengthen an employee's bond to the organization and enhance satisfaction with work. By relying on others, and being part of a high performing team, repatriates can improve their re-integration into the workplace and potentially enhance

their own satisfaction through mutual understanding, recognition, and relationships. From this, we propose the following.

*Hypothesis 3: Perceived team orientation will be positively associated with job engagement.*

## **COMMUNICATION**

When employees believe that their organization is concerned about them and cares about their well-being, they are likely to respond by attempting to fulfill their obligations to the organization by becoming more engaged (Maslach, et al., 2001). In addition, because employees tend to view their supervisor's orientation toward them as indicative of the organization's support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), communication is also likely to be an important predictor of employee job engagement. In fact, a lack of communication from supervisors has been found to be an especially important factor linked to burnout (Maslach, et al., 2001).

Having frequent and fluent communication during the international mission between the domestic company and the expatriates is considered a relevant factor to improve adjustment to work after the repatriation (Harvey, 1989). Benefits of the communication system include updating the employee on the politics, hierarchical, labor, and strategic organizational changes that occur in the domestic company during the duration of expatriation (Malek, Budhwar, & Reiche, 2015). Communication should also include information exchange regarding career support and the characteristics of the job that will be occupied by the employees after and beyond repatriation (van der Heijden, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2009). A company that maintains this type of communication allows expatriates to feel that their needs are being considered by their organizations, which can lead to improved repatriate adjustment (Tung, 1998). Empirically, some studies have observed that a good communication system reduces turnover rates after repatriation (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). This brings us to our fourth hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 4: Perceived communication from managers will be positively associated with job engagement.*

## **APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE**

The degree of transfer of global management competencies after repatriation has a significant influence upon affective and behavioral outcomes, such as job motivation and performance (Yalabik, et al., 2013). This is because satisfaction with the job depends on the match between the knowledge and abilities of the employees and the job content (Robbins, 1998). Employees' perceptions that they are overqualified for the job may adversely affect their engagement with the job (Vieira, 2005) and this finding can be applicable for repatriates (Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2007). Many organizations assign repatriates jobs that do not match with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they gained during their tenure abroad (Bossard & Peterson, 2005) and this situation is one of the key complaints on their return (Vidal, et al., 2007). This also aligns with the individuals' need for control and belief of control or self-efficacy (Bandura & Cervone, 1986, Compeau & Higgins, 1995) where it is suggested that the successful transfer of previously acquired competencies to a new position will increase self-efficacy. Repatriates therefore have expectations that the home country organizations would offer jobs that align with their new found knowledge, abilities, and skills on their return, a situation as it was before they were expatriated (Pickard, 1999). Fulfillment of these expectations would improve repatriate engagement with their jobs when they return to their home country. Non fulfillment would lead to breach in psychological contract that could affect engagement negatively. Hence, our fifth hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 5: Perceived application of knowledge by the firm will be positively associated with job engagement.*

## **JOB ENGAGEMENT AND TURNOVER INTENTION**

As alluded to earlier, job engagement is defined as emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Baumruk, 2004, Richman, 2006, Shaw, 2005) or the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by employees in their jobs (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004). Kahn (1990: 694) defines personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.” Thus, engagement means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role (Kahn, 1990, Kahn, 1992). Rothbard (2001: 656) also defines engagement as psychological presence but goes further to state that it involves two critical components: attention and absorption. Attention refers to “cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role,” while absorption “means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one’s focus on a role.”

According to Maslach, et al. (2001), job engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy; the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Research on burnout and job engagement has found that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (vigor and dedication) are opposites of each other (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). Job engagement is not a momentary and specific state, but rather, it is “a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior.”

In summary, job engagement has been found to be positively related to organizational commitment and negatively related to intention to quit, and is believed to also be related to job performance and extra-role behavior (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, Sonnentag, 2003). Hence.

*Hypothesis 6: Job engagement will be negatively associated with turnover intention.*

## **THE MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB ENGAGEMENT**

As reviewed in our earlier sections on repatriate turnover, the perceptions of organizational support in relation to their jobs will affect whether repatriates will remain with their organization upon repatriation (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Organizational variables relating to the job as manifested in the availability of repatriation support practices or repatriate management practices have been found to significantly influence turnover intentions of repatriates (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). If organizations are able to address or manage well potential repatriation concerns or perceptions in advance, repatriate turnover will happen less frequently (Stahl et al., 2009). Insufficient repatriation support practices in the organization can increase repatriate turnover rates (Bücker et al., 2016) because they are not able to internally employ these repatriates (Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

