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REPATRIATION OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS STUDENT SOJOURNERS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: ROLE OF ACCULTURATION

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ABSTRACT

When students return from studying abroad they often find that it is more difficult than they anticipated weaving themselves back into their native culture. With the emphasis on implementing Information Systems in developing countries it is imperative that the knowledge learned abroad is used within the home country. For this research-in-progress, we propose that the psychological theory of acculturation can be used to explain IS-specific difficulties experienced by IS student sojourners as they repatriate to the home countries after studying abroad.

Keywords

Information systems, information technology, developing countries, repatriation, sojourning

INTRODUCTION

The failure rate of information systems implementations in developing countries continues to exceed the failure rate within developed countries (Heeks,2002). A lack of skilled IS resources is given as a contributing factor to these failures (Heeks,2002) despite the number of students from developing countries studying IS abroad. To understand why successful students are not making the anticipated impact on the level of skilled resources in their home countries, our study looks at the job satisfaction of repatriated students.

Job satisfaction has been shown to affect intention to leave (Wickramasinghe, 2009), a primary concern within the repatriation literature (Bonache, 2005; Downes, Thomas, and Singley, 2002; Sanchez Vidal, Sanz Valle, and Barba Aragon,2007; Stevens, Oddou, Furuya, Bird, and Mendenhall, 2006). While job satisfaction of IS practitioners in developed countries is an existing concern for the IS community (Lim, 2008; McKnight, Phillips, and Hardgrave, 2009; Morris and Venkatesh, 2010; Rutner, Hardgrave, and McKnight, 2008), little focus has been given to job satisfaction of IS student repatriates in developing countries. In fact, there is limited research in the psychology literature regarding repatriation of student sojourners to developing countries or the IS literature on the effects of cultures on IS in developing countries.

Due to the cultural aspects of sojourning and repatriation, a holistic research approach is required that leverages the extant literature regarding (i) IS job satisfaction, (ii) the psychological study of repatriation, and (iii) the effects of culture within the IS domain. As culture has a significant role in our study, we also leverage acculturation from the psychology literature. Through an extension of acculturation, we propose a theoretical model to explain job satisfaction of repatriated IS student sojourners. By improving job satisfaction of repatriated IS sojourners, we are able to not only improve the level of skilled resources in developing countries, but subsequently to improve the success of IS implementation and therefore the benefits of IS in developing countries.

This study contributes to several streams of literature. Primarily, the research aids in identifying difficulties of repatriation for IS student sojourners from developing countries. Successful repatriation of IS sojourners from developing countries is a key element in increasing the level of skilled resources within the developing country community which will aid in more successful IS implementations. Second, the research extends the use of job satisfaction to support IS as well as the study of repatriated students as a measure of the success of their repatriation. Third, the research helps fill the gap in the psychological literature regarding repatriation of sojourners from developing countries and answers Szkudlarek's (2010) call for diverse, cross-discipline research. Finally, the

research contributes to the acculturation literature by providing an extension into the cultural aspects of information systems in developing countries (ISDC).

The remainder of the research is organized in the following manner. First, we review the extant literature encompassing job satisfaction, sojourners and repatriation, and acculturation. Next we propose our re-acculturation-based model for the repatriation of IS sojourners. Due to space limitations we are unable to present our proposed research methodology, conclusions, implications, limitations, or future areas of work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Satisfaction

A major concern in the repatriation literature is intention to leave and a primary antecedent: job satisfaction (Bonache, 2005; Downes et al., 2002; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2007; Stevens et al., 2006). The emphasis on job satisfaction is due in large part to the focus of repatriation literature on managers and the drive for organizations to retain the knowledge that is learned during a manager's sojourn (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2007). This literature, however, does not directly apply to student sojourners repatriating and working in an IS environment.

Job satisfaction in the IS literature focuses on both users of IS (Morris and Venkatesh 2010), including users in developing countries (Anandarajan, Igbaria, and Anakwe, 2002) as well as on IS workers (Rutner et al., 2008). While Bennett et al. (2002) focused on organizational commitment, Rutner et al. (2008) evaluated the emotional dissonance that exists within IS workers. Lim (2008) focused on a specific type of IS worker, those working in academic libraries, and McKnight et al. (2009) studied turnover intentions with respect to workplace and job characteristics. Studies linking job satisfaction to turnover intention of IS personnel include Chang and Lee (2000), and Thatcher, Stepina, and Boyle (2002). None of the IS literature focused on developing countries or on repatriated students.

Antecedents for job satisfaction can be found in a number of theories including (i) job characteristics model, (ii) value-percept, (iii) direct and indirect dispositional studies, (iv) and the Cornell model (Judge and Klinger, 2008). As noted above, both repatriation and IS literature use primarily the job characteristics model. The job characteristics model is based on (i) task identity, (ii) task significance, (iii) skill variety, (iv) autonomy, and (v) feedback (Judge and Klinger, 2008).