The key antecedents in our study i.e., foreign experience, involvement, team orientation, communication, and application of knowledge can be identified along the dimensions of internal employability of repatriates as proposed by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). They suggest domain specific (use of professional knowledge) and competencies for career development that suggest internal employability of repatriates lack of which could lead to repatriate turnover. The former i.e., domain specific (use of professional knowledge) would align with practices of the organization that recognizes the foreign experience gained by repatriates in their international assignment and providing them opportunities to apply such knowledge. For the latter i.e., competencies for career development they suggest providing increased personal flexibility on the job to the repatriates and also their increased involvement in departmental and organizational activities. These competencies align with the practices that encourage increased repatriate involvement, communication and those that promote team orientated activities. Studies have shown that repatriates who see a strong connection between their international

assignments and their career paths after repatriation in the long term are more likely to stay with the organization upon repatriation (Stahl et al., 2009). Their internal employability as facilitated by the organizational practices that recognizes their foreign knowledge and enable them to apply it on the job post their return are important to reduce repatriate turnover. Besides practices that increase their involvement, improves organizational communication with them, and enhances their participation in teams post their return improve their career development opportunities which reduces turnover intentions.

As suggested above repatriates who perceive strong organizational support through the various practices of recognizing their foreign experience, providing them with the opportunities to apply such knowledge, increasing their involvement on the job, communication well with them, and involving them teams are likely to stay in the organization and contribute to organizational goals (Ye et al., 2017). The more they perceive such support the more they display stronger engagement to their jobs post their return to the home country (Hochwarter et al, 2003). There are a number of reasons to expect job engagement to be related to work outcomes. One is that the experience of job engagement has been described as a fulfilling, positive work-related experience and state of mind (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, Sonnentag, 2003) and has been found to be related to good health and positive work affect (Sonnentag, 2003). These positive experiences and emotions are likely to result in positive work outcomes. Hence engaged repatriates are more attached to the organization and are less likely to leave the organization (Bal et al., 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

We had hypothesized that organizational practices to recognize foreign experience of repatriates, provide opportunities to their apply their knowledge, increase their involvement on the job, communicate well with them, and facilitate their team participation increase repatriates'

engagement on the job. Consistent with the Maslach, et al. (2001) model these practices (e.g. job characteristics, communication, application of skills) have been associated with various work outcomes. Specifically, given that these practices reduce repatriate turnover (as argued earlier), we propose that repatriate engagement serves as an important mechanism through which such organizational practices affect outcomes such as repatriate turnover (Chiang et al. 2018). Our suggestion is in line with several studies that have found job engagement as a mediator between antecedent variables and outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, Sonnentag, 2003). Therefore, the final hypothesis of this study is as follows.

*Hypothesis 7: Job engagement will mediate the relationship between the antecedents and turnover.*

## **METHOD**

We test our hypotheses using a survey sample of repatriate managers that was collected for this study. Our constructs are latent variables and thus all dependent and independent variables consist of between 3 and 6 indicators. Factor analysis was used on the items to determine their fitness for further analysis. As our model predicts a single mediation effect, we have used the multiple regression approach to testing mediation developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008) and followed the PROCESS method of bootstrapping as presented by Hayes (2018). We used the SPSS Macro developed by Hayes (2018) to test all of our hypothesis. We have taken a PLS approach using SmartPLS (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) to test model fitness (Wong, 2019).

## **SAMPLE AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The primary data for this study was a quantitative survey of repatriates who had been expatriate managers in U.S. based firms. Before developing the survey, we interviewed HR

personnel and three repatriates to discuss the factors to be tested, and to determine additional important factors. Based on their feedback, a survey was developed based on existing and validated scales. In a second stage, a pilot test of the survey was conducted with a group of thirty in order to test the framework and determine if statistical implications exist and are potentially valid. The survey questions were tested for factor reliability and additions of attention filters and demographic questions were made to better organize the sample. Human research ethics requirements were satisfied through the first author's institution prior to the collection of the data. Appropriate respondents were then professionally solicited by the research firm Qualtrics to ensure that a random and non-bias sample was selected.

For the survey, variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). Table 1 depicts the number of items used for each latent variable and their respective loadings. Scale reliability was evaluated using and composite reliability (CR) (see Table 2) and Cronbach's alpha (coefficient alpha) (see Table 3) giving a measure of how well a set of manifest indicators measure the scale (DeVellis, 2003). Nunnally (1978) recommends an alpha value of .7 to ensure satisfactory internal consistency. All latent variables have a Cronbach's alpha and CR in excess of .7.

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Insert Table 1, 2, and 3 about here  
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*Descriptive Statistics:* A total of 254 complete responses were returned. The responses received then underwent a more thorough level of screening to remove any straight-lining in responses and to further limit any outliers from the group. A total of 221 responses were deemed appropriate for further statistical analysis.

The correlation matrix is presented in Table 3. Sixty one percent (136 respondents) of the respondents were male. The largest group was in the 25-34 age range representing 41.6% of the sample (92 respondents) followed by the 35-44 age group representing 27.6%. As expected, given the nature of MNEs, most of the respondents came from organizations with greater than 100 employees (79.6%) with slightly over a quarter of the sample from firms with over 1000 employees. The industries represented are diverse, with Technology, Internet & Electronics representing the largest industry group at 12.7% (28 respondents).

The largest job classification was manager level representing 24.9% (55 respondents). In terms of location of assignment, the U.K. topped with 18.6% (41 respondents), followed by China with 16.3% (36) and Japan with 13.1% (29).

*Discriminant validity* - Discriminant validity is examined via the average variance shared, termed average variance extracted (AVE), between a latent variable and its indicators. This value should be larger than 0.50 (see, for example, Fornell & Larcker, 1981: p. 46) and its square root should be considerably larger than the correlations of the latent variable with any other latent variables (see, for example, Hulland, 1999: p. 200) . Table 2 shows that the AVE for each latent variable is greater than 0.5. In addition, using Fornell and Larcker (1981) test, Table 2 shows that the square root of the AVE (indicated on the diagonal) for every latent variable exceeds the absolute correlations with the other latent variables (Lux, Grover, & Teo, 2019) or AVE is greater than the maximum shared variance (MSV) (e.g. Almén, Lundberg, Sundin, & Jansson, 2018). Thus, we can conclude that discriminant validity is not an issue.

*Common Method Bias*: We asked respondents to assess perceptually both dependent and independent variables, and thus we were aware of suffering from the possible presence of common method bias. We therefore followed guidance from Podsakoff, Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

and Lee (2003: 889) to adopt a widely used technique to address the issue of common method bias using Harman's one-factor (or single-factor) test. We have entered all variables measured subjectively by the respondents into the technique. The unrotated principal components factor analysis reveals the presence of three factors with eigenvalues greater than 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%). Podsakoff, et al. (2003) explain that we need to suspect the presence of a substantial amount of common method in the case where (1) a single factor emerges from the factor analysis or (2) one general factor accounts for the majority of the covariance among the measures. The explanations given by the previous literature and the results clearly verify that common method bias in this research is negligible.

*Measurement Model Fit:* Our model is comprised of five latent independent variables. In order to establish the validity of a five variable model, we used the approach recommended by (Hulland, 1999). In this approach to indicator reliability, each individual item (indicators) should have a loading on the intended construct of 0.707 or higher to be considered reliable. This common rule of thumb is used because it demonstrates that the variance explained is greater than the error variance (e.g. Carmines & Zeller, 1979, Hulland, 1999). Table 1 shows that almost all indicators are above the 0.707 threshold. When we collapse the model into one latent variable, more than half the indicators fall below the 0.707 threshold, which demonstrates that our data is not better expressed as one latent construct.

*Non-response Bias:* We tested for non-response bias via t-test for significant differences between the early 25% of respondents and the late 25% of respondents across key variables and observed no significant differences. Further, based on Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001) we coded 'days to respond' as a regression variable for handling non-response error. Lindner, et al.

(2001) point out that if the regression model is not significant then we can assume that non-respondents do not differ from respondents. Thus, based on both findings we conclude that non-response bias is not a pressing issue in this research.

*Multicollinearity:* Prior to assessing the model through regression, the variables were checked in order to determine any potential multicollinearity issues. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to assess multicollinearity concerns and the VIF scores ranged between 1.12 and 2.51. VIF scores of less than 10 suggest that there will be no significant influence upon the stability of the parameter (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

## **DEPENDENT AND MEDIATING VARIABLES**

*Job engagement* – Mediating Variable: Repatriates overall engagement to their job and organization was measured with six items that were extracted from (Saks, 2006). Sample items include: “I really throw myself into my job” and “I strive to work as hard as possible for this organization.” The reliability estimate using Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was 0.84.

*Turnover intention* – Dependent Variable: As mentioned earlier since it is difficult to measure actual repatriate turnover, most studies use “*turnover intention*” as proxy (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009, Chi & Chen, 2007, Lee & Liu, 2007, Vidal, et al., 2007). Further, turnover intention has been shown to have a strong relationship to actual turnover (Chen, Hui, & Segó, 1998), a commonly observed phenomenon in engagement research. Turnover intention is a 3-item scale that was extracted from Shuck, Reio Jr, and Rocco (2011) and displays an internal reliability alpha of 0.83. Sample items include: “If I have my own way, I will be working for this organization for as long as possible” and “I frequently think of quitting my job.”

## **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

*Perceived Employee Recognition:* Repatriate's perception of how valued their international experience is to their organization was measured by three items from Amenumey and Lockwood (2008). Sample items include: "My superiors 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 0.73.