Job satisfaction is not immune to the effects of culture. Ng, Sorensen, and Yim (2009) found in their research that the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance varied according to Hofstede's (1980) cultural indices: (i) power distribution, (ii) individualism, (iii) masculinity, and (iv) uncertainty avoidance. Similarly, Thompson and Phua (2012) explained the need to consider cross-national equivalence when studying non-US subjects.

Sojourners and Repatriation

> *Indeed, very little is known about foreign students in the Third World, the policies of Third World countries or the specific problems of reintegration of returned students from the perspective of the sending countries – Altbach, 1991, pp. 307.*

When education is not available in their heritage culture, many individuals travel abroad to more developed countries for education with the belief that they can bring knowledge and experience back to help advance their heritage culture (Glaser and Habers, 1974). When a person leaves their native country for a period of time with the intention to return it is called sojourning. Sojourning is comprised of three basic phases: (i) the outbound journey, (ii) the time in the host country, and (iii) and the homeward journey. Repatriation, reentry, and re-acculturation are the terms given to the homeward journey of sojourners (Sussman, 2000)[1]; the process of returning to their native country and fitting back into their native society (Martin, 1984).

The psychology literature on the outward journey of sojourners is expansive, covering both students and professionals (Baruch and Altman, 2002); however, there is significantly less research on the repatriation of sojourners (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997; Thompson and Christofi, 2006). In repatriation literature, the preponderance is devoted to manager-level individuals (Forstenlechner, 2010) from the United States (Szkudlarek, 2010) or the special case of Japanese Kikokushijo (Kano, 2000) with only a limited number of studies on repatriation of

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[1] To avoid confusion, repatriation will be used in this study to denote the return of sojourners to their heritage culture; re-acculturation will be used to indicate the extension of the theory of acculturation to the repatriation process.

Europeans (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997), and sparse literature on the repatriation of individuals from developing countries (Glaser and Habers, 1974; Strachan, Samuel, and Takaro, 2007). The repatriation literature is further segmented into assigned expatriates, those individuals sent to foreign countries for work and to self-initiated expatriates, such as students, who have chosen to leave their native cultures of their own accord (Forstenlechner, 2010)

Acculturation

The study of acculturation is used for "comprehending those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936, pp. 149). The driving force behind acculturation is the stresses that are experienced by individuals when they are relocated from their heritage culture to a new culture (Berry and Sam, 1980). For all but sojourners, relocation is typically permanent; furthermore, refugees and asylum seekers relocate involuntarily while immigrants and sojourners relocate voluntarily (Berry and Sam, 1980).

Modern acculturation theory focuses on Berry's Model of Acculturation (Berry and Sam, 1980) which postulates that individual acculturation stresses result in one of four acculturation strategies: (i) integration, (ii) separation, (iii) assimilation, or (iv) marginalization. The acculturation strategies are based on the significance given to the host and heritage cultures. Maintaining heritage culture while also accepting the host culture results in integration; maintaining the heritage culture and shunning the host culture results in separation; not maintaining the heritage culture and only accepting the host culture is assimilation; and disregarding both heritage and host cultures in marginalization.

Berry's model focuses on an individual's adaption in the acculturation context based in part on both group and individual factors, and based both on factors that exist prior to acculturation as well as factors that arise during acculturation (Berry and Sam, 1980). At the group level, acculturation accounts for the cultural factors of both the heritage culture as well as that of the host culture and focuses on the changes that are present at the group level. At the individual level, the factors that arise prior to acculturation represent individual factors such as age and knowledge before the relocation while factors arising during acculturation are a result of the interaction between the individual and the host society.

Psychological acculturation of the individual in Berry's model (Berry and Sam, 1980) indicates how the individual deals with group acculturation as well as with moderating factors prior to and during acculturation. Behavioral shifts, acculturative stress, and psychopathology are the features of psychological acculturation and are measured through psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

RE-ACCULTURATION MODEL OF REPATRIATION OF IS STUDENT SOJOURNERS

Constructs

Job Satisfaction

Thompson and Phua (2012) developed a four-item instrument to measure job satisfaction. To promote reuse and generalizability and in addition to standard validity checks, the authors evaluated their instrument for (i) temporal stability, (ii) cross-national equivalence, and (iii) cross-population equivalence. The resulting Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction[2] is the measure used as our dependent variable.

Job Characteristics

The job characteristics model (Judge and Flinger 2008) holds that (i) task identity, (ii) task significance, (iii) skill variety, and (iv) autonomy are the primary antecedents to job satisfaction. Both the repatriation (Bonache, 2005; Downes et al., 2002; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2007; Stevens et al., 2006) and the IS literature (Bennett et al., 2002; Lim, 2008; McKnight et al., 2009;Rutner et al., 2008) have focused on the job characteristics model. Therefore, we posit that:

> H_1: *Positive Job characteristics are positively related to positive job satisfaction.*

Re-Acculturation

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[2] Due to page constraints the BIAJS is not included.