*Perceived Involvement:* Repatriate's perception of how they were involved in the workplace after coming back from their international assignment was measured with three items extracted from Rees, Alfes, and Gatenby (2013). Sample items include: "I am involved in organizational decision-making" and "I am given more challenging work in recognition of my abilities" The reliability estimate using Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.77.

*Communication:* Repatriates perception of how well management communicates with them is measured with four items that were extracted from Suutari and Brewster (2003) expectation based factor. Sample items include: "Organizational goals are clearly articulated" and "I am provided with regular updates on ongoing projects". The reliability estimate using Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.79.

*Team Orientation:* Repatriates perception of how their team would incorporate and integrate their knowledge and experience was measured with 2 items extracted from De Cieri, Sheehan, Costa, Fenwick, and Cooper (2009). Sample items include: "Your coworkers respect your skills, experiences and opinions" and "you and your coworkers meet often to discuss both work and personal issues". The reliability estimate using Cronbach's alpha for this variable was 0.77.

*Application of Knowledge:* Repatriates perception of how well their skills are being utilized within their domestic organization now that they have returned from an international assignment

were measured with 2 items extracted from (Kraimer, et al., 2012). These items are: “My organization encourages the sharing and dissemination of newly acquired skills and knowledge” and “My organization makes good use of my knowledge and skills.”

## **CONTROL VARIABLES**

Six main control variables were used in this study to control for factors influencing job engagement and turnover intentions. We have identified these control variables from extant research that has examined turnover intention. 1) *Gender* has been shown to impact many dimensions of the expatriate repatriate experience (Lee, Chua, Miska, & Stahl, 2017). 2) *Length of assignment* can affect a managers easy transition as longer the assignment the more difficulty the repatriation process (De Cieri, et al., 2009). 3) *Region of expatriate assignment* was coded using dummy variables to control for the effects of traveling to more culturally distant countries (Shin, Hasse, & Schotter, 2017). 4) *Tenure* at the organization, which was the length of time spent by the employee with the organization (Bal, De Cooman, & Mol, 2013, Ren, Bolino, Shaffer, & Kraimer, 2013, Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009). 5) *Organization size*, measured by number of employees, can have substantial impact on the resources available for employee adjustment or managerial attention towards repatriates (Hamori & Koyuncu, 2011).

## **RESULTS**

Table 4 shows the results of the regression analyses using Process in SPSS (Hayes, 2018). The model is presented in its complete form with Engagement as a mediator. The overall variance explained by the model is substantial for both the Mediating Variable (Engagement) Adjusted  $R^2 = 55.9\%$  and the Dependent Variable (Turnover Intention) Adjusted  $R^2 = 34.9\%$ . The PROCESS method uses normal theory tests for direct effects and bootstrapping method for the indirect effects of mediation. PROCESS produces T and p values from which statistical

inference can be made. Bootstrapping generates an empirical representation of the sample distribution of the indirect effects (Hayes, 2018). As suggested by Hayes (2018) we used a 95% confidence interval with a 5000 bootstrapping sample. The indirect effect is significant if zero falls outside of the confidence interval. See Hayes (2018) for a fulsome explanation and stepwise approach to the PROCESS method. Table 4 first presents the control variables and the non-hypothesized direct paths of the independent variables on turnover intention. Then the hypothesized direct effects of antecedents on engagement are presented using the normal theory test and the mediated effects of the antecedents on Turnover Intention through Engagement are presented using the bootstrapping method

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Insert Table 4 about here  
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Four of the five antecedents show significant positive relationships with job engagement. We therefore find support for Hypothesis 1 (H1) Perceived Recognition ( $\beta = 0.162$ ;  $SE = 0.060$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), Hypothesis 2 (H2) Perceived Involvement ( $\beta = 0.133$ ;  $SE = 0.062$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), Hypothesis 3 (H3) Perceived Team Orientation ( $\beta = 0.156$ ;  $SE = 0.056$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), and Hypothesis 5 (H5) Perceived Application of Knowledge ( $\beta = 0.379$ ;  $SE = 0.053$ ;  $p < .001$ ). These antecedents were therefore found to be positively associated with job engagement. Hypothesis 4 (H4) Perceived Managerial Communication, however, was not supported ( $\beta = 0.046$ ;  $SE = 0.066$ ;  $p > 0.1$ ).

Job engagement displays a strong negative relationship with turnover intentions ( $\beta = -0.423$ ;  $SE = 0.120$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and therefore we find support for our Hypothesis 6 i.e., higher job engagement reduces repatriate turnover intentions.

The mediating hypothesis, H7, is the key objective of this study. Once again, in four out of five antecedents, job engagement mediated the relationship between the antecedents and

turnover. These results show that job engagement significantly mediated the influence of Perceived Recognition (Est  $\beta$  = -0.069; 95% Confidence (not zero); L=-0.156 H = -0.004); Perceived Involvement (Est  $\beta$  = -0.056; 95% Confidence (not zero); L=-0.140 H = -0.002); Perceived Team Orientation (Est  $\beta$  = -0.066; 95% Confidence (not zero); L=-0.147 H = -0.12); Perceived Application of Knowledge (Est  $\beta$  = -0.160; 95% Confidence (not zero); L=0.297 H = -0.054). Perceived Managerial Communication, however, was not supported (Est  $\beta$  = -0.012; 95% Confidence (zero); L=-0.084 H = 0.044). These results therefore largely show support for our Hypothesis 7.

## DISCUSSION

Our paper contributes to the research on repatriation, by specifically examining the employee perceptual antecedents of repatriates to study organizational outcomes such as retention or turnover. 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 repatriate job perceptions on turnover intentions. Our primary theoretical contribution is the use of social exchange theory and the understanding of psychological contracts to show theoretically and empirically that job related perceptions of repatriates influence their job engagement which then serves as an important mechanism of influence on their turnover intentions. Scholars argue that repatriate retention is essential to an MNE's success as they act as boundary spanners between home and host country operations (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). In responding to the calls by scholars to understand the underlying processes that drive turnover intentions (Chiang, et al., 2018), our results suggest that job engagement is a significant mechanism through which repatriates perceptions of recognition of their foreign experience, involvement, team orientation, and application of knowledge influence

turnover intentions. While perceptual antecedents of recognition of foreign experience of repatriates, their involvement, their team orientation, and application of knowledge are distal predictors of turnover intentions, their job engagement is a more proximal predictor of turnover intention i.e. the effect of these perceptual antecedents is felt through job engagement, The empirical establishment of job engagement as a mediating factor in this study is thus the key contribution in affirming its role to explain the underlying processes which drive turnover intentions of repatriates, an understanding of which would help MNEs fine tune strategies to retain repatriates.

Our finding that recognition of foreign experience of expatriates is linked with turnover intention, resonates with existing research findings that one of the key problems in the repatriation process is that organizations do not recognize repatriates international experience and assign them with jobs that do not match their newly gained experiences (Bossard & Peterson, 2005, Suutari & Brewster, 2003). This recognition of foreign experience is therefore important to increase such employee's job engagement which then improves retention.

Involvement of the repatriate with the job has been found to be significant with job engagement which has the potential to consequently influence turnover intentions. These findings are in line with extant findings that job characteristics such as autonomy, flexibility, and decision making help improve involvement of the repatriate on the job (Yalabik, et al., 2013). In their international assignments prior to repatriation these employees enjoyed a great degree of responsibility and autonomy (Bossard & Peterson, 2005), which they find reduced when they come back to their home countries leading to difficulties in adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1999). Increased involvement by empowering repatriates on the job would help improve their job

engagement which subsequently has the potential to reduce their turnover intentions (Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2017).

Our finding on the relationship between team orientation and turnover intentions mediated by job engagement is clearly an understanding of the importance of repatriates' interpersonal relationships at work (Chiang, et al., 2018). Good interpersonal relationships with others provides a sense of connection and reduces uncertainty involved with interacting (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Team orientation provides that social support from co-workers that can help facilitate repatriate work adjustment (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999).

Our significant finding on the application of repatriate knowledge and its relationship with turnover intention through job engagement is key in the strategic utilization of such knowledge by organizations for competitive advantage (Oddou, et al., 2013). While expatriates have gained explicit knowledge such as technical facts about local markets, customer preferences, local cultural norms and business practices (Burmeister & Deller, 2016), they also develop tacit knowledge and skills such as a more global mindset, new management and language competencies, and access to global networks (Fink & Meierewert, 2005). The application of such knowledge improves job engagement and reduces turnover intention of repatriates.

Our non-significant findings on the influence of communication on job engagement and turnover intentions may need further exploration by future research. The finding of the relationship between job engagement and turnover intention is synonymous with prior work that considers work engagement as a “positive construct” and explores linear relations between work engagement and organizational outcomes (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Our findings therefore emphasize the importance of the repatriate's job engagement to reduce their intention to leave the company.

Extant research has largely examined repatriate turnover intentions through qualitative studies (Bücker, et al., 2016), where the importance of the knowledge gained and the alignment of goals of the repatriate and the home organization is emphasized for internal employability. Scholars have suggested that future research should have a greater balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the repatriate research (Chiang, et al., 2018, Yan, et al., 2002). In particular it is suggested that research should help improve the understanding of the mechanisms that underlie repatriates' decisions to quit the organization following repatriation (Kraimer, et al., 2009, Kraimer, et al., 2012). We have added to the above scholarship through a quantitative study in understanding how job related perceptions of repatriates influence turnover intentions. Finally, we have addressed the call for larger sample sizes in repatriate research with a sample size of 221, where a majority of studies in this research have sample sizes less than 100 (Chiang, et al., 2018, Kraimer, et al., 2009).