Berry's model of acculturation explicates that, at the individual level, a person adapts to the stresses that occur prior to acculturation as well as stresses that occur during acculturation resulting in an acculturation strategy[3]. We extend Berry's theory by proposing that (i) factors prior to repatriation as well as factors during repatriation can be used to measure re-acculturation and that (2) a person's re-acculturation strategy moderates the job satisfaction measures (i) task identity, (ii) task significance, (iii) skill variety, (iv) autonomy, and (v) feedback. To this extent, we predict that:

> *H₂: Re-acculturation moderates job characteristics.*

Factors Existing Prior to Re-Acculturation

Outward-Bound Acculturation Success

Gregersen and Stroh (1997) found that sojourners' ease of repatriation was affected by (i) time overseas, (ii) cultural novelty, and (iii) social status. Conversely, Martin (1984) posited that the sojourner's outward-bound success did not impact repatriation success. It is clear from Westwood, Lawrence, and Paul (1986), however, that major cultural differences between the host and home country make repatriation more difficult. We hypothesize:

> *H₃: The individual's outbound sojourning success is positively related to re-acculturation.*

Heritage Culture Attitude Towards Sojourning

Martin (1984) further identifies three sets of representative variables for studying repatriation, (i) background, (ii) host culture, and (iii) reentry. Westwood et al (1986) state that "Rather than being regarded as a welcome agent of change and progress, the student may be envied and forced into a struggle for recognition" (pp. 225).

> *H₄: Heritage culture attitude towards sojourning is positively related to re-acculturation.*

Heritage Culture Attitude Towards IS

The perception of IS in developing countries varies from region to region, but several common perceptions that have been noted include (i) IS is women's work (Lynch and Szorenyi, 2005), (ii) there are a lack of IS jobs (Lynch and Szorenyi, 2005), and (iii) knowledge is power and IS forces people to give up their knowledge/power (Pradhan, 2002). Additionally, due to the limited visibility of IS, its benefits are often not seen or appreciated by everyday people (Lynch and Szorenyi, 2005). As a result, we hypothesize that:

> *H₅: Heritage culture attitude towards IS is positively related to re-acculturation.*

Factors Arising During Re-Acculturation

Self-Awareness of Changes

While Sussman's research (2002) does not show a link between outbound acculturation and returning repatriation stress, she does show that the more the individual identifies with the host country the more repatriation stress will be present. Sojourners change as a result of the acculturation into the host country; such changes may not be accepted or understood within the social culture of the heritage country (Herman and Tetrick, 2009: Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001). It is important for the sojourner to recognize these changes (Martin, 1984) to enable them to understand the often negative or disinterested responses from friends and family (Thompson and Christofi, 2006).

> *H₆: Self-awareness of changes while sojourning is positively related to re-acculturation.*

Awareness of Heritage Culture Changes

In addition to the sojourner changing, the heritage social network has changed; this includes friends and family as well as the underlying cultural structure (Martin, 1984: Thompson and Christofi, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). In Martin's (1984) framework on repatriation the reentry variable environment represents whether the individual returns to the same situation they left or whether substantial changes have occurred while they were gone.

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[3]See Bosher (1998) for details on computing an acculturation index utilizing measured bidirectional effects.

H_7: Awareness of heritage culture changes while sojourning is positively related to re-acculturation.

Home Country IS Maturity

Altbach (1991) notes that the availability of resources in the home country can provide obstacles for repatriates to exercise their new knowledge and skills. Due to the newness of IS within developing countries, the developing countries typically do not have mature core IS competencies, as a result both internal knowledge (Pradhan, 2002) as well as infrastructure (Pradhan, 2002; van Doodewaard and de Jager, 2008) are lacking. The maturity of the home country's IS prevents the student from implementing what they have learned.

H_8: Home country IS maturity is positively related to re-acculturation.

Ability to Make Significant Impact

Martin's (1984) repatriation framework outlines the major factors to consider during repatriation. The re-acculturation literature into four types: (i) stage theory, (ii) curves of adjustment, (iii) copying styles, and (iv) culture learning; furthermore, the issue of intercultural communication between host country and sojourners, and discusses the extent to which this communication leads to learning and changes the individual's perspective on their home country. Repatriation difficulties included in the framework are (i) academic, (ii) professional, (iii) social, (iv) cultural, (v) linguistic, and (vi) political. Unfortunately in many instances the sojourner does not receive the acceptance or recognition that was expected (Westwood et al., 1986). The goal for many sojourners is to return home and with their foreign education and experience and contribute their new knowledge to their heritage society (Glaser and Habers, 1974). In many cases, the opposite happens; "Any or all of these difficulties may be at great odds with the returning student's expectations of personal fulfillment and success and the desire to give one's expertise to one's country and people" (Westwood et al., 1986, pp. 225).

H_9: Ability to make a significant impact is positively related to re-acculturation.

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