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Our findings suggest that the extent to which the MNE applies the skills and experience of the repatriate will be a critical factor in demonstrating commitment to the repatriate and valuing his/her time and effort spent abroad. A consistent theme identified in repatriate literature is that many repatriates feel undervalued upon return; suggesting that specific organizational value be placed on their experience gained while abroad. In concert with recognition, which is also a powerful force behind repatriate job engagement, recognition goes a long way towards understanding the mental commitment undertaken during an international assignment and the desire for it to be recognized upon return.

By linking recognition to job engagement, we see that repatriates who found themselves appreciated for their experience, expertise, and ability became much more engaged in their work

and developed greater job satisfaction. This also leads to a direct relationship with turnover, as the greater the job engagement the lower potential turnover. These two factors, while similar in nature, suggest that the international assignment is one that needs to be valued and appreciated both by the co-workers of the repatriate and through organizational initiatives in ensuring the experience and skills acquired are applied upon return.

Perceived involvement and team orientation suggest both an individual level and managerial level concern relating to job engagement. Perceived involvement leads to the suggestion that it is important to reintegrate and get the repatriate involved in activities and issues as quickly as possible. This can be accomplished through involvement in activities, perhaps debriefing and sharing his/her experience abroad and any valuable lessons that could be attributed to making international ventures a success for the organization.(knowledge transfer) When coupled with team orientation and the need for managers to guarantee work functions in cohesive teams with regular opportunities for team building and sharing of ideas, we suggest that the potential for re-engaging the repatriate becomes significantly higher.

We find that job engagement is a significant independent factor in determining turnover intention for repatriates. This further invigorates current research into job engagement studies and suggests that MNEs pay closer attention to engaging their workforce. We suggest that this becomes especially important when considering the time, investment, and knowledge put into and uncovered by repatriates throughout their entire international assignment. The re-engagement of repatriates is extremely important if MNEs wish to potentially leverage organizational competitive advantages (Oddou, et al., 2009) and enhance the absorptive capacity (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005) of their organizations in pursuit of further advances abroad.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

While our findings would inform MNEs about improving ways to manage their repatriates' expectations to better facilitate the repatriation process and reduce turnover, some of the areas of future research stemming from our findings would be as follows. First, is related to the limitation of this study in the lack of objective indicators of actual turnover (Ye et al., 2017). The relationship of repatriate turnover intentions and its relationship with turnover therefore needs to be considered. As mentioned earlier scholars have used turnover intention as a proxy for turnover as it is difficult to measure actual repatriate turnover (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009, Vidal, et al., 2007). However, it is yet to be established in literature that turnover intention leads to actual turnover in the long run (Van Dick, Christ, Stellmacher, Wagner, Ahlswede, Grubba, Hauptmeier, Hoehfeld, Moltzen, & Tissington, 2004). Future research may therefore need to develop fine grained measures to examine our model using actual turnover. It is also important for future studies to use a broader set of data that will allow to understand deeper the relationship between these perceptual antecedents and turnover intentions of 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; Santos & Robertson, 2019). Understanding the importance of international assignments to the repatriates' career success may help understand their turnover intentions in the short and longer terms (Santos & Robertson, 2019). We suggest that future researchers should also develop studies using longitudinal designs to explore the above.

Our variables have been operationalized using perceptual data. Future research may consider using objective measures for the variables in order to avoid concerns of respondent consistency. Scholars also suggest exploring potential moderating variables that could influence

our suggested model. Some of the potential organizational level moderators could be 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); organizational career support for repatriates (Zikic, Novicevic, Harvey, & Breland, 2006); rewards (Babakus, et al., 2017). Some of the specific individual level moderators could be re-adjustment of expatriates, coping strategies, and expectations of repatriates (Chiang, et al., 2018). Interpersonal and team level characteristics could be further analyzed by examining the influence of group composition, social support, relationship quality, and social networks on repatriates' job engagement and subsequent turnover intentions (Chiang, et al., 2018). Further, future research can expand on our findings by focusing on one or two of the antecedents used in our study. Such studies can theorize and empirically test complex interactions between them using moderated mediated models, as our results reveal correlations among the antecedents considered in our study.

Repatriates could be of different types (Chiang, et al., 2018) i.e. those who returned from firm sponsored international assignments; those who have returned from self-initiated international assignments; students, volunteers, missionaries; repatriates moving to other destinations. Our paper included only those repatriates who are firm sponsored. Future research may extend our understanding to other types of repatriates referred above.

Future research may also examine the role of country level factors both those of the home country and host country in affecting the repatriation process. Specifically, how do similarities and dissimilarities of the national cultures of the home and host countries affect the repatriation process and specifically how they can act as moderators in our model to predict turnover intentions? For example, repatriates from collectivistic societies, where social support is strong,

re-adjust easier than those from individualistic cultures (Vidal, et al., 2007). Similarly, the effect of economic and social development of home and host countries on the readjustment process may also be considered. Differences in living standards, availability of resources (Chiang et al., 2018), available career opportunities on return (Doherty, Richardson, Thorn, Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013), emerging economy contexts (versus developed country contexts) (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, & Valk, 2010) are some of the key moderators that can be considered in our model to predict turnover intentions.

We recognize that the dataset that we used for this study may limit the generalizability of our findings in several ways. In order to include as many dimensions as possible without overwhelming our participants, scale items were extracted from existing measures instead of using the entire validated instrument. This may affect the validation of those items. Going forward it would be useful for future research to increase the number of items from each previously validated scale used in the study. We trust that the findings from our study and the above observations will sufficiently motivate future research.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our research findings suggest that job engagement is a significant mechanism through which repatriates' perceptions of recognition of their foreign experience, team orientation, and application of knowledge gained from international assignments influence turnover intentions. While these perceptual antecedents are distal predictors of turnover intentions, repatriates' job engagement is a more proximal predictor of turnover intention i.e., the effect of these perceptual antecedents on turnover intentions of expatriates is felt through the extent of their job engagement.

From a managerial perspective, our findings affirm other conceptual and empirical studies which suggest that the repatriation of employees from abroad is part of the overall process of an international assignment, as their turnover suggests an overall failed attempt. By addressing repatriation as part of the whole process, organizations can build better mechanisms to properly re-engage employees upon return, retain their knowledge and experience, and contribute further to MNE competitiveness, performance, and growth. By recognizing the experience of repatriates, an MNE can provide personal value and a sense of affectation, enhancing job engagement and reducing the high cost of turnover.

#### **DATA AVAILABILITY**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [author removed], upon reasonable request.

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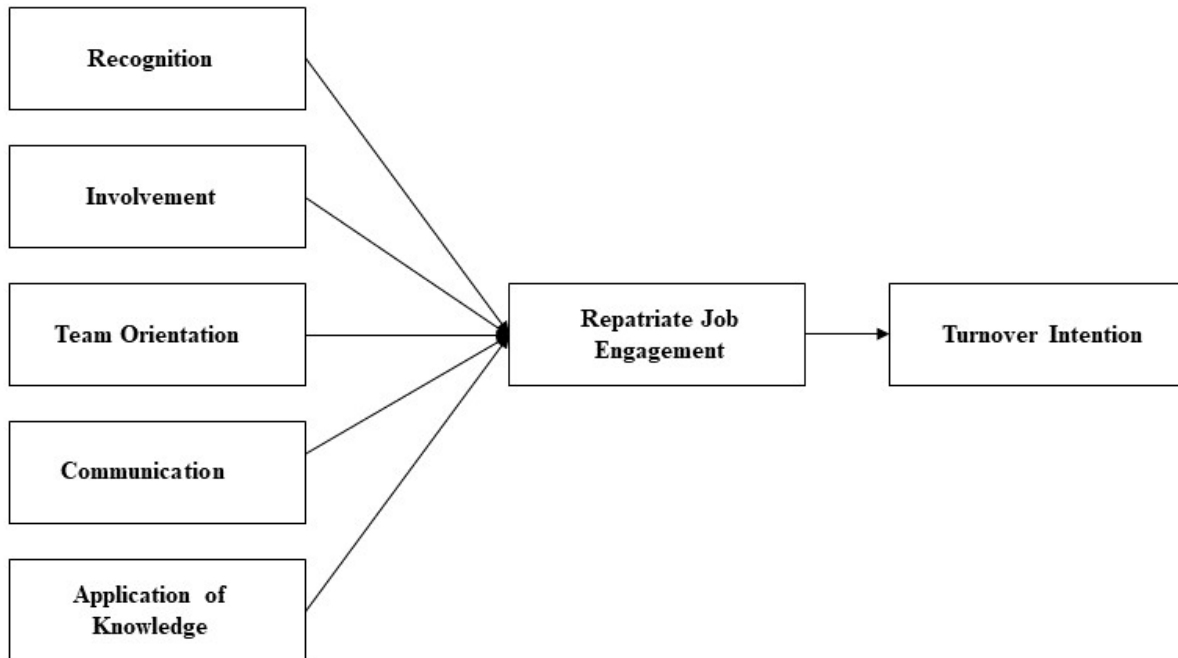
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**FIGURE 1: MEDIATED MODEL FOR EXPATRIATE JOB ENGAGEMENT**



**TABLE 1: LATENT VARIABLES AND INDICATOR LOADINGS**

Variable	# of Items	Indicator Loadings					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Recognition	3	.83	.75	.71			
Involvement	3	.84	.79	.64			
Communication	4	.75	.72	.71	.65		
Team Orientation	2	.91	.57				
Application of Knowledge	2	.82	.72				
Job Engagement	6	.83	.80	.77	.73	.74	.53
Turnover Intention	3	.92	.91	.78			

**TABLE 2: RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Recognition	0.85	0.58	0.30	<b>0.76</b>						
2. Involvement	0.87	0.58	0.35	0.61	<b>0.76</b>					
3. Communication	0.87	0.59	0.35	0.66	0.60	<b>0.76</b>				
4. Team Orientation	0.86	0.61	0.31	0.63	0.60	0.66	<b>0.78</b>			
5. App of Knowledge	0.85	0.64	0.32	0.59	0.55	0.63	0.62	<b>0.80</b>		
6. Job Engagement	0.86	0.57	0.43	0.68	0.63	0.64	0.68	0.71	<b>0.75</b>	
7. Turnover	0.85	0.80	0.31	0.47	0.37	0.42	0.43	0.48	0.61	<b>0.90</b>

CR, Composite reliability; AVE, Average variance extracted; MSV, Maximum shared variance  
 Bold numbers denote square root of AVE for Fornell and Larcker test (1981) AVE test

**TABLE 3: CORRELATION MATRIX**

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Recognition	4.15	.58	(.78) <sup>+</sup>						
2. Involvement	4.23	.58	.53**	(.77)					
3. Communication	4.09	.59	.55**	.59**	(.79)				
4. Team Orientation	4.10	.61	.46**	.52**	.56**	(.77)			
5. App of Knowledge	4.21	.63	.46**	.49**	.56**	.44**	(.74)		
6. Job Engagement	4.15	.57	.53**	.54**	.54**	.52**	.66**	(.84)	
7. Turnover	1.95	.80	-.43**	-.37**	-.43**	-.40**	-.48**	-.56**	(.79)

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

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

<sup>+</sup> Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal in brackets

**TABLE 4: DIRECT EFFECTS & MEDIATION ANALYSES  
RESULTS USING PROCESS IN SPSS**

Variable	Path	Normal Theory Tests			Bootstrapping Results for Indirect Effects (95% CI)		
		Coefficient	SE	T (with <i>p</i> )	Point Estimate	Lower	Higher
<b>Control Variables</b>							
Gender	Engagement	-0.021	0.055	-0.378			
	Turnover	-0.005	0.094	-0.051			
Assignment Length	Engagement	-0.025	0.019	-1.309			
	Turnover	0.054	0.032	1.665			
Tenure in Organization	Engagement	0.017	0.020	0.833			
	Turnover	-0.051	0.032	-1.595			
Organization Size	Engagement	0.018	0.013	1.329			
	Turnover	-0.051	0.023	-2.264*			
<b>Direct Paths of Independent Variables on Turnover (in complete model with engagement)</b>							
Recognition	Turnover	-0.110	0.104	-1.067			
Involvement	Turnover	0.040	0.106	0.380			
Communication	Turnover	-0.113	0.112	-1.006			
Team Orient	Turnover	-0.141	0.098	-1.442			
Appl of Knowl	Turnover	-0.192	0.101	-1.988*			
<b>Hypothesized Effects: Direct Effects of Antecedents on Engagement &amp; Mediated Effects of Antecedents on Turnover through Engagement</b>							
Engagement	Turnover	-0.423	0.120	-3.511***			
Recognition	Engagement	0.162	0.060	2.720**			
	Indirect				-0.069	-0.156	-0.004
Involvement	Engagement	0.133	0.062	2.146*			
	Indirect				-0.056	-0.140	-0.002
Communication	Engagement	0.046	0.066	0.702			
	Indirect				-0.012	-0.084	0.044
Team Orient	Engagement	0.156	0.056	2.773**			
	Indirect				-0.066	-0.147	-0.012
Appl of Knowl	Engagement	0.379	0.053	7.201***			
	Indirect				-0.160	-0.297	-0.054

Outcome Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F
Engagement	59.9%	55.9%	14.9
Turnover	40.7%	34.9%	6.51

1. Dummy variables for Region & job description are included as factors in the models, but not reported in the table

Notes: Standardized Regression Coefficients are Reported N=221

† p<0.1 \*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